



KINGS UP

by H.P.S. GREEN

Take a Yank pilot soured on the world. A Paris mademoiselle. A strange gent with a monocle, and a red-nosed taxi hawk. Mix well with champagne, toss into tracer-torn sky—and watch for fireworks!

BILLY KING HEAVED the big bi-motored Caudron off the ground, and pointed her nose up toward the tormented sky above Paris.

The blinding teams from the searchlights were stabbing in every direction, and the heavens were dotted by the sinister red flashes of the protective barrage which the French gunners were throwing up. Bits and chunks of metal from those shells were flying and falling everywhere. The black-crossed Gothas were throwing a strafe—and hell was loose upstairs.

The cool night air fanned Billy King's face, helped to dispel the fumes of the champagne he had drunk. He realized abruptly that he was in the midst of one of the most hare-brained escapades of the war. The whole

affair had come about naturally enough. It was one of those things "which seemed a good idea at the time." But no disinterested person—particularly the French and American military authorities—would ever consider it a good idea at any time whatsoever.

For he, Billy King, holding a lieutenant's commission in the U.S. Army, was taking off in the middle of the night in a French Army plane, with three oddly assorted passengers. To wit: as the court-martial proceedings against him would read if he lived to be tried: one Borus, ex-king of an obscure country called Monravia; one girl, known only to him as Betty; and one red-nosed Paris taxi driver.

A searchlight caught and held them for a long time before it moved on. Billy expected every moment to

be caught in a hail of anti-aircraft shells, for the big Caudron had no business whatever up there in the night, and looked much more like a German bombing Gotha than like the little pursuit planes which were supposed to be defending Paris from raiders. But apparently the French cocardes on the wings, and the fact that the big ship was calmly circling for altitude, satisfied the operators at last. They took their light away to look for other quarry.

As Billy continued to climb into the night, it seemed to him as if he were in a dream. Or, better some evil nightmare. He tried to figure it out logically, but none of it made sense. It was a jumble—all of it—ever since he had left his own squadron at the Front. He could remember, of course, that he had come up to ferry a new ship back. He vaguely recalled the café—the first few drinks.

But after that—

Before he met the girl, Billy had been leaning on the bar with bleak and morose thoughts chasing each other through his brain. He was a moody chap, given to strange outbursts, and stranger impulses which he restrained in most cases. He had a mixture of Scotch and Indian blood in his veins. His friendships were few and strong, his hatreds devastating. At the moment both of those emotions were being strongly played upon.

As for friendship, it seemed lost. Jack and Pug and he had gone through the flying schools together. Had eaten, and drunk, and flown together. They formed one of those close, pure, unselfish friendships known only to boys and very young men. At the Front they had fought together.

Until yesterday.

Yesterday—

Billy King ground his teeth, and swallowed the drink before him in one gulp. Their friendship was broken up forever—in this world, at least Jack and Pug had been shot down—in flames. They had died, Billy believed, through the cowardice—certainly through the error—of the French flight leader who was called Saligaud. Captain Raoul Saligaud—curse his dirty soul! That was why Billy was in the café. The French squadron commander, an elderly, kindly man, had sent him to Paris to fly a big Caudron back to the squadron. And to try to forget the death of his two friends—for a night, at least.

BUT Billy King hated the French. A year in the Foreign Legion infantry, under hardboiled officers and non-coms, was mostly responsible. That was before the

United States entered the war and Billy became eligible for transfer.

And when he did transfer, what did they do? Shot him right back into another French outfit again!

With Jack and Pug, it hadn't been so bad, especially since his rank as Lieutenant in the United States Army had protected him from the indignities he had suffered as a private in the Legion. But as the lone American in the squadron! Billy trembled with anger at the thought. And with the flight leader, Saligaud! Billy'd kill him! The dirty coward—to save himself, and lose better men. Billy'd shoot him out of the air! He'd beat him to death on the ground!

So great was the flyer's passion, that it burned him out, leaving him weak and maudlin for the moment. He looked around the bar. The other Yank pilots with whom he'd come there had gone on their way. Left him to drown his gloomy sorrow alone. They can go to the devil, Billy thought. He ordered brandy, encore.

Someone thrust a folded paper into his hand. It was a short note, in English:

Dear American Pilot:

Won't you join me? You look so lonely and sad.

—BETTY.

A waiter was beckoning to him, and Billy King followed the man into the the main room of the café.

Seated behind a table on the red plush-covered banquette which ran around the wall was a remarkably pretty girl. She was a little tough, perhaps. No, a little hard. But not in the slang sense. Hard as a soldier is hard. The table was covered with silver-plated buckets, each of which contained ice and a bottle of champagne.

"*Bon soir, Mademoiselle,*" said the flyer.

"Hello, Lieutenant," the girl replied. "Sit down and have a drink. "This isn't bad wine. The king knows his vintages."

"King?" inquired Billy, a trifle hazily, pouring himself a glass. "What King? I'm King."

"King of what?" asked the girl, curiously.

"King of Peru," replied Billy, who was refilling his glass. He neglected to add the name of the state in which the town of Peru was situated.

The girl smiled.

"Go on, you're no Spaniard "You're a Yankee."

"Sure," said Billy. "Say, who ordered all this wine?"

"The king ordered it," the girl replied.

"I ordered it?" the flyer asked, vaguely. "Why, I'd have sworn it was here when I sat down!"

“No, no—King Borus of Monravia. Here he comes now.”

BILLY looked up and saw a rather good-looking, monocled young man in tweeds—a rare sight in war-time Paris, where most men not in uniform had limbs or features missing, and medals to show where they’d gone.

“Who’s this?” demanded the civilian haughtily, removing his monocle.

“King of Peru,” answered the girl, with what, on a less lovely face, would have been described as a grin.

“I thought Peru was under a republican government,” remarked the ex-king of Monravia.

“So it is, now,” replied Billy. “The Democrats went out at the last election.”

But the other man was not listening. He sobbed:

“But this is terrible. That you, a brother monarch, should try to steal my girl. Don’t you know that in these times, when crowns are rocking and toppling all over the world, we kings should stick together? Remember what happened to the Car!”

“I haven’t been stolen,” said the girl “But it’s my duty to be polite to an Allied officer. You’re only a civilian, Borus.”

“That’s not my fault. None of the Allied countries would accept my services.”

“What’s the matter? You look healthy enough.”

“That’s not the trouble. None of them would give me my proper rank. I was both a general and an admiral in the forces of Monravia before this—*er*—revolution.”

“I enlisted as a private in the French Foreign Legion,” remarked Billy King.

“Think of that!” exclaimed the girl. “Be a man, Borus. Why don’t you get ahead and fight?”

“Fight!” exclaimed the ex-king. “That’s a good idea. We’ll fight for the girl. Have you swords or pistols with you?” he asked Billy.

“I hardly ever carry swords, and I left my pistol at the Front,” replied the American.

“Then well fight with our fists!” exclaimed the Monravian king, springing to his feet. “Let’s go to the washroom!” Billy King rose quickly. They had been drinking a great deal of champagne, but he sobered instantly at the prospect of a fight. In his overwrought state, there was nothing he would have liked better.

In the washroom they took off their coats and hung them up, rolled up their sleeves and squared off.

After an instant’s sparring, the ex-king of Monrovia

hung a fast left onto Billy King’s eye, that made him stagger. The Yank instantly perceived that he had a first-class boxer to deal with. That was all right with him. He’d feared he’d have a set-up, or a kicker and butter to deal with, like some Frenchmen and Belgians in the Legion.

He bored in, slipped a fast one off his opponent’s ear, and then drove a right to the foreigner’s lower ribs which brought him up standing.

They fought furiously for a moment, then Billy landed a looping right on the other’s jaw that brought him down. But in doing so the American slipped on the wet tiling of the floor and collapsed on top of his antagonist, who immediately clinched. For half a minute they rolled over and over, with neither gaining an advantage.

Suddenly Billy let out a terrific howl, and tried to get free. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw something which made him forget everything else. The old hag who had charge of the lavatory was rifling their coats where they hung on the wall. Billy had just seen her taking the wallet which contained all his money and papers!

BUT the harder he tried to break away, the faster his opponent held him. The fool thought Billy was weakening, and trying to break off the battle.

In vain Billy yelled and howled into his ear. The old woman, her drabbed skirts trailing after her, had made off through a back door before Billy could make Borus break off the battle.

When the pilot could finally get free, and onto his feet, he rushed to the door by which the drab one had fled, and looked out.

It led to a darkened alley, black as a hat. The old woman doubtless knew it as well as the palm of her own hand, and pursuit was plainly useless.

“Now you’ve done it, you fool,” said Billy angrily to the ex-king. “Why couldn’t you let me go after her?”

“Well, it’s too late now,” returned the other. “Suppose we call it off and have a drink?”

They went back to find the girl, Betty, crying bitterly.

“You shouldn’t have left me alone,” she sobbed. “I can’t bear to be alone when I’m conscious—that’s why I invited Billy here to sit down. I want to forget, and when I’m alone I remember.

“The ambulance I was driving broke down. I couldn’t get it started. It was moonlight—just as it is tonight. Presently the Germans started shelling the road. They kept coming nearer. Great fountains of mud, and

jagged steel. I couldn't get the damn' thing started, and it was full of wounded men. They began to scream. They called on me to get them away, and I couldn't help them. Then the shells got there. One—the very last they fired—was a direct hit on the ambulance. Oh! It never touched me, where I was in front trying to crank. But can I ever forget? Where's the wine?"

"I'll help you to forget!" cried the ex-king of Monrovia eagerly.

"You're a civilian, Borus. Except for that, I like you."

"I'll enlist in your Royal Flying Corps—in the French Foreign Legion—anything."

"It would take you too long to get to the Front," the girl objected. "I think I could learn to like this flying man, if I got to know him."

"No—no!" cried Borus. "Tell me something I can do—anything!"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," she said at last. "If you will get me the mustaches of Captain von Grunow of the Imperial German Air Service, I'll take you!"

She had named a famous German ace whose facial adornments were said to rival the Kaiser's own.

"VON GRUNOW'S mustaches!" exclaimed King Borus. "But he is in Germany. How could I get there? Fly?"

"To be sure."

"But I have no airplane. Perhaps our brave pilot here has one," he added with a sneer.

"I have a bi-motored Caudron sitting on the field out at Villacoubiay, waiting for me to take off in the morning," said the Yank pilot, dully. He was thinking of something else. Von Grunow! It was Von Grunow's jagdstaffel which had brought down Jack and Pug—damn his Boche soul!

"You fly the king over and see whether he has the nerve to get the mustaches of von Grunow!" cried the girl.

"Nerve! Me! It's he that hasn't the—nerve! Why, I'll bet him ten thousand francs. . . . But I forgot— We have no money."

"Damn you and your money!" cried Billy King, hoarsely. "I'll fly you over! For nothing!"

"No money!" the girl cried. "Then how can you pay for all this wine?"

"I can arrange that. I have credit at the *caisse* here," said King Borus of Monrovia. "But can you find the aerodrome of von Grunow?" he asked the pilot.

