



FLAMING DESTINY OF THE SKY DAMNED

by ANTHONY FIELD

Once again the hell-diving Black Sheep Squadron rears through screaming, shell-torn war skies! Some member of that infamous Black Sheep Squadron was a spy who had sold their honor to hell—so theirs was a double mission of hate as they roared through flaming skies in a mad attempt to save the Allied High Command from raw annihilation!

CHAPTER I

A MACHINE GUN CAN BE pretty nasty in the hands of an expert. And there's something to be said for shrapnel—a hand grenade and a French .45. But the quickest and surest way of acquiring a black eye, a bloody nose or a couple of busted ribs, along the entire

Western Front, was to look cock-eyed at one of the Black Sheep.

And on this particular evening, the members of the Black Sheep Squadron were in a particularly nasty mood. Had been, in fact, for the past ten days. Ever since things had started to go haywire.

Captain Quinn—boilermaker Jack Quinn—C.O. of the outfit, stood straddle-legged beside one of the hangars and from jaundiced eyes surveyed his domain. The sun was flaming low in the west and already a violet dusk was gathering in the east. On the tarmac stood two planes, their motors idling.

A step sounded behind him and he turned as Captain Drake joined him, proffered a crumpled pack of Camels. Quinn took one and they lit up.

"According to the calendar," said Dake, "it's Spring, someplace. Imagine! Robins twittering. The smell of lilacs." He kicked at a clod of dirt. "Nuts! Spring don't come to the Western Front. Smell the nice burnt castor oil. Hear the sweet music—of the big guns up ahead."

"The hell with Spring," growled Quinn. He flung his half-smoked cigarette to the ground, crushed it savagely beneath his heel, turned to watch the flyers straggling toward the mess shack. A half dozen conflicting emotions crawled slowly across his battered face. His Squadron—the infamous Black Sheep! Sky Devils, too tough to discipline, with records as black as their name. Flying, fighting fools who had made history on the Western front. Heroes all.

All? Quinn's face darkened. His hands clenched into huge fists at his side. "Look at 'em," he said bitterly to Dake. "No whistling. No horse play. No scrappy brawls. Not a peep out of them—that bunch of hell raisers. I don't like it."

Dake shrugged. "Neither do I. But you can't blame the men for looking cock-eyed at each other. Hell, that rumor is spreading like wildfire from outfit to outfit, all through the sector."

Quinn spat, ran a gnarled hand around the stubble on his chin. "A spy," he said harshly. "A spy in the Black Sheep." He gagged at the word, continued bitterly. "Listen, Dake, I hand-picked this bunch. They're bad eggs—so tough and hard boiled no brass hat could handle 'em. They'll kick the hell out of military etiquette, maybe, but they've sure blasted the Boche out of the skies. I'm damned if I believe a single man-jack of 'em has sold out to Germany."

Dake—Killer Dake, ex-gangster—blew twin streams of smoke through his thin nostrils. His face was a bleak mask as he drawled: "But you do believe it.

And why not? Listen—for the past three weeks Jerry has left his calling card—a flock of bombs—at every drome in the sector. Except ours."

Quinn glowered. "So what?"

Dake's face was still a mask. He shrugged. "That's not much, maybe. But every few days a Fokker pays us a quick visit—thumbs his nose at us—and then beats it. Nice, friendly social call. Nuts! Why don't we rate a bomb? That's the clincher—and you know it."

An acid venom gnawed at Quinn's heart. He nodded. "I know. That's why I keep a couple of ships warming up all the time. Next time Jerry comes, I'm going up and ride him down. I'll make him talk. By God, I'll find out what's at the bottom of all this."

"Just like that, eh?" mocked Dake. He flicked his cigarette away in a glowing arc. "For all you know—I'm it. Come on, let's eat."

"If I thought you were," growled Quinn, as they headed for the mess shack, "I'd take you apart—into little pieces—just like that."

Dake grinned. "That works both ways, sweetheart," he drawled. "If I . . ."

He broke off suddenly and both men pulled up in mid-stride. Above the distant rumble of the big guns came the drone of a motor. Their eyes swept skyward, focused on a speck that grew larger in the East. The speck sprouted wings and a moment later Quinn's straining eyes made out the twin black crosses of the enemy ship.

"It's a Jerry," he shouted hoarsely. "Come on, Dake."

DAKE hard at his heels, he sprinted headlong across the tarmac, bellowing for the mechanics. His eyes never left the Fokker as he ran. It swooped down low, then banked hard around on one wing tip, straightened out and roared skyward again in a soaring climb. Even as Quinn vaulted into the cock-pit of the nearest ship, the Fokker headed under full gun into the East.

Quinn cursed. A stream of vitriolic oaths spewed from his lips. It was a nice demonstration for he knew that it was futile to chase that vanishing plane. By the time he got his own crate into the air, the Jerry would be a diminishing speck in the distance.

Warily he raised his hand to signal Dake and the waiting mechanics. Then, wiping the sweat from his brow, he climbed slowly out of the ship and trudged once more towards the mess shack.

A half dozen Black Sheep were gathered at the door. They looked at Quinn. They looked at Dake. No man spoke.

Quinn glared at them belligerently. "Sure," he growled. "Our little playmate again. But he didn't come to fight." Still no one spoke. Quinn felt his biceps swell. "Well, what the hell are you staring at me for?" he demanded.

Suspicion—a gnawing, nameless fear ate deep into the hearts of the Black Sheep. They shuffled their feet, glanced warily at one another. Then, in that same ominous, brooding silence, they turned and trudged back into the mess shack.

In the little estaminet at St. Omer, later that evening, Quinn leaned his bulk against the bar and stared bitterly into his untasted glass of whiskey. He was oblivious to the smoke-fogged room—the high-keyed babble of voices about him—the drunken *poilu* banging out raucous ditties on the battered piano in the corner. He was thinking of the events of the past two weeks. Machine guns had jammed—mysteriously—control wires had snapped—flights on special, secret missions had run into traps of German Fokkers. He was thinking how nice it would be to wrap his fingers around the neck of the man responsible.

Dake, who stood beside him, jabbed him savagely in the ribs with a hard elbow. "Come on, Jack," he said. "Toss it down. You need it. You've been growling at yourself for the past ten minutes."

Quinn snorted, tossed down the drink at a gulp and banged on the bar with his empty glass. "Fill 'em up, Emile," he barked at the perspiring proprietor of the cafe. Then he turned to Dake and prodded a stiff forefinger into the Killer's navel. "So I'm going haywire, too?" he snarled. His face purpled and a swelling vein beat savagely in his temple. "Listen, Dake, if I get the rat who's selling us out . . ." The whiskey glass crumpled to fragments in his hand. He swept the pieces to the floor, ground them to dust beneath his heel. "Like that," he said grimly. He shook his two massive clenched fists beneath Dake's nose. "With these hands."

Killer Dake's heavy-lidded eyes never blinked. His thin nostrils flared and his mouth became a cruel, red line. "If I don't get him first," he said evenly.

Emile brought their drinks. They had their glasses half way to their lips when the door to the estaminet opened and a crisp voice called: "Tention!"

Preceded by his orderly, Colonel Gorham, the Commander of the Camouflage School which adjoined the drome of the Black Sheep, entered the cafe. The tinny notes of the piano died out—the babble of voices subsided as the men snapped to

attention. That is—all but Quinn and Killer Dake—who still lolled negligently at the bar.

Colonel Gorham was a man who lived up to the maple-leaf on his epaulettes. He was a stickler for military etiquette—a mincing martinet who liked to see men jump. His dark, handsome face flushed, then paled at the insult offered by the two indifferent backs of the flyers.

HE PULLED himself up to his fullest, starchiest height. His eyes hardened; the muscle along his jaw bulged. Not waiting for his orderly, he, himself, repeated the order. "Tention!"

In the hushed silence of the estaminet, the word exploded like a bomb. With all the insolence he could put in the movement, Quinn pivoted slowly around on the bar, leaned back against it, crossed his feet and held up his glass of whiskey.

"Mud in your eye, Colonel," he said and downed the drink.

A red film clouded Gorham's eyes. He clutched the swagger stick he carried so hard that his knuckles stood out white in sharp relief. Slowly, with a firm, measured tread he crossed the cafe, halted a pace before the two Black Sheep.

His voice was brittle, frigid. "Captain Quinn, I believe?"

Quinn scowled. "Never mind the formalities, Colonel. You know damn well I'm Quinn. So what?"

Gorham should have known better—should have known that Quinn was spoiling for a fight. But his pride was wounded. The proper respect due an officer of his rank had been flouted in his face. He had been insulted before a whole cafe full of men. The swagger stick came up. But ever before it could descend, Quinn's long arm shot out and fingers of steel clamped about the Colonel's wrist.

Quinn exerted just the proper amount of pressure—twisted. Gorham's face writhed in pain—and then slowly, the swagger stick trickled from his fingers, clattered noisily to the floor. With the toe of his shoe, Quinn kicked it contemptuously to the center of the room, then released the Colonel's wrist.

"Don't crowd me, Gorham," he growled. "I feel lousy as hell, tonight." Anger and hate crawled slowly across the Colonel's ashen face. His marble-blue eyes were pin-points of venom and a line of sweat beaded his upper lip. For a long minute the eyes of the two men clashed like the steel of a pair of duelists engaging.

With an effort Gorham controlled his voice. “You have not heard the end of this, Captain Quinn.”

Quinn sighed patiently. “All right—run along now like a good guy. Report to G.H.Q. if you must—but leave me alone.”

Gorham’s hand dropped to the automatic holstered at his hip. “I would have been within my right to have . . .” Quinn lounged forward abruptly from the bar, caught the Colonel by the lapels of his tunic. His chin jutted forward until it was but a scant few inches from the Colonel’s nose.

“Yeah?” he growled. “Rights—superior officer discipline. *Blah!* That’s all you Brass Hats think about.” And while Gorham’s face turned an apoplectic purple—while the veins in his neck threatened to burst—Quinn continued. “Now, get out of my way. I’m getting out of here—it smells.” With the words, he let his hands drop from Gorham’s tunic and brushed roughly past him towards the door. And while the Colonel stood paralyzed, speechless at his effrontery, he stepped across the threshold and slammed the flimsy door behind him.

CHAPTER II

OUTSIDE, QUINN RAISED HIS HEAD and breathed deeply of the cool, night air. His anger evaporated and his shoulders sagged. Letting off steam had done him good. But he knew that Gorham would raise hell. He sighed heavily at the thought of all the explaining he would have to do, when G.H.Q. hauled him up once more on the carpet.

The door of the estaminet banged behind him and Dake pulled up beside him.

The Killer was grinning.

“Sweetheart,” he chuckled, “if I was a Frog, I’d kiss you. And so would the rest of the Black Sheep. They’re all in there grinning like monkeys and Gorham’s fit to be tied. But he’s scared to say boo at ’em.”

Quinn didn’t smile. “He’s a damn fool if he does. Solomon—*er* Murphy—or Von Goetz would take him to pieces. I got trouble enough as it is.”

From the direction of the drome came the subdued roar of a motor. Quinn’s face turned towards the sound as it grew rapidly louder. His eyes narrowed. “Somebody’s in a hurry,” he said.

Together the two flyers watched twin beams of light blossom in the blackness, dart from side to side as a car sped down the winding road. For some reason that he could not explain, as he watched the headlights grow larger, Quinn grew strangely tense. The headlights vanished for split seconds behind trees and houses, reappeared again, brighter each time. Then they swung into the little village. Quinn felt no surprise when the car rolled up, braked to a sudden halt before the estaminet. The wheels kicked up a cloud of dust that gleamed like flakes of gold in the bright glare.

A figure leaped from behind the wheel and automatically Quinn stepped forward to meet it. The surprise was sudden, complete. For it was a girl—a vision of a girl—who hurried towards him. He had a swift mental impression of a slim figure—of a trench coat several sizes too large wrapped around her—of bobbed hair whipped by the wind and gilded by the reflected rays of the head-knaps behind her. Her face was no more than a pale blur but her eyes were wide in unmistakable appeal.

She glanced at Dake, then quickly back to Quinn.

“You’re Captain Quinn?” she asked breathlessly. “C.O. of the Black Sheep?” Her voice was low, husky. It did things to the hard-bitten Quinn.

“Yeah,” he rumbled. “And who are you?”

She came up close to him, turned her face up to his. “I—I’m . . . Never mind who I am. Listen. I must get to Paris. At once. I want one of your pilots to fly me there.”

Quinn grunted—as though he had received a jolt in the midriff. “Hey,” he growled. “Wail a minute. Not so fast. Maybe you better do a little explaining, first.”

The girl’s face worked. She bit her lip. Her brows drew into a straight line and her eyes were troubled. “I can’t explain now,” she said hurriedly. “It would waste valuable time. This is urgent, I tell you.”

A dozen conflicting thoughts raced through Quinn’s brain. For weeks, now, the word spy had been uppermost in his mind. He had brooded over it, lived with it, slept with it. Now mysteriously out of the night, had come this strange girl. Beautiful—a phoney story—no explanation. Something warned him to watch his step. His jaw set. He avoided the girl’s eyes and scowled.

Busy sorting out his tangle of thoughts and emotions, he failed to hear the door of the estaminet open and close. Not until a harsh voice rasped behind him, did he turn.

“What’s this?”

Colonel Gorham, his face still crimson from the recent indignity he had suffered, stalked forward with his orderly at his heels. Quinn felt, rather than saw, the girl stiffen.

“Damned if I know,” he said. “She says she’s got to get to Paris—fast. Wants a pilot to fly her there.”

COLONEL GORHAM’S eyes narrowed to mere slits in his face. He squared his shoulders, drew himself up to the full of his height.

“She’s not going, of course,” he snapped.

The girl clutched at Quinn’s sleeve. Incipient panic flared in her eyes. Her lovely face hardened in lines of desperation.

That was bad enough. Caution might yet override the strange surging of blood in Quinn’s veins at her appeal. But the sight of the arrogant Colonel—his curt, instant refusal of her request—made Quinn see red.

He bristled. “Yeah? Who says she’s she’s not going—and why?”

Colonel Gorham’s face went from crimson to white. A vein pulsed dully at either side of his temple.

“You insubordinate fool!” he grated. He stalked forward, his orderly following him, until he stood between the trio and the waiting car. “Who is she? What is she doing here? By what authority . . .”

Quinn breathed heavily. That same tension, that had come upon him when he first saw the headlights of the approaching car, was gripping him now. He sensed that something vital was transpiring—that minutes were precious—that a great deal was at stake. Torn by indecision, he turned troubled eyes to the girl.

“You better talk, sister. Spill it, fast. If you’re on the level, you can have anything you ask for.”

