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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DAVE DAWSON WITH THE FLYING TIGERS



DAVE DAWSON WITH THE FLYING TIGERS

by R. SIDNEY BOWEN

Author of:

"DAVE DAWSON AT DUNKIRK"

"DAVE DAWSON WITH THE R. A. F."

"DAVE DAWSON IN LIBYA"

"DAVE DAWSON ON CONVOY PATROL"

"DAVE DAWSON, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT"

"DAVE DAWSON AT SINGAPORE"

"DAVE DAWSON WITH THE PACIFIC FLEET"

"DAVE DAWSON WITH THE AIR CORPS"

"DAVE DAWSON WITH THE COMMANDOS"

"DAVE DAWSON ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT"

The War Adventure Series

THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING COMPANY

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CHAPTER ONE

Eagles' Reward

With all the appearance of a man striving to solve one of the world's weightier problems, Freddy Farmer studied the Hotel Savoy menu card line by line from top to bottom. Across the table Dave Dawson sat looking at his closest pal, and grinning from ear to ear. Eventually, though, when the English-born air ace continued to take the menu apart bit by bit with his eyes, Dawson decided that enough was enough. He reached over and whisked the card out of Freddy's hand.

"Okay, little man," he chuckled. "I'll tell you what the big words mean, if you like. Now, this one, here—water. That's stuff that comes in a glass. You drink it. It also comes down out of the sky in what we call rain. It flows under bridges, and—"

"And please stop, I beg you!" Freddy snapped. "My sides ache with laughter. I couldn't possibly stand another of your hilarious remarks. And hand back that menu before I take measures that will get us both thrown out of this hotel!"

"But why hand it back?" Dawson laughed. "Holy smoke! Don't you know it by heart yet? For fifteen solid minutes you've been looking at the thing."

"Quite," the other replied gravely. "And thoroughly enjoying myself making believe. Hand it back, please, young fellow!"

"How's that?" Dave echoed, and passed the menu. "Making believe? I don't get you."

"Knowing the limits of your so-called flashes of brilliance, I can well imagine!" Freddy shot at him. "However, the fact of the matter is that here in London food is rationed. And there are many, many savory dishes that don't even appear on menus any more. So, to make myself feel good, every time I pick up a menu I simply imagine that all the pre-war dishes are there. And I have a lot of fun deciding just what I'll order. Do I make myself clear?"

Dawson sighed heavily, and shook his head.

"Too clear," he said sadly. "Lately I've been suspecting that you were going just a little bit screwy. Now I know! And me waiting here, polite like, while you fumbled around! What a guy!"

Dave snorted, sighed again, and crooked his finger at the waiter. The man came over to their table, and the two air aces gave their orders in accordance with the short list of items on the menu.

"It will be wonderful when this war is over!" Freddy Farmer murmured as the waiter walked away. "Just think, Dave! Just think of being able to step into a restaurant and ordering anything that strikes your fancy."

"Which would be everything in the place, as far as you're concerned!" Dawson laughed at him. "For a skinny guy, I never saw the beat of how you can store food away. It scares me at times, too. I have dreams that you've eaten so much that you can't even fit into one of the new Lancaster bombers. But skip it, pal. For two long months you and I can do any darn thing we want. And back in the little old U. S. A. there are plenty of things for us to do. I'll really show you the States this time! And how!"

The English youth half smiled, and nodded.

"Yes, quite," he grunted. "But *next* leave we get we're going to spend here in England. And another thing, my boy! Not that I actually believe you are crooked, you know. However—well, I'm jolly well going to get a little practice tossing coins before I have another go at it with you. And that's a fact, too!"

"So help me, pal, it was strictly on the up and up," Dave said as he made a little cross with his finger over his heart. "And it was the best of two out of three, too. I was just lucky, kid. But look, Freddy. If you really and truly want to—"

"Not at all, Dave!" the English youth cut in quickly. "Don't mind me, old thing. I always feel a little bad when I leave England, if only for a day or two. No. You won the coin toss, and so we'll spend our leave in the U. S. Besides, we're supposed to make some speeches to help sell War Bonds, you know. And speaking of that, do you know something, Dave?"

"What? But I think I can guess, Freddy. As a speech maker *I'm* a swell coal truck driver."

"Me, too!" Freddy echoed with a grimace. "Good grief! I'd rather face a flight of Messerschmitts than a speaker's audience. I know I'll be a terrible flip, as you call it."

"It's flop, pal," Dawson chuckled. "And that'll be two of us. Between you, me, and the gate post, I'll be tickled silly if something happens to make this lecture tour in the States fall through. I don't feel happy about it, at all. Just the same, though, if it will sell some War Bonds, then we sure can't let them down. And it will give you a swell look at Uncle Sam's home grounds."

"Yes, there's that part of it," Freddy Farmer murmured with a nod. "It's little enough for us to do, and—"

The English youth suddenly stopped dead with his mouth hanging open. Dave, looking at him, saw his eyes come out like marbles on the ends of sticks. And for a split second he thought his pal had been stricken ill. Then as he turned his head and looked in the direction of Farmer's stare, his own jaw sagged, and his own eyes popped out in dumbfounded amazement.

The reason was the approach of the waiter with their orders. However, what the man set before them wasn't even close to what they had ordered. In fact, it was almost as though the Good Fairy had waved her magic wand and changed the Hotel Savoy dining-room into a little bit of another world. In short, each of them was served with a generous helping of red, juicy roast beef! There were also mashed potatoes, and creamed corn, and peas. And, yes, thick brown gravy, too!

For a long moment both of them sat speechless for fear that a single sound would break the spell, and that all that was set before them would disappear in thin air. Eventually, though, Dawson summoned the courage to look up into the waiter's grinning face, and speak.

"My heart is bleeding, but I'm afraid you've made a mistake," he said with a gigantic effort. "We didn't order this. Is there some rich Indian Rajah staying at the hotel? And he brought along his own supply of food, huh?"

The waiter laughed, and shook his head.

"Hardly, sir," he said. "The officials would have taken it from the blighter before he left the ship, I fancy. Only them that has the ration meat coupons can get it. And that goes for Royalty as well as the likes of me."

"But—but, I say!" Freddy Farmer stammered out, and made a helpless gesture with his hands. "We used up our last meat ration coupons yesterday, you know."

"This is a gift, sir," the waiter said. "From the gentleman at the next table. He gave me all of his meat coupons, he did, and told me to serve you the best. And the best it is, I guarantee, too!"

If Dave and Freddy had kept their eyes on the waiter's face, they would have seen him unconsciously lick his lips, and an envious look creep into his eyes. However, they had both turned as one man and were staring at the next table. There, dressed in a quiet but Bond Street-tailored business suit, sat a short and slightly rotund Chinese gentleman. He met their collective stare, smiled broadly, and bobbed his head up and down. And then, when neither of the air aces were able to speak, he got up from his table, came over to theirs and bowed gravely.

"Would you do me the honor, Gentlemen?" he said in perfect English. "I confess that my ears overheard a bit of your conversation, and as I had several unused meat ration coupons, I thought that perhaps you two would accept. But permit me to introduce myself. I am Mr. Soo Wong Kai."

Still not quite sure that they had not been dumped down into a little corner of fairyland, Dave and Freddy pushed back their chairs and stood up.

"There aren't the words to thank you, Mr. Kai." Dave smiled, and extended his hand. "I am Captain Dawson, and my friend, here, is Captain Farmer."

"Your introductions were unnecessary, Captain," the Chinese said with a smile, and shook hands with them both. "You two famous men of the air are known to millions, you know. When I return to China, this thrusting of myself into your acquaintance will be one of my happiest memories. But if I might make a suggestion—the roast beef is not half so savory when it is cold. I beg of you, please seat yourselves, Captains, and give me the great happiness of eating my humble offering."

"On condition that you have the waiter bring your meal over here, sir, and join us," Freddy Farmer said politely. "And may I ask, sir? You are the Mr. Kai of the Chinese Embassy here, are you not?"

"You are absolutely correct," the other smiled, and signalled to the waiter to transfer his meal to their table. "Quite correct and, indeed, kind. We of China do not like to take our meals alone. And it is the same when we are in foreign lands, too. So I must thank you from the bottom of my heart for your generous hospitality."