"Find it!" exclaimed the American. "Why, I bombed it yesterday!"

It seemed that what the ex-king said about having credit at the cafe was true, for, after a conversation with the cashier, they were allowed to leave without hindrance or argument. They found a taxi outside, and told the driver to take them to Villacoubiay.

"Villacoubiay!" the chauffeur exclaimed. "But—that is impossible! I shall have to get more essence, which is difficult, if not altogether out of the question. And, furthermore, I have an atrocious thirst," he added, slyly. "Perhaps, with the aid of a bottle of cognac, now—"

"Get a bottle," directed Borus.

"Get two bottles," amended Billy King.

"Four bottles will be better," said Betty, counting them on her fingers. "There are four of us here."

"It will cost fifty francs a bottle at this hour of the night," warned the taxi driver. He had ragged gray whiskers, resembled a pirate in looks, and was beginning to act like one.

"A trifle," said Borus, grandly. "Hurry—we must be going."

The chauffeur, whose brother ran a small zinc bar not far away, and who was planning to make a ripe profit all around out of what he took to be a party of crazy Americans, hastened to set the taxi in motion.

He stopped at two obscure houses, from the first of which he emerged with some tins of bootleg gasoline, and from the second with four bottles of legitimate, but extremely expensive, French nose-paint. Three of these he distributed among his passengers, and immediately announced that he was ready to start out for the flying field. After three snorts at his bottle of cognac he would have willingly started to drive to Cincinnati.

At Borus' behest, he stopped at a small hotel, and waited until the ex-king came out loaded down with flying equipment. Then they were ready to leave the city.

AS THEY approached the flying field, excitement sprang up in and around Paris. Searchlights began to cast their revealing ribbons into the sky, and whistles sounded.

"An air raid!" the girl exclaimed. "The Gothas are coming!"

"Let them come!" remarked Billy King, as he quenched his thirst.

The taxi man stopped his ancient vehicle with a jerk which threw all three of his passengers into a tangled heap.

“Here we are, gentlemen and lady,” he announced. “The tariff, including the cognac, will be five hundred francs.”

“We will pay you when we have returned to Paris,” announced King Borus of Monravia, loftily.

Billy King routed out the old noncommissioned officer who was in charge of the field for the night, and told him to start up the Caudron that he was to ferry to the Front in the morning, and which was sitting on the line in readiness for an early start. It seemed a ridiculous performance to the old Frenchman, that a pilot should want to test his ship in the middle of the night, but then, the old man reflected, all Americans are crazy, and consequently ridiculous. Furthermore, this particular American lunatic offered him a hundred francs to start the ship.

The searchlights were bobbing about wildly, and the anti-aircraft guns were opening up more and more, as the Frenchman cranked the two motors.

The ship was a new Caudron, still something of an experiment, designed to protect the rear of bombing squadrons, and was a veritable battle cruiser of the air. It was built to carry three men—the pilot and two observers, one in front and one behind him. Since the two motors were out on each wing, it gave a clear and unobstructed view to the man in front—and also clear range of fire.

The crate Billy King was taking carried six machine guns. There were two in front, for the observer there, and two behind, mounted in pairs on adjustable tourelles, and two tunnel guns fixed to fire below at any German rash enough to try to get underneath the flying destroyer. The pilot was supposed to have enough to do to fly the thing, without doing any shooting.

The American climbed into his cockpit, and inspected everything with a meticulousness worthy of a New England old maid. He took nothing for granted, apparently, not even that both motors were there. But they were there, right enough, and before long they would be warm enough to take off.

He waved his hand to Borus and Betty, where they were standing on the ground.

THE girl understood. She staggered slightly, and clung to her companion for support.

“Water!” she gasped in French to the old noncom. “Water! I’m faint!”

No Frenchman in his senses is ever too old and feeble to be gallant to a pretty woman. Without a grumble, the man hastened away toward a nearby hut.

The pilot beckoned to Borus.

“Come on, you!” he yelled. “Come on, if you’ve got the nerve for a flight over the lines after von Grunow’s mustaches!”

Without a word, the ex-king of Monrovia clambered into the rear cockpit. And, to the American’s dismay, the girl, Betty, climbed agilely into the front one!

“Hay, *you* can’t come!” he shouted.

“But I *am* coming!” she cried. “In the first place, I must come along to make sure that it really is von Grunow’s mustache that Borus brings back, and not a bit of some dead horse’s tail. Second, I’m quite good at first aid,” she added gruesomely. “And third, I haven’t got my taxi fare back to town.”

Billy shrugged. The whole affair was crazy, anyway, and a little more foolishness could make small difference. He opened the throttles, and the big ship began to lumber along the ground. As it did so, a *farouche* figure in a long overcoat and a streaming muffler came galloping across the field, and started in pursuit.

Billy fed the laboring engines more gas, but it was no use.

The pursuer gained, and made a flying leap at the tail. Catching it, he clawed his way up the fuselage, sticking his fingers through the fabric, and clinging to the longerons, until he gained the rear cockpit. It was the taxi driver, who was saying things which nobody could bear. Which was just as well, perhaps.

“Pigs, and sons and daughter of pigs!” he screeched into the twin blasts from the motors. “Camels and mackerels! Name of a small, white, sore-tailed dog with dirty habits, never will you miscreants escape without paying me my five hundred francs!”

The old noncom who had started the motors came out of his hut with a carafe of water and a glass just in time to see the ship taking off and the extra passenger climbing aboard. For a moment he stared, then he ran forward, stopped, and jumped into the air and waved his arms above his head. Then ran forward again, for all the world like a comic cop in the movies, and just as usefully.

The big Caudron bumped across the field, and took off into the bright inferno that was the sky-top of Paris.

CHAPTER II
COLD MEAT

HELL WAS POPPING IN THE SKY. In the beams of the searchlights which swung and criss-crossed ceaselessly was a hail of flying steel. The defense guns were tossing a barrage of high-explosive shells in mad endeavor to protect their city.

In Paris the sirens were howling. Fire engines with their helmeted crews were tearing up and down the streets. Women and children crouched—some calm, some panic-stricken—in the cellars and subway stations.

Above rocketed the night-flying scout planes whose pilots were waiting for the enemy. Occasionally the shrill drone of their motors would make homing revelers cringe farther into their shelters. They didn't know that it was only the heavier grumbling of the Germans' bombing Gothas that they had to fear.

The big Caudron was roaring up into the sky, with Billy King crouching at the controls, and grimly watching the fireworks around him. In the front cockpit, the girl Betty looked fearlessly out into the horrible chaos which men were making of the calm, moonlit heavens. In the rear, the taxi driver and the ex-king were yelping into each other's ears about the delinquent fare as though they had been on the Paris pavement. The craziest crew that ever manned—and womanned!—an airplane on the Western Front. Without doubt.

Billy cut the motors for a moment, and yelled into the comparative stillness:

"Load your guns! Drums under the cowling! Understand me? Load your guns!"

To his surprise, the girl in the front cockpit loaded and cocked her Lewises with calm efficiency. Somewhere, some time, she had been well taught. Equally to his surprise, in the rear, it was the grotesque taxi man, not the ex-king, ex-general, and ex-admiral of Monravia, who did likewise.

Again one of the searchlights caught the Caudron in its beam. Others followed, until the big ship was spotted in a cone of converging pencils of light. Billy King clung firmly to his controls, and kept on his

course. He knew better than to try to dodge out of the lights, but he wondered what the men on the ground were doing. Studying him through a powerful telescope, most likely.

The bi-motored Caudron was painfully like the bi-motored Gothas in appearance at first glance, and a mistake on, the part of the watchers might well bring a storm of high explosive—which would be bad. Or a hail of bullets from the Vickers of some of the defending planes—which would be worse, and which was much more likely. The night-flying pilots would have no time to study the big ship in front of them before they opened fire. . . .

But all the searchlights swung away eventually. Evidently their operators had decided to look for something better elsewhere.

After some minutes the searchlight struck them once more. Billy gasped. He was no longer alone in the sky. Beside him was a heavy, blunt-nosed Gotha. He could even perceive the sinister crosses on her wings.

"Shoot!" he howled. "Cold meat! Smack 'er!"

IN FRONT, the girl swung her guns to bear. In the rear the ex-king of Monravia and the nighthawk taxi driver of the Paris boulevards were scuffling.

"*Le Boche!*" screamed the chauffeur. "Away from those guns! Let me shoot, imbecile!"

"No!" yelled the other man, wrestling the old Frenchman away from the guns. "Out of the way, you old idiot! It is I, King Borus of Monravia, the General-in-Chief, and best machine gunner in the Monravian Armies, who will shoot!"

"But no, me—Alcide Druot, ten years in the Algerian Army of France—I will shoot the dirty Boches!"

The two men wrestled furiously, and finally they fell, still struggling, down into the cockpit.

But in front, it was different. The girl Betty squeezed her triggers, and two streams of metal and phosphorous went screaming into the belly of the big baby-killer scarcely forty feet away. The Gotha's rear gunner awoke with a jump to the fact that it was not a sister ship which was flying along with him, and he swung his guns about. But before he could fire, a burst of bullets mowed him down. Then the gleaming, searing phosphorescent deluge moved forward, found the gas tank of the big bomber, and she exploded with a crash which almost blew the French ship out of the air.

A gust of bullets swept past Billy King's head from

the other side, and the pilot leaped into action. The downed German's comrades had come to life and realized what was going on.

But the big French Caudron with its American pilot, and its girl gunner up in front, was cavorting around them like a Nieuport, always with the deadly, searching, fiery streaks coming from its bow. Billy King's one regret was that he himself could not shoot. But Betty was doing wonderfully. She handled the guns like a veteran.

In the rear cockpit—where, with two men who claimed to be expert machine gunners, one might expect to see a marvelous exhibition of gun handling—there was nothing to be seen except the Lewises flopping around aimlessly on their mounting.

The two passengers were battling madly on the floor, in deadly danger of crashing through the thin boards, which were intended to hold the weight of only one man. A kicking foot slashed out through the fabric of the fuselage—the heavily booted foot of the chauffeur. Farther and farther his leg came out through the side of the ship, as though the former king were trying to shove him overboard. Then the ship lurched, and the pair slid to the other side of their little doghouse. This time it was the turn of Borus' arm to protrude—then his head—out into the garish light of the searchlights and the exploding shells.

AT THAT moment the air was filled with a high, whining sound. The Spads of the defenders of Paris were arriving, their motors wide open, their wires shrieking, their twin Vickers rattling continuously. Here was a flock of enemies, those Spad pilots thought. The more lead we throw into the mess, the more damage we do.

And they did plenty.

The Gotha formation had been disorganized by the sudden appearance of the death-dealing enemy bi-motor in its midst—disorganized to the point where one of the Gothas had actually shot another down. And the Spads shot down three more, firing at everything in sight except sister Spads.

If the Caudron had been anywhere around, it would have been riddled unmercifully, on the theory that it was a captured ship which the Germans were using. But it was not there.