She glanced at Colonel Gorham’s rigid, uncompromising face, shook her head. “I can’t tell you anything,” she insisted. Then dropping her voice, she whispered frantically to Quinn: “Please! You must help me! I’ve got to get to Colonel Flagg at once.”

“She’s a spy!” burst out the Colonel. “That’s obvious. And what’s more—she’s under arrest. I...”

It was the mere mention of Colonel Flagg that did the trick—the name of the one man from whom Quinn would take orders—the name of the only Brass Hat who could command his respect. Quinn’s indecision vanished on the instant. His head sank between his shoulders—his chest swelled.

Gorham saw, cried out warningly as his hand went for the gun at his belt. “Quinn!”

Quinn laughed—a short, nasty laugh. His left arm swept the girl to one side; his right hand clenched into a huge and iron fist. At the same instant Dake, who had stood silently by, went into action like an uncoiled spring.

Gorham’s teeth were bared, the gun was in his hand, when Quinn’s pile-driver fist connected with the side of his jaw. The Colonel spun half around, his eyes glassy. The gun jerked and roared as he fell, stabbing the night with flame.

“Hell!” said Quinn. “You asked for it.” Then he turned back for the girl.

He did not even glance at Dake—he knew that the Killer was like a striking snake in action. Instead he grasped the girl’s arm and pulled her on a run to the waiting car.

The door of the estaminet banged open as he shoved her roughly into the front seat, climbed behind the wheel and shifted swiftly into gear. In a moment bedlam broke out behind them. Men shouted, cursed; someone blazed wildly away with a gun. The wheels of the car churned the dust and as it gathered speed, Dake vaulted onto the running-board. The confusion around the estaminet redoubled as he piled breathlessly into the back seat. Then Quinn jammed his heavy boot hard down on the gas and the car leaped down the deserted street.

The hullabaloo faded rapidly behind them as they sped through the little village and headed back toward the drome of the Black Sheep.

It was the girl who spoke first. Her eyes, frankly admiring now, studied the granite profile of the man beside her.

“Captain, you certainly can use your fists,” she exclaimed enthusiastically. She laughed—a low husky laugh. “He’ll probably swear an Army mule kicked him—if he ever wakes up.” Then suddenly she sobered. “I’m sorry there had to be trouble. But I swear to you that in helping me—you haven’t made a mistake.”

Quinn steered dextrously along the rutted road with his left hand for a moment, so that he could blow tenderly on the knuckles of his right.

“I hope not, sister,” he said fervently. “I been on the carpet plenty times. And the chances are against me seeing the end of this man’s war. But just the same, I’d prefer to have Jerry blast me out of the skies instead of ending up against a brick wall.” He blew on his bruised hand again. “Strange. I always thought all Brass Hats had glass jaws. How did you make out, Dake?”

On the rear seat, Dake lounged negligently back on

the bouncing cushions. "I guess the Colonel'll have to find a new monkey to shine his shoes—for the next day or so, anyway," he drawled.

Quinn grunted. "Swell."

THE rest of the drive was made in speed and silence. They pulled up to a screeching halt on the drome of the Black Sheep. Even as they piled out, Quinn bellowed and grease monkeys came running. A ship was hastily trundled out of the hangar.

Dake drew his C.O. aside. "Listen, Quinn. This whole outfit has busted regulations high, wide and handsome before. That's why we're here—all the trouble-makers who wouldn't knuckle down and take orders. But this thing is serious. I don't like it."

"Neither do I," admitted Quinn. "But this spy business has been getting my goat. I'm sick of sitting around on my can and just growling about it. Something big is in the wind and there's only one way to find out what it's all about. I'm flying this dame to Paris, myself. Colonel Flagg knows the answers."

Dake nodded. "But hell's going to bust loose any minute. Colonel Gorham won't waste time. You'll be grabbed by the nearest M.P. that spots you. And me . . ."

A mechanic called to Quinn. He strapped on his helmet, took his goggles from his pocket. "Forget it. Look—you stay here in command of the squadron till I get back. If G.H.Q. jumps you—refer 'em to Flagg. If we gambled right—he'll square us. If we didn't . . ."

He left the words unfinished, called the girl and hurried with her to the waiting plane.

CHAPTER III

THE MOTOR OF THE DORAND throbbed an even song of power. Quinn ran an expert hand and eye over the mechanism of the Vickers, slapped it lovingly, then turned to the girl in the rear cockpit. He waved a heavy wrench under her nose. "See this?" he asked.

The girl nodded.

"Good," growled Quinn. "I use this on the heads of little girls who go haywire in the air and make a grab for the controls. Don't forget."

She smiled at him. "Don't worry. I won't go haywire." Quinn's scowl turned into a slow grin. He chucked

her under the chin but there was no disrespect in the gesture. "I believe you, sister," he said simply. "I think you got what it takes. Take it easy, now and we'll be in Paris in forty minutes."

He settled himself behind the controls, jazzed the throttle once, eased it down again and waved a gauntleted hand at the ground crew. The chocks were yanked clear and slapping the sauce to the motor, the Dorand leaped forward, cleared the row of hangars at the far end of the field, circled once for altitude, then headed into the north.

Quinn lounged negligently at the controls as he arrowed the ship towards Paris. He was vastly intrigued by the slip of a girl in the rear cockpit. No matter who she was, she had guts and there was nothing he admired more than that. He was speculating on what she had to report to Colonel Flagg when she tapped him on the shoulder.

He turned. She pointed up and above them. Following the direction of her finger he made out in the pale light of the rising moon a quartette of ominous shadows that hovered over the tail of the Dorand. His eyes narrowed. "Fokkers," he shouted at the girl. She nodded. "I know. I was afraid, maybe, this would happen."

Quinn looked at her narrowly, then smiled. "So you knew, eh? Well, baby, do you want to beat it back to the drome or do we try to fight our way through?"

The girl's lips hardened and flecks of fire danced in the depths of her gray eyes. "Fight," she said simply.

"The odds are a hundred to one against us."

"I know. Fight anyway."

Quinn laughed. And then, as if to answer that challenging laugh and the girl's defiant words—the Fokkers spilled over on their noses and like predatory birds of prey, dived for the Dorand.

Hard-boiled Jack Quinn, Captain and Commander of the Black Sheep Squadron, was aware of an unaccustomed thrill as he prepared for battle. By God! The girl liked a fight as well as he did. What if the odds *were* a hundred to one against them! He cleared his gun for action, fired a short, testing burst. From behind him came the rattle of machine-gun fire. He screwed around swiftly and his eyes flew wide. For with a cool efficiency that matched his own, the girl was firing a clearing burst through the swiveled machine-gun mounted above the rear cockpit. Quinn grinned at the girl—blew her a kiss, then turned back to the controls.

The Fokkers came down in a slashing power dive. Venomous lead thudded into the fuselage of the

Dorand. "If they're looking for a fight, by God they'll get one," grunted Quinn. "Boys, here I come."

He ripped the throttle wide, jerked the stick forward, then back. The engine roared a crashing response and the Dorand catapulted heavenward. He completed a perfect loop and as he plunged on the downward arc his Vickers spewed a hail of lead into the center of the Jerry tripe.

The Germans were momentarily caught off guard. Their formation wavered before the unexpected attack and before they could recover the girl hammered out a long, unerring burst on her gun. The apex Jerry crate fell off on one wing. Its pilot threw an imploring hand to heaven then slumped behind the controls.

Quinn chuckled sardonically. The girl had asked for a ride and she was ready to do her share. What had he told her a moment before? That the chances were a hundred to one against them? Nuts to that! What were four Jerry tripe with a machine gunner like that in the rear cockpit!

A devastating barrage of 303's raked the Dorand. It trembled violently and dipped one wing. Quinn jammed down his rudder bar and thrust the stick to the left. Slowly the crate righted itself and after a moment's hesitation continued on her upward climb.

A black crossed ship came pounding down from nowhere and settled for a fleeting second over his tail. He tugged at the controls violently and tried a swift Immelman but before he could complete the manoeuvre splinters of glass flew up into his face from his shattered instrument board.

HE CAME out of the Immelman in perfect combat position. Centering his gun, he unleashed a thin thread of fire into the midst of the Fokkers. Echoing his own gun came the roar of the Vickers behind him. The pilot of the center Jerry ship rose to his feet and then fell, as his ship dropped nose first to its last landing.

Three rattling Spandaus drummed murderously at the Dorand. Quinn dove but the German crates dove with him. Singing steel whirred past his head like a flock of buzzing bees. Suddenly he jerked back the stick and flung his crate straight into the vortex of the plunging German crates. Behind him, never faltering once, he heard the deadly song of the girl's Vickers.

The Germans broke, gave way before his charge. A savage laugh of exultation rumbled in Quinn's throat. What a girl! What a sky devil she had turned out to be. Even Killer Dake couldn't do better with a machine gun. And then abruptly, the skeleton's dance of death

behind him came to an end. Quinn screwed around in his seat and his heart constricted within him. A dry flame licked at his throat.

For the girl was slumped forward against her safety belt, one hand still wrapped around the trigger of her Vickers. Her face was drawn and the ashen pallor of her cheeks was heightened by a thin trickle of blood that welled from between her lips. An ugly red stain spread slowly across her tunic.

Quinn's hand went out to her. Her eyes fluttered open, her lips moved—twisted, but no words came. Again and again she tried to speak without success. Then, with a weary sigh like a tired child, she closed her eyes once more.

Quinn swallowed at the lump in his throat; his eyes were unaccustomedly dim. "Game to the end, eh, kid?" he muttered.

Then the drumming of lead against the fuselage of the Dorand snapped him back to the urgency of the situation. Guns flaming, a Fokker lashed down at him. He whipped back the stick. The nose of the Dorand came up, faltered. The motor coughed, once—twice—then died out altogether as a tongue of orange flame erupted from the cowling—swept back avidly in the rush of the slip stream. A searing blast of heat enveloped the cockpit.

Quinn's guts turned to a hard knot. He was crashing down a flamer with Colonel Flagg's operative unconscious in the rear cockpit. He almost wished that she were already dead.

CHAPTER IV

BELOW, ON THE DROME of the Black Sheep—frenzied activity. A siren wailed. Men tumbled from bunk-house and mess shack. An ambulance clanged brazenly across the field. And, then, like a flaming comet, the Dorand landed drunkenly on one wheel, skidded, slewed around and settled in a burst of flame.

As one, the Black Sheep rushed forward. A blast of searing heat pushed them back. And as they watched with wide and unbelieving eyes, a dark figure staggered out of that blazing funeral pyre, reeled drunkenly, stumbled, caught himself and plunged forward. In his arms he sheltered a limp and grotesque heap.

“My God! It’s Quinn!”

With hoarse shouts, the Black Sheep surged towards him, caught him as he fell. A lurid orange glow silhouetted them starkly as they hauled him and the girl clear of the burning crate.

Quinn came to a few minutes later with the burning sensation of whiskey searing his parched throat. The fog rolled back from his brain and he pushed himself up on one arm, climbed unsteadily to his feet. The Dorand still blazed brightly . . . and then he remembered—the girl—the start for Paris—the dog fight. With a bellow he pushed aside the men who were ministering to him, elbowed his way through the group around the girl and dropped to one knee beside her.

The over-sized trench coat had protected her from the flames. But her eyes were closed and she lay still—ominously still.

SICK at heart, Quinn took one slim hand in his own huge paw. “Has . . . is she . . .”

The doctor looked up at last, his face sober “No, she’s not dead yet but I’m damned if I know why,” he said crisply. “Three machine-gun slugs. We’ll get her over to the field hospital right away.” He looked sharply at Quinn. “You better come, too.”

Quinn snorted. “Not for treatment. I’m all right. But I’d like to talk to her. She can answer some mighty important questions.”

The doctor shook his head. “I’m afraid she might be unconscious like this, for a long time. That is—if she doesn’t . . .” He met Quinn’s eyes, broke off abruptly.

Quinn ran his tongue over blustered lips “If—if she does come out of it, send for me right away, will you, doc? It’s important.”

The doctor nodded, lifted the girl up in his arms. “Hold it!” said Quinn.

While all eyes watched him, he dug a grimy fist into the pocket of his tunic, fumbled for a tiny scrap of metal. Then, pulling aside the blanket that covered the girl, he smoothed the folds of her trench coat. A pair of goggles slipped from one pocket. Automatically he picked them up, thrust them into his own tunic. Then, while the assembled group watched him in silence, he pinned a D.S.C. on the breast of the girl.

“She deserves it,” he said huskily, “far more than I do.”

He saluted. And as one man, the flames of the Dorand lighting up the scene, the Black Sheep snapped to attention as the doctor carried the girl toward the

waiting ambulance.

The eyes of the hard-boiled C.O. of the Black Sheep were strangely misted as he watched the ambulance careen down the road. He swallowed hard at the lump in his throat.

“So she was really on the level, eh?” said Dake soberly. “Lousy break.”

“On the level—and game to her finger-tips,” answered Quinn. “Dake . . . if she don’t pull through . . .”

“Buck up,” snapped Dake “I know it’s tough but this is no time to cry about it. G.H.Q. is raising hell, all right. You and me are slated for a court martial, unless you can think fast. What do we do now?”

Quinn’s shoulders squared, his chin stuck out at its usual pugnacious angle. He jabbed a stiff forefinger at the third button of Dake’s tunic. “Listen, I’m up to my ears in this spy mess now, and I’m seeing it through.”

He whirled around at the group of mechanics and pilots who were clustered around the smouldering wreckage of the Dorand. “Jennings! Kilday! Brice! Jump lively, you monkeys. I want a ship. Now.”

There was that in his voice that made the mechanics jump. His Black Sheep stared wonderingly at his blackened face.

“What the hell’s up?” demanded Dake.

“I started for Paris, didn’t I?” said Quinn. “Well, that’s where I’m going.”

“But . . .”

“But nothing I got a whole lot of questions to ask—and Colonel Flagg can answer ’em. If a young girl can do undercover work—so can Jack Quinn. On second thought . . . hmmm . . . that gives me an idea.”

He screwed up his face in thought and the resultant grimace made him look like a black-faced gargoyle. “Yeah . . . I think I’ll deal myself in. And just on a hunch, I’m taking somebody with me.” He turned toward the group of flyers, raised his voice to a bellow. “Hey—Von Goetz! Come over here!”

A tall, slim, deceptively quiet-mannered pilot detached himself from the group, sauntered over to them.

A SPEEDY pursuit plane was trundled out of its hangar. Eager hands spun the prop and the motor coughed, caught. Quinn raised his voice above the sudden roar of the motor.

“We’re taking a little jaunt to Paris, you and me. If the breaks are with us, we’ll be able to raise a little private hell on our own. And I got a hunch we will—I always did have a nose for trouble and by God, I can

smell it.” He whirled on Dake. “You just sit tight till I reach Flagg. If a bunch of Brass Hats or M.P.’s come after you—run ’em off the drome!”