"Well, to be truthful, sir," Dawson chuckled, "the pleasure really is all ours. You'd be surprised how sick Freddy and I get of hearing each other sound off."

"Eh?" the English youth grunted, and shot Dave a hostile look. "Sound off, you say?"

Soo Wong Kai laughed softly and leaned toward Freddy.

"The American way of saying, throwing the bull, Captain Farmer," he said. "Or, as you English would have it, swinging the gate. In China we have an expression which, when translated, means, counting the locusts. There are billions and billions of locusts in China, you see. So to say that one is counting the locusts is to mean that one is simply talking to hear oneself. Or sounding off. Or throwing the bull. Or swinging the gate. You see?"

"I've got a hunch you've kind of been around here and there, eh, Mr. Kai?" Dave grinned at him. "And—oh, my gosh! Pardon me, sir!"

The Chinese looked at Dave and raised his thin brows in innocent puzzlement.

"For what, may I ask, Captain Dawson?" he said. "For what reason should you exclaim and ask my pardon? I fear I do not quite understand."

Dawson swallowed, and licked his lower lip quickly.

"I suddenly remembered seeing your picture in the London *Times*, and reading about you, sir," Dave presently said. "You're Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's new Minister of War, aren't you? And the head of the Military Mission that recently arrived in England?"

"That's true." The Chinese nodded and smiled. "But I still fail to see why you must beg my pardon."

"Well, for being sort of flip with my talk, sir," Dave said. "You're a high government official, and—well, after all—"

"After all, are we not both men, Captain?" the other interrupted quietly. "And are we not fighting the same foe, each in his own way? Believe me, Captain, it is I who look up to you, because of the great and fine things you have accomplished in the name of liberty and world happiness. You, and your true friend, here. And millions of other brave soldiers, too. Yes, I am a high government official, as you say, but the higher a man gets the more he respects and admires those who do the fighting, and shed the blood. They are the ones who are winning this war, not we aged ones who are serving our respective countries in some official capacity. *Youth* will win this struggle, Captain. And youth will win the peace, too. But—"

Soo Wong Kai paused. His face remained grave, but as he leaned slightly toward Dawson there was a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"But what do you say we skip it, eh?" he chuckled. "Out the window with who's who, and why. Until we must part, let's just be three guys named Joe, huh?"

Both Dave and Freddy gulped hard, and then burst out laughing.

"Fair enough, it's a deal!" Dawson cried. "But I repeat what I said just now. You've sure been around, Mr. Kai. But plenty!"

CHAPTER TWO

Clocks Won't Wait

For the next hour the English air ace, the Yank air ace, and the new Chinese Minister of War would hardly have noticed a German Luftwaffe bomb coming down through the dining-room ceiling. None came down, of course, because the good old R.A.F. patrolled the night skies outside, and German night fliers had long since realized that the R.A.F. boys could beat them to the punch any day in the week, and twice on Sundays. Under pressure from the Chinese official, Freddy and Dave recounted some of the experiences they'd had during the war. And under polite pressure from them, Soo Wong Kai told them many interesting stories of China.

"That's one country I sure want to visit before I die," Dave said after a short silence. "It must be very wonderful in China. I've read quite a bit about it, but I guess if you piled all the books about China one on top of the other you wouldn't even begin to scratch the surface, eh? If you get what I mean, sir?"

"Yes, I do, Captain," the other replied. "And I'm afraid you're quite right. There has been a great deal written about China, but it would take ten times as much to tell the story of the real China—the China of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his people."

"There's a soldier!" Freddy Farmer spoke up with a vigorous nod. "What a splendid leader, and what splendid troops he now commands. I quite agree with Dave, sir. I, too, hope to visit China some day."

"And may that day come soon," Soo Wong Kai said gravely. "Soon, because of the things you will see in China. And soon, because of the honor such a visit would be to my country. China has come a long way, and she still has a long, long road to travel. But we shall travel that road, and we shall attain the goal at the end of that road. But there I go sounding off, when I can easily see that you two gentlemen are doing me the great honor of being polite. So—"

"No, you're wrong, sir!" Dawson spoke up quickly. "I'm enjoying every second of this talk. And I know Freddy is, too. Believe me, sir, and this is the truth: If I'm given the chance—which you can bet on that I won't be—of picking the next front to fight on, I'll pick China right off the bat."

"Hear, hear!" Freddy Farmer added his bit quickly. "Quite, sir. We were almost there, when we were in Burma just before the States came into the war. However, as Dawson says, if we have our choice next time, it will most certainly be China."^[1]

"And a happy day that will be for my struggling countrymen," Soo Wong Kai said softly. "We have there, now, the Flying Tigers. True and brave airmen they are. And China will never be able to repay her debt to those gallant boys. What they have done for China is something no nation and no people could ever hope to repay in full. And to have you two fight on the China front would be much the same thing. Do not look at me so, for it is the truth when I say that I have heard your names, and your deeds, mentioned deep in my country. So, should your orders ever carry you to China, all that China has to offer is yours for the asking. And—Ah! But the truth embarrasses you, eh?"

Dawson grinned, and wished that some of the redness would go out of his face. He liked praise just as much as the next fellow, but Soo Wong Kai was sure hitting on all sixteen cylinders.

"Well, there's a couple of other fellows or so fighting in this war, too, sir," he said with a little laugh. "But thanks just the same, sir."

"And thank you, Captains, for a most pleasant meeting," the Minister of War said as he rose to his feet. "I shall always remember this happy event. And it will be my perpetual wish that some day we will meet again in my country. Again, thank you. And I bid you a heartfelt good evening, Captains."

Both Dawson and Freddy leaped to their feet, stammered out their thanks, shook hands with the Chinese, and remained at attention as he walked away and out of the dining-room.

"Well, quite an event, what?" the English youth breathed after they had reseated themselves. "Quite a splendid chap, eh? A very decent sort."

"Tops, and how!" Dave grunted, and pointed at their empty plates. "Go on and say it, pal. I can read it in your eyes."

"Say what?" Freddy demanded. "And just what can you read in my eyes, I'd like to know?"

"What you're thinking, and wishing," Dave said with a straight face. "That he'd brought along one of his official buddies."

"You still aren't making sense!" Freddy snapped. "Speak up! Get it off your blasted chest, whatever it is."

"As if you didn't know!" Dawson snorted. "If he'd brought along one of his official buddies, why then there would have been more meat ration coupons, of course. And you could have worked them for a second helping of roast beef. Don't try to kid a pal, pal! You were kind of thinking that, weren't you?"

"No, my little man," Freddy replied softly, and slowly reached for a dish of pudding he hadn't touched yet. "But would you care to have me *show* you what I'm thinking *now*?"

"Do, sweetheart!" Dave growled, and reached for his own pudding. "And you'll be combing pudding out of your hair, too. So—Sweet tripe, Freddy! Let's dive in and finish this. We're due out at Croydon Airport in a little over an hour. And we haven't packed, or paid the bill yet. And you can bet your sweet life that that Newfoundland-bound bomber isn't going to wait for us."

"Right as rain!" Freddy echoed behind a heaping spoon of pudding. "Darned decent of the Air Ministry to give us a ride by air, instead of having us make the crossing by water. A magic world, isn't it, Dave! By this time tomorrow night we'll be dining in New York City. Magic isn't the word."

"No, it's speed!" Dawson snapped. "Can the chatter, pal, and just shovel it in. And I'll match you for the check."

"No, Dave, I'll pay it."

"What?" Dawson gasped. "Am I hearing things?"

"I said that I would pay the check," Freddy replied. "No! Not because I am big-hearted, either. Simply to save the trouble of tossing coins with you—and losing *as usual*."

"Oh, well, don't feel too bad, pal," Dave grinned at him. "You'll catch on to how it's done, some day. Then you can make up for lost time. However, just to prove that I'm a nice guy, I'll pay the check myself."

That last caused Freddy Farmer to go speechless. And he remained speechless while Dawson took the check from the waiter and paid it in full, plus tip.

"Wonderful!" the English youth breathed softly. "I have just witnessed the miracle of miracles,

and I don't believe I have the strength to get out to Croydon Airport."