Billy had heard the Spads coming, and he knew too well what his fate would be if they caught him in the sights of their Vickers. He shoved the big Caudron into a dive which it was never built to stand. But it

did. It was an everlasting credit to its makers, and a monument to their skill and conscientious handiwork, when it came out shrieking thousands of feet below.

Billy set the great ship on an even keel, and headed on toward Germany, and the mustaches of von Grunow. His head was cool, and he had time to think things over, and take stock.

The girl had regained her feet after being thrown to the floor in the dive, and she was up in her cockpit again. So were the two fighters in the rear. The howling dive, and the fear of being dashed to a boneless pulp on the ground had frightened them into temporary docility. Each was satisfied to let events take their course until they were safely on the ground again.

The big Caudron plowed on through the cold night air, calm and unmolested. Billy was climbing her as fast as he could, to gain altitude before he crossed the battle lines, but he might as well have saved himself the trouble. There were no Allied searchlights on the path he was taking, and the Germans were strictly piped down in every aerial department, waiting for the return of their own raiders.

Billy purred contentedly as he followed the silver ribbon of a river that he knew would lead him almost to the aerodrome of von Grunow's killers. A crazy, wild-eyed, idiotic enterprise? Of course it was, and he knew it only too well. But what of it?

He was still so upset by the loss of his two pals that his mind, while clear enough, might quite properly be said to be unhinged. Even killing the German leader of the squadron which had burned up his friends was not good enough for Billy. He would try to humiliate him in a manner which would ring through all the places in the world where flying men gathered. And put an end to his deadly career at the same time.

For it must not be thought that Billy took the mustache idea seriously. Not at all. He meant to capture the German ace *in toto*, and had he searched France from end to end, it would have been difficult to find anyone—except his present companions—hare-brained enough to go on such an expedition with him.

And—if he failed? What of that? He didn't care. Rather a German prison camp than the company of Frenchmen whom he hated almost as much as he did the Germans. Particularly the company—even the sight—of the cowardly flight leader, Saligaud.

FROM the great height at which they were—three thousand meters—almost ten thousand feet—Billy saw the field that he had bombed thirty-six hours

before. The field of von Grunow's *jagdstaffel*. On the other side of a strip of woods which appeared only ribbon thick from that altitude, but which in reality was fully a quarter of a mile wide, was the field which von Grunow's *jagdstaffel* used for taking off and landing. So the French squadron leaders had decided on the occasion of their last raid, since bombing the field where the hangars and barracks were situated had done nothing to hinder the movements of the German fighters.

Photographs of the terrain below had substantiated that theory. They had shown the regular field torn and pitted with bomb holes to such an extent that a man would have had hard work to take off with a sky-hawk. They had shown hangars, barracks, and several small buildings squatting among the trees at the edge of that field. And they had also shown countless wheel tracks on the field on the other side of the strip of woods.

The only theory which would fit this evidence was that the Germans wheeled their ships through the woods and used the distant field for landing and taking off, trundling them back for shelter and overhauling in the hangars each evening. A lot of work, to be sure, but German soldiers did not mind work. Or at least they didn't dare to make their dislike known.

Billy had been squeezing the gas supply of his motors down and down, until they were barely idling. At last he cut the throttles and then the switches.

"Here goes nothing!" he muttered. He had burned his bridges behind him as surely as Caesar. No chance to take off again, if things were not as he might wish on the supposedly empty field. German soldiers might rush out with ready rifles, so that he would want to take off again. No matter.

He might need his motors, in case he should make a slight mistake in judgment of distance or altitude. No matter. Billy King was resolved not to make a fizzle of the expedition, even if it was an insane one. He meant to land and do business on that field.

THE big Caudron sank silently downward, the dead props standing up in a manner that reminded Billy of a propeller that he had once seen marking a dead airman's grave. He shivered a little in spite of himself at the thought.

Down and down, in a wide, silent spiral. Billy wondered on what part of the field he had better land. Along the edge, where the ship might be better concealed, or toward the center, where there might

be a better chance of taking off in a desperate hurry? Suddenly he saw that the question had been decided for him. It would be all that he could do to stretch his glide to the edge of the field. And a tight squeeze even at that.

Fighting for every inch of altitude, he came around in a smooth, slightly skidding turn, cleared some tree tops by a foot, and settled down in a pancake landing so flat that the big bi-motor hardly rolled at all. Plenty of room ahead for a take-off, thought Billy, with some satisfaction. He clambered stiffly down from his seat in the ship between the two motors, and found the others on the ground already, talking excitedly among themselves.

"Where is von Grunow?" inquired the ex-king of Monravia, anxiously.

"Through those woods, I believe," returned Billy King, taking off his flying coat, and throwing it over the big ship's lower wing. "That's where I'm going to look for him, anyway."

"Oh, you are going to look for him?" asked ex-king Borus, in pleased surprise. "What do you want of his mustaches?"

"To hell with his mustaches!" growled Billy, furiously. "I'm going to either capture or kill the skunk!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Borus and the girl, in excited tones.

"Name of a louse on an Algerian who has not bathed for sixty days!" exclaimed the taxi chauffeur. "What is all this imbecile talk of mustaches, and what was the thought in trying to cheat me of my five hundred francs? Do you think to bilk Alcide Druot as easily as this, by taking a voyage in an aeroplane? Pay me, now, or I shall personally cut out each of your livers with my knife, except that of the charming mademoiselle. I shall allow her no doubt beautiful liver to remain inviolate!"

As he spoke, he drew from some place in his clothes a long, broad sticker about the size of a British bayonet.

"Fool!" spat Borus. "Do you think this is a matter of an aeroplane ride? We are now in German-occupied territory, and not far away are hundreds of Germans who would rather kill you than drink beer! We have landed here on a mission from which we will probably not return alive! You have probably killed yourself by coming with us."

"IT IS you who are the fool—and of an idiotism unbelievable," returned the old man, calmly, plucking a wiry hair from his wind-torn beard and carefully trying his knife on it. "You, who interfered with

Corporal Alcide Druot, the best man with a machine gun in the Army of Algeria, when he was about to kill innumerable dirty Boches. You, who think with your talk of Germans, to make *me* fear! Bah!”

“Once I followed a deserter from the Army one hundred and fifty miles across the Sahara, across a waste swarming with savage riders, who, if they had caught me, would have placed me on an ant-hill with a stake through the tenderest part of my belly. And why do you suppose that I chased him, and caught him, too? For patriotism? Bah! For the reward? Bah again!”

“I pursued him because he tried to cheat me, Alcide Druot, out of eighteen francs, forgetting to pay me before he left! You, with your Germans! Because I am old, and racked with fever, and missing these fingers—” he held up the stump of a left hand—“and the fools of doctors will no longer allow me to serve in the Army—because of these things, do you think I am afraid of a few hundred Germans? Me, Alcide Druot? Bah! You show your idiotism!”

Active as a boy of sixteen, he climbed up to the rear cockpit of the Caudron, and came down carrying the twin Lewis guns, still with full drums. With his long knife, he started digging himself a fox-hole in the soft ground, grumbling to himself.

“It is not so that I like to use my knife, but what would you? A man cannot properly use *mitrailleuses* standing on a monument, or in a box made of cloth. Ah, bring on your Boches now! For three years I have longed for this chance! So, those doctors would reject Alcide Druot, finest marksman of the Army of Algeria!”

“All right, Old Walrus, stay here and guard the ship,” said Billy King, quick to see the advantage of such an arrangement. “But don’t shoot me when I come back. For I’m going, and I’m coming back, too,” he added grimly.

“I am going also,” said King Borus.

“And I,” said the girl, quickly. She had been silent until then.

“Better stay with the old man,” said Billy. “You might get killed, and you’ll only be in the way.”

“Let her come,” said Borus. “She might be able to help. But tell me, are you armed? What are your plans?”

Billy King looked around the broad field, lying calm and silent in the light of the moon. A moon already past its zenith and beginning to go down. There was no sound to be heard but the distant guns—no more sign of danger than in a pasture in Indiana.

“No, I’m only armed with these,” he said, raising two muscular hands whose fingers were already curving and twitching with desire for action. “Plans? What is there to plan? Find the sentries—watch them—kill them silently. Secure their weapons. Avoid the big barracks, and the hangars. Find a small house, probably at a distance from the others. That should be the house of the squadron commander von Grunow himself. Get in, choke or knock him out. Tie him up—with—let’s see.”

He climbed into the ship again, and brought out a heavy pair of pliers. He cut away one of the landing wires.

“If we ever land again, it will probably be for the last time,” he said, harshly. “We’ll tie him up with this.” He wound the wire into a small coil, and put it into a pocket of his blouse. He nodded to the two.

“I’m going,” he said. “We haven’t got any too much time before dawn. You two—do just what I say, if you enjoy living. This started out as a fool trip, but there’s no fooling now. And you, Old Camel—” to the taxi driver—“guard this flying taxi well!”

“Be easy, Young Rooster,” said the old man. “I, Alcide Druot, of the Army of Algeria—”

But he was talking to himself, for the others were gone.

CHAPTER III THE SENTINEL

BILLY KING LED THE WAY, walking swiftly across the moonlit field, and then along a broad, well-defined road which he found running through the woods.

This thoroughfare was amply wide for the passage of small scout planes, and Billy saw immediately that the theory formed by the French from their photographs was correct.

However, the road had been so cleverly and painstakingly camouflaged that it was impossible to detect a sign of it from the air. That same camouflage helped make the passage extremely dark, and Billy paused for a few moments after he was well into it, and halted his companions, so that their eyes would have a chance to get accustomed to the blackness.

During the pause, he cautioned them severely not to make a move or show themselves, but to leave

everything to him until he called on them for help. The others said nothing, and, after a moment, Billy once more started along the soft dirt of the dark road. Inside the wood all was very still.

When Billy was a young boy, a prominent naturalist and author had started a cult which encouraged boys to emulate the better qualities of the warriors of some of the Indian tribes. He encouraged lads to practice woodcraft—among other things—and taught them how to do it in his books.

Thanks to a natural attitude, and much practice—thanks, too, perhaps to the strain of Indian blood in him—Billy King could far outstrip his comrades in the pursuit of the redskins. He could move as silently as any savage, take advantage of the least bit of cover, the smallest shadow, to keep himself invisible. This art was now to stand him in good stead.

As he emerged from the woods at the edge of the field on which the German hangars faced, he halted. Became part of the scenery. For long moments he waited, moving no muscle, making no sound.

The bomb-torn field of von Grunow's *jagdstaffel* stretched calm and bright before him. Scarcely a suspicion of a breeze stirred the treetops. Billy was trying hard to get his bearings. Less than forty-eight hours before he had been fifteen thousand feet above this very place, while his observer jerked a lever which loosed a string of heavy demolition bombs loaded with T.N.T. The scars of those bombs were now a series of deep, smoking craters across the field.

In the pictures which another observer had taken, the French photographic experts had claimed to see various things which were altogether unnoticeable to the ordinary eye. Two hangars—three barracks buildings—and several small house. And, at a distance from the others, one of the Frenchmen had pointed out what he claimed was another building.