Quinn jerked his head at Von Goetz, stalked with long strides to the waiting plane. His hand was already on the throttle as Ven Goetz climbed into the rear cockpit.

“Would it be out of order,” said Von Goetz sarcastically, as he adjusted his goggles, “to inquire just what I’m supposed to do?”

Quinn groaned aloud. “I knew you’d ask that. Hell—how do I know? For the time being, you can just keep your mouth shut and keep an eye out for Jerry tripes.”

Automatically his eyes roved over the instrument board, checked on the positions of the quivering needles in the gauges. Then he jizzed the throttle. The roar of the motor rose to a higher crescendo. The frail ship trembled, the whirling propeller glistened in the dim light. Quinn glanced back over his shoulder, made out the figure of Dake, watching him from straddled legs. He could not see, but he had a pretty good hunch that for once Killer Dake was not wearing his usual bland poker face. With a mocking laugh, he raised his thumb to his nose in that direction, waggled his fingers. Then he signaled to the waiting mechanics. The chocks were pulled out, the ship surged forward. Quinn gave it the gun, taxied at gathering speed across the uneven tarmac. He cleared the trees at the end of the field, kept the stick back and continued to climb.

Undoubtedly the whole outfit, including Dake, thought he had gone completely haywire. He chuckled at the probable thoughts of the pilot in the cockpit directly behind him. Maybe he was nuts. He’d soon find out. And he still had a hunch that Von Goetz might come in handy. German born, with all the polish and formality of a Prussian officer, for some reason Von Goetz had always nurtured an undying hatred of the German Military Machine. His hate was cold, calculating, deadly. A model of efficiency, resourcefulness and courage, he was outstanding even among the famous fighting Black Sheep.

Though his heart was heavy when he thought of the girl, Quinn felt better than he had for weeks. He was getting action. That in itself was balm to his fighting spirit. But it was the prospect of yet more action and danger before him, that made the wind in the guy wires sound like a symphony in his ears. There was a gleam in his eyes as, for the second time that night, he headed in the direction of Paris.

COLONEL FLAGG scowled at the papers that littered his desk, then with an oath shoved them to one side. This was the third night in succession that he had remained in his office until well after Midnight and he was in a royal temper. In charge of Air Intelligence in those hectic days, his task was a gruelling one. But what exasperated him beyond measure was the constant stream of querulous complaints and questions, of impossible orders, that came from higher up.

His particular headache, right now, was the activity of a daring spy in a certain sector. Rumor, on its fabulous wings, had brought him the information that the trouble focused around the drome of the Black Sheep.

He assaulted the desk with a fist. The Black Sheep! Why, damn it all—he himself was responsible for them. At the suggestion of that fighting madman—Jack Quinn—he had rashly permitted the formation of a squadron of hell-raising fools. What headaches they had given him! Ever since, he had spent half his time getting them out of one mess after another, squaring them with outraged officers who demanded retaliation for all sorts of indignities. And now—this. The Colonel felt a vagrant impulse to tear at his graying hair.

Without the formality of a knock, the door of his office banged open. The Colonel shoved back his chair with a harsh rasp, jumped to his feet. Then he placed his hands on the edge of the desk and stared at the apparition who had entered.

The apparition saluted.

From the blackened mask of a gargoyle issued a cracked, but familiar voice.

“I’m sorry, sir. But I had to come unannounced.”
“Quinn!”

Then for the second time in ten minutes, the Colonel banged a heavy fist on his desk.

“Hah! Just the man I want to see. And when I get through with you . . .” The fury died suddenly from Flagg’s voice, as he continued to stare at Quinn’s scorched features. He said hurriedly: “At ease . . . That’s better. Now—what the hell happened to you?”

Quinn knew that the Colonel, too, in his youth had been a bit of a hellraising Black Sheep. There was a strong bond between them and now that he had shown his respect—a sincere respect—he relaxed. He sank wearily into a chair and fished in his pockets for a cigarette.

“Crashed,” he said tersely as he lit up. “A flamer.”

Colonel Flagg hitched one hip on the corner of his desk. "The luck of a fool," he snorted. "But what are you doing in Paris?"

Briefly Quinn told him about the girl, about their flight and the tragedy that had overtaken them. He left out mention of Colonel Gorham. As Quinn talked, the Colonel's face darkened. But he said nothing until Quinn had finished.

Then from the top drawer of his desk he pulled out a bottle and two glasses. Pouring out two stiff shots, he shoved one across to Quinn.

"That was—R-5," he said quietly. "One of the best operatives I've got. I—" he raised his glass in a toast—"I love her like a daughter."

They tossed off their drinks in silent tribute.

But war is war—a grim business and no time for sentimentality. With a sigh the Colonel became once more the shrewd head of the Air Intelligence. "She gave you no message?"

Quinn shook his head. "No, sir. She tried to, up there in the plane. But I couldn't make it out. I know she had important news for you—that's why she was in such a sweat to reach Paris. I thought maybe you could guess what it was."

The Colonel slid off his desk, paced across the floor several times. Suddenly he stopped, looked squarely at Quinn.

"Listen. You know, as well as I do, that there's a spy—a damn clever spy—operating somewhere in your sector. And you know the finger points right at the drome of the Black Sheep. You know your own outfit. Who is he?"

Quinn flung his cigarette savagely at the cuspidor. "I wish I knew, sir," he grated. "If I ever lay my hands on the black-hearted, yellow-bellied traitor, I'll make him sorry he was ever born."

THE Colonel took three more paces, shrugged his shoulders. "I was hoping you could help me. Well, now you know what R-5 was doing. She was on the trail of that spy. And from what you tell me, she must have found out something." He ran his hands through his hair. "That's the way it goes. After risking her life to get information, you had to run into a German patrol and she gets crashed. Just tough luck, but the Allied command isn't interested in that—they demands results."

Quinn ran his fingers tenderly over one side of his scorched face. "Tough luck—my elbow. I beg your pardon, sir. But for weeks the Fokkers have turned tail

and run away from Black Sheep ships. This bunch was out to get us and they must have been tipped off."

Colonel Flagg's fists clenched. "So much the worse that we can't lay our hands on him, whoever he is."

He stalked back to his desk, flung himself into his chair and rested his head in his hands. "Now, unless R-5 is able to talk, her work will have to be done all over again. And the traitor will be doubly on his guard."

Quinn straightened in his chair. "That's what I came to see you about, sir. The Black Sheep squadron was my idea and it's my outfit. If I say so myself, we've made a sweet record on the Western front. I've handled them so far and if there's a traitor in the outfit, I'll take care of him, too. I want your permission to have a free hand and find him."

Colonel Flagg looked up at him in silence for a long moment. "I know how you feel," he said at last. "But you're a flyer—not an Intelligence man. Just how do you propose to go about it?"

It was one thing to admit to von Goetz that he had not the faintest notion, but quite another to say the same thing to Colonel Flagg. Quinn evaded a direct answer. "I got several ideas, sir. But of course it will all depend on how things shape up."

Colonel Flagg continued to look doubtful. Quinn rose to his feet and made a sincere appeal. "Listen, Colonel. You know me. You've backed me up before. And until now, it's worked out all right, hasn't it? Just give me a chance. I'll come through." For a few moments Colonel Flagg drummed a tattoo with his fingers. Then abruptly, for the third time that evening he slammed his fist on the top of the desk. "Done. Go to it, Quinn. I'll see that the necessary orders are put through. You've got a free hand. And believe me, I hope you succeed."

Quinn smiled wryly. "Thank you, sir. There's just one other favor. Lieutenant von Goetz is here in Paris with me. He's waiting for me at the Hotel Calais. I could use him."

"Fair enough." Flagg nodded. "I'll see that the orders go through for him, too."

Quinn brought his heels together, saluted smartly. He said nothing more until he had reached the door and had one hand on the knob.

"Oh, I almost forgot, sir. If you can also manage to keep Colonel Gorham off my neck for a while . . ."

A slow tide of crimson crept up from the vicinity of the Colonel's collar. An icy calm crept into his voice as he asked: "And just what seems to be bothering

Colonel Gorham?”

Quinn shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. “I—I’m sorry, sir. But circumstances made it necessary. I was forced to hit the Colonel on the jaw, sir.”

The Colonel rose from his chair, stretched himself up to his full height. The color continued to rise up his cheeks, belying the frosty gleam in his eye. “Merely a case of assault and battery this time, eh? And on a superior officer.”

Beads of perspiration popped out on Quinn’s smoke-blackened brow. He thought of Dake, back there at the drome. Drawing a deep breath, he continued hurriedly: “Yes, sir. And Captain Dake. I’ve left him in charge of the squadron. But . . .”

“And what—” inquired the Colonel politely—far too politely—“did circumstances force Captain Dake to do?”

Quinn was sweating copiously. He watched the flush creeping slowly up the Colonel’s face, like the red fluid in a thermometer, rising slowly toward the bursting point. “Captain Dake also was forced to assault—Colonel Gorham’s orderly.”

Very carefully, Flagg spread out his fingers on the edge of the desk. “I’ve already told you, Captain Quinn, that I would let you take on this mission. But until I can mollify Colonel Gorham, I would suggest that you make yourself as scarce as possible.”

THE slow tide of crimson reached the bursting point. Flagg pointed a finger at the door. The finger shook. And his voice shook. “Now—damn you—get the hell out of here.”

Quinn saluted and ducked at the same time. And as he closed the door hastily behind him, he chuckled. For through the closed portal he could hear the Colonel’s fist connect with his desk top.

CHAPTER V

QUINN WAS STILL GRINNING when he entered the room in the Hotel Calais. Von Goetz, sprawled negligently on the rickety bed, looked up from a scrap of paper on which he was scribbling.

“Love letter?” asked Quinn.

Von Goetz licked his stub of a pencil, frowned in

heavy concentration, shook his head.

“No—system. I’ve been working on it for a year. When the war is over I’m going to Monte Carlo and bust the bank.”

“Brilliant,” said Quinn. “But so very simple.” He surveyed the room with a single, all-inclusive glance. A strip of faded red carpet on the floor, a single chair, a cracked mirror, a dim alcove that contained a washstand with a chipped bowl and pitcher upon it. “Just like the Ritz,” he murmured.

Von Goetz shrugged. “Paris is a trifle crowded. Even for this palatial suite I had to give madam the winnings from last night’s crap game, two packages of cigarettes and a knitted scarf. I never liked that scarf, anyway.” Quinn stripped off his tunic. A pair of goggles fell to the floor. He picked them up, turned them slowly in his fingers. They had fallen from R-5’s trench coat. With a sigh, he carefully tucked them away again, then went into the alcove, poured a little water from the pitcher and dabbed it on his face. Some of the black—not quite all—was transferred to a ragged towel.

“Look,” he said, “if you were hunting a spy—just how would you go about it?”

The only response was a mirthless laugh. Quinn dropped the towel and went back into the room, sat down gingerly on the flimsy chair and cautiously tilted it back against the wall.

“No fooling,” he said. “How do you catch a spy?”

Reluctantly von Goetz looked up from his column of figures. “You get down on your knees,” he said gravely, “and pray that Mr. Spy drops right in your lap.”

Quinn sighed. “And I thought you’d be a help to me. Listen—did I—or did I not—see a bottle of cognac and some glasses hiding behind the wash basin? Maybe there’s some inspiration in that bottle.”

Von Goetz dropped pencil and paper on the bed, got up. “If you could only spot a spy as easily as you can find liquor, you’d be set. All right—I’ll pour a couple.”

He vanished into the alcove. Quinn screwed up his face in deep thought. His eyes rested, unseeingly, on the cracked mirror on the wall.

For a moment nothing disturbed his concentration. Then suddenly he went rigid in his chair. Every nerve in his body tingled. An icy finger traced a chill line down his spine.

For into the rectangle of the mirror materialized a dark shadow. And the shadow moved. For a matter of seconds Quinn watched with fascinated

eyes—watched the shadow that moved so silently, so slowly—so ominously across the gleaming surface. Then his heart kicked out a faster beat as he realized that the shadow had its living counterpart a little to the right and behind him. The hair rose at the nape of his neck as he realized that on the iron balcony outside the open window crouched a man. Even through the mirror he could see the light from the street lamp below reflected on the blued steel of an automatic.

Quinn had to think—and think fast. His own gun was with his tunic, at the other side of the room. He made a lightning decision, but it was only his brain that worked fast. Slowly, very casually, he let his tilted chair drop to the floor. From the corner of his eye he saw the figure crouched, waiting, outside the window. And while his every nerve was a-tingle, he sauntered over to the bed, picked up the paper and pencil von Goetz had dropped and idly scribbled upon it.

He was pretty sure that the intruder had not seen von Goetz. Hoping that the latter would not speak before he could warn him, he walked casually into the alcove, dropped the slip of paper on the wash-stand. Von Goetz stared at him—at the paper. On it was hurriedly scrawled:

Don't move or talk—we're going to have company.

It was von Goetz turn to stiffen. A swift glance of understanding passed between them. Then Quinn picked up the drink that had been poured and walked back into the room. His gun was in plain sight but he knew better than to reach for it. Careful not to look directly at the window, he resumed his place in the chair.

FOR long moments the silence hung heavy in the room. Quinn's ears were strained to catch the slightest sound. It was well that the mirror had warned him, for the first movements of the watcher were furtive, so stealthy, that he barely heard them.

Light as a cat the intruder slid across the sill and dropped to the floor. Quinn's flesh crawled as he sensed the shadowy menace drawing nearer to him. Then suddenly, without warning, it materialized.

A crouching man confronted him. The gleaming automatic was pointed in an unwavering line at the middle of his broad chest. A low, guttural voice said: "Do not move!"

Then von Goetz catapulted from the alcove. Before the intruder realized that he had been tricked, the flyer's long arms pinioned him from behind. Quinn

shot from his chair, knocked up the hand that held the gun. It exploded with only a barking cough—silenced by the black cylinder attached to the end of the barrel. Plaster sprayed from the ceiling.

With guttural, foreign curses, the intruder struggled frantically to free himself. There was a flurry of fists, the lashing of kicking legs, the thud of blows and a snarl of pain.

Futile to struggle against the like of the Black Sheep. Though the intruder was tall and well-built and he battled with the savage desperation of a trapped animal, it was but the work of minutes for von Goetz and Quinn to subdue him. An iron fist connected with his jaw; fingers of steel clamped like a vise about his wrist; the gun trickled from nerveless fingers and clattered to the floor. With crimson drops oozing down his cheek and von Goetz' fingers dug deep on either side of his windpipe, the man suddenly relaxed and the fight was over.

Von Goetz transferred his grip to the back of his coat collar and curiously the two flyers surveyed their prisoner.

"And just who in hell," demanded Quinn, "are you?"