"Oh, Big-Hearted Dawson, they call me," Dave grinned. "Besides, I feel pretty swell right now. And who wouldn't when he was about to head back to the good old U.S.A.! Well, let's go, youngster. That bomber won't wait."

A few minutes over an hour later the two youths climbed out of the taxi in front of the Croydon Airport Administration Building, parked their suitcases outside and went inside to report to Group Captain Bainsworth, R.A.F. Commandant of the field. The senior officer smiled, and nodded as they came to attention and saluted.

"Knew you chaps would be along presently," he said. "Squadron Leader Hixon, your pilot, was in here a moment ago fretting that you wouldn't show up in time. I assured him that chaps going on leave are never late. You've proved that truth again. Well, Dawson, I fancy you're a bit bucked up to be going back to the States, what?"

"Right on top of the world, sir," the Yank air ace informed him. "Not that I don't like England, you understand, sir, but—"

"Quite," the senior officer broke in with a smile. "Any chap wants to see his native land. And you, Farmer? Glad to be going along?"

Freddy half shrugged, and let a little sigh slide off his lips.

"It's quite wonderful out in the States, sir," he said. "But—well, I try to be a good soldier and go where I have to. And this time, it happens to be the States. Of course, I could do with a bit more interesting company, but—"

The English youth shrugged again and made a little gesture with his hands. The group captain chuckled, and Dave shot Freddy a you-wait-until-we're-outside look. Then he grinned broadly.

"Well," the group captain presently said, "I guess the aircraft is about ready. I'll go along out to it with you. Good luck, both of you. And—well, have a marvelous time. Yes, quite! Be sure and have a marvelous time. And the very best of luck."

The way the senior officer seemed to hesitate in saying the last couple of sentences had a queer effect on Dawson. He gave the man's face a keen look, but could read nothing there. Then, with Freddy, he thanked him for his good wishes, and walked with him out of the Administration Building, and over to where a revved up Lockheed "Hudson" bomber was waiting at the far end of the field. They walked almost three quarters of the way in silence, but when they got close to the waiting bomber Group Captain Bainsworth slowed up to a halt and faced them.

"I say, a moment, you two," he said quietly. "A favor I want you to do for me. After you reach New York, you'll be going on down to Washington to say hello to Colonel Welsh, of U. S. Intelligence, no doubt. Well, I have a letter I'd like you to deliver for me. It was sent out here about half an hour ago. Better stick it away out of sight. Best not to let anyone know you're carrying it, you know. Here."

Dawson happened to be standing closest, so he took the sealed envelope that Group Captain Bainsworth slipped out of his pocket and handed over. Dave didn't look at it, though. He looked at the group captain, licked his lips, and frowned slightly.

"Yes, glad to, sir," he said. "But—well, there's the matter of the censors, sir. On the American side, I mean. I may have to turn it over to them for inspection. That be all right, sir?"

"Decidedly not, Dawson!" the senior officer replied gravely. "Let no one see it. But don't worry. Take a look at the name and address, and you'll understand why there's no need to show it to anybody but the right party."

Dave held up the envelope and glanced at what was written on the outside. Freddy Farmer took a look, too. And they both stiffened and caught their breath. The envelope was addressed to—

The Hon. Cordell Hull
Secretary of State
Washington, D. C.

"Jumping catfish!" Dawson choked out before he could check his tongue. "But—but why doesn't this go by diplomatic pouch, sir?"

"I don't know myself, Dawson," the group captain told him. "For a good reason, no doubt. I simply know that it arrived here half an hour ago, along with instructions to turn it over to you two chaps for delivery. Perhaps you'll learn the reasons in Washington. Perhaps not, too. No matter, though. Just take it along, and don't let anybody get so much as a look at it. Well, let's get on over to the aircraft."

"Yes, sure," Dave mumbled, and slid the sealed envelope into an inside pocket. "It will be delivered, sir, without anybody else getting a look at it—not even the censors."

"Splendid, splendid!" murmured the senior officer almost absently. "That's the thing to do. Quite!"

A few moments later Dave and Freddy were in the bomber and Squadron Leader Hixon was slowly opening up the engines to move the aircraft forward toward the take-off runway.

"All aboard, pal!" Dave called out cheerfully to Freddy Farmer. "A late breakfast in Newfoundland, lunch in the air on the way down the Canadian coast, and dinner in little old

Manhattan! Boy, oh boy! And then sixty days of having fun!"

"Except when we have to make those blasted speeches for War Bonds!" Freddy Farmer growled out as a tag line.

CHAPTER THREE

Simmering Doom

At almost the exact moment the Lockheed Hudson bomber cleared the runway at Croydon Airport, and went nosing up into the night-shrouded sky, a man entered the lobby door of a certain hotel in the West End section of London, and took the elevator to the fourteenth floor. There he got off, turned to the right, and walked along the corridor until he reached the sixth door on the left. He faced it, and hesitated a moment while he shot a sharp piercing glance back along the corridor. Satisfied that he was alone, he reached out a bony forefinger and stabbed the hotel suite button four times in rapid succession.

Thirty seconds ticked by, and then the door was opened a scant inch. There was no light to be seen through the door opening, only pitch darkness. And then a voice inside grunted, and the door was swung open wider.

"Come in quickly, please!" a soft, hissing voice commanded out of the darkness.

The man passed through into the darkness, and moved a little to the side so that the door could be closed. He heard the latch click. And then at a second click light flooded the suite sitting-room in which he stood. He turned his head and met the eyes of the man who had opened the door. He smiled coldly, and the corners of his mouth were a little drawn and tight.

"You are nervous tonight, *Herr* Kyoto?" he muttered thickly.

The one addressed as *Herr* Kyoto smiled broadly, but only with his lips.

"It is better to be nervous than to be a fool, my friend," he said in his soft hissing voice. "A fool dies soon. And a dead fool is of no use to his country, be he Japanese or German. You agree, yes?"

The man who had entered the hotel suite shrugged his massive shoulders, slipped out of his heavy coat and threw it over a chair as he let his big frame drop into another one.

"Perhaps yes, and perhaps no," he grunted, and watched the other glide across the rug and settle like a butterfly in a chair that would comfortably have held three of his half-pint size. "I cannot speak for you Japanese, only for Nazis. And a man who can be a fool cannot be a Nazi. At least, he can merely be one in name only. But I speak just words. You may have a reason for your seeming nervousness? It is possible that you are not so safe in London as you would like to believe, eh?"

The Japanese smiled again, and once again it was only with his lips. His eyes were still like those of a cobra on ice. He reached out his thin right hand and rubbed the ball of his thumb back and forth across the ends of his other four fingers.

"During my stay of twelve years here in England, my true German friend," he said, "I have spent much money so that all would be well when the day arrived. My money, my lips, and my hands have done all that was necessary to prove that I am Japanese only by birth. It is known, and believed, by all those of importance in England that instant death awaits me should I ever return to Japan. That is as I wished, and planned it to be. True, yes, I am often stopped on the street. I am often politely conducted to the nearest police station by some fool English official. But my papers are all in order. They have been so for years. And so it is always an apology and my continued freedom in less than five minutes. However, perhaps being nervous yourself causes you to think that I am? Perhaps that is what you mean?"

The German's face became hard and brutal. He thrust out his right arm to its full length, with his fingers extended.

"So!" he said harshly. "You don't see any trembling or quivering of the fingers, do you? No, and naturally so. I have no time to be nervous—about anything. I have time only to serve *Der Fuehrer*, and the Fatherland."

"As in like manner I serve my Heaven-born Emperor, and Japan!" the half-pint breathed out. "However, you and I need have no worry about the other. Nor was this meeting arranged so that we might discuss such impossible things. It was arranged for you to make a report to me, yes? And you have a report to make, please?"

The Nazi lowered his head for a moment, and a look of angry contempt glowed in his eyes. However, when he raised his head again his twinkling eyes matched the smile on his lips.