"There," he had said, "is very likely the house of the old fox—von Grunow, himself."

BILLY KING was resolved to get von Grunow. The German ace, while his own list of personal victories was not particularly impressive, had the knack of teaching and organizing. His *jagdstaffel* was always among the most formidable on the Front. This despite the fact that, unlike some others, it did not contain the names of a large number of aces who had made their reputations in other squadrons. It was composed of young flyers direct from school, whom von Grunow had taught and made into aces himself.

Borus nudged Billy impatiently, reminding the American that he was not alone on his desperate excursion.

"Well, what did you come here for—to dream?" asked the ex-king of Monrovia, impatiently, his voice breaking the stillness.

Billy could see nothing—hear nothing. Either there were no sentries on guard, or they were neglecting their duty. Or maybe they were posted in places of concealment, instead of walking posts. But Borus was right. They must move—take a chance. They couldn't afford to wait any longer, for the night wouldn't last forever. With a whispered "*Stay here*" to his companions, Billy King moved silently as a werewolf toward the house which the French photographic expert had said might be the dwelling of the *jagdstaffel's* commander.

The woods had been carefully scraped clean of every bit of undergrowth—every dry leaf and twig—by the thrifty Germans gathering kindling, and anyone could have moved without a sound, provided they were sober and careful. Billy soon saw before him the building which he hoped housed the German commander. He stood motionless for moments, waiting for someone else—if there were anyone else—to move. At last he was rewarded. An extra dark shadow stirred, then started to walk.

It was a sentry, at last.

With the stealth of a Sioux warrior, Billy King crept up behind him. He knew that he must kill this man. He hated the idea, but this was war, and he had a job on his hands. And then there were Jack and Pug—brought down in flames. . . .

Like a stalking wildcat, the American shortened the distance between him and the unconscious sentry. At last, as the man paused, and was about to turn, the flyer sprang.

HIS knees landed in the small of the German's back, his hands around his throat. The fellow's gun flew into the air. He tried to shout, but the sound coming from his startled lungs was something between a grunt and a gurgle. He collapsed forward onto the grass, two-thirds knocked out, with the American's sinewy hands shutting off the air from his starved lungs. In vain he tried to thrash about, and unseat the Old Man of the Sea who was riding him. He knew that he was dying.

Billy King knew it, too. He felt the enemy's struggles growing weaker, and he knew the man couldn't last

long. He would have liked to let him live, but he couldn't do it. He had to look out for himself, and his companions.

So far, so good.

And then something landed on the American, in his turn. A heavy body that shouted loud, guttural yells—raising the alarm!

Billy left his erstwhile victim, and turned to meet the attack. He threw off the man who had jumped him. As the fellow staggered backward the flyer hit him with all his strength, knocking him sprawling. The mysterious assailant fell where a ray of moonlight slipped through the leaves overhead, and showed his face clearly. The American saw the familiar features of Borus, the ex-king of Monravia!

"You treacherous hound!" snarled the flyer. "I'll murder you!" He leaped forward.

The double-crosser could and would fight Billy's blow had landed on his chest, and had not hurt him much. He sprang to his feet and rushed at the American, expecting to meet the cool fighter he had encountered in the washroom of the Paris cafe only a few hours before. Instead, he ran into a maniac with the strength of a devil.

Insane with rage, Billy hit the other man on the nose so hard that the organ in question was reduced to a flat, bloody pulp. His next blow spread the mouth of the supposed ex-king of Monravia all around his face. Borus collapsed, in a helpless agony, disabled by sheer pain. Realizing that his game was up, the American turned to try to make his escape. He was too late.

A stocky man in pajamas had rushed out of the house, and Billy leaped toward him to mash him down. But before he had a chance, a detachment of German soldiers piled into the little glade and surrounded him.

FOR a while they must have thought they had a bear by the tail. They tried to seize him, and tore their nails on the tough, hard whipcord of his uniform. They tried to smack him down, but the American moved so fast that they struck each other instead.

They might have shot him, but the stocky man in pajamas kept shouting for them to take him prisoner. Meanwhile the flyer was smashing faces and cracking ribs among his adversaries. But they were too many for him, and more kept coming.

Finally flesh and blood could do no more, and they seized and held his flailing arms. Two big Germans who smelled of stale beer and onions held him firmly

between them at last. Two more menaced him with bayoneted rifles, but they might have saved themselves the trouble. Billy King was so far gone that he would have toppled over if he hadn't had assistance.

A woman rushed into the open space among the trees—the girl, Betty. She thrust herself close to the Yank flyer, and spoke in German which he understood vaguely.

"So, American swine, they have you! We trapped you neatly, *nicht wahr?*" How stupid you are! And how brutal!"

She slapped both his cheeks in turn, so hard that it made his reeling head swim anew. Then she ran and knelt by the treacherous Borus.

"Did he injure you, poor dear Ludwig? The *verdammte* Yankee!" She pillowed the fallen man's bloody head upon her knee, but after a moment of struggling, he managed to stagger to his feet. He swayed, and a trickle of blood ran down his chin.

The stocky man who had rushed out from the house in his pajamas then took the center of the stage. An errant moonbeam shining through the trees revealed on his upper lip the famous and unmistakable mustaches of the great von Grunow. His voice was suave and sarcastic. He asked:

"And now, as the officer in command of this *jogdstaffel* of the Imperial German Army, might I perhaps be informed as to just what all this disturbance, and this interruption of my rest means?"

By that time almost every member of the squadron was crowding around—pilots and mechanics and clerks and orderlies—and von Grunow felt it incumbent upon himself to take charge of the situation. The man with the smashed face swayed on his feet, and blubbered thickly.

"Heinrich! The surgeon for this fellow!" cried von Grunow, perceiving how seriously the man was injured.

"Fellow indeed!" the girl cried indignantly. "That is the famous secret agent, Count Ludwig von Amstein. And I—I am *Fraulein* Zeiss, of whom you may have heard. For weeks Count von Amstein has been seeking a way to get from Paris into Germany with valuable papers and codes which he had in his possession, but the spies of the French counter-espionage division suspected him, and he couldn't get away, until now. And I have much important information, which I have concealed here." She tapped her forehead meaningly.

"The Count and I met, and recognized each other by the signs and passwords, but for a while we could

do nothing. Then, tonight, we tricked this Yankee fool into flying us over here of his own free will. Colossal, is it not?"

The Germans standing around guffawed loudly.

"And what was the trick, if I may inquire, *Fraulein*?" asked von Grunow, curiously.

"You will laugh when you hear it, *Herr Hauptmann* von Grunow," said the girl.

The German snorted in anticipation.

"It was for the purpose of obtaining your mustaches for a souvenir."

VON GRUNOW stiffened.

"Was? Impudent swine!" cried the German ace in a bellowing voice. "Frickart, throw him into the guardhouse until tomorrow . . . Ah, there you are, *Herr Doktor*—" to a bilious-looking man who had evidently just been awakened from an alcoholic sleep—"attend to the *Herr Graf* here, and make him as comfortable as possible. Bring him into my house—and you come also, *Fraulein*."

Billy King heard no more, for the German soldiers were leading him away.

The American was conducted by two of the biggest Germans on the field, one of whom held him firmly by each arm. In front walked a noncommissioned officer armed with a Luger pistol and behind came two privates with bayoneted rifles. And the pilot was still weak and dizzy, more from the terrific exertions he had made to escape than from any punishment he had received.

But he had received a blow over the right ear from which blood was trickling down his neck and inside his collar, and his left wrist was lame. He was so all in that if running a hundred yards would have given him his liberty, he wouldn't have been able to make it

The Germans marched him along the edge of the field, passing two hangars, one of them partially wrecked by the bombs of the French squadron on their last raid. At length they turned up a narrow path, which they followed for perhaps a hundred feet before they came to a small house built of stone. As they shoved him through the doorway, the American noticed that the walls of the place were at least two feet thick. The door, which was shut and fastened behind him, resounded with a heavy clang which testified to the weight of its iron construction.

Billy King lit a match. By its yellow gleam, he was able to perceive that the place had no windows, and was furnished only with a plain wooden bench about

four feet long that stood in one corner. In the other was a pile of dirty-looking straw. The interior of the room was ten or twelve feet square.

The flyer found his cigarette case, which was a stout affair of gun metal, and only slightly crushed. He lit a cigarette, sat down on the bench, and considered his position. He had come to his senses at last. What a fool he had been!

In fact, as he now saw only too clearly, he had been a bigger fool than anyone would ever believe possible.

Of his own free will he had transported two dangerous spies to Germany. Had landed them safe and sound on a Boche aerodrome!

BILLY realized that the reasons which had caused him to commit his rash deed would appear silly—childish—in the eyes of a cold, calm, judicial court-martial. It would be better, as a matter of fact, to be convicted of treachery rather than attempt to present them in his defense. He wondered whether insanity was a valid defense in a military court. If it were, he certainly ought to be able to plead it successfully! The whole affair was crazy as a bedbug.

Besides bringing the two spies home, he had presented the Germans—free of charge!—with a nice, new Caudron, which incorporated one or two new features which they would undoubtedly be glad to study at their leisure. Fool? Why, he *ought* to be locked up—but in a padded cell, not a camp for prisoners of war. Still, while there's life, there's hope. And he was very much alive. And rested, too, by this time.

He lit matches and examined the interior of his prison carefully. His first impression had been correct—the place was windowless, and doorless, except for the one great iron door. Ventilation was secured by a series of horizontal slits which ran around the house just under the roof. The slits were barely three inches wide. Nothing doing there. The Frenchman who had built the little house had evidently planned to have its contents left undisturbed.

The roof? Ah, there was an idea. Billy upended the bench against the wall, managed with some difficulty to climb upon it and stand erect. He reached upward and found he could touch the roof easily. It was hardly six inches above his head. It was built of heavy double tiling, the upper layer set in cement.

But there was a chance.

He struck another match to get the bearings of the places where the tiles joined, opened his pocket knife, and went to work.

It seemed hopeless.

"I'd need the years that Monte Cristo had, to get through here," he muttered. But, as the minutes passed, and he scraped patiently away, he saw that he was making progress. Dust from the cement showered down constantly over his head and shoulders, and the concrete-filled space between two of the tiles rapidly became an open crack. But as he began to feel a trifle of encouragement, he heard heavy footsteps approaching.

He leaped to the dirt floor, set the bench on the two square boards which served it for legs, and tried to shake the cement dust from his hair and shoulders. Then he sat down and rested his face in his hands in the manner approved for despondent prisoners.

Bolts creaked, and the door opened, revealing three German soldiers standing in the pale moonlight.

"The *Herr Kommandant* will question you," said the first German. The American rose and went with them without a word.

CHAPTER IV THE TEST

AS HE WENT, Billy King's mind worked fast. All his fury was gone for the moment. The Scot in him, cool and calculating, rose to the surface. What should he say in answer to the questions which the *jagdstaffel's* commander would undoubtedly ask him? The business of escaping through the roof was not promising. Perhaps he might get farther by the use of craft. He'd see what he could do. And, another thing! He hated to admit, even to a German, what a fool he had allowed the two spies to make of him.