The man's shoulders sagged, but he did not answer.

"A Kraut, from the cussing he did a few minutes ago," said von Goetz grimly. He shook his prisoner as a terrier shakes a rat. "Can you talk English, you? If not, I'll oblige with German."

The prisoner found his voice. "I speak English, perfectly," he muttered. "But I am not answering questions."

Von Goetz' eyes narrowed. His jaw sagged for a moment. "Well, I'll be damned," he swore softly. "I never thought it would work."

Quinn scowled at the prisoner. "What would work?"

"Praying," answered von Goetz. "Praying for a spy to drop in your lap. And here he is."

Quinn's eyes gleamed. A soundless whistle escaped his lips. "Whew! I didn't think—I didn't have time to think. ... A Jerry spy! Hot dog!" He spat on his hands, rubbed them together. An unholy light glowed in his eye as he took a step closer to the prisoner. "You're going to talk, Jerry! Don't you think he won't?"

"Watch it!"

The spy's hand had darted for his pocket. Quinn leaped forward. Von Goetz grabbed at him. But at that they were a split second too late.

The man's hand came up in a lightning gesture to his lips. His Adam's apple bobbed once, convulsively. Then he drew himself erect and faced them with a

faint half-smile twitching the corners of his lips.

Von Goetz and Quinn froze as they realized what he had done. He inclined his head in a mocking bow.

“Yes, you are too late.”

Quinn’s jaw set in a rigid line. “Who are you?” he demanded swiftly. “What are you doing here? What were you after?”

Again the man smiled. But already the smile contorted in the first spasm of pain. “I shall never have to answer,” he said heavily. Then his eyes wandered vaguely around the room. “I have failed,” he muttered. “I have failed.”

Despite their instinctive hatred for a Jerry spy, Quinn and von Goetz felt sick at heart as they watched him. Fortunately the poison he had taken was a swift and merciful one. A single, racking shudder shook his body. Von Goetz slipped an arm about him, supported him, headed him toward the bed. He took one stumbling step, then another. His eyes glazed over and his knees turned to water. A long sigh escaped his twisted lips. Then the two flyers picked him up bodily. But it was a lifeless body that they deposited on the bed.

FOR a long moment they stared down at their victim. Then they shrugged off the spell of horror that had gripped them at the spy’s dramatic suicide. War is war. They had seen sudden and violent death only too often. And for a spy—Death perched, grinning, always, on his shoulder.

Quinn shook his head. “Too bad I didn’t get a chance to work on him. Now we’ll never find out what he was after—and how he got on our tail.”

“Probably not,” agreed von Goetz. “Unless there’s something on him.” They turned the body over and began a thorough search of the dead man’s clothing. All labels had been carefully removed from his garments. They found a crumpled pack of cigarettes, a cheap watch of Swiss make, a handful of change . . . and then Quinn swore savagely under his breath. For from the inside pocket of the dead man he had removed a photograph—a photograph of a young and beautiful girl . . .

“Why—it’s the girl—R-5,” muttered von Goetz.

“Yeah,” said Quinn harshly. “It ties in some place but I’m damned if I see where. If this mug is carrying R-5’s picture, it’s a cinch that he’s a member of the ring she was working on—the ring that’s been raising hell with the Black Sheep.” He thrust the picture into his pocket and with a dark scowl making a deep V between his brows, continued the search.

Beside the photograph, there were just three items of interest. First, a small oval-shaped disc. One side was blank but when Quinn turned it over they saw that a number had been stamped on the other.

“Z 91, eh?” muttered Quinn. “That’s all. Ever see a tag like this before, Emil?”

Von Goetz shook his head. “No. Can’t say that I have.”

“Must be his identification,” said Quinn. Carefully he smoothed out the first of two crumpled scraps of paper. “Smudged. I can hardly read it. In French. Looks like—Rue Martin—32.”

“That’s it,” said von Goetz over his shoulder. “What’s on the other?”

Quinn smoothed out the second scrap of paper. For a moment the two flyers stared at it. Quinn whistled silently. Though the words were clear and legible, they did not make sense:

TLSR 3MZI FGKS R72YX HS4E37WW
YB61HY9G SOF2 311 NR44XS ID3Y4Y

“Code, by God!” grunted Quinn. “And the chances are it’s damned important.”

Von Goetz laughed mirthlessly. “Don’t expect the answer to that one to drop into your lap. If that’s the Imperial German code you’ll never unravel it.”

They lapsed into a silence, considering the problem. Quinn scowled thoughtfully at the still form on the bed. No use wasting regrets that the spy had not lived to talk. All they had was an identification disc, and address, and a meaningless jumble of words. But Quinn’s hunches were working overtime that day. The paper bearing the code message fairly seared his fingers. He sensed that it was of vital importance—that even then he was wasting precious moments.

The lines of that still body impressed themselves on his subconscious mind. Vaguely he noted the long limbs, the lean but muscular frame. Then his eyes wandered over the Teutonic features, classic in death, the shock of tousled fair hair.

Suddenly something clicked in his brain. He whirled on his companion, ruffled von Goetz’ neatly combed hair and stepped back to squint at the effect.

“What the . . . ?” began the flyer indignantly.

“Look,” Quinn interrupted eagerly. “That Jerry on the bed looks a little bit like you. You can talk German with the best of them. I got an idea.”

“I can’t believe it,” exclaimed von Goetz sarcastically. But his eyes lit up and he squinted closely at the face of the dead spy.

Quinn ignored the interruption. “That address—he wouldn’t have kept it in writing if he’d been there before. Chances are it’s a clearing house for Boche information, and if he’s never been there—nobody would know him by sight. Get the idea?”

VON GOETZ did. His thin nostrils flared. Like the rest of the Black Sheep, the thought of action and danger exhilarated him. “Go on,” he snapped.

Quinn glanced at the watch strapped to his wrist. “It’s not one, yet. I’ll trail you, cover you from outside. Watch your step—take it easy—find out anything you can. If you get into something over your head, blaze away and I’ll come running.” Then his voice dropped. “The chances are a hundred to one against you. This spy game is dynamite. This is no order, Emil. I have no right to give you such an order. I . . .” He faltered, stopped.

Von Goetz faced him squarely. “Order be damned,” he said earnestly. “Me—I have a date at a certain house on the Rue Martin. And I’m late now. So just don’t get in my way.”

Any answer to that would have been inadequate. Instead, Quinn stuck out his hand.

CHAPTER VI

QUINN RAN A FINGER around the inside of his collar, jerked his head to ease the growing stiffness at the back of his neck. He did not dare to stir from his post and he did not dare to take his eyes off the lighted window up above him. Five minutes after he had slipped soundlessly into that dark alley, the shade that covered the window had moved a trifle to one side. That was von Goetz’ signal that he had safely entered the spy nest.

But that had been quite some time ago—and the shade had not moved since. Quinn glanced again at the radium hands of the watch strapped to his wrist. Twenty minutes! Twenty minutes that had seemed twenty hours! A growing uneasiness possessed him.

The alley was shrouded in deep gloom, malodorous and stuffy. Leading up the side of the shabby building was the spidery outline of a fire escape. It crept past the lighted window with the drawn shade, melted

into shadows above. Quinn shifted a bit to one side, tried to stretch his cramped muscles. His foot touched a garbage can. Something furry brushed against his puttee, spat, scurried off into the darkness. Occasionally, from the street beyond, came the clatter of a passing cab. Otherwise the city was silent.

Beads of sweat gathered on Quinn’s brow. What had happened to von Goetz. Surely, if all had gone well, he should have come back before this. Quinn scowled at the blank rectangle of the window. If this was what it meant to be a spy—he didn’t want any part of it. Action—no matter how hazardous—was meat and drink to him. This watching and waiting was like a file rasping on raw nerves.

He tried to tell himself that von Goetz was probably making tremendous and important discoveries. But his uneasiness persisted—grew. He sniffed the air—smelled trouble. Unconsciously his hand crept to the gun at his belt. With the gun in his hand, he hesitated. A fierce and bitter battle waged in his own brain. All his instincts urged him to dash after von Goetz. His cold reasoning urged him to wait—if von Goetz was succeeding in his ruse, the interruption of Quinn might well be his death warrant. And to make it worse—danger hung like an aura about that shabby building at No. 32 Rue Martin.

His nostrils crinkled. His brain seethed. He took a tentative step forward in the darkness.

And then it came. The stillness of the night was suddenly shattered by the crack of a shot. The shade at the lighted window jerked violently—the pane went out with a crash—and glass tinkled down into the alley.

Quinn leaped forward as though he had been shot from a French .75. He leaped upward, caught the lower rungs of the fire-escape. It was old and rickety and creaked dangerously under his weight. But with that shot Quinn had thrown caution to the winds. The rusted iron bars screeched a protest as he raced upward. He crouched for a split second before the bullet-starred window. Then, hunching one massive shoulder, he catapulted through, landed in a shower of glass into the room beyond.

He took in the scene before him at a single glance. On hands and knees, von Goetz was trying to push himself up from the floor. In the doorway at the far side of the room, stood a hawkfaced man, a smoking Luger in his fist.

Quinn side-stepped fast along the wall as the Luger roared. His own automatic convulsed to life. The Luger jerked from the German’s hand, sailed in a wide arc

across the room. He went down slowly, joint by joint.

From the room beyond came hoarse shouts, the sounds of a shattering door.

"The window!" shouted Quinn. "Emil! Can you make it? I'll cover you."

With an effort von Goetz pulled himself erect, lurched towards the window. A blurred face appeared in the doorway. Quinn squeezed lead fast and the face dissolved in a red mist.

"The next one who shows gets the same," roared Quinn. Swiftly he backed to the shattered window, threw lead again at the doorway, then leaped to the fire-escape.

Von Goetz was already halfway down, the rusted ladder swaying under his hasty descent. Quinn plunged recklessly after him.

A thud in the alley . . . another as Quinn followed. Together the two Black Sheep sprinted through the blackness.

A HEAD popped into silhouette at the window above. Streaks of orange split the gloom of the alley—lead ricocheted off the brick wall above Quinn's head. Two seconds later the pair erupted from the mouth of the alley, raced headlong down the deserted Rue Martin.

At the corner they ducked into a darkened doorway.

"Get you bad?" asked Quinn anxiously.

"Shoulder," said von Goetz. "Paralyzed for a moment, that's all. But thanks, old man, for . . ."

"Nuts," said Quinn savagely. "Do you think I'm going to let you die before you tell me that system?"

Colonel Flagg's newest and greenest operatives went into executive session in the bar of the Hotel Calais. The hour was late and they were the only customers. The stout little bartender brought them cognac, rubbed his eyes and retired behind the bar to resume his interrupted snoring.

Quinn was eager for details. "Well, what happened? What did you find out before the fireworks started?"

Von Goetz tossed off a stiff four fingers, coughed, cleared his throat, touched gingerly at his shoulder.

"You'll be surprised. It went off swell, at first. Damned if I know yet what blew the lid off. I must have slipped on one of the answers. But before I did . . ."

Quinn was sitting on the edge of his chair. "Well? Go on! Never mind the dramatics."

Von Goetz dug into his pocket, pulled out a small, leather-bound notebook. He brandished it under Quinn's eager nose. "This," he announced blandly, "is a

code-book. I only hope it's the right one."

Quinn pounced on the book and pawed eagerly in his own tunic for the scrap of paper they had taken from the spy who had invaded their room earlier in the evening. With shaking fingers he smoothed it out on the table, thumbed anxiously through the little leather-bound book.

"Where the hell's that pencil? Get busy, von Goetz. It's in German."

The cognac was forgotten. For tense moments there was no sound but the heavy breathing of the two men, the labored scratching of the pencil as von Goetz worked over the code. When at last von Goetz stopped, Quinn raised anxious eyes to his. "Well—what does it say?"

"Plenty," von Goetz assured him solemnly. "Ludendorff sends his congratulations. The bridge at Marigny is completed. Two fresh divisions come up at dawn, mass for a surprise attack in the morning."

Quinn frowned darkly. He knew that sector. The Allied position there was precarious at best. With two fresh German divisions thrown against it, the Allied line would crumble—and all hell would not be able to stop the Boche.

He whipped up his hand, glanced at his wrist watch. "Listen, Emil," he said urgently. "Get Flagg on the phone. Tell him to have a D.H. bomber—ready and loaded—waiting for me at La Rochelle in twenty minutes. It's got to be there."

"And where in the hell do you think you're going?" asked von Goetz.

"I'm going to blast that bridge at Marigny, so those two divisions don't get across."

CHAPTER VII

VON GOETZ AND COLONEL FLAGG had done their part. A short half hour after leaving the Hotel Calais Quinn climbed into the cockpit of a lumbering D.H. at the field at La Rochelle. He juzzed the motor a moment until the pounding cylinders crashed out a song of defiance. Then he throttled down, signaled to the ground crew and the chocks were yanked away.

The ship rolled forward under half throttle. Quinn

gave her more gun and taxied slowly along the ground into the slight east wind. The D.H. was heavy, sluggish from the cargo of explosive death pinned to its belly.

He gave her more gun and pulled gently back on the stick. The bomber answered the controls and lifted into the air. Quinn gained altitude in a slow, banking climb. He circled the field once, got his bearings, then abruptly the brilliant white ground lights below blacked out as the mechanic cut the switch.

For a split second Quinn closed his eyes and flew blind. A thrill of exultation raced through him. Make monkeys out of his Black Sheep, would they? By God! He'd show them. Then he opened his eyes again and they were focused for the velvet night. He became aware of the moon—a pale silver globe casting an eerie light over the world.

He climbed steadily till his altimeter registered five thousand, then leveled off. The roaring of his motor made him impervious to other sounds but, far ahead in the distance, a long line of livid flashes showed him that the enemy artillery was still in action.

The crisp night air flung itself into his face. His prop sang gaily, a spinning metal top, tearing at the impending atmosphere. His eyes strained ahead through his goggles and his heart kicked out a faster beat as he winged his way towards the front and . . . He shrugged. Who knows?

A half hour passed—forty minutes. Then below him appeared the winding thread of the River Marne. A desperate counter attack of the combined Allied forces had checked the German drive on the far side of the stream. The two opposing forces had dug in and for the past three weeks the heavy artillery of the Boche had been trying in vain to blast a hole through the defending lines.

The bridge at Marigny had long since been blown up by the French, when the Germans first started their push. And now, unless the big guns could shatter the allied forces, the German drive was checked.

At least, so thought the allied high command. But Quinn knew what the high command did not know. The river had been bridged—two fresh divisions were due to cross it in another twenty minutes. If they did, all hell wouldn't be able to stop them.

Quinn kicked his rudder-bar hard right and followed the silver ribbon of the river northward. He was there with two thousand pounds of T.N.T. to see that the Boche didn't cross that river.