"Yes, and a most interesting report, *Herr* Kyoto," he said. Then, after a quick glance at his wrist watch, he went on, "At this moment the airplane is in the air and flying westward. They are both aboard. And one of them must carry the document that was delivered to the commandant of the Croydon Airport. My agent also told me over the telephone that this commandant walked out to the airplane with them. He saw the commandant hand something to one of them, to the one named Dawson, so he believes. But because of the distance, and the bad light, my agent could not tell which of them received what the commandant gave. However, that is unimportant. We

know, now, that one of them carries a certain document."

"It would seem so, yes, *Herr* Miller," the Jap murmured, and gave a short nod of his head. "Forgive me, please, but we do not *know* if this be *truth*. Your agent saw something change hands, but he did not see *what* changed hands."

"Perhaps I should have instructed him to run out to them and ask?" the Nazi sneered.

"It would have been foolish to do so," Kyoto replied, as though the remark had sailed right over his head. "But I was only pointing out a possibility, my friend. Like you, I am sure that the one called Dawson, or the one called Farmer, carries the document. Had they not dined with Soo Wong Kai I would wonder. But they did, and so I do not wonder."

The Japanese emphasized his words with a faint nod of his billiard ball-shaped head. And for a moment or two the suite sitting-room was filled with silence. Presently, though, the little brown rat of the Rising Sun made chuckling sounds in his throat, and gave a little twist of his head.

"These enemies we must fight and crush are strange people, indeed!" he grunted. "They let two mere children, two young boys, perform a task that belongs to grown men. It is difficult not to laugh in their faces when I hear of them doing such things. No wonder they prove so weak, and so stupid!"

"And lucky!" the German echoed savagely. "Those two, I mean. I had two brothers, two of our greatest aces. This Dawson, and this Farmer, shot them down. One over France. The other in Libya. It was over a year ago. My brothers were killed. That American and that English swine have probably forgotten all about those two air battles. They probably do not know to this day the names of those they killed. But I know of *them*. And I will never forget. It will be the greatest joy of my life to let them know the truth—just before I destroy them as they destroyed my two brothers."

"When *all* is accomplished, may that joy be yours threefold, my friend," the Japanese said softly. "But *not* until *all* is accomplished. Personal desires must wait. There is something else a thousand times more important. You agree with me, of course?"

The Nazi's face tightened, and he locked eyes with the Japanese. Being of the "Master Race," he was filled with the sudden animal urge to curl his thick fingers about the little brown man's neck and snap it as one might snap a toothpick. His sense of treacherous cunning refused to permit him the joy of doing that, however. These monkey men of the Far East were of some use to *Der Fuehrer* in carrying out his great and wonderful plan for the world. So it was better to soothe and salve them along until they, too, should be made slaves to serve the Fatherland.

And so *Herr* Miller presently relaxed, smiled and nodded his bullet-shaped head.

"But of course, *Herr* Kyoto!" he exclaimed. "You need not have any fears. We Germans win the battle first, and enjoy ourselves afterward. No, have no fear. A certain document will never reach Washington D. C. That is my promise. With my own hands I will turn it over to you. *Der Fuehrer* himself has so ordered. Nothing, then, shall stop me from obeying that order."

The Japanese nodded politely, but a glint of worry came into his slanted brown eyes.

"Yes, the true soldier always obeys," he purred. "But, speaking of the little arrangement just between us two, the money is even now waiting for the moment when you place that document in my hands. No one else will know. However, I do not think that it can be earned with words, words that we speak to each other here and now. There is an airplane carrying that document westward at this moment—while you are here, honoring me with your company. Time is short, and the distance from you to that airplane grows longer and longer. But then, it may be that you are a master of magic, yes?"

Herr Miller laughed, and there was both amusement and scorn in the tone.

"So you *are* the nervous one, eh?" he echoed. "You worry that I let those two little swine and their precious document slip through my fingers? Ah! I am afraid that you do not truly understand us Nazis, *Herr* Kyoto. We plan for everything. We make sure that there will be no failure, even before we start. *Mein Gott!* You have only to look at all that we have accomplished in two short years to believe for the truth what I say. Yes, time grows short, and the distance grows longer. But that matters little to me."

The German paused to puff out his chest, and set his jaw at an arrogant angle. These stupid little brown men of the Far East! What swine to think they could suggest things to Germans! But aloud, he said:

"In a few moments I will leave you, *Herr* Kyoto. I will go to a certain spot not many miles from here. Yes! Close to the shadow of London itself. A German plane and a German pilot will be waiting for me. He will take me far out to sea. The plane is very fast; so much faster than this airplane that has the document aboard. Also, certain of our U-boats well posted about the North Atlantic are keeping track of that British airplane's journey. I will contact them by radio, and will meet the one nearest to that airplane's course. By parachute I will go down to the water's surface. The U-boat I select will pick me up. A short time later it will be light. Then we will go to the surface and watch for this aircraft. And when we sight this airplane?"

The German paused again, rubbed his hands together, and shook with silent laughter.

"Then, *Herr* Kyoto," he continued, "will be the beginning of a most enjoyable little experience. And by the following day, at the latest, you can expect me here in this room—with your precious document! It will all be so very simple."

As the Nazi finished the Japanese rose from his chair, clasped his two hands in front of him and bowed low from the waist.

"I salute you and bid you good fortune, *Herr* Miller," he said in his soft hissing tone. "I will await with joy and confidence for your return. When the document of which we speak is in my hands, it will be the same as the winning of a score of major battles. May good fortune go with you, and the deep joy of your personal revenge be yours *after* you have accomplished the main part of your mission."

The Nazi smiled and turned toward the door, but there was a look of icy contempt in his eyes that the Japanese did not see. However, perhaps it was not necessary for the Japanese to see that look of cold contempt, for when the door had closed behind the Nazi the little brown rat from the Far East curled his lips back in a snarl, lifted one hand and sliced it edgewise through the air.

"When you return with the document," he hissed out in his native tongue, "*then* we shall see who is of the master race!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Atlantic Mirage

With its twin engines thundering out a mighty song of power, the R.A.F. Lockheed Hudson bomber cut a straight and true path westward at some eight thousand feet above the long rolling grey-green swells of the North Atlantic. Higher up, a billion twinkling stars looked down on a crazy world at war out of a cloudless night sky, and served as a billion guiding beacons to that lone aircraft pointed dead on for the Newfoundland coast.

Stretched out comfortably in the empty bomb compartment of the Lockheed, Dave Dawson absently lifted a hand and pressed it against the upper left part of his tunic. Underneath the cloth he could feel the sealed envelope tucked safely away in the inside pocket. A moment later he let his hand drop down into his lap and sat scowling faintly at the rack of signal flares on the port side of the compartment. Then, suddenly, as though he could actually feel it, he turned his head to meet Freddy Farmer's curious stare. The English-born air ace nodded and grinned.

"I've been combing my brains, too, old thing," Freddy said, "wondering what in the world that envelope contains. Blasted odd that it should be turned over to us for delivery. And to your Secretary of State, no less."

"Yeah, screwy, all right," Dawson grunted. "Funny thing, though. The way it was handed to us, it makes me feel as though I were smuggling something into the States. You haven't got enough fingers on your two hands to count the number of aircraft that are flying back and forth across the Atlantic these days. And not a few of them are strictly courier planes, too. So why wasn't this sent by one of the usual courier planes, I ask you?"

Freddy Farmer sighed and shook his head.

"You can ask me," he grunted, "but I haven't the faintest idea what's the correct answer."

"And you can say that again for me!" Dawson muttered. "Unless it's because—Oh nuts! I'm just letting the old brain go for a stroll."

"Unless what, Dave?" the English youth prompted. "I know, I know! It's probably another one of those crazy hunches of yours. But some of them have come pretty close to the real thing in the past. So what's this one about?"

"Come *close*, huh?" Dawson snorted, and gave Freddy a hard look. "Plenty of them have smacked the nail right on the head. And you know it, pal. But anyway, the only reason I can see why they handed this to us is because they didn't want it to go by the usual method."

"Obvious!" Freddy Farmer snapped. "A ten year old child could reason that out, silly! I thought you had a hunch on *why* they didn't want it to go the usual way. And while you're on the subject, just who do you mean by *they*?"