As he entered the dwelling of von Grunow, Billy King saw that the German commander "did himself well" as the English put it. The room was furnished with a thick carpet, and stuffed chairs covered with some expensive-looking material. There was even a piano in one corner. In the center of the room was a sizable table of dark wood, which was almost completely covered with bottles and glasses. Four people were sitting around the table, while two orderlies stood at attention ready to serve them.

Billy noticed that both orderlies were armed with

pistols, and he had already seen two sentries with rifles outside the house.

At the table were von Grunow, with his famous mustaches almost as large as the horns of a cow, and his long-nosed, intelligent face. Next him was another German officer who never said anything—merely listened. He seemed to be an adjutant, or perhaps an intelligence, or operations officer.

Opposite von Grunow was the man whom Billy had known as Borus, ex-king of Monravia. The American noted with satisfaction that the fellow's nose was completely covered by pads and bandages, and that his mouth was so mended with court plaster that he couldn't open it. The Honorable Borus had to have a pad and pencil on the table beside him to write out anything he wanted to say.

Hovering over him was the girl—once Betty—now *Fraulein* Zeiss. Her eyes were sparkling. Billy couldn't tell whether it was with wine, or joy at reaching Germany, or some other emotion. But she sprang to her feet when he approached the table.

"Yankee pig!" she screeched. "Look what you have done to my Ludwig! But there is one thing," she added, "your brutality has at last made me realize how much I love him."

She put her arms around the man's neck, and kissed his ear affectionately. Von Grunow smiled under his long nose and his great mustache, while the other German officer's tongue came out of his mouth and ran back and forth over his lips. The girl was really lovely in this affectionate mood. Then suddenly she changed, and leaped up like a tigress.

"But my Ludwig can't kiss me with his poor injured mouth!" she cried. "Yankee, I'll scratch your eyes out!"

"*FRAULEIN!*" came von Grunow's heavy voice in a parade ground tone. "Enough of this by-play. We shall now get back to business. There are many things about this affair which are not at all clear. I have here the descriptions of Count Ludwig von Arnstein and *Fraulein* Zeiss, to be sure, but at present the *Herr Graf's* face is not exactly recognizable. *Fraulein* Zeiss is represented as having blonde hair, while yours, *Fraulein*, is almost black."

The girl's smile was so contemptuous that the hardened and worldly-wise von Grunow almost blushed.

"Of course I realize that the color of a lady's hair is subject to change," he said hastily. "But I still cannot see how you persuaded this American to bring you

here. The story about my mustaches is really too ridiculous.”

“He was drunk, *Herr Kommandant*,” said *Fraulein Zeiss*. “Furthermore, after all the danger and suffering through which we have passed to get back to the Fatherland, I do not think your harsh treatment and suspicions are at all in order.”

“But I have been informed by telephone that our Gotha formation was fired upon near Paris, and broken up by a bi-motor French plane like the Caudron in which you say you came here,” persisted the German commander.

“I have already explained that the plane was boarded by a wild Frenchman just at the moment of taking off,” cried the girl. “It must have been he who did the damage, if any was done. I fired the guns in the front cockpit, to be sure, in order to avoid arousing the suspicions of the American. He could see me. If I had failed to shoot he might have suspected something—turned back. But I was very careful indeed not to hit a German plane.”

The man with the bandaged face was grunting, but no one paid him any attention.

“I have yet to hear anything authentic about this Frenchman whom you claim was with you,” said von Grunow. It is now half an hour since I sent Sergeant Frickart and a detachment to take charge of the French ship.”

A long burst of machine-gun fire—Lewis-gun fire—came to them.

“You hear the Frenchman now,” said *Fraulein Zeiss*.

“I tell you,” she went on, “that powers much higher than you will not be pleased at the reception you have given us.”

Von Grunow shrugged, and turned to Billy King, who had been standing by quietly, taking in everything as well as he could with his sketchy knowledge of German.

“What have you to say, *Herr American*?” asked the commander of the *jagdstaffel*, in English. “Do you understand German?”

“A very little,” replied Billy King. “But I am disappointed that you have not offered me a drink.”

Von Grunow signed to one of the orderlies, who filled a glass with brandy. Billy drank it down at a gulp. Immediately he felt a little better.

There had been a desultory popping of rifles going on in the distance for some time, and now came another ripping burst of machine-gun fire.

“Go and order Sergeant Frickart to stop his

operations at once, and to report here to me!” von Grunow said angrily to one of the orderlies.

The orderly vanished.

“And now—*er*—Lieutenant,” the German commander said, peering at the silver bars on Billy’s shoulders to find out his rank—“now will you please have the goodness to explain to me more clearly your part in this altogether extraordinary affair?”

The American paused before replying. Then he said:

“Captain von Grunow, I should like to speak to you alone.”

The German looked at him sharply, and then took him into a room which was furnished with a large, curtained, French bed. He lighted a lamp which stood on a small stand, shut the door, waved the American to a large, easy chair. Von Grunow sat down on the bed.

“Well, what is it? Are you, too, a German agent?”

“No, I am not. But do I look like a fool?”

The German ace surveyed him keenly. He remarked the sharp blue eyes, surrounded by quizzical wrinkles. The thin-lipped mouth, drawn down at the corners by satirical lines.

“No,” the German admitted, “you don’t look like a fool to me.”

“I was piloting one of the French ships that bombed your field here the day before yesterday,” Billy continued.

The German raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

“Did you remark the maneuvers of the French flight leader?” the American persisted.

The German nodded.

“What did you think of them?”

“Foolish. He seemed to lose his head, and, at the same time, he lost two ships of his flight. They separated from the rest of the formation, and we brought them down easily.”

“Those two pilots were Americans—my best friends!” cried the American. “I believe that Saligaud, the French flight leader, lost them on purpose. By making a sudden turn to the right, after signaling a left-hand turn, he lost the two rear ships on the left of the formation. I believe that if I were to return to the French squadron, he would lose me. Besides, I hate the French. I served in the Foreign Legion, and the French officers there used me cruelly. And now—this!”

“Do you think I was deceived by the silly gabble of those two spies yonder? Not at all. I would fight in the American Army, perhaps, but never again for the French. I had already resolved to desert. I had resolved to spend the remainder of the war in a comfortable

prison camp. By bringing the spies over, I could prove to you Germans that my heart was in the right place—as between you and the French, at least—and, in return, it is only right that you should make my captivity easy for me.” As he was speaking, Billy King managed to give his face an expression of unspeakable duplicity—a leering villainy which was slightly repulsive, even to the German.

“So you knew they were spies all the time?” mused von Grunow, to whom the idea had evidently opened a new train of thought.

“Why else should I think they wanted to land here in German-occupied territory?” asked the American, with a great appearance of craftiness. “Would you expect me to believe that they wanted to come here after your mustaches? But why did you throw me into that jail? I have heard that the Germans always gave captured aviators all they wanted to drink. I should not have come here, if I had not wanted to be here, so why take any trouble to keep me from escaping? Why lock me up when I come here willingly?”

“You may have all you want to drink—but not with me,” said von Grunow, with a look of distaste. “But I heard someone come in. I must see what is going on.”

“You understand that if you repeat what I have told you I will deny every word of it. It will be your word against mine?” cried Billy King.

The German motioned him out into the other room without replying.

THE German sergeant, Frickart, had come into the *jagdstaffel* commander’s quarters. His uniform was covered with dirt, and he was panting heavily.

“Well, what now?” asked von Grunow, testily.

“*Herr Kommandant*, there is a French swine guarding the enemy ship,” replied the sergeant. “He has dug himself a trench in the ground, and there he lies, armed with two machine guns, and protected by the earth. He howls vile insults at us, and already he has killed *Lieder* and *Baumgarten*, and wounded *Kronkhauer*.”

The German commander made angry noises.

“Leave him alone for the time being,” he ordered. “We can afford to lose no more men, and firing may injure the aeroplane, which we need. Mount a machine gun in the edge of the trees, covering the plane, but do not fire unless he starts the engines, and attempts to take off. Post several sharpshooters in trees from which they can pick him off at their leisure when morning comes.”

“*Zu befehl, Herr Kommandant!*”

Under cover of lighting a cigarette, Billy King had helped himself to a handful of matches, the chief characteristics of which, as he later found out, were that they made a vile stench, and almost always went out at just the most inopportune moment. But the keen-eyed von Grunow had noticed this action, and now he came up and looked the American over closely.

The table and those immediately around it were shown up brightly by the glare of a tin reflector above the big lamp which illuminated the room. The eyes which enabled the German ace to spot an Allied ship miles away in the broad reaches of the sky missed nothing.

“You have dandruff very badly, haven’t you Lieutenant?” he remarked, with a malicious grin. Reaching out he plucked some of the cement dust that had lodged around the button of the American’s shoulder strap. He rolled it between his fingers.

“Your head must indeed be made of stone, if it sheds such dandruff as this,” he went on, with a sly grin. “I have known that the roof of that guard house was its weak point, provided a prisoner had a little intelligence and initiative. . . . Empty your pockets!” he barked.

“Make sure that he has done so,” he added to an orderly.

THE American placed the scanty contents of his pockets on the table. His pocket knife, cigarette case, a few French coins, his identity card as a pilot, a corkscrew, a handkerchief, and some matches—that was all. The German ace scanned the identity card with interest, then opened the knife, and looked at the blade. It was scratched and worn blunt by the work already done on the roof. The German officer laughed, and slipped it into his own pocket.

“For a souvenir of one of the most amazing experiences I have had during the war,” he said. “I trust you won’t mind, Lieutenant? You might have known that such an old bird wouldn’t be caught napping for long.”

A sudden thought came to him.

“By the way, if what you have told me is true, why did you fight so hard for your liberty, and why did you beat our good Count von Arnstein so cruelly?”

“Why shouldn’t an American officer fight for his liberty?” asked Billy King boldly, ignoring the reference to what he had told in the bedroom. “As for that fellow there—von Arnstein, or whatever his name is—we

were rivals for the girl. We had already had a fight in Paris over her, during which an old hag stole all our money. I welcomed the opportunity to give him a good whipping.”

“Is that true?” von Grunow asked the spies.

The girl nodded.

“Yes, they did fight,” she said. “The idea of this brutal American imbecile thinking that he could take me away from my Ludwig!” She fondled the other spy, who was drinking brandy through a straw placed in a small hole which the surgeon thoughtfully left in the court plaster over his mouth.

“This American is not such an imbecile as he may appear,” said von Grunow, speaking in German. “He will bear careful watching, for I should not be at all surprised if he turned out to be a counter-espionage agent, put onto your trail.”

Billy King’s heart sank. He began to be sure that he had been too smart

“Just what the American’s purpose in coming here was, is not at all clear,” the German commander went on, “but I have no doubt but what his plans were deeply and carefully laid. This scheme of having a spy-carrying plane defended throughout the night by an expert machine gunner who mysteriously appears, and who then takes the trouble to entrench himself in the ground, is a new and disturbing development in my experience.