He glanced swiftly at his tachometer, counted the seconds, then dipped the nose of the D.H. in a long

glide. The moon was a distinct advantage in enabling him to locate his objective but by the same token it revealed him to the enemy. But all that Quinn asked for, then, were two minutes.

He swept up the river at an altitude of a thousand feet. Leaning far out of the cockpit he strained his eyes on the dappled water below. Abruptly he zoomed and went into a steep bank. Below him the pontoon bridge threw a narrow span across the water. On the right bank of the stream as he flew northward, confused masses of dark moving shadows resolved themselves into packed columns of regimented gray-clad troops.

No lights showed but even above the roar of his racing motor, Quinn heard the vague rumble of ten thousand marching feet as the Germans came up for the surprise attack.

A wild elation filled his heart. He was in time. He had a few jokers up his sleeve that would make the Boche think twice before they crossed the river that morning.

HE CIRCLED back, swooped low towards the bridge like a bird of prey awaiting the moment to descend to the kill. Then suddenly he thrust the stick forward and the D.H. dropped her nose toward the water. The wind shrieked through the struts like a banshee's wail. Engine and prop combined in a whirring song of power. Quinn's hand rested steadily on the stick and his feet were firm on the rudder bar. For a fleeting moment a grin twisted his lips. His hand went out to the lever of his port bomb release. The bridge was speeding up to meet him with startling rapidity. With one simultaneous movement, he tripped the release and pulled the stick hard back.

Swiftly, unerringly the bomb plummeted down towards the bridge.

The lumbering D.H. staggered in its steep climb, wobbled drunkenly as a lurid crimson flash lit up the water and the earth below.

Quinn levelled off, banked, circled and roared back to the attack. He cut his motor and dove again. Once more he sent two hundred pounds of death and destruction hurtling down towards the bridge. A perfect hit! A crashing detonation drilled into his ears and in the split second before he zoomed upward again, a volcanic eruption of water, splintered wood and tangled pontoons rose skyward.

For the third time Quinn banked, circled and plunged downward. Another volcanic explosion rent the night. Even through the jarring sound of his

engine, the deafening noise was clear. Again and again he tripped his bomb release. The entire surface of the river seemed to erupt in a billowy cloud of water and flame, and shattered pontoons.

Rid of her load of destruction, the D.H. rode easily now. Of one thing Quinn was sure. No Jerry troops would cross that bridge that morning. But he was not quite so sure whether he would ever break a bottle of cognac in the estaminet at St. Omera again. He swept around in a wide bank and turned the nose of his ship towards the West.

And then a groping yellow finger traced itself across the sky. It cut across the laboring D.H. like a knife. Quinn cursed, snapped himself erect at the controls and jammed his stick over to the right.

The game of dodging that revealing searchlight was on in grim earnest. Again and again that thin pencil of light swept across the heavens. Soon it was reenforced by three others.

Time after time Quinn caught his breath as the ghostly shafts shot past his ship with less than yards to spare. The Archies began blazing away madly, trusting to luck rather than good marksmanship.

Quinn throttled his engine and listened intently. As he had feared he heard the faint throbbing of pounding motors in the distance. The Fokkers were out in search of their prey, awaiting the moment when the glaring eyes of the lights would pin the invader to the sky.

They nailed the D.H. at last. What a moment before had been an invisible roaring bird in the air, was suddenly transformed into a gleaming white thing bathed in a flood of iridescent light. In an instant three gleaming beams had centered on the D.H. Quinn stunted all over the sky in a vain endeavor to shake off the mesh of brilliance which enveloped him.

Then something seemed to smash up against his goggles. The ship was entirely circled in a noose of liquid silver. The instrument board before him gleamed brightly in the flash of this nocturnal sun.

Quinn nursed a few more revolutions out of his already pounding engine and ran for it. Madly he hurtled through the sky in a wild race with grinning death peering mockingly over his shoulders. Four flashing searchlights held him fast in their revealing fingers.

Though he was going to make a fight of it, Quinn knew that he could not escape. The pursuing Fokkers could outdistance his lumbering bomber two to one. Tensely he waited the moment for Death to tap him on

the shoulder.

Then it came. A thin, staccato riveting sound fought against the roar of his motor. Something phosphorescent gleamed in the darkness as a burst of tracers flew past. His finger tensed on the trip of his gun. For a reckless moment he considered swinging into a swift Immelman and sending an answering burst into the teeth of the enemy. But this time discretion would undoubtedly prove the better part of valor.

OUTNUMBERED as he was and with those devastating lights playing upon him, to fight was sheer suicide.

Like a huge hawk, a black silhouette appeared over Quinn's tail. A synchronized Spandau belched forth a flaming streak of tracers. A burst of lead splintered the instrument board before him.

Flying instinct alone saved Quinn. He jammed the rudder and flung the stick over. He fell away before the charging rush of the Fokker, saw the black crossed ship whirl like a juggernaut overhead. He whipped up the nose of the D.H. For fleeting seconds the sights of his guns were dead on the German. His finger twined itself around the trigger. The whinning 303's ate their avid way into the Fokker's gas tank. A thin blue flame crawled along the cowling, then burst into a flaring inferno.

The German flyer turned around in the cockpit. Quinn saw the white, fear-stricken face, lit up by the licking flames. Then the Fokker fell over on her nose and plunged towards the shell-torn earth below.

Quinn jerked his ailerons into play and cleared his guns again. He had tasted blood and he decided to stand and fight for it. Better that than take a burst of lead in his back while he was running. They would get him anyway, those Fokkers. But before they did, he would do his damndest to crash a few more of them to hell along with himself.

But success was not to be so simple. The Fokkers were flying rings around the heavy bomber. Again and again lead tore through his fuselage. A bullet thudded into his arm and the stick was wet with blood.

The engine coughed unevenly. He glanced upward and saw a pair of dark shadows darting for his tail. He plunged the stick forward and the ship began a roaring journey toward the earth. The engine was now spluttering badly. Down and down he plunged, muttering a fervent prayer that was half a curse, that his own lines had been crossed.

Again he looked up and his heart kicked out a faster beat. The searchlights and the Fokkers were gone. His eyes strained through the darkness, seeking a place to land. He saw nothing but an impenetrable blackness.

Then, too late, he saw the dim light of a concealed fire. Too late he realized that the needle on his altimeter was fast approaching zero. Swiftly he jerked back on the stick. The D.H. groaned under the strain. The motor protested loudly, then quit altogether.

Quinn felt himself falling, tail first. Then the weight of the nose made itself felt and whipped down. There was a splintering of dry wood as the undercarriage scraped a tree top. Something struck him a terrific blow on the small of the back. Then the blackness of the night enveloped him.

The infantry dragged him out of the shattered remnants of his ship and carried him to the nearest casualty clearing station. A monocled British Medical Officer extracted a steel slug from his arm, set a couple of broken ribs.

But at seven o'clock, a few hours later, Quinn was having breakfast with his Black Sheep.

CHAPTER VIII

A FEW HOURS' SLEEP—a bath—a shave—a big hooker of Scotch under his belt—and Quinn was ready for action once more. Now that he was mixed up in this spy business, he was determined to see it through. Not alone to vindicate his Black Sheep but to avenge the gallant R-5.

From the hospital came word that she was still unconscious—still hovering between life and death. No chance of getting a lead there. Patiently, laboriously, Quinn canvassed all possible angles in search of a starting point, only to draw a blank in each instance.

It was von Goetz, arriving from Paris, who reminded him of R-5's picture.

Quinn's fist assaulted the table of the mess shack. "Emil!" he exploded. "You've got it!"

"Got what?"

"The lead I've been looking for. The girl's picture. Don't you see? She was operating in this sector. She must have been seen by somebody—she must have lived some place. Simple! All I got to do is to take her

picture around to all the cafes . . . to all the . . ."

He was halfway out the door. Von Goetz shook his head sadly from side to side. "So help me," he said. "I think the C.O.'s going soft on us—soft over that girl."

Quinn traded his battered Spad for a motorcycle that afternoon and canvassed the little villages that sprawled on either side of St. Omer. At each stop he showed the picture of R-5, masked his discreet questions under the guise of a heart-sick Romeo. But it was not until eight o'clock that night that he got his first worthwhile lead.

To the south of St. Omer, and dangerously near the Western Front, lay Le Sens. So far, through a combination of luck and circumstance, the small village had escaped Mars' ugly wrath. Mainly because its narrow, winding dirt road—turned now into a river of mud by the spring rains—led to nowhere of importance; but also because its houses were too few, its surrounding farm land barely productive.

For strategic purposes, then, Le Sens would appear quite useless. Yet on the huge war map that covered one whole wall in the General Staff room at German Headquarters, a special blackheaded pin noted its location. And on the map that Colonel Flagg used for personal intelligence, Le Sens' finely printed name was carefully circled with red.

And it was here that Quinn hoped to pick up the trail of the girl.

It had turned into a hell of a night. The sky was an inky black and there was a penetrating drizzle of rain falling as Quinn fought his bucking motorcycle over the muddy road that led into the village. He cursed the rain that trickled down his neck, cursed the muck that was spattered over him by the slewing wheels of the motorcycle, cursed the whole damn mess. But he kept going.

Only once did he deliberately slow up. That was when the stabbing beam of his headlight, swinging suddenly off the road as the motorcycle skidded, flashed against a building. For a few moments Quinn paused, directing the glow of the headlight over the long, low structure—a hangar!

There was cause to wonder over the appearance of an airplane hangar near a village like Le Sens, but Quinn had neither the time nor the inclination to puzzle over it. He swung the wheel back, jammed in the gear, twisted hard on the throttle. And, with his lined face set grimly, with lips drawn back in a half snarl, with eyes narrowed against the rain, he plunged on down the road.

In less than two minutes he roared into Le Sens. In the whole of the small village only one building showed light, and as Quinn splashed to a halt in front of it, a hoarse whisper spilled from his chapped lips.

“Thank God!”

THE light came from a small *boite*, and there was nothing Quinn wanted more at that moment than a shot of liquor. He shoved the motorcycle up against the building, jacked it up, then plowed through the ooze to the door. And even before Quinn had reached the bar, the bartender—a fat, bald, baby-faced Frenchman—had dug up a towel. “*Beaucoup* mud, *m’sieur*.”

“Too damn’ *beaucoup*,” Quinn said. “Any brandy?”
“*Oui, m’sieur*.”

Quinn took the towel and mopped the mud and water from his face as the bartender poured the drink. He tossed the brandy down in one thankful gulp, ordered another. When he had finished this he got out his package of Bull Durham and the girl’s picture. He slid the picture across the bar, began rolling a cigarette.

“Ever see her?”

The bartender glanced at the picture, started. His eyes were wide, a half whisper slipped from his lips.

“*Fille de joie*.”

Like a striking adder, Quinn’s hand shot out, clamped about the bartender’s collar.

“What’s that?”

“*Non! Non! Mon capitan! Par-donez moi*.”

Slowly, Quinn’s mighty hand relaxed its grasp, and the purple began to recede from the Frenchman’s face, giving place to a deathly white. With practiced precision, Quinn rolled out the cigarette, but never once did his smouldering eyes leave the bartender’s perspiring countenance. And when he finally spoke his voice was steady, emotionless, coated with ice.

“What put that nasty little idea into your head?” he asked slowly. “Talk English.”

“It is—it is *oui dire*—what you say, much talk.”

“Go on—I’m listening.”

The bartender dabbed at his face with the bar towel, tugged for the third time at his collar. Quinn’s eyes still stabbed into his.

“She—she come here many times. Sit. Drink. Go out with men.” He was waving his arms now, emphasizing the facts upon which he might have based his former statement. “They all say things.” He shrugged again. “*C’est la guerre*.”

Yellow flame flickered in the gray depths of Quinn’s

eyes. He lit his cigarette, inhaled, deeply, and smoke billowed from his mouth with the next question.

“*Who* says so?”

“The—the men who—” The bartender paused, having difficulty with his choice of words. Before he could continue the door of the *boite* was flung open, wind and rain lashed in, and the bartender began gesticulating wildly. “*These men, m’sieur*”

Quinn had already spun about, and was staring now with swift appraisal at the men who entered. There were three of them, an American, an Italian and one of doubtful parentage, and they were dressed in civvies. As they stood there, just inside the door, returning Quinn’s inspection, water dripped from their hats and from their coats and formed small puddles on the muddled floor.

The nearest of the trio—the tall, lean, hard-visaged American—was the first to move, the first to speak. Instinctively Quinn disliked him. Disliked the fanatic gleam in his blue eyes, disliked the cruel twist of his thin mouth. Slowly the American crossed the room, leaned against the bar. His voice was sharp, brittle.

“What’s chewing at your guts, La Roche?”

“Tell him—explain him, *M’sieur* Whitey, about this *fille*.”

La Roche passed the picture over to the American, then stood back, dabbing at his beet-red forehead, obviously relieved. Whitey picked up the picture, scanned it casually. A scornful smirk plucked at the corner of his mouth.

“*This* dame? What about her?”

HOT anger flamed suddenly through Quinn’s body; his eyes narrowed, smouldering with a venomous hate. It wasn’t that Quinn felt called upon to defend the girl because he believed there might be any basic truth in the rumors about her! But he did object to the sneering insolence that lay behind that slur.

“What was that?”

Quinn’s voice was low and hoarse, but freighted with a leashed resentment. Perhaps Whitey didn’t notice this, or perhaps he just didn’t give a damn.

His lips thinned out, an ugly snarl touched the corners of his mouth.

“You heard me, buddy. I said she was not so good.”

Quinn swung, smashed the flat of his hand across the American’s face, slamming him back against the bar. Then, leaning forward, head hung low, arms dangling, Quinn balanced on the balls of his feet.

“Come again?”

For a long moment the American stayed there, back against the bar, staring levelly, calculatingly at Quinn. The left side of his face was flushed; mottled anger glinted in his cold blue eyes. But he didn't move a muscle, just stood there and stared, and Quinn knew that his weren't the actions of a coward, but of a man deliberately charting his course.

Once the stocky Italian's hand dropped toward his coat pocket, but halted at a glance from Whitey. And finally, in a voice that was deathly calm, the American answered.

“What's wrong, fellow?” he asked. “Nerves?”

Whitey's icy calm had its effect on Quinn. With an effort he fought for restraint. Damn it, he couldn't lose his head now! Too much depended on him. His ultimate objective was a hell of a lot more important than his personal emotions. There was a lead here, and he couldn't let it slip out of his grasp. He had to use his head, not his fists. So when he spoke again, the sharp edge of his voice had been dulled.

“Sorry,” he said “I guess you're right. This damn war's got me.” He turned back to the bar, moved his glass over toward the petrified bartender. “The round's on me,” he said.

La Roche went into action and Quinn, picking up R-5's picture, swung about to face the American.