"For a little guy you can sure ask plenty of big questions!" Dawson growled. "Sweet tripe! How do I know? They could be most anybody. Maybe the Yank Embassy in London. Maybe Yank G.H.Q. in London. And maybe the Queen of Sheba, too! How do I know? I had lots of questions I wanted to ask the group captain back there at Croydon, but after taking a look at his face, I could tell it wouldn't get me to first base. Maybe he knew, but it was my hunch he wasn't going to tell us."

Dawson paused a moment to lick his lips and shrugged.

"So who sent it is anybody's guess, and I'm not even bothering to guess," he continued. "But about it not going through the usual channels, here's what I think. The powers that be were afraid it would be spotted, maybe even swiped, or lost. Maybe they knew that somebody was wise to the fact that this was headed for Secretary Hull. So to throw whoever it was off the beam, they sneaked it out to Croydon to be taken across and delivered by us. Who would guess that a couple of guys going to the States on leave would be carrying a letter to the Secretary of State? See what I mean?"

"Yes, that's a possibility," Freddy Farmer grunted with a frown. "But here's a funny thing, Dave. I

didn't exactly *plan* to pop on down to Washington to say hello to Colonel Welsh. Did you?"

"To tell the truth, I hadn't even thought of it yet," Dawson replied. "Of course, if we should be passing through D. C. I sure would drop in to see the colonel. But it was just one of those things I'd probably do while on leave."

"But Group Captain Bainsworth seemed to think that was just what we were *going* to do," Freddy argued. "And right after we reached New York."

"Yeah," Dawson grunted, and looked at his English pal. "Or else it was a left-handed order, and we're just catching on now."

"And that's a possibility, too," Freddy Farmer said with a grave nod. "But—blast it!—we're supposed to be going on leave, and to forget the confounded war for a spell—if we can. Which we won't, of course. But there should be a law against filling up a chap going on leave with mystery. There really should!"

Dave opened his mouth to speak. Instead, though, he bent his head and faked a cough while he wiped the grin from his face. When next he looked at Freddy, his eyes were bright and eager.

"Know what, Freddy?" he said. "I just thought up a way to find out all the answers. Yes sir! And it's foolproof. We can't miss!"

"Really, Dave?" the English youth echoed excitedly, and leaned forward a little. "How?"

Dawson winked very confidentially, and started to slip a hand inside his tunic.

"A cinch way!" he said in a stage whisper. "And are we dumb not to have thought of it until now! Tell you what, pal! We'll rip open the envelope and see for ourselves. I bet you all the stored up coffee in Brazil that it will be mighty interesting, too!"

Freddy Farmer sat up straight. The blood drained from his face, his jaw sagged, and a look of utter horrified amazement came into his eyes.

"Good grief, Dave!" he gasped out. "Are you mad? Are you absolutely balmy? Open that envelope? When it's addressed to Secretary of State Cordell Hull? Good grief, Dave! Why—why—why, they could shoot you for a thing like that. And besides, it was entrusted to us. For Heaven's sake, Dave, don't you dare open—"

The English youth broke off short and choked and sputtered over his own words as he saw the broad grin spread over Dawson's face.

"Boy! Do I get a kick out of the way you can change expressions on that mug of yours!" Dave laughed. "Okay, sweetheart. Just for you I'll let the envelope stay right where it is. But, pal, did you rise in a hurry to the bait that time! Boy, oh boy!"

Deep red flooded Freddy's face, and he could only go on sputtering for a moment or two longer.

"You no-good blighter!" he finally got out. "You almost had me believing you for a moment. Blast you! For sixpence I'd take that envelope away from you, and make sure that nothing happened to it!"

"Well, of course you could *try*, pal!" Dave grinned at him. "But maybe they wouldn't like us to make a wreck out of this bomb compartment. So let's skip it, huh? Besides, I think I'll go forward and ride with Squadron Leader Hixon for a while."

"Do that, by all means!" Freddy Farmer snapped at him. "And observe him closely. Perhaps he can teach you something about flying. Nobody else has been able to, though, Lord knows, they tried hard enough and long enough!"

"Smacko!" Dave chuckled, and pushed up onto his feet. "I walked right into that one. So that evens us up. See you later, pal."

"Much later, if I get my wish!" Freddy snorted, and squirmed around to a more comfortable position. "Now, run along, my little man. I've got important things to think about."

Dawson let the conversation hang on a nail right there, and went forward and into the pilots' compartment. The co-pilot's seat was empty, and he caught Squadron Leader Hixon's eye in the rear view mirror, and cocked a brow.

"Mind if I ride with you for a bit, sir?" he asked.

The pilot grinned, nodded, and jerked his head at the empty seat.

"Do that, Dawson, please," he said. "Been on the point of calling somebody up here to help me keep awake. Blasted uninteresting flights, these. Too much water, and too little anything else. But I fancy you're just as keen to get it done with as I am, what?"

"It will be swell to get back home, and how!" Dave grunted, and slid into the empty co-pilot's seat. "I've got a million things I want to do, but I probably won't have the time to do even half of them. Time flies too darn fast when you're on leave."

"How right you are!" the Squadron Leader echoed. "A chap no sooner settles down to have a bit of sport and fun than it's time to pack up and catch a train or bus back to the drome. But war's like that, of course. Good times go by in a hurry. And—well, flights like this one seem to take years and years."

"Well, dawn's busting over the horizon, anyway," Dawson consoled him. "And it looks like we'll have sunshine and blue sky for the rest of the trip. That—"

The Yank air ace cut himself off short, leaned forward and peered out through the window glass on his side.

"See something?" Squadron Leader Hixon inquired casually.

Dawson didn't reply for a moment. He thought he saw something on the surface of the water a few miles ahead and a couple toward the north. It seemed to disappear from view, however, when he strained his eyes. Then, suddenly, he saw it again, and his heart leaped up in his throat to hit hard against his back teeth. Without taking his eyes off the distant object, he reached and rapped Squadron Leader Hixon on the arm.

"Take a look up ahead there, and a couple of degrees to the north, sir!" he cried out. "That looks to me like a submarine on the surface. Yes, it is. But I can't tell from here whether it's one of theirs or one of ours."

"By Jove, you're right, Dawson!" the Squadron Leader's voice boomed close to Dave's ear. "A sub, right enough. And not making headway, either. It's—Oh, blast our luck!"

"What do you mean?" Dawson shot at him.

"Not a U-boat," the pilot said with heavy disappointment in his voice. "Can tell from the shape of the conning tower. It's one of our undersea boats. Should know I'd never have the luck to come across one of Hitler's U-boats on the surface like that. I'm—I say! Seems to be a bit of trouble, what? They've sighted us and sent up a signal."

Dawson didn't make any comment for the moment. His gaze was fixed on the submarine awash on the surface, and he saw the red distress flare arc up into the air from the conning tower bridge. Squadron Leader Hixon had changed course and was drilling the Lockheed Hudson down across the sky straight toward the motionless submarine. In a matter of seconds Dave was able to see the groups of men on the bow and stern decks. And as a second and a third red distress flare arced upward, he saw the men on deck start waving their hands wildly. And a split second later he saw a thin column of smoke come up out of the conning tower hatch.

"Trouble is right!" he grunted. "Must be a fire inside, which forced them all up top-side. Nothing we can do for them, though, is there, sir? This Hudson can't land in the water to pick them up."

"Certainly can't!" the pilot grunted with a frown. "Too many of them, anyway, even if we could. The chaps are just out of luck, too. My orders are for radio silence, regardless. I can't even send out a flash to any of our navy boats that may be close by."

"That is tough!" Dave groaned, and watched the trickle of smoke come up out of the conning tower hatch. "But we could change course, sir. I mean circle around a bit and perhaps spot one of our patrol destroyers, or something. Then we could drop a note giving them the location of these poor devils."

"Yes, of course we can do that, and will," the pilot said. "A good suggestion, Dawson. First, though, we'll slide down over them for a closer look. There's just the chance that it isn't as bad as we think. Maybe they just want to give us some kind of a message, and that fire aboard is really under control."

"Well, here's hoping, and how!" Dawson breathed as the Lockheed went sliding down lower and lower. "There's only one thing worse in my book than fire in the air, and that's fire on the water."

"And aren't you right!" the Squadron Leader echoed, tight-lipped. "Well, here goes for a better look at the chaps."