“For all I know, other planes may have landed, and there may be a platoon of wild American savages concealed in the neighborhood, ready to attack us here and kill us and destroy everything after this scout has spied out our dispositions of material and personnel. At any rate, I shall post extra guards.”

Then indeed Billy King came to believe that he had pulled a tremendous boner in not appearing to be simple-minded, drunk, crazy, anything but adopting the wise attitude which he had displayed before von Grunow. He had spilled the beans, the soup, and all the other courses.

“AS FOR you, *Herr Graf* and *Fraulein*,” continued the commandant of the *jagdstaffel*, “your identity and actions do not appear to me to be above suspicion. I do not say that you are not what you purport to be, but your account of your doings is fantastic, to say the least. The story of a taxicab driver climbing onto the tail of your plane when it was taking off, is—you must admit—bizarre. So, too, is the tale of *Graf* von Amstein passing himself off as the ex-king of Monravia.”

“I have explained to you why he did that!” the *Fraulein Zeiss* cried. “He heard the other Americans calling this pilot ‘King,’ and he hoped to excite his interest, and get friendly with him quickly by saying that he was a real king. Also, he thought that the American might jump at the chance to become the rival of a real king for a girl. As though anyone could take me away from my Ludwig!” she cried again.

The commander of the German squadron shrugged.

“Fantastic!” he said. “I do not understand the workings of such a mind.”

“You have no imagination!” cried the girl. “You! You are only a stupid soldier. Do you think that you could have moved about France for three months undetected, as Ludwig did? Never—not even for a day! Of course you can’t understand the workings of his brilliant mind, and neither can the French, fortunately for Germany. He has obtained vital facts about the new American Army.”

“If he would turn over those documents which you say that he has obtained to me, I might be able to judge better as to their value, and also to keep them safe,” suggested von Grunow.

“No!” cried *Fraulein Zeiss*.

The male spy shook his head violently, and made rumbling noises in his closed mouth. He wrote rapidly in German on the pad of paper at his elbow:

I shall to no one but the Herr Oberst Schlegel of the Intelligence, these papers turn over.

The commandant shrugged indifferently.

“As you please,” he said. “Colonel Schlegel will be here the first thing in the morning. I have notified him by telephone of your arrival.”

“What did he say?” asked *Fraulein Zeiss* eagerly. “He was pleased that we had arrived? He spoke of rewarding us?”

“He said nothing except to take good care of you, and to keep you here until he came,” remarked the German grimly.

“But it is now almost two o’clock,” he went on. “I must lead my young gentlemen to the attack at dawn tomorrow, and I need a little sleep. All these things can be ironed out in the morning. Meanwhile, I offer my honored visitors accommodation for the night. I have one extra bedroom here in this house, with one bed. Will that be sufficient?”

The girl blushed rosily.

“To be sure. I must stay up to take good care of my poor Ludwig, who has been so terribly injured by that

nasty American. I am a graduate nurse, you know. And have you more champagne, for us to toast our new-found happiness?" she concluded.

"To be sure—all you want," smiled the German ace, giving an order to his striker. The man went out to a back room, apparently a pantry, and returned with a tray on which were four bottles of wine and two glasses. At a sign from the commandant, the man took the loaded tray into another room, and lighted the lamp there.

CHAPTER V BARE FISTS

THE AMERICAN WATCHED all this byplay with disgust. To think that he had actually fought over such a treacherous and repulsive harpy! What craziness had been engendered by a few drinks under the garish light of the huge, glass chandelier of the Paris café!

But Billy King was sane enough now. Escape seemed to be growing harder all the time, but he was determined to encompass it some way. There was one big factor in his favor. The Caudron was still where he had left it, and it would remain there until morning under the capable guardianship of Alcide Druot

"And now to take care of our other midnight caller," grinned the German commander. "We must see to it that he is very well taken care of indeed. Is not Wedel on guard outside?" he asked the orderly.

"*Ja wohl, Herr Kommandant,*" the man said, standing at attention.

"Bring him in."

The orderly clicked his heels, and went outside. He returned with one of the largest Germans that Billy King had ever seen. The man was at least four inches over six feet, brood enough to fill an ordinary doorway, and his neck was so large that it made his close-cropped, bullet head appear ridiculously small by comparison.

"During the time when I was attending Oxford, in England," remarked von Grunow, with a twist at each of his mustachios, "we undergraduates had what was known as a 'rag' and I secured a souvenir from a 'bobby.' These will come in very handy now."

While he was speaking, he had gone into his

bedroom for a moment, and reappeared dangling a pair of large, old-fashioned handcuffs. He snapped one cuff around the American's right wrist, and reached for the left wrist of the soldier, Wedel.

"Not too tight, *Herr Kommandant!*" exclaimed the German soldier. "I have been a policeman, and I know how uncomfortable such things, when they are too tight, can be."

"Are you sure that it was as a policeman that you learned that, Wedel?" asked von Grunow, with a laugh, as he completed fastening prisoner and jailer together. "Well, well, we won't go into that."

"Now, Wedel," he went on, sternly, "I have reason to believe that this is a very important and dangerous prisoner indeed. You will answer for his security with your back, if not with your life, for I swear that if he should escape, I will have you lashed to ribbons! Get a pistol from the sergeant of the guard, and, if you hope to have any comfort in the future in the Imperial German Army, be sure that you do not fall asleep for an instant. Have the sergeant lock you together into the guardhouse."

"*Zu befehl, Herr Kommandant!*"

The soldier saluted rigidly with his right hand, clicking the heels of his heavy boots, and turned sharply, forcing the American prisoner to run around him in a circle, like a dog on a short leash. Then the pair went out.

STRANGE to say, the American was not discouraged by these elaborate precautions to prevent his escape. So great was his determination to slip out of this trap, that he actually felt confident, now. He had hypnotized himself into believing that he was going to escape, and he saw in his big, heavily armed guard nothing more than a walking arsenal provided for his convenience.

Wedel found the sergeant of the guard and secured a pistol, the holster of which he fastened to his belt. Then he led the way to the stone guardhouse. This time Billy noticed that the place was not fitted with a padlock, nor a lock of any kind. The door was merely fastened shut by three great iron bolts—one at the top, one at the bottom, and one in the middle.

The sergeant came along, shut the door after them, and slid the bolts shut carefully. The American and the German crossed the interior, and seated themselves side by side on the wooden bench. Billy King gave himself over to thinking out various plans for escape.

The pilot took out one of the few cigarettes which remained, and lit it. He offered one to the German,

but Wedel refused. He produced a porcelain pipe from some recess in his clothes. Billy noticed by the light of the match and the German's wrist watch that it was two o'clock. He had an hour and a half before it would begin to get light, if the guard's watch was right. His own timepiece had been hopelessly smashed in the fight when he was captured.

Billy King had studied the German soldier carefully under the light in the quarters of von Grunow. The man was big and in fairly good physical condition, except that he limped. Probably he had been wounded in the infantry, or some other combat branch, and, after his recovery, been transferred to this job as a ground man in the Air Service. At any rate, it was apparent he needed exercise. When he sat down, his stomach bulged slightly. He had not the board-like abdominal muscles of the professional pugilist which his appearance suggested. He was vulnerable.

Billy waited while Wedel fumbled around for tobacco and loaded the porcelain pipe. He watched like a cat while the man lit one of his stinking matches, applied it to his pipe, sucked mightily, and then had the misfortune to have his light go out. He possessed himself with patience while his guard lit another match, and even delayed until Wedel, drawing with all his strength, had exhaled most of the air from his lungs.

Then he struck.

EVERY ounce of power in his wiry body, every bit of his rage at the misfortunes which had been crowded into the last two days, went into that blow. It landed squarely upon the solar plexus, and Billy King's fist sank into the German's stomach until it seemed as if it brought up against the man's backbone. Breathless and helpless, Wedel made strange noises in his throat as he slipped off the bench onto the floor. The American was on him, hands at his throat, cutting off his wind.

Billy King knew that he had to kill that German. It would not be the first enemy that he had killed. He had shot them down out of the air, blasted them out of their dugouts, and impaled them on his long French bayonet, in the Foreign Legion. But this business of flesh to flesh—murder with bare hands—was sickening.

Still, this was war. His own life and reputation were at stake. Relentlessly he fixed his sinewy hands into the German's great neck, and, bearing down with all his weight, he squeezed.

Even with the advantage of that tremendous blow,

which would have laid out most men completely, the American had no easy time. With his two hundred and fifty pounds of weight against the pilot's hundred and fifty, the German's dying thrashings were stupendous—like those of an expiring whale. Time and again, the American was almost hurled off of his enemy and against one of the stone walls. But the German had to die, and die he did—at last. But he died a great incubus of inert flesh, fastened to the man who had killed him.

When the German was still, Billy King nerved himself for a revolting task. Killing he had done—but mayhem, never. Yet he must rid himself of his great burden before he could escape. He had thanked von Grunow for furnishing him the tool to do it with—the German's own sharp bayonet.

The American drew the weapon from its scabbard, prepared to sever the German's hand at the wrist. He twisted his own right hand around in the manacle, and clutched the hand of Wedel with all his strength.

As he squeezed the dead hand, he was surprised. It was not the hard, solid hand of a workman, or even of a man who has gone in for sports—baseball, tennis, golf. It was the soft, pliable hand of a musician who has avoided hand-hardening exercises—easily compressible, like that of a child, or a young girl. And the cuff was comparatively loose around the big-boned wrist.

Squeezing and compressing the limp hand, and working and tugging on the manacle, the pilot edged it off, a millimeter at a time.

At last he was free.

He sprang quickly to his feet, the bayonet in his hand. He upended the bench, climbed upon it, and attacked the roof with fury. He knew that he must escape now, or stand trial for murder by the Germans. And a court-martial would never pardon his killing his guard, even though the man had been armed to the teeth, with all the odds of weapons and size in his favor.

BILLY KING worked desperately, but even with the heavy bayonet, it was slow work. Finally, exhausted by the strain of laboring with his arms above his head, he slipped to the floor. He lit a cigarette, and looked at the watch on the dead German's wrist.

Three o'clock! He could never dig away the tiles in time—it would be quite light before four. There was only one thing for it. He must smash out the tiles with the butt of the German's rifle. It would make a

tremendous noise in the stillness of the night, and there was little question but what it would be heard by the sentries, who would bring the guard on the run. No matter. Better to take a fighting chance—to die fighting, if that was on the cards—than to face a court-martial, and death by hanging or a firing squad.

Billy King took off the German's watch, and fastened it around his own wrist. He strapped on the man's pistol—looking in vain in his belt and pockets for extra cartridges for either pistol or rifle. Then he dimbed once more onto his bench, and prepared to crash his way through the roof. But before he had delivered the first blow he heard a scraping noise at the door. One of the bolts was being carefully drawn!

Instantly the American jumped silently to the dirt floor. He reversed his rifle, groped hurriedly for the bayonet, found and fixed it, and stood at the ready, waiting to see what would develop.