“I met her about a year ago,” he said softly. “And we hit it off pretty good. Then she disappeared—just vanished into thin air. Since then, between her and the damn' Boche, I've been quietly going nuts.

“I got a tip one day that she was here in Le Sens. So when she's not here, and when I hear cracks like that being made, well—” he tossed down his drink —“you know how it is.”

Whitey raised his glass, drank slowly, rolling the liquor in his mouth. “Yeah,” he said, “I know. Dames get under a guy's skin sometimes. That's the way it goes. But now about Mabel, here, well, all I know is what I know.”

“Mabel?” Quinn was certain the surprise in his voice sounded genuine enough. “That isn't—Oh, I get it.”

“Yeah,” Whitey said. “Mabel Bowers. Anyhow, that's what she called herself around here—not that it made a damn' bit of difference. But look here, fellow—if you want. I'll take you down to Madam Lucille's place. That's where Mabel stayed, and if there's anyone in town who knows where the kid went, it'll be the old lady. She's that sort.” Quinn had ordered another

round of drinks, and was in the process of rolling a cigarette. Beneath lidded eyes he studied Whitey's bland face. Finally he puffed the cigarette to life, raised his drink from the bar, and stared evenly at the lean-faced American.

“Let's go,” he said,

“THE drizzle had stopped, but there was still a wet mist in the air, and the ground was mucky under foot. Quinn closed the door behind him, stared at his motorcycle, then at Whitey.

“We'll walk,” Whitey said. “It'll be easier.”

They turned away from the *boite* and headed back along the road over which Quinn had driven. For the first minute no word was spoken, then Whitey began to talk, ramblingly, of the village, the war, the *boite*. And thus they turned down a small, dark alley-way near the edge of town. Whitey pointed to a black outline at the far end.

“That's the house.”

They crossed in intervening alley, continued on a few steps and it was then Quinn suddenly stiffened. He had heard a sound from behind—the sucking sound of a foot being pulled from mud. He whirled—too late. Something hard and unyielding crashed against his head, myriad lights flashed crazily before his eyes, and then all consciousness was swept away in the sea of utter blackness that flowed over him.

CHAPTER IX

BLACKNESS STILL ENVELOPED HIM when Quinn slowly opened his eyes. His head throbbed with a dull, pounding ache; his mouth was dry and there was a taste of blood on his lips. He tried to move, discovered that he was bound tightly, and cursed.

Grimly he tried to piece together the scattered segments of his memory. Bit by bit he succeeded, and as the picture took shape, Quinn's anger mounted. He'd been a stupid, blundering fool. Not only had he walked wide-eyed into a trap, but he'd actually supplied the bait.

He strained again at his bonds, but he'd been tied by an expert. The exertion set off a riveting machine inside his head, and he was forced to relax. Whoever

had sapped him had put a hell of a lot of feeling into it. Quinn imagined it was the husky Italian. That alley they had crossed undoubtedly led down past the *boite*.

Where in hell was he? He narrowed his eyes, tried to peer through the darkness, but he succeeded only in distinguishing a hazy blob of black in the distance. All he knew for sure was that he lay on a wooden floor, inside some building, somewhere in Western Europe.

Time moved on leaden feet. Impatiently Quinn tested the ropes that held his wrists. The deadly monotony of inaction was gnawing at his vitals. He grumbled a curse, tried to wet his parched lips with a dry tongue, shouted hoarsely. But all he heard in reply was the flat echo of his own voice.

Again and again he shouted, until the pounding pain in his head made him stop. But even as he lay back, panting from the strain, griting his teeth against the throbbing ache that enveloped his brains, he knew that his efforts had borne fruit.

He saw the faint reflection of a moving light even before he heard the footsteps. The light came closer, casting weird shadows against the far wall, and the footsteps grew louder, more confused. Then, abruptly, as the bearer of the light swung out from behind some concealment, Quinn realized where he was.

The huge blob of black that had caught his attention before, and which had just now caused the wired shadows, was an airplane—a Spad. Without a doubt he was in the hangar he had seen on the way into town.

Almost before he realized it, Whitey was standing before him, the angular lines of his lean face accented by the gasoline lantern's reflection. And it was then, for the first time, that Quinn saw the flowing profusion of almost pure white hair that had given the man his name.

"Getting lonesome?"

"What do you think?"

A smile danced over Whitey's face as he hung the lantern from a nail on the wall.

"I think you're damn' lucky to be alive. What do you think, Carlos?"

The short stocky Italian, righting a fruit box to be used as a seat, showed his white teeth in a wide grin.

"*Madre de Dios*, what a head!"

THE third man of the trio, a sparely built man of medium height, paid only slight attention to what was going on. For a moment he stood just on the fringe of light. Then, as Whitey dragged a chair over toward

Quinn, the man turned and walked slowly away.

Quinn twisted himself about, faced Whitey.

"What the hell's this all about?"

"That's just what I was going to ask you."

"We're getting nowhere fast. I'd like to know why you tried to knock my brains out. I'd also like a glass of water."

"It simplified matters to sap you. You might not have come here without raising a fuss, so—" Whitey shrugged. "Carlos had his heart in the job. Almost too much heart."

"All right, so here I am. What for? And how about that water?"

"Carlos, tell Dummy to bring some water. Whitey turned back, dragged a cigarette from a crumpled pack, stuck it between thin lips and lit it. He blew a banner of smoke toward Quinn's face. Then his answer came, sharply, crisply.

"Where's the broad?"

"That," Quinn said thinly, "is what I've been trying to find out."

"Don't hand me that crap. Where is she?"

The lines on Quinn's forehead deepened. The whole set-up became screwier by the minute.

"If I did know, do you think I'd tell you?"

"You'll tell, all right," Whitey shot back. He turned as Dummy appeared with a bucket of water, took the bucket and put it on the floor near his chair. Then he faced Quinn again.

"Maybe you can have a drink later. If I don't have to use all this first. Now, we'll see just how tough you are." He crossed to Quinn, hoisted him to his feet, leaned him back against the wall.

"I owe you a smack in the puss, wise guy. See if you like the taste of your own medicine."

There was nothing Quinn could do. He ducked his head as far as possible when Whitey swung, but he couldn't avoid the stinging slap of the man's palm. It smashed across his cheek, set his head ringing. Then Whitey backed off, his lips twisted in a vicious snarl.

Quinn closed his eyes for a fleeting moment against the bolt of pain that roared through his head, spat dryly, and glared back at the American.

"I'll remember that, you . . .!"

"That won't be all you'll have to remember, wise guy. Unless you talk. Where's the girl?"

"Nuts to you!"

Once again Whitey swung, this time with his fist knotted. The blow hammered into Quinn's jaw, bounced his head back against the wall, hurled him

off balance. But hardly had he crashed to the floor when Whitey and the Italian were lifting him again, propping him upright.

Dimly, through the thunder that rumbled in his head, Quinn heard Whitey talking, but he paid no attention. His eyeballs ached; the taste of blood had come again to his mouth. Then, abruptly, a deluge of cold water splashed over him, shocking him back to a hazy consciousness.

He felt a hand gripping his collar, saw a thin, flushed face close to his own. "I said are you gonna talk?"

Two one-syllable words formed on Quinn's lips. With sneering defiance he spat them into Whitey's face.

"Still tough, eh? Well—I'll make you talk! You'll be a jabberin' lunatic before I get through!" Whitey whirled about, crossed swiftly to the plane, and in a moment came back, pulling a grease-covered glove over his right hand. Then, before coming back to Quinn, he stopped by one of the buckets of sand that hung along the wall, and carefully coated the glove with a gritty layer of sand.

HE GRABBED Quinn's collar with his left hand, waved the cruel weapon before Quinn's bloodshot eyes.

"Now, are you gonna spill your guts?"

Once more the short Anglo-Saxon epithet rose to Quinn's lips, and once more Quinn hurled it at Whitey. But hardly had he formed the pronoun when the sharp, grit-covered glove smashed into the side of Quinn's face.

Quinn's knees buckled, his eyes glazed, but somehow he held on. Held on while Whitey smashed his fist again and again into Quinn's face, pounding his features into a bloody pulp. But there was a limit even to Quinn's endurance, and long before Whitey's sadistic rage was spent, a merciful unconsciousness claimed him.

When Quinn finally came to, he was aware of a chilling draught of air. Painfully he opened his eyes, stared dazedly about him. He was still in the hangar, lying on the floor where he had fallen. The others were there too, working on the Spad. It was then that Quinn noticed that the hangar doors were open.

For a few moments he watched them, but with a complete indifference. He was too sick to care. His face was raw, numbed; his whole body throbbed with pain. He wanted only to rest, undisturbed, to stretch out somewhere on a cool green field, far from the thunder

and agony of war.

Only once did a spark of interest flare within Quinn. That was when he noticed the wings of the Spad being decorated with huge Maltese Crosses. But the flare soon died, and he closed his eyes to drift off into a welcome coma.

Quinn was next conscious of being dragged roughly across the floor of the hangar, and hoisted into the rear office of the Spad. He remained limp, and kept his eyes closed, not caring much what happened. He felt the safety strap tighten about his belly, then felt the slight movement as the crate was rolled out onto the tarmac.

There was a scraping sound as someone clambered into the front cockpit, and, from the sound of his voice, Quinn knew it was Whitey.

"I'll be back," Whitey was saying. "They'll sweat it out of him at Headquarters, all right."

"May—be," another voice said. That would be Carlos. "Hees one tough *bambino*."

"Yeah. They'll find out how tough he is. Anyhow, they can't ride our cans so much now. We haven't located R-5 but this mug will do for a while."

"R-5! She was a pretty lady."

"Like hell! She was a damn Yank spy."

"You say that justa because she no—whatyoucallit."

"All right wise guy, but don't forget to ditch that motorcycle or you might be laughing in hell. Get on the prop." There was a moment of silence, then—

"Contact!"

"Contact!"

CHAPTER X

THE SPAD'S MOTOR COUGHED, caught, then throbbed to life with a steady song of rhythmic power. And as life came to the Spad, life miraculously seemed to flow again through Quinn's veins. New life. The dead weariness that had settled over him seemed to vanish. Even the crucifying pain that stabbed through his head became suddenly dulled. The throaty rumble of the crate's motor acted on him like a shot of adrenalin. His heart picked up, his blood pulsed faster. He was in an airplane. And when Jack Quinn was in an airplane, regardless of the circumstances, the world was his oyster.

Straining against the strap, Quinn raised himself slightly in the rear office, slowly opened one eye. Carlos was standing on one wing, shouting something in Whitey's ear—something that was lost to Quinn in the swift rush of the Spad's slipstream. Then Whitey nodded, jazzed the throttle a couple of times, and Carlos got down.

Abruptly Whitey raised his hand, the chocks were pulled, and the Spad moved forward. Quinn knew that it was going to be tough taking off from the soggy tarmac, especially at night, but he also knew that Whitey could handle a ship. Knew it instinctively from the moment they started. And he was right.

Whitey got the Spad off the ground, and sent it in a long spiralling climb. The prop whirled madly, churning a flashing silver arc in the night, dragging the Spad higher and higher into the heavens. The rain had long since stopped, and the stars were out again, strewn in all their coruscating glory across the black velvet of the sky.

Abruptly, at about ten thousand feet, Whitey levelled off, swung the Spad's nose to the east. And just as abruptly, Quinn snapped out of his hop. Streaking through the night like a mad meteor, with banners of flame spewing redly from its twin exhausts, it would be but a matter of minutes before the Spad was safely over German territory. Quinn had to act—and act fast.

He tugged once at the bonds about his wrists, tugged again, then strained against them. They gave but little. For a long moment he stared at the Vickers gun, mounted on the swivel just in front of the rear office, its snout almost resting on the Spad's top wing. But it offered little consolation. There was no way he could use it—to any advantage.

The minutes ticked swiftly by. They were well over the German lines by now, and every revolution of the Spad's motor brought Quinn nearer his doom. But it wasn't the thought of that, that brought the curse to Quinn's lips. He'd faced Death before—and spat in his eye. That was his job—and a job he liked. And Quinn knew, without the slightest feeling of emotion, that someday the leering Reaper would catch up with him. But when that day came, Quinn wanted to go out with the feeling of a job well done.

He couldn't go now. Too much depended on his success. The fate of the Black Sheep, if not the morale of the whole air force, hinged on his ability to discover the leak that had done so much damage. To fail now, with success almost within his grasp, would torture his soul more than all the fire and brimstone in hell.

Once again his eyes swung to the Vickers. What the hell was there about the gun that attracted him? What kept pulling his attention back to it? It looked okay. It was mounted right. It wasn't cold enough for the grease to freeze. It— Grease!

The word slammed through the mist that clouded Quinn's brain. Grease! He moved his bound feet about the floor of the office, moved them until they struck a heavy, solidly packed can of the stuff. Now, if he could get the can, get its lid off, get some of the contents out. If! If! If! Damn the word!

HE STRAINED against the safety belt, bent forward as far as he could, but his fingers still fell short of the can's handle. Nor could he get his hands around far enough on his left side to loosen the belt. Now he leaned back, inhaling deeply of the rush of air that swept by him, gathered what strength he could. And then, with a sudden forward lurch, he threw his weight against the strap.

His point came up on Fate's dice. The Spad bounced through an air pocket at the precise moment that he surged against the strap, and Whitey was too busy with the crate's controls to hear the commotion behind him. In addition, the abrupt dip of the Spad added to Quinn's forward impetus. The tips of his fingers clawed about the can's handle.

But with the can in his lap, Quinn was still not out of the woods. He had to get the top off now, and get it off in a hurry. And once again Fortune smiled on him. The top of the can had not been jammed in tightly and it was but a matter of minutes for Quinn to pry it out with his fingernails. Then he set to work in earnest.

As the trim Spad roared through the night, Quinn got out a fistful of grease and rubbed it as well as he could over his wrists and the ropes that bound them. Then, adding another handful for good measure, he worked his wrists about as much as possible to distribute the grease. And finally, with his heart hammering madly, he strained at the bonds.

They gave—only the barest fraction of an inch. But they gave.

Little by little, Quinn worked his right hand through one of the loops. It was slow, tedious, aggravating labor. He cursed under his breath as time sped swiftly by; he kept one eye on the cockpit ahead, relaxing suddenly whenever it seemed as though Whitey might turn around.

Then abruptly it happened. The rope slipped over the base of his thumb, over his knuckles, and his hand

came free. Thirty seconds later he had loosed his other hand, and in another half minute he had removed the rope from his ankles. But his luck suddenly changed. As he twisted about to unbuckle the safety belt, Whitey turned and looked back. And when Quinn straightened up he found himself staring straight into the unblinking eye of Whitey's Luger.