"What a sweet spot to be in, I don't think!" Dawson grunted. "A fire right under their feet, and about four miles of ocean under the fire. I hope—Hey! What gives?"

Dawson hardly realized that he had choked out the last. As a matter of fact, the words he spoke were simply automatic, for in the next split second his brain was in a mad whirl. The forward gun of the submarine had suddenly spat red and orange flame upward. And in practically the same instant the starboard engine of the Lockheed exploded in a thunderous roar of sound, and a sheet of vivid red flame went sweeping back over the wing!

CHAPTER FIVE

Ice Cold Courage

For a seemingly year long split second it was absolutely impossible for Dawson to get control of his whirling brain. And it was obviously the same with Squadron Leader Hixon, for the pilot just sat motionless in the seat, gaping wide-eyed out at the flame and smoke pouring out of all that was left of the starboard engine.

"They nailed us!" Dawson suddenly found his tongue. "Their bow gun. A bull's-eye on the starboard engine. Better level off, sir! We're heading down too fast!"

As a matter of fact, Dawson's wild yell of alarm wasn't necessary. The squadron leader had snapped out of his trance, and was battling furiously with the controls. But like a wild horse with the bit in its teeth, the Lockheed Hudson went screaming downward toward the rolling grey-green swells of the North Atlantic. What was left of the blasted starboard engine started flying off in small pieces. One chunk of metal smashed straight into the window close to Dawson's head. He

ducked just in time as a shower of slivered glass came spilling in on him.

Then terror seemed to explode in his chest as he saw the squadron leader slump over against the control wheel. The flying chunk of metal had carried on past Dawson to glance off the pilot's helmet. Its force was not enough to rip through the helmet and snuff out the man's life. But it had been enough to knock him cold and send him slumping forward over the control wheel. Even as Dave glanced at the man, he was in action himself. With one outflung hand he forced Hixon back in the seat. And with the other he swung the control wheel over to a position in front of him. Then he grasped it with both hands and took up the struggle that Squadron Leader Hixon had left unfinished.

However, it was almost as though the Lockheed had become something human, and gone just a little mad. It was as though the aircraft actually realized that it was master of its own fate, and were savagely hurtling downward to smash itself to bits, as well as the bodies of the men it had aboard. Face grim and strained, and lips pressed tight, Dawson battled the crippled plane with every ounce of his strength. Twice he succeeded in getting the nose up and the craft back onto even keel. However, a good portion of the damaged starboard wing had been ripped away by the furious slip-stream of the plunging bomber, and no sooner would it get on even keel than it would flop over on the damaged wing, and struggle to wham right down to the vertical.

Whether more shots were fired from the guns of the mysterious submarine below, Dawson didn't know. Nor did he dare take his attention off the bomber for one split second to take a flash look. If noise meant shooting, then the submarine was hurling up everything it had aboard, for there was a continuous thunder in his ears. However, the sound could well have been caused by the violent vibration of the diving plane, plus sections of the starboard wing breaking free. But what caused the continuous thunder was the least of his worries. In fact, he didn't even give that item a second's thought. If the Lockheed hit those grey-green swells nose on it would be curtains for fair. Not even a Heaven-sent miracle could save a man's life from that kind of a crash. That kind of thing just didn't happen.

"Up, baby; up, pal! Come on! Up with it, and take it steady. Come on! Up—up—*up!*"

From a long way off Dawson heard his own pleading, commanding voice. A day of doom thunder was in his brain, now, and there was a terrific pounding in his chest as though his heart would burst out through his ribs at 'most any second. And down there before his eyes the grey-green water came surging, lunging upward. And then, suddenly, the nose of the Lockheed came upward for the third time. How, or just why, he didn't have the faintest idea. Maybe Lady Luck or the gods of good fortune had reached down and given invisible help. The fact was that the bomber seemed to realize that it did have a master, and was grudgingly obeying that master's commands.

At any rate, the nose came up until the aircraft was on an even keel. On an even keel, with the belly of the fuselage not fifteen feet over the grey-green swells. Dawson had long since killed the port engine, and so there was but one thing to do in the few split seconds of time allowed. Before the plane could flop over on its damaged wing again, he hauled the nose even higher. That killed off flying speed and brought the bomber to a stall. For a century long instant it seemed to hang dead motionless in the air, with its nose slanted up several degrees toward the clear dawn sky. Then it quivered violently and dropped belly first toward the water like ten ton of loose brick. A split second before it hit, Dawson spun half around in the seat and flung both arms about Squadron Leader Hixon, and braced hard with both feet.

The crash landing gave him the crazy thought of an express train ripping through a stalled freight loaded with empty tin cans. The roar of sound was deafening, and a wave of darkness surged up out of nowhere and tried to engulf him. And to make it all quite complete, a hundred or so little unseen demons stepped up and sledge-hammered every square inch of his body. When his brain stopped spinning long enough for him to take stock, he found that the force of the crash had flung him clear across the pilots' compartment, so that he was completely shielding Squadron Leader Hixon with his body. He also was able to realize that the pilot had regained consciousness, and was gaping up at him out of wide and still slightly dazed eyes. Dave grinned, tight-lipped, and heaved himself off the man.

"You hurt bad, sir?" he choked out. "Can you move? We're down in the water now. Got to get out of here before the nose goes under."

For answer the squadron leader straightened up in the seat and shook his head. Then he spoke.

"Quite fit," he said. "Thanks to you, of course. Something must have cracked me one on the head. Right-o! Let's get aft and see if the others are all right."

Dawson didn't hear the last because he was already ducking through the door and back toward amidships. After a couple of steps his eyes focussed on the scene, and his heart leaped with relief. The crew, and Freddy Farmer, were none the worse for wear and tear. They had obviously realized that a crash landing was inevitable and had braced themselves for the jolt. But even at that the force of the crash had spilled them around like peas in a can. They were slowly picking themselves up off the belly floor as Dawson came down the catwalk.

"Anybody hurt?" he shouted.

A general mumble in the negative assured him that the worst could be no more than a few bruises here and there. And then Freddy Farmer was standing beside him, eyes flashing.

"You and Squadron Leader Hixon gone completely balmy?" the English youth barked. "What in the world did you mean by sliding down so close to a U-boat? Why in thunder didn't you stay high? There're no depth bombs aboard. Or didn't Squadron Leader Hixon know?"

"U-boat?" Dawson choked out. "You're nuts, pal! It was one of ours! And is the fur going to fly because those blind men took a pot shot at us! They fired distress flares, and Hixon—Ye gods! Look, will you! Look!"

Dawson practically gagged out the last as in that moment he had unconsciously turned his head and looked out through one of the bomb compartment ports. There, not seventy yards away, was a German U-boat nosing slowly through the water toward the crashed Lockheed. Its superstructure wasn't even close to that of British design. And what was even more convincing was the black cross edged in white that was painted on the sides of the conning tower.

"The blighters! The low-down tricky blighters. They had her rigged up to look British. But now they've tossed the camouflage overboard and are showing their own dirty colors. And what about me? Good grief! I should be thrown right out of the R.A.F. for this stupid bit!"

It was Squadron Leader Hixon who had gasped and groaned out the words. He had come aft to join Dawson, and seen for himself through the compartment port. His face was drawn and haggard, and he wore the utterly bitter expression of a man who wants nothing but the opportunity to crawl away and cut his own throat.

"My mistake as well as yours, sir," Dawson spoke to him quickly. "She certainly looked English when we started down. The dirty rats! Waited until we were so close they couldn't miss with that bow gun. What a sweet mess this has turned out!"

"Well, it won't get any better if we just stand here," Freddy Farmer said quietly, and pointed at the two inches of sea water that already covered the compartment floor. "I suggest that we go top-side, and at least not give them the satisfaction of seeing us drown like so many rats!"

"That's showing the old brains, pal," Dawson grunted. "You're dead right! Up we go, everybody. That she's heading over here must mean that she plans to take survivors prisoners. So—well, it could be worse. And more than one fellow has escaped from a German prison camp."