The door was being unbolted very slowly, with a minimum of noise—a fact which puzzled the pilot. That was not like a sergeant or corporal of the guard, on a tour of inspection. Was someone creeping in to murder him, he wondered? If so, they'd meet a warm reception! He'd skewer them on the broad German blade before they had a chance to make a move.

Finally the last bolt was withdrawn, and the door began to open slowly, noiselessly. In the darkness of the prison house, the American could see the intruder outlined clearly against the light shed by the setting moon.

It was the girl—Betty, or *Fraulein Zeiss*.

For moments she stood there motionless, peering into the dark interior of the room, trying to accustom her eyes to the gloom.

Billy stood immobile, hoping that she would come farther into the prison, so that he could more easily seize her and tie her up. Suddenly she gasped:

"You're free!"

The pilot dropped his gun, sprang forward, and seized her by both wrists with a grip that made her expel her breath sharply, restraining a scream of pain.

"Don't hurt me!" she breathed sharply. "I came to set you free. We must get away. I have the papers. Hurry! Where is your guard?"

"Dead!" growled Billy King. "And so will you be if you make a sound to raise the alarm. Be quiet, and I'll only gag you and tie you up. But make no mistake! I'm going away from here, and it will be hard luck for anybody who gets in my way—man or woman, baby!"

"Don't be silly!" said the girl in an agonized

whisper. "Why do you suppose I took such pains to open your door so quietly? For my own amusement? Do you think I crept up here to release a prisoner in an enemy camp for fun? Why do you think I risked my life? It was so that we might escape together. I've got what I came here for. Let's be moving, before it's too late."

BILLY KING thought rapidly. It must be as she said, unless she was setting some kind of a trap for him. And he could see no point in that. Why should she let him loose, armed, able to kill several Germans before he was shot down, if she was a German herself?

It didn't make sense. Nothing made sense, but if this girl let him out of his prison, she must be O.K. At any rate, he'd take a chance.

There was little else to do. Play the game out, with the cards that were dealt him. That was all he could do. And this girl was no slouch, either, when it came to shooting. He suddenly remembered how she had thrown lead among the German Gothas over Paris. She'd be an ally worth having, provided she stayed on the square.

"Got a gun?" he asked, releasing her wrists.

"No, I didn't have time to look for one."

"Take this," he said, handing her the loaded pistol. "Now, follow me. No funny business—no butting in except when I tell you to. I'm better at this wood-creeping stuff than you are, and I'll do all the dirty work. You keep well back, and don't make a sound, or do a thing without orders from me. What's your name right now?"

"Betty will do," she replied, ignoring his thrust.

Billy drew her away from the door, shut and bolted it, and then struck boldly off into the neatly underbrushed woods. For the time being, he led her by the hand.

The flyer could find his way through woods like that as easily as a Parisian *flaneur* can navigate the boulevards. He soon struck the road along which the Germans wheeled their ships from one field to the other. They hurried along it, keeping close to its right-hand edge, prepared at any moment to dodge among the trees if anyone came along going in the opposite direction. Men going that way, Billy King didn't care to meet. If they went on, that would make so many less that he would have to fight.

But he met no one. Soon he was approaching the place where the road ended at the other field. Where—unless something had happened—the Caudron rested

under the guardianship of that doughty old soldier, Alcide Druot.

THE field was still bathed in pale moonlight, and, silhouetted against it, the American could perceive vague figures. Letting go of the girl's hand with a sharp slap on her arm as a signal for her to remain where she was, he advanced with the swift, silent stealth of an Indian.

Presently he perceived clearly what blocked the road. It was a heavy machine gun, mounted on a tripod. Grouped around and behind it were the figures of its crew. One—two—three—four men. A bad layout. Slipping among the trees, Billy King advanced until he was scarcely five feet from the Germans.

They Crouched silently near their weapon. Apparently their orders had been not to talk or smoke, for they were doing neither.

A hoot drifted across the field where the Caudron squatted, and a voice jeered in French:

"Come on, Boches! Only I am here—alone. I, Alcide Druot, an old man, a cripple, too infirm to be admitted into the Armies of France. Come on and visit me, for I am getting very lonely."

Two corpses stretched on the ground ten or fifteen yards from the edge of the woods testified to the fact that the Germans' last attempt to make the old cripple a visit had ended in a fiasco.

At the old Frenchman's taunts, the crew of the machine gun stirred uneasily, and cursed under their breaths, but they did not try to get hostile. Their orders had been strict, and in the Imperial German Army orders were obeyed.

The American pilot studied the situation. He did not believe that there were other Germans hidden in the woods nearby. If there had been, he was sure that he would have sensed their presence. The best thing would be to creep up and kill the Germans silently, but that was obviously impossible. One he could bayonet—perhaps two. But the others would shoot him with their pistols.

No, a silent death for his enemies was dearly impossible. Such being the case, a hand grenade was what he needed. Tossed under the gun, it would ruin the whole outfit with one great explosion. But he had no hand grenade.

Only one course remained, to tackle them with his rifle, and get as many as he could. It would bring the guard—probably the entire camp—on the run, but there was no help for it. Further delay was useless. He

drew a deep breath—stepped out—and *bam!* His luck broke.

AS HE took that step forward, Billy King's foot came down on what was probably the only dry stick of wood within hundreds of yards. It cracked sharply in the stillness. The Germans leaped to their feet, and turned in the direction from which the sound came.

One of them seemed to see a darker shadow among the others in the trees, and he whipped out his pistol. Billy saw the glint as the man's gun came up, and his rifle spat. The man crumpled as the rest of them began to fire.

Swiftly working the bolt of his rifle, Billy shot down another enemy. The others, leaping forward, were firing wildly with their pistols at the flash of the gun. A slug from one of the Lugers sliced through the muscle of the pilot's back just under his armpit, twisting him partly around. Another parted his hair, so that the grazed skin felt as though a crazy barber had drawn a razor along the top of his skull.

He had no time to work the bolt of the rifle before the two men were on him. He drew back the gun with the murderous knife on its muzzle, and plunged it at the first German. The man screamed, twisted, and the jagged blade ripped into his uniform and held there. Billy couldn't jerk it loose.

The other German could have killed Billy easily. But he suddenly lost his nerve, screeched, and fled along the road which led to the other field. Two shots rang out, and the sound of his heavy boots pounding along the road ceased.

The girl came running swiftly forward, and found the American gasping, leaning against a tree.

"I got him!" she cried. "Oh, are you wounded?"

For answer, he seized her and hurled her to the ground, throwing himself down beside her. Perturbed by the shooting, and fearing that it presaged an attack on his position by the ship, old Alcide Druot was throwing tracers and solid slugs into the woods. Fortunately, he had trouble controlling the two bucking Lewises without any proper support for them, and his bullets were flying high. After three or four warning bursts, since he saw no signs of an offensive against him, the old taxi driver ceased firing.

Instantly, Billy King shouted in French:

"Hey, there, Old Cabbage, it's I—the American, and the little chicken! Don't shoot! We're coming!"

He ran to the gun the German crew had manned, and quickly dismantled it, hurling the parts far and

wide into the woods. Then he dragged the girl to her feet, and they started running hand in hand across the field. The Frenchman held his fire.

“Hurry!” the pilot cried. “All aboard. The Boches will be here in a few minutes. You!” he cried to the chauffeur, “can you crank a flying taxi?”

“I cranked the first airplane which ever flew with the Army of Algeria!” yelled Alcide Druot. Apparently the old Frenchman was not lying, for he seized the prop of the left-hand motor in a most businesslike manner. The pilot, ignoring the stinging pain of his wound, gained his cockpit with a speed which would have done credit to a monkey.

CHAPTER VI ZERO FLIGHT

A FEW MOMENTS LATER both motors were drumming steadily. But long minutes of danger lay before them before they could take off. The engines were water-cooled, and stone cold. It would be suicide to take off without properly warming them. Billy King dosed the radiator shutters, and yelled to the old Frenchman:

“Can you find stones to block the wheels? We must speed up our coffee mills, and warm this *coucou*.”

The veteran of the Army of Algeria ran around with his nose to the ground like a hunting dog trying to pick up a scent. The moon was almost down, but at last he found two stones such as he was looking for, rocks about the size of footballs. Once they were under the wheels, the pilot could open his throttles wider. The thermometers began to crawl up almost at once.

But Billy King feared that they would warm up too late. Rifle bullets were snapping through the air around him. One whipped across the front of his blouse. Its tearing tug reminded him of clothes. Climbing out of the cockpit, he donned his flying coat, and the helmet and goggles which he had placed in one of its pockets. A bullet slapped through the fabric on each side of the cockpit where he had been sitting. Another slithered off the leading edge of the upper wing, showering the girl in her front cockpit with splinters.

Even as the pilot yelled: “Shoot! Spray those

woods! Shoot!” she realized what was happening, and sent burst after burst at the Germans, combing the trees for the unseen marksmen. The rifle fire ceased, but the American knew that before long the enemy would bring up machine-guns. What that happened, he would have to take off—or try to—whether the engines were warm or not.

He climbed back into his dangerous seat, and advanced the throttles another half inch. A minute more and he could start. The old Frenchman was in his rear cockpit, replacing the guns on their *tourelle*, and bringing them to bear on the place from which an attack would come.

Apparently incited by the increased roar as the pilot advanced the speed of his motors, a detachment of Germans suddenly advanced to the assault. As bullets from the guns of Alcide Druot lashed them, they threw themselves onto their faces, and commenced sniping at the Caudron and its occupants. But, from his elevated stand in the ship’s cockpit, they were cold meat for the veteran of the Algerians. He nailed them to the ground, lashed them, sent them scampering back with bullets kicking dust at their heels.

“*Vive la France!*” he shouted, waving his arms above his head. “*Vive la France!*”

A BULLET caught him low in the shoulder, spun him around, and knocked him sprawling onto the floor of the cockpit. Others followed it, some of them tracers, ripping into the fuselage, raking it, and traveling backward and forward along its length. The Germans had finally brought over and set up another heavy machine-gun. The girl was firing back at it with her Lewises, trying to hit the source of the gleaming tracers, but the heavy Maxim kept on shooting. Even if its gunners were put out of action, there were dozens of other men to take their places. Big odds.

Billy King pulled the throttles back to the end of their arcs. The powerful Hissos howled. The big Caudron lurched forward against the stones which blocked it, leaped them, and tore across the field toward the light of the rising sun.

The moon was nothing more than a pale blob on the western horizon, and the red streaks in the east shot up, giving everything a pinkish tinge, like the frothy blood that stained old Alcide Druot’s lips up in the rear of the ship. The German bullet had nicked his lung.

The big ship, torn and bedraggled but still airworthy, left the ground, and started up into the gray heavens.

But Billy King held her down. Swerving over the trees, he headed straight north for the Allied lines, right over the field which he had bombed two days before.