There was only one course to take, and Quinn took it. A scorching oath rumbled from his lips as he struck at the gun. Flame flashed in the darkness, a burning pellet of lead gored a furrow along Quinn's side. But he'd accomplished his purpose. The Luger was smashed out of Whitey's grasp, went hurtling over the side of the Spad.

Yet Whitey's reaction was equally quick, equally effective. The gun hadn't cleared the side of the fuselage before his balled left fist hammered against Quinn's jaw, knocking him off balance. And the small Spad lurched madly as Whitey bent over, tried to shove Quinn out into space.

Quinn's foot slipped on a mess of grease, his body swung about, and blackness beckoned ominously below him. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he caught framework of the Vickers, and grabbed. And not a split second too soon.

The Spad dipped, threatened to go into a spin, and Whitey dove for the stick. Now it was Quinn's chance, and he didn't miff it. He snatched one of the ropes from the seat of the rear office, bent forward. And even as Whitey was righting the ship, Quinn twisted the rope about the spy's neck, threatened to garrote him.

Whitey clutched at his throat, fought to breathe, but Quinn tightened his grip. And then, leaning close to Whitey's ear, he shouted:

"Back to St. Omer. Snappy!"

CHAPTER XI

ON THE WAY BACK toward the Black Sheep 'drome, the details of a daring plan of action took swift shape in Quinn's head. It was a plan, which, if successful, would be sure to bust the German spy ring wide open. If not—well, what the hell! And once again the main cog in the scheme—the one man who fitted perfectly into his plans—would be von Goetz.

Standing in the rear cockpit, one hand grasped firmly about the framework of the Vickers, the other clamped about the rope that circled Whitey's neck, he kept on watch for the familiar landmarks of the Black Sheep 'drome. Down below, the war-torn terrain of the Western Front, bathed now in the pale silver light of a descending moon, moved slowly by.

Then he saw the 'drome—a patch-work of black and gray—and he leaned forward and signalled Whitey—shook his head. Whitey looked puzzled, but flew on. Shortly after, there came into view a deserted field—Quinn's objective. He poked Whitey, pointed toward the field, emphasizing the order with a sharp twist of the rope.

Whitey nodded, cut the motor and the Spad went into a long, sweeping glide, its guys screaming in the swift rush of wind. The field rushing up to meet them was small, rough of surface, lined on two sides by ragged rows of trees. Quinn prayed that his unwilling pilot knew his stuff!

"Keep it cut!" he shouted. "Roll in from the north!" Whitey obeyed—explicitly.

With a piece of rope, Quinn bound Whitey's wrists. Then, helping him out of the Spad, he wound the remaining rope about the man's ankles. As an extra precaution. Quinn made a big knot in the middle of his neckerchief, jammed the knot into Whitey's mouth, and tied the neckerchief tightly about his head.

And then, hoping no one would investigate and discover his captive before he returned, Quinn headed swiftly for the nearby 'drome of the Black Sheep.

"You think it will work?"

Side by side they walked through the night—Quinn and von Goetz—back across the field toward the Spad. Already the moon had dipped below the edge of the earth, and now that heavy darkness that heralds the dawn was beginning to cloak the land. It was von Goetz who had asked the whispered question.

"I hate like hell to get you messed up in this," Quinn said thickly, "but you're the only one who—"

"Going soft?" There was light mockery in von Goetz's lowered voice.

Quinn glared at him. "Nuts!" he shot back hoarsely; "If it wasn't—"

"Then answer my question."

Quinn shrugged, took a half dozen steps before he spoke.

"How in hell do I know?"

A silence fell between them then as they moved across the field toward the plane. But it was an understanding

silence. These men knew each other—knew the bad points as well as the good. And they knew, too, that each accepted as his own the fatalistic philosophy that governed the squadron of Black Sheep.

They lived recklessly, these Black Sheep—lived only for the needs of the moment. They fought hard but fair, neither asking nor giving quarter. And on that day when the bony finger of Death beckoned them down the dark road to oblivion, they would go without whining, their steps firm, a defiant snarl on their lips. Thus they came to the Spad. Without a wasted moment, Quinn loosened the ropes about Whitey's legs, got him to his feet, yanked the gag from his mouth.

"Whitey," he said softly, "you're in a spot. There are two things I can do. One is—put a gun up against the middle button of your fly and pull the trigger. You'd be a long time dying, Whitey. That slug would eat into your guts and stay there, making you pray to God someone would blow your brains out. It's a hell of a death, Whitey—a hell of a death. And for that, I'd get a D.S.C."

Quinn was staring intently at Whitey's face, watching closely for any reaction. It came. Sweat beaded his forehead; he wet his lips. Quinn went on:

"Or," he said, "I could turn you over to Intelligence with a strong recommendation for clemency, and you'd probably save your skin. You know why I'd do that? Because you kicked in with certain information. Which is it?"

FOR a long, tense moment, Whitey didn't answer. Slowly, Quinn rammed von Goetz's heavy service automatic into the spy's belly. Idly he toyed with the trigger. His voice, when he spoke, was no more than a hoarse whisper.

"Well—"

Whitey cracked. His face was screwed up into a tight knot; he was breathing noisily.

"For God's sake, don't shoot! What do you want to know?"

The tension left Quinn's muscles. He took one of the cigarettes von Goetz held out, puffed it to glowing life. Then, for a full half hour he and von Goetz hurled questions at Whitey, drawing out every bit of pertinent information the man possessed. At the end of that time, von Goetz turned to Quinn.

"There's a good chance—a damn good chance!—the trick will work. When do we leave?"

Quinn glanced toward the east, where a faint haze

of orange light was beginning to show on the horizon. And when he faced von Goetz again, his heavy jaw jutted forward, and a light of grim purpose flickered in the depths of his steel-gray eyes.

"Just as fast as we can."

CHAPTER XII

LESS THAN THIRTY MINUTES LATER the trim little Spad, checked and secretly refueled, was once again pressed into service. And as it lifted its gallant wings out of the gray murk that coated the earth, its cargo strangely resembled the cargo it had borne away from the tarmac at Le Sens.

In the front cockpit, his hand closed firmly about the stick, sat a man who might have been Whitey. And in the rear office lay Quinn, bound as before, roaring once more into the west to keep a date with Death.

Quinn's plan was dangerously simple. With von Goetz once more in the role of an impersonator, Quinn would be delivered into the den of the lion. Once von Goetz was accepted as Whitey, Quinn hoped that he would be able to learn the identity of the traitor who was selling them out.

That was all there was to it. Simple? It was too damn' simple! There ought to be a hole there somewhere, but Quinn couldn't see it. Von Goetz had the ability, the knowledge and the guts to get away with his role. Whitey was only a minor cog in the huge German war machine. It would be ridiculously easy for von Goetz to fall into his place.

Beyond their arrival at German Headquarters, Quinn had made no plans. Hell, how could you? You can't draw to a hand before it's dealt. Sure, he knew he was sticking his head in a noose. So what? He'd done it before and got away with it, and he could do it again. And suppose he didn't? Once more—so what?

And so onward sped the Allied ship, directly into the face of the rising sun, deeper and deeper into the land of the enemy.

With the aid of the rough map Whitey had drawn for him, von Goetz located the 'drome used by the branch of the German Air intelligence interested in the girl. And almost before Quinn realized it, the wheels of the Spad were bouncing over German soil. The ship

had not come to a halt before it was surrounded by the 'drome guard.

As von Goetz rose up in the front cockpit, he shot a swift glance of encouragement towards Quinn. It was as though he had reached over and clasped his brother Black Sheep's hand. But once his feet touched the ground, von Goetz changed completely. Holding himself stiffly erect in his best arrogant Prussian manner, he barked an order in German to the Sergeant of the Guard—an order that he and his prisoner be escorted immediately into *Ober-Lieutenant Hofstadter's* presence.

The fact that von Goetz was in civilian clothes created no surprise. Apparently a number of German operatives used this 'drome as a base. The guards jumped to obey von Goetz' command. Quinn was hauled roughly out of the Spad, the rope was removed from his legs and, surrounded by three of the largest guards, he was made to follow von Goetz into the large white stone building next to the hangars.

An orderly announced their presence, and they were taken directly before Hofstadter. The *Ober-Lieutenant*—a large, broadfaced Bavarian with a close-cropped moustache—rose as von Goetz saluted, spoke sharply in German. And in German, von Goetz replied.

It was explained that Quinn had been captured in Le Sens while searching for R-5, that the picture of the girl had been found on him, and that he had refused to talk even under physical persuasion.

HOFSTADTER came out from behind the large desk, fired a guttural question at Quinn. Von Goetz turned about and, with a thin sneer curling his mouth, said sharply:

"The *Herr* Lieutenant wants to know if you still refuse."
"You're damn' right I do!"

Quinn put as much vehemence in the reply as he could. Von Goetz shrugged, relayed the information to Hofstadter. The captain bellowed an order, the door was flung open, and the three burly guards came in. And then, with not even a glance from von Goetz, Quinn was taken down into the basement and thrown into one of the dungeon-like cells.

As the heavy steel door clanged shut behind him, a sinking feeling attacked Quinn's stomach. He didn't like jails worth a damn. They cooped you up, didn't give you a chance. He'd rather face half an army in the open—any day. You could swing your arms, smack somebody in the jaw, do something. But here—hell!

Time shuffled by on leaden feet. For a while Quinn paced the length of the small, damp, stinking cell, impatience clawing at his vitals. But finally the reaction set in; the physical and mental strain of the last twenty-four hours demanded its toll. His body cried for rest, and its cries could not be denied.

And so Quinn sank, exhausted, to the hard wooden bench, stretched out, and pillowed his head in the crook of his arm.

Almost immediately he was asleep.

CHAPTER XIII

QUINN awoke suddenly. Von Goetz appeared. Von Goetz' manner was brusque, crisply authoritative, his voice sharp. "Come here," he snarled. "The guard doesn't speak English—I know. I've learned nothing yet. There's a meeting later on. You'll be questioned. Sit tight. Now shout something back at me."

"Do they feed you in this dump?" Quinn growled. "I haven't eaten for twenty-four hours."

"I'll fix it," Von Goetz shot back. "See you later."

Quinn heard the hollow echo of von Goetz' receding footsteps, heard him say something in German to the guard. And it wasn't long after that when the guard came with food and cigarettes.

After he had eaten, Quinn resumed his pacing of the floor. He had no idea of the time.

The afternoon dragged slowly. It was well on towards five and Quinn had worked himself into a beautiful lather, when von Goetz appeared again. His manner was, as before, crisply Prussian. But there was agitation in it, too.

"Listen," he said urgently, "and don't interrupt. I've got the dope but I've got to talk fast. They haven't called your case yet—awaiting orders from the High Command."

"Well, who's our spy?" growled Quinn.

"Hold on tight," said von Goetz. "It's Gorham!"

"The hell you say!"

"It's a camouflage trick. He's painted messages on the roof of his school—messages which can only be read by Jerry flyers wearing special glasses. Glasses that eliminate certain colors. Those goggles you found on R-5 were a pair."

“Why, the dirty . . .”

“Shut up. Now listen closely. There’s a big blow-off due for tonight. The Allied High Command, from Foch down, are personally inspecting the positions in sector 42. Very under cover. Gorham got the information some way and reported here to the Germans . . .”

“Go on—go on,” urged Quinn.

“Haven’t you guessed?” said von Goetz. “Jerry is planning to bomb that sector off the earth—and the Allied High Command along with it. A flight of bombers and Fokkers is due to take off from here in an hour.”

Von Goetz glanced quickly up the corridor, then continued. “You’re going to get away in one of those Fokkers, now. The rest is up to you and the Black Sheep.”

“Yeah,” growled Quinn. “But how about you?”

“Shut up. I’m giving the orders this time, Quinn. You’re not the C.O. now—just a lousy stir-bum. Besides, I can’t go. I’ve got to show up for that meeting within the next ten minutes. If I’m not there, or if I try to duck out on it, it’ll screw up the whole thing. We’ve got to catch them with their pants down.”

“And you stay here for the jazz, eh? Like hell!”

“What do you think war is, Quinn? A Rotary luncheon!”

THERE was irony in von Goetz’ tones—irony that made Quinn a little ashamed of his show of emotion. Von Goetz was right—Quinn knew that. It was tough to run off, leaving someone you knew, someone you liked, holding the bag. But you had to play the cards that were dealt.

“I think Sherman was a pansy,” Quinn said.

“Keep your drawers on,” Von Goetz said sharply. “They won’t bother me—for a while. On the way out I’ll tell the guard to bring you your dinner. The rest is up to you. Good luck!”

With a slight wave of his hand, von Goetz turned, strode erectly down the corridor. Quinn gripped the bars until the knuckles of his hands showed white.

“I’ll be seeing you,” he said. Then, in a hoarse whisper, he added: “Probably in hell.”

Nervously pacing his cell, waiting for the guard to come, Quinn’s thoughts turned to the man who had betrayed his countrymen. Gorham! As much as Quinn hated the martinet’s guts, he found it hard to believe it was true.

The colonel was the type of army man who

usually didn’t sell out. It wasn’t because of any high patriotism, but usually because they were more interested in their precious authority than in money. Give them some epaulets, a pair of boots, a crop, and a chance to ride herd over a bunch of suckers who couldn’t fight back and they were happy.

But if it was Gorham—well, that meant the Black Sheep were cleared.

Quinn snapped out of his reverie at the sound of the guard’s heavy tread. He moved to the door, waited, every muscle in his body drawn taut. And even before the guard came up, bearing his tray of food, the sudden roar of a Mercedes power plant told Quinn that the flight was getting ready.

The guard opened the door, unsuspectingly stepped inside.

But, of course, the guard didn’t know Quinn.

Whistling a martial air as he put the tray down on the bench, the guard was unaware of Quinn’s movements. But when he turned to go the whistling stopped, and the cry that rose to his lips died in a guttural gurgle as Quinn’s mighty hand closed about his throat. Now Quinn’s fist crashed into the guard’s jaw, and with an expiring sigh the man slumped to the ground.

Quinn bent down, rolled the unconscious guard over, dragged off his gray uniform coat. Quickly slipping this on, he bent again, got the man’s hat. Then, stepping quickly through the door, he gave one last glance inside the cell.

“Sorry, fellow. That’s the way things go.”

He slammed the door after him, moved lithely down the corridor. He took the steps that led to the upper hallway two at a time, hugging the rail. At the top he paused, glanced carefully about. About forty feet down the hallway stood two guards. Quinn knew that if they got a good look at him they’d raise an alarm. He hadn’t donned the guard’s coat with the intention of fooling anyone, but rather with the hope that it would take them an extra moment or two to get wise.

And odd moments, in times such as these, were worth their weight in cognac.

The roar of a half dozen Fokkers pounded in from the tarmac outside. Quinn waited until he saw the two guards faced the other way, then stepped quickly down the hall. And he had almost reached the door when a hoarse shout sounded behind him.