Dawson grinned cheerfully as he spoke the words, but in truth his heart was heavy as lead. And then, suddenly, as he caught Freddy Farmer's eyes on him, his heart seemed to stop beating altogether and freeze up in a solid ball of ice. The English youth's eyes were not fixed on his face. On the contrary they were fixed on that part of his tunic that covered his inside pocket. And although Freddy didn't move his lips to say anything, he didn't have to. In a flash Dawson remembered the envelope addressed to Secretary of State Cordell Hull.

Could—could that envelope be the reason for all this? Was there any connection between that envelope addressed to Cordell Hull and the mangy trick the U-boat had played in shooting down the Lockheed?

The two questions stumbled a burning path through his brain. And although he tried to thrust them aside as utterly fantastic, they remained fixed and fast to taunt and torment him as he climbed top-side with Squadron Leader Hixon, Freddy Farmer, and the four members of the bomber's crew. And as if that weren't bad enough, the envelope tucked away in his inside pocket began to feel like a plate of white hot steel burning away the skin of his chest.

By the time all had reached top-side, and were staring at the U-boat creeping closer and closer, the Lockheed was well down by the nose, and the damaged starboard wing was completely under water. For one crazy instant Dawson wondered why those Hitler-mesmerized killers aboard the U-boat didn't head off in the opposite direction and leave them to a watery fate, which would come in a very short time. But even as he wondered about that, the burning sensation of the sealed envelope in his inside tunic pocket seemed to give him the answer.

"Well, if it's true," he whispered to himself, and started to slide his fingers inside his tunic, "then they're going to have fun trying to get it!"

He gave a faint nod of his head for emphasis, and then reached up with the others to grab hold of the rope that came curling through the air from the bow of the U-boat. They all caught it, and one of the Lockheed's crew quickly made it fast about the opened fuselage hatch.

"Pull yourselves over!" a harsh voice came from the conning tower bridge of the U-boat. "And if you swine try any tricks, you will all be dead men. Hurry! Pull yourselves over. I do not wish to remain here all day! Hurry!"

A fitting remark rose to Dawson's lips, but he choked it back and took his hold on the rope. Slowly the half submerged bomber was pulled over until it was bumping against the hull of the U-boat. A couple of square-headed Nazis caught hold of it with boat hooks, and held on hard while the voice on the conning tower bridge snarled out the next order.

"Jump aboard, you fools! Be quick about it. Fall overboard and you can save yourselves. We won't! So be quick about it!"

It was no time for those on the top of the Lockheed to put up any argument. And so one by one they leaped across the three feet of open water, caught hold of German hands outstretched and clambered up onto the sea water-dripping deck of the U-boat. Dave was the last to leave the doomed Lockheed Hudson. And when his feet touched the wet deck, he ignored the hands reached out to help him, and turned around to stare back at the bomber.

"Happy landings, old girl!" he said softly. "And don't worry. You've got thousands of sisters and brothers that will carry on for you. So long!"

CHAPTER SIX

Action C.O.D.

Steel claws slammed down on Dawson's shoulder, and spun him around. Close-set pig-like eyes blazed into his, and thick lips twisted back in a snarl.

"What are you trying to do?" the owner's voice roared in his ears. "What kind of a trick is this? You think you can still escape, eh?"

Dawson stared steadily at the huge man, who wore a seaman's jacket over civilian clothes. He stared steadily, then grinned, tight-lipped, and shrugged a little.

"You'd never guess, Nazi," he said evenly. "And even if you did, you wouldn't understand. Only white men would!"

The German bunched one huge fist, and it looked as though he were going to smash it straight to the Yank's face. As a matter of fact, Dawson expected just that, but he did not regret his words. He was too filled with boiling rage to care what he said to these Naziland-born butchers. However, the German seemed to think better of his first intentions. His face remained puffed and red with rage, but he relaxed slightly and was content to stab Dawson with his pig-like eyes.

"We will see about that tongue of yours later, Captain Dawson!" he rasped out in a voice that shook and trembled. "Yes, later, we will see about many things. Now, go aft with these other swine. And if you wish a bullet in your swine skull, then just try another trick on me! So! Move along, you dogs!"

With their hearts and hopes down in their boots, but with their heads high and their jaws squared, the little group from the doomed Lockheed permitted themselves to be herded to the conning tower and down into the bowels of the U-boat. And from the central control room they were shoved and cuffed forward to an empty torpedo storing chamber. The air was thick and foul, and it was difficult to breathe. However, not one of them so much as made a face. They were ordered to sit down on a steel bench, and they did so without a word of comment, and with a look of calm defiance on every man's face.

When they were seated, the man in civilian clothes and the commander of the U-boat stood in front of them and swept them with leering, triumphant eyes. Then the commander spoke to the other in German.

"My congratulations, *Herr* Miller," he said. "It was as simple as you promised it would be. Too bad we were forced to cast all that clever superstructure camouflage adrift. We might have been able to use it again before we return to the St. Nazaire base."

"Yes, it was very simple," the one addressed as *Herr* Miller grunted back, and toyed with a small but deadly Luger he held in his big hands. "But it is perfect planning, and thoroughly knowing your swine enemies, that makes things so simple. Do not forget that, *Herr Kommandant*. But I think we had better submerge at once. There are many British patrols in these waters. I can do what I came to do under water as easily as on the surface. But send one of your men in here to assist me in keeping an eye on these dogs. Two of them have the reputation of being reckless, stupid fools. And I do not wish to deal with them until another little matter is settled. So send one of your men in here, at once."

"*Ja, ja!*" the U-boat commander replied, parrot-like, and turned and ducked out through the compartment door.

Hardly had he disappeared when his place in the compartment was taken by a hefty Nazi sailor wearing the familiar look of meek obedience and Teutonic dumbness from the neck up. At a word from *Herr* Miller, he took up a position where the Luger in his hands could be trained dead on any man in the bat of an eyelash. *Herr* Miller glanced over at him, nodded his approval, then let his leering gaze slide back over the row of prisoners. He gave a jerk of his head, and a jerk of his Luger.

"Empty your pockets, at once!" he rasped out, and let his leering gaze rest for a full second on Dawson's face. "Empty your pockets and toss everything on the deck here at my feet. The swine who does not empty out everything will be shot instantly!"

For a couple of seconds not one of the prisoners moved. Then Dawson chuckled softly and began tossing his personal belongings down onto the compartment's steel deck.

"Might as well give him his selection, fellows," he grinned at the others. "He's holding the gun, he and his brother rat."

"Silence, swine!" the German thundered, and practically waved the barrel of his Luger in the Yank's face. "And let me remind you, you American dog, if you do not empty out *everything*, I will shoot you on the spot!"

Dawson looked up at the man, and although he kept a thin grin on his lips, there was nothing but a chip of ice in his chest.

"Okay, *Herr* Miller," he replied in the man's own tongue. "I'm tossing out everything I've got. And you can strip me, and search my clothes if you want to. But I just want to ask one question. It's important to *both* of us, *Herr* Miller!"

The Nazi narrowed his eyes, and gave Dawson a hard, searching stare. Then he grunted and nodded.

"And what is the question?" he demanded in German.

"Has the Lockheed gone under yet?" Dawson asked with forced calmness.

The Nazi blinked, and looked just a trifle startled.

"But of course!" he finally rasped out. "It was sinking when you fools came aboard. By now it is halfway to the bottom."

"Yeah?" Dawson echoed softly. Then with a head shake of mock pity, "That's tough—for *you*, *Herr* Miller. You should have made the Lockheed empty *its* pockets—if you get what I mean?"

The Nazi started to speak, but checked himself and slid his narrow-eyed stare along to Freddy Farmer's face. The English youth was taking a bunch of keys from his tunic pocket. He stopped the motion for a moment, stared innocently back at the Nazi, then flipped out his hand.

"Here, catch, old bean!" he grunted. "The key to the situation, you know, what?"

The German's brain was much too slow for his reflexes. He automatically caught the bunch of keys as they came sailing through the air, and stared down stupidly at them. Then he bellowed out an oath and flung them down onto the steel deck.

"So!" he bellowed. "You swine dogs dare me to shoot, eh?"

"Why not?" Dawson cut right back at him in a flash. "It might as well be now as later. But you're still out of luck, *Herr* Miller. *We haven't got it!* I left it aboard, and you'll have to do some diving, what I mean."