As they swept over the hangars, they could see Germans milling around, and wheeling out their Fokkers. The girl in the front cockpit sent them scurrying to cover with her Lewises. But, concealed in one of the hangars, the commander of the *jagdstaffel*—von Grunow of the mustaches—sat in his ship behind a whirling prop.

The German leader's rage was so great that he was a madman. To think that he had been outwitted—on his own field! And now the wretches who had done it were escaping, shooting down more of his men as they left, in a final crowning insult. But he was resolved that they shouldn't get far!

The Mercedes engine of his Fokker was roaring full out, and the thermometer showed that it was warm enough to risk a take-off. Ten strong men held its vibrating lower wing, and four more sat on its straining tail, fighting the impulse of the shrieking prop.

The bomb-torn field in front of the hangars might be too rough for any ordinary take-off, but there are more ways than one of getting off the ground.

The mechanics who were holding the champing Fokker were watching their commander closely. They saw when von Grunow raised his left arm over his head; and when he brought it down, every man hurled himself flat onto the dirt. As if sprung from a catapult, the German ship leaped into the air, and tore away after the fleeing Caudron.

BILLY KING was making no effort to climb. On the contrary, he was keeping as close to the ground as he could, rising just enough to clear the clumps of trees, and then coming down to hug the dirt once more. It was contour flying with a vengeance. Sleepy Germans along his route hardly realized what was coming before the Caudron was gone into the dull morning light. Of one thing, the pilot meant to make absolutely certain. No flying enemy was going to get under his tail!

Occasionally Billy looked backward and upward. He saw the lone Fokker in the sky. The enemy pilot hadn't seen him yet, but he was cruising northward, and it was a safe bet that he would miss nothing that he could see. The American held a straight course. The field he had left was, after all, only twenty-five miles from the Front in a straight line, and he had already covered half that distance. There was a chance that he might be able to get across the lines unobserved.

Billy King felt that the pursuer was von Grunow. Down on the carpet as he was, the American would have welcomed a chance to battle the German ace and trainer of aces, with a good gunner in the rear. But old Alcide Druot had disappeared. The pilot had no doubt that he was dead. With only a corpse to protect his tail, a good pilot could come in to the attack at an angle which would mask him from the guns in the front cockpit, and drill him at his leisure.

But the time for that was getting short. The Caudron was making r.p.m.'s. The terrain flashed by now. They were sweeping down the street of a ruined village that the American knew was scarcely five miles from the Allied lines.

But, as he left the town behind, Billy King realized that he had made a mistake in not avoiding the place. Behind him German soldiers were swarming out of the cellars and funkholes where they had taken refuge. Flares were spouting.

Red balls shot into the air—a star shell went up and hung in the sky, suspended from its tiny parachute. No pilot with eyes in his head and wits in his skull, could fail to see and understand such signals.

The Fokker came hurtling down out of the sky.

Von Grunow was an old campaigner. A few hundred feet above the escaping Caudron, he pulled up and observed it carefully before coming in to the attack. Crouching beneath her guns in the front cockpit, the girl sent streams of tracers and service bullets whizzing up to search for the enemy. Billy King wished she had not done so. The chance for a hit at that distance was small indeed, and her fire emphasized the fact that the rear of the big ship was dead and empty.

The German ace could not fail to notice that. And he did not.

SWOOPING around in a circle, von Grunow came down behind and above the Caudron's tail. As Billy King had foreseen, he kept the big ship's upper wing between him and the forward gunner. With the speed of its long slanting dive, and full gun, the Fokker ate up the distance between the two ships as if the quarry had been standing still.

Looking over his shoulder, the American pilot kept close tabs on the distance between him and the enemy. The big Caudron could never dogfight successfully with a Fokker in the hands of a skilful pilot, but Billy King was going to do his best. He tensed as the German sent a testing burst spluttering about his tail.

But, as he prepared to jerk the heavy bi-motor up into a *chandelle*, and give the girl in front a chance for a fleeting shot, he saw something which made him pause.

The guns in the rear cockpit were moving . . . moving. Not just jerking and flopping around aimlessly, as they had been doing but slowly and surely lowering their muzzles to bear on the onrushing Fokker. That meant . . . What did it mean?

The American wished he knew. He watched the pair of Lewises, fascinated by their steady, purposeful swing.

In the Fokker, von Grunow bared his teeth. The wind swept his mustaches back into his ears, and his eyes snapped as he gloated over his victims. Beard him, would they? Not and live!

His hand clenched. Steel and phosphorous leaped from the muzzles of his Spandaus. The slugs shattered the Caudron's tail, and came ripping up the fuselage toward the big ship's crew. And then, at fifty feet, the Fokker ran into a shower of flying metal. A bloody head appeared above the cowling of the rear cockpit as the Lewises sang their terrible song:

"Brhrhrhrh. Brhrhrhp!"

Like a dozen riveters gone mad.

"Brhrhr!"

The propeller of the Fokker disappeared—its radiator shredded away. A slug slithered along the Spandau sights, and into the body behind them. The Fokker went down by the head, and hurtled into the ground.

A grotesque, yet majestic figure raised itself up in the rear of the Caudron—drunken, old red-nosed Alcide Druot.

"Vive la France!" he shouted. *"Vive la—"* But a torquent of dark blood poured out of his mouth and choked him. Von Grunow's dying bursts had torn his chest to pieces.

So, as he would have wished, died the veteran of the Army of Algeria.

THE battered Caudron tore on. Alert Germans in the front lines popped at it with rifles. A machine gunner ripped one of the tires to tatters with a burst of bullets. But the big ship did not falter. With both throttles wide, and the two motors pounding their utmost, the remnant of what had been a brand new airplane a few hours before rushed on over French territory until Billy King could set it down flapping on a French flying field.

Mechanics helped him steer it to the line.

The French pilots crowded around, gaping their amazement as a girl, still pretty in spite of the smudges of burnt powder on her face, came climbing down. She cut short their admiring phrases, and addressed herself to a captain who seemed to be in command. "I'm XY2—from Germany—with important papers. Notify Paris immediately—the Intelligence."

"You might as well notify my squadron while you're about it," said the American, climbing wearily to the ground. "Call Squadron 157, and tell them that Lieutenant King is here with a crippled ship."

"Mais oui, mon Lieutenant—Mademoiselle," cried the French captain. "You would no doubt like refreshment—coffee, cognac? Lieutenant Dubois! Escort them to the cantine."

The French pilots followed them saw that they got their refreshments. Then, winking at each other significantly, they withdrew.

Billy King lowered a glass of rank French coffee, liberally laced with cognac, and then began to feel some of the characteristics and tendencies of a human being.

"Would you mind?" he remarked, "telling me a little something of what this is all about?"

The girl sipped her coffee.

"You deserve to know," she said after a moment. "This spy, Ludwig von Arnstein, had the French authorities buffaloed. They believed that he had obtained important papers, and that he still had them in his possession. Also plans and codes. But although they searched him and his belongings again and again, they could find nothing. They hesitated to arrest him, for fear that he had arranged to have them sent to Germany if that occurred.

"Finally they sent me to vamp him. I kept him on the string, and gained his confidence to a certain extent, but in the most important matter, I could do no better than the others. Where he kept his papers was too much for all of us.

"But I stuck with him, and last night things finally broke. I guess he felt them closing in on him, and knew that they would end up by arresting him. Holding him on suspicion if nothing else. His passport and identification papers as a Spanish nobleman were in perfect order, and he was vouched for by prominent Spaniards, which made interfering with him a dangerous matter politically, but they couldn't let him go on forever.

"Last night, in the cafe, he heard you tell your friends

that you were ferrying a triplace ship out to the Front this morning. That gave him the idea of getting you to take him back to Germany. He had a dozen schemes for persuading you to do so, including the one of pretending to be the ex-king of Monrovia, which he thought up as being a play on your name—King.

“By that time, I had thoroughly convinced him that I was *Fraulein* Zeiss. She was a German spy whom the French recently captured, and who was glad to give up her signals, passwords, and everything in exchange for her life. Von Amstein kept no secrets from me except one—where he had hidden his papers. That, I couldn’t find out. At that time, for all I knew, he might have made arrangements for them to be delivered to him at the very aerodrome at Villacoublay. By a confederate like the taxi driver, for instance. So there was nothing for me to do but tag along.”

“WHERE did he keep his stuff?” the American wanted to know. “Surely old Alcide Druot was no confederate of spies.”

“I discovered too late that he had left them in the custody of the cashier of the cafe, and that she kept them for him in her safe,” the girl replied. “Not a bad gag, at that. But I didn’t find that out until we were in Germany. There, of course, I still had to play the part of *Fraulein* Zeiss until my chance to get the papers came.”

“Did you kill him?” the American inquired, dryly.

She shook her head. A spot of color came to her cheek.

“I always carry a supply of chloral hydrates with me,” she said. “Sleep-powder. A little in his wine fixed him. And, after what you did to his face, it will be a long time before he will spy again. A little more of the chloral in champagne which I passed out the window to the guards for them to drink to our happiness settled them, and then I came and let you out. I don’t see why you should complain. If he hadn’t been a spy, he would have been a very charming man.”

“I’m not complaining!” cried Billy King. “I’m beyond that.”

The French captain came bustling in. “The orders from Paris are to take you there by plane immediately, *Mademoiselle!*” he cried. “You are ready?”

“One moment,” she said, and turned to Billy King.

“You will get leave,” she whispered. “I shall put all your actions in the best light, and tell them that you

acted under my orders, and that you are a hero. You must come to see me. 28 Rue Brey. You will?”

The American looked doubtful.

“I don’t know,” he said. “You change too rapidly for me. American, English, French, German. I might wake up and find you a Chinese woman!”

She made a little face at him. Hurried away. Billy King knew he’d never see her again.

THE captain lingered a moment. He looked at the American, who was stiffly trying to take off his flying coat.

“But, *mon Lieutenant*, you are wounded!” he cried, seeing the dried blood streaking the flyer’s blouse underneath his arm. “I will call the *medecin major* at once!”

The doctor came and dressed the wound, and put plaster along the top of the American’s head where the bullet had kissed it. Then the French captain put him into his own bed.

Billy King’s last thought before he dropped off into a heavy sleep was: “These Frenchmen here seem to be O.K., but what will I do when I get back to that squadron? The only American in it! And, for a flight leader—that dirty coward, Saligaud!”

When he woke up, the commander of his squadron was beside the bed. The Frenchman’s face was stern.

“So, Lieutenant King,” he said, “you have ruined my new Caudron!”

“Yes, yes,” he went on, hurriedly, “I know that it was in a good cause—that you did splendidly, and that you will no doubt be decorated. But it was not discipline! You disobeyed orders from me—your squadron commander. You will get your two weeks’ leave. Very well. But I cannot have undisciplined men—however brave—in my squadron. When you are ready for duty again—yes, I hate to have to tell you—but I shall insist that you be assigned to an American squadron.”

Billy King sat up straight in bed and stared at the French captain like a wild man.

Transferred to an American squadron—

Two weeks leave—

Paris.

28 Rue Brey—

“You know. Captain,” he said in a strange voice to the astounded Frenchman, “I might see her again after all.”