Quinn increased his pace, the man shouted again, louder. There was no alternative left him. Inhaling

deeply, Quinn dashed out of the building—and directly into the arms of a quartet of guards!

It is a matter of debate who was the more surprised. The soldiers gave ground before the very momentum of Quinn's dash, but then one of them spotted the khaki pants. With a grumbling roar he threw himself at Quinn.

THIS was more like it. This was trouble that Quinn could understand—and handle. Racing quickly forward, he met the soldier's charge—met it with a thundering right that landed flush on the man's jaw. And then, without a wasted motion, he pivoted, hurled his knotted left fist at the nearest gray-clad foe. Like a half-filled sack of wheat the man slumped, joining his companion in a peaceful coma.

The very fury of Quinn's attack had its effect on the remaining two. Neither wanted to take the initiative, and it was this indecision which gave Quinn his chance.

He knew then that they weren't armed. But he knew damned well that it would be but a matter of seconds until someone appeared who was. He whirled again, located the nearest Fokker, and sprinted toward it.

He had taken but a half dozen strides when all hell broke loose behind him. The shouts of the soldiers were added to that mad bellowing voice of the hallway. And directly on the heels of that, came the staccato crack of a spitting Luger.

An angry wasp of lead caressed the lobe of Quinn's ear, whined off into space. Another tugged at the tail of the German coat. Little puffs of dust rose lazily from the ground ahead. But the Fokker was only a scant ten feet away—just two more leaps—and—

Flexing his powerful muscles, Quinn flung himself toward the cockpit.

Quinn gave the Fokker the gun. The powerful Mercedes motor roared, the trim black ship hopped over the restraining chocks, bounded down the runway like a frightened gazelle. And then, as Quinn pulled back on the stick, the German crate rose gracefully.

Behind him, Lugers stabbed the air. Quinn zoomed—zoomed so steeply that for a moment he thought the ship would slip into a disastrous tail spin. He eased up a trifle on the stick and the Fokker ate out of his hand.

BEFORE the yelling German could get a plane into the air, Quinn had his crate at a safe altitude, streaking

like an arrow directly into the heart of the lowering sun. Nothing impeded his mad flight across the desolate stretch of No-Man's-Land. He gave the ship all the sauce it had and roared in the direction of the Black Sheep 'drome.

A splatter of Archie fire greeted him as he soared over the Allied lines. But Quinn was hardly aware of it. Only one thought lived in his brain. Gorham was a traitor and he had placed the Allied High Command in very great peril. There was only one hope—one desperate hope—that Quinn and the Black Sheep could stop the enemy bombers in time!

High above the 'drome of the Black Sheep he killed the engine and dove.

Contact! The engine roared. Quinn gave the bus all the sauce she had, dropped her nose and like a live, intelligent thing the Fokker dropped to a perfect three point landing.

CHAPTER XIV

THE 'DROME OF THE BLACK SHEEP came to noisy life. Men erupted from the mess shack, charged out of the bunkhouse. Mechanics, brandishing heavy wrenches and stout iron bars, streamed from the hangars. Before the glistening prop had ceased whirling, the black-crossed Fokker was surrounded by threatening men, covered by a score of leveled guns. Then Quinn rose in the cockpit and wiped the spattered oil from his grimy face.

"My God! It's Quinn!"

Growls changed to a burst of cheers.

But their jubilation was short-lived. Quinn did not smile at their antics. With an upraised hand, he commanded silence.

"Quiet!" he bellowed. "This is no time for hurrahs. Get this—and get it straight." While the Black Sheep, suddenly sobered, listened in silence, he hurried on: "Never mind how I got the dope. But the Boche have planned the most brazen, daring coup that's ever been pulled on the Western Front. In less than half an hour . . ."

While the setting sun illumined his face with a lurid glow, he told the Black Sheep the startling news of the intended bombing that he had got behind the German lines. He made a wild and heroic figure, with the wind

whipping his hair, eyes gleaming from a face caked with dried oil, blood and grime. His hand raised in a clenched fist, his voice rang in simple eloquence. And there wasn't a man on the field who wouldn't have followed him through the gates of Hell itself.

Quinn did not need their hoarse cheers, when he had finished his dramatic speech, to tell him so. He pivoted around, waved his arms, bellowed order upon order. And a split second later the drome of the Black Sheep came alive with a frenzy of activity.

Eager hands trundled ship after ship from the hangars. Motor after motor spluttered to avid life. The slanting gold and crimson rays of the sun glinted back from whirling propellers. Pilots raced for their ships. Chocks were pulled. And one after another, the sky-busting squadron of the Black Sheep roared across the tarmac and stretched wings eagerly to the air.

In the lead, Quinn hurtled his plane across the skies in a mad race against time. He glanced back over his shoulder, saw the squadron climb into position, spread fanwise behind him and match his speed with neat precision.

He could see, now, the jagged scars in the earth that were the front line trenches. His fingers tightened on the stick. With a prayer in his heart, he flew straight as an arrow, conscious only of the precious seconds slipping still more speedily by.

His pulse kicked out a faster beat as he winged over the lines. Far below him, in that network of tunnels and dug-outs, were the generals of the Allied High Command. With a surge of exultation, he saw the barbed wire entanglements, the gaping shell holes, the erupting geysers that marked No-Man's-Land. He had won! He had beaten Jerry to the mark!

And then a savage curse ripped off his lips. The heavy bank of clouds, a deepening violet now, were suddenly torn asunder. Churning the clouds to ragged banners of mist, came three huge bombers. And hovering about them, like a swarm of deadly wasps, darted the protecting convoy of Fokkers.

With a single, sweeping glance, Quinn counted. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . six . . . eight . . . twelve . . . fourteen . . .

EVEN as he flipped his ailerons in signal to break formation, he vowed that the Boche would not break through.

Those lumbering bombers, heavy with their murderous cargo, had to be blasted from the skies. Quinn picked out the foremost one for his own, gave

his Spad the last ounce of power and hurtled toward it. A Fokker saw, dropped in a screaming dive to protect it. And in the graying skies over No-Man's-Land, the two flights tangled. All hell broke loose—a hell of throbbing propellers, of whining motors, of searing lead and sudden, violent death.

It was as though Quinn's very spirit drove his ship through the air at unbelievable speed. The bomber he had marked for his own swerved, tried frantically to get out of his way.

Quinn's gun chattered. With unerring aim the Vickers probed with fingers of steel, found the life-pulse of the giant bomber. The huge ship shuddered in mid-air, then suddenly smoke and flame streamed from it. It fell off on one wing, then with gathering speed plummeted like a meteor gone mad toward the pock-marked terrain below.

First blood!

But if one of those two lumbering bombers escaped, got over the Allied front lines . . .

Even as the thought crossed his mind, he saw another of the bombers receive its death blow. While a Black Sheep plane soared in triumph above it, the big German ship began its last dive.

Quinn, banking sharply around, did not wait to see it crash. The dog fight had scattered over the heavens. He was returning to the fray when he saw something transpiring below him, that made his jaw sag. His eyes bulged in their socket.

As though in a trance he saw one black-crossed ship swoop down, ride like Nemesis on the tail of another! Frantically the foremost Fokker tried to escape. But the second pilot—whoever he was—handled plane and stuttering machine gun like a master. Steel raked the sky—he found the other's blind spot—and the unbelievable duel between two Boche ships ended in grim tragedy. The fleeing pilot flung his arms up in a last imploring gesture to Heaven. Then without a guiding hand on the stick, his ship somersaulted before the weight of its motor pulled the nose down and it rocketed earthward.

The answer came to Quinn like a flash.

"Emil!" he cried.

It was—it *must* be—von Goetz, over there in that triumphant Fokker. Quinn exulted. Not only was he exultant to know that von Goetz still lived. Of such stuff were the Black Sheep made—and Quinn's own gallant heart responded at the thought.

Then the grin died on his lips. A trim Spad hurtled down toward the Fokker. A Black Sheep was after

German blood—and he could not possibly know whose hand was piloting that black-crossed plane!

There was no time for Quinn to warn either of them. With a prayer in his heart he shoved the stick forward, swooped in a screaming power dive.

THE Black Sheep pilot was intent only on his victim. His Vickers came to avid life as Quinn shot downward. Lead stitched through the wings of Quinn's plane as it flashed through the narrow space between pursuer and pursued. As he flashed by, Quinn could see the startled face of De la Roche as the latter abruptly ceased firing.

The Frenchman held his fire until Quinn pulled out of his dive, executed a smart Immelman and leveled off. Quinn had no time to marvel at the fact that he was still alive—that his mad, suicidal dive had not been his last. He waved frantically at De la Roche, and though the Frenchman was obviously puzzled by the order, he banked sharply and ceased his pursuit of the Fokker. Then Quinn sped after von Goetz, signalled to him to head for the Allied lines.

For a brief second Quinn watched the black-crossed plane as it turned its nose into the West.

It was hard to realize that only a few brief, hectic minutes had passed since the two flights had tangled. The sky over No-Man's-Land was still a tangle of pinioned wings; of hammering machine guns; of roaring motors. Fokkers and Spads zoomed, dove and side-slipped about each other.

But the battle was over almost before he reached it. The great and daring plan of the Boche had come to disaster. Despite their numbers, the Jerries were getting the worst of it and they knew it. The last of the bombers, which had escaped thus far unscathed, broke suddenly away and made a desperate dash for its original objective.

Growling deep in his throat, Quinn hurtled down toward it. At the same time, two more of the Black Sheep Spads erupted from the melee and converged on the fleeing bomber.

That was the end—and Quinn knew it even as his hand reached out to the trip of the Vickers. From the corner of his eye he saw another Fokker careen earthward—saw the rest of the Boche convoy suddenly break free and streak at top speed for the German lines. Then the clumsy bomber was lined directly in his ring sights.

A moment later, another flaming coffin dropped into Eternity.

The carnage was over.

The daring plan of the Imperial High Command had been blasted. Quinn was satisfied.

CHAPTER XV

VON GOETZ WAS NERVOUSLY PACING up and down the tarmac, when the battle-scarred Black Sheep dropped their wings to earth again. Of the twelve who had soared into the east a short half hour ago, only nine returned.

With eager questions the men crowded around Quinn and von Goetz, pressing them for details of their exploit behind the enemy lines.

"Save all that," growled Quinn. "There's one more job we got to do."

"What?" asked Dake.

Quinn's eyes hardened. "Clear the name of the Black Sheep—get the man behind all this dirty work."

An angry rumble issued from the throats of the men at his words—then died away. There was silence for a few moments, then Quinn continued heavily. "He's our old boy friend, Colonel Gorham." The ominous rumble started up again but Quinn silenced it with an upraised hand.

"Take it easy," he said. "This is von Goetz' party. He took all the risks—did all the dirty work. Gorham belongs to him."

A far-away look came into von Goetz' marble-blue eyes. "A nice idea, Jack," he murmured. "A nice idea." He looked down at the German uniform he was wearing and a crooked smile twisted at his lips. Yanking the automatic from its holster he examined it carefully. "I think the dear Colonel would appreciate the irony of dying by a German Luger," he drawled. "Let's go."

With Von Goetz in the lead, silently the men moved across the field.

Still in silence, a few minutes later, they crowded into Gorham's private sanctum at the camouflage school.

The Colonel looked up sharply from a large map he had been examining. His eyes blazed in anger at the unexpected interruption. Then the anger faded, yielded place to panic. He made a pass for the gun at his hip but long before he could draw, the Luger in von Goetz' fist dug deep into his navel.

Gorham stiffened. His face flushed, then paled.

Slowly his eyes passed over the sullen faces of the Black Sheep, settled at last on the field gray uniform worn by von Goetz.

“What—what’s the meaning of this?” he demanded.

No one spoke.

Von Goetz reached out a bony hand—ripped the maple leaves from Gorham’s shoulders and tossed them into the traitor’s face.

Beads of sweat popped out on Gorham’s brow. A pulse hammered dully in his throat. He looked wildly, appealingly, about him but his glance was met by nothing but that ominous silence—a silence that was far more terrible than any accusation could have been. “What—what. . .”

“Shut up, you lousy spy,” grated von Goetz. “And listen.” Gorham ran the point of a dry tongue over drier lips. Von Goetz hefted the Luger in his fist. “First, I want you to know that your plan to blast the Allied High Command to hell has failed. Quinn and the Black Sheep have seen to that.” Gorham staggered back—pulled up hard against the desk. “Next, I beg to inform you that you are about to die.”

Gorham gnawed at his under lip until the blood spurted.

“But I’m so tender-hearted,” continued von Goetz with gentle irony, “that I can’t shoot you down in cold blood as you deserve. I couldn’t even do that to a mad dog. So I’m going to give you a break.”

Gorham’s eyes were wide with fear. He seemed to have shrunk physically within the past two minutes.

“Yes,” said von Goetz slowly. Then with his foot he sent the table crashing back to the wall. Gorham looked at him from wild eyes. “You have an automatic, Gorham. I have an automatic. We will start from the center here—each take ten paces towards opposite corners—turn and fire. You understand?”

GORHAM jerked his head up and down, veiled his eyes to hide the cunning light that sprang up in them.

Swiftly he yanked out the automatic from his holster and the two men stood back to back in the center of the room.

“Ready?” asked von Goetz.

“Yes,” said Gorham.

“Then march.”

In the heavy silence of the room their measured footsteps sounded like the strokes of doom. One, two, three . . . Gorham’s knuckles stood out white around the butt of his automatic . . . four, five, six . . . Gorham’s heart pounded like a trip-hammer and swiftly he calculated the distance to the nearest window . . . Seven, eight, nine . . .

Gorham whirled, fired in one movement—before the count of ten.

Though he wasn’t aware of it at the moment, von Goetz had a new part in his hair. He pivoted swiftly, laughed—and the Luger bucked and roared in his fist. Once—twice.

The automatic sailed from Gorham’s hand in a wide arc. He clasped the pit of his stomach, went down slowly, joint by joint.

Von Goetz lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply. Then slowly he stepped across the room to where Gorham lay on the floor in an ever widening pool of blood. “I only shot you in the guts,” he said evenly, “because you cheated. You’ll die. But you’ll die slowly.” He turned to Quinn and the grim-faced Black Sheep. “I think that is all we can do here, boys,” he said quietly.

“A good job done,” rumbled Quinn. He shuddered once, then glared belligerently at the still silent men. “Well, you muggs,” he bellowed, “what the hell are we standing here for! On to St. Omer. There’s still one job to do.”

“What’s that?” asked von Goetz.

Quinn stiffened to attention, clicked his heels together. “Drink a toast. Two toasts,” he corrected. “One to the three Black Sheep who are making it hot in hell. The other to the girl—R-5.”