As Dawson clipped out the words, he held his breath, and kept his gaze riveted on the German's face. But it wasn't more than a split second or two before he knew beyond all doubt that the fantastic, and the utterly incredible was indeed the truth. A Nazi U-boat, cleverly camouflaged as a British submarine in distress, had shot down an R.A.F. Lockheed Hudson for just one purpose: to capture its crew alive and secure a sealed envelope that this *Herr* Miller *knew* was carried by someone aboard. Moreover, he knew that that someone was either Freddy Farmer or himself.

The conglomeration of inner emotions that swept across the Nazi's face told Dawson the truth. And if he needed any further confirmation, he received it right after he spoke again.

"That's right, *Herr* Miller," he said evenly. "There's our stuff on the floor. Strip us and search our clothes, if it will make you feel any better. But you won't find a certain sealed envelope. No, not unless you do some fancy diving and reach that bomber. You see, stupid, we had *our* orders, too. And you can guess what *they* were!"

Wild, angry dismay flooded the Nazi's face. Not yet accustomed to dumbfounding defeat, he was unable to maintain rigid control over his emotions. His eyes popped out, and then popped back in again. His jaw sagged, and his lips moved, though he didn't utter a sound. His hands shook, and the beet red came surging up into his flat, moon-shaped face. Dawson knew that the danger point was close, very close. The German had been flung far off balance, and in the next second or so the animal training in him would get the upper hand. Cold, common sense would go flying out the window, and all that would be left would be the savage lust to butcher and slaughter.

And so Dawson half stood up, and tore off his tunic.

"It's the truth, *Herr* Miller!" he shouted, and started to rip open the seams. "Take a look, stupid! You see anything hidden in the lining? Take a look and weep, you fathead. See any sealed envelope? See anything that interests you? I told you that I left it aboard. Okay! See for yourself. Here! Take a darned good look!"

As Dawson spoke the last he held out his ripped tunic with his hands. He practically shoved it right under the Nazi's nose. And then, as the German automatically looked down at it, the Yank air ace practically exploded in a whirlwind of action. He flung the tunic straight into the Nazi's face. He slapped down his right hand, caught the Luger by the barrel and twisted it free. His other fist he smashed to the German's jaw, and one knee he brought up hard into the Nazi's belly. And then, in what was practically a continuation of the original movement, he reversed the Luger in his hand, half turned, and drilled a single shot at the pop-eyed Nazi sailor. The bullet hit the steel plate right behind the sailor's left ear. And that was close enough. His own gun dropped from his fingers, as he flung both hands high in terrified surrender. And the Luger had hardly struck the deck before Freddy Farmer had dived from a sitting position on the metal bench and scooped it up. But Dawson didn't see that fast bit of action. He didn't because he was busy clipping *Herr* Miller one for good measure on the back of the skull as the man fell down. That done with, he shot a look over at Freddy Farmer and grinned broadly.

"Nice going, pal!" he chuckled. "But I'll give you a kiss later. We've got things to do, right now. Okay, you fellows. Get behind Farmer and me. Maybe that shot of mine was heard, and we haven't got time to lose."

"But, good grief, Dawson!" Squadron Leader Hixon gasped out. "What in the world can you do? There must be thirty Nazis, at least, aboard this thing, man!"

"That's right!" Dawson shot back at him. "And I'll bet not one of them has any hankering to drown! Catch on? Okay. Stick close while Freddy and I rush the central control room. Okay, sailor! Step along ahead of me!"

As Dawson spoke the last he whipped out his free hand and caught the scared stiff sailor by the arm, and yanked him over and shoved him through the compartment door leading to amidships. He and Freddy Farmer kept right at the German's heels. Like blockers running interference for a

ball carrier, they went charging into the central control room. Dawson saw the U-boat commander turn from his post at the periscope sight. He saw the anger that flooded the Nazi's face as he recognized the sailor, and right after that the look of dumbfounded fear that glazed the man's eyes as he caught sight of Dawson and Freddy Farmer right behind.

Perhaps it was just a nervous twitch of the U-boat commander's hand. Or perhaps he actually did start to reach up for his holstered Luger. At any rate, Dawson didn't wait to find out which. He squeezed the trigger of the Luger he held in his own hand, and the bullet snipped a button off the German's jacket before it smacked into the radio panel on the far side of the control room.

"Don't move, anybody!" Dawson thundered in German. "Get stupid, any one of you square-heads, and we'll all go to the bottom, to stay for good. I—"

The Yank choked off the rest, half turned, and fired the Luger. A thin-faced, hawk-nosed junior officer had tried to snatch up a gun and shoot across his chest at Dawson. His gun didn't even have a chance to go off. Dawson's bullet caught him in the chest, spun him like a top, and dumped him flat on his face, to stay there motionless.

"Anybody else want to play?" the Yank grated, and swept his eyes over the four or five other Germans in the control room. "Suits me swell, if you want to. So just start something. Go ahead, you Nazi slob!"

There was a moment of silence, save for the whine of the electric motors driving the U-boat down below the surface. Then its commander made sounds in his throat and licked his lips.

"What do you want?" he choked out. "You are prisoners. Not one of you will live to tell of this madness."

At that moment, and for reasons that Dawson couldn't even understand, a flood of war memories swept across the screen of his brain. He remembered scenes of Nazi-slaughtered men, women, and children. He remembered scenes in which houses, villages, and mighty cities had been laid flat in smoking, stinking ruins by the Nazi hordes. He recalled the floating dead bodies of Yank, British, and other United Nations seamen from ship upon ship sent diving to the bottom by Hitler's ruthless U-boat commanders. A hundred scenes of horror and death that made the rage seem to freeze like lumps of ice within him. Lips tight and eyes hard, he stepped over to the U-boat commander and gun-whipped him with the Luger across each cheek.

"Dry up, rat!" he grated as the Nazi reeled back, moaning with pain. "Just get this steel fish up on the surface, or I'll put one right between your fishy eyes. Come on! Snap out your orders! And don't get the idea I don't understand German. You get us top-side, and pronto, or we'll wreck this tub, and all go down together. Step on it, you. Top-side we go, and in a hurry!"

The German shook and shivered, and tried desperately to summon what little courage he had left. But true to the German type, when he no longer held the whip hand there was nothing but cowardly yellowness to him. And he almost fainted with fright as Dawson suddenly drew a bead on a point square between his eyes.

"Don't! Don't shoot!" he sobbed out. "I will do as you ask. I will give the order to surface the U-boat."

"And tell everybody to stay right where they are at their posts, too!" Dawson barked at him. "The first Jerry to stick his face inside this control room will get you a slug right in your fat face. Get it? Okay! Do your stuff!"

The U-boat commander trembled some more, then picked up the inter-com phone and gave the necessary orders. Dawson watched him like a hawk, and with ears tuned to every German word the man spoke into the inter-com. Then, when the U-boat trembled and started up by the bow, a great sense of joyous relief flooded through him. But he didn't let any of it show for an instant on his face, or in the agate hard eyes he kept fixed on the U-boat commander. He didn't worry about the other Germans in the central control room, because he knew that Freddy Farmer was keeping an eye on them. As a matter of fact, at just about that same moment he felt rather than saw his English pal at his elbow. And then he heard Freddy's quiet voice.

"What a shame you've already received all the medals they give out in this war, Dave," the English youth chuckled. "Certainly deserve one for this little bit. Though, of course, it didn't actually happen, you know. Just a mad dream!"

"You telling me, sweetheart?" Dave shot out of the corner of his mouth. "I won't even ever believe this, myself. But keep your eye on those other birds. They might dive for their—"

"Hardly!" Freddy Farmer interrupted. "I've collected all their guns. I'll show them to you sometime when you're not so busy."

"Do that, pal," Dave chuckled. "And get set to crank open that conning tower hatch just as soon as we hit surface. There might be a plane or two up there cruising around. Or maybe a British destroyer."

"What a cheerful chap!" Freddy groaned. "And do I hope you're all wrong about *that!*"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Yankee Bluff

The next few moments seemed to Dawson to be year upon year stretching slowly out to their fullest extent of time. During every ticking second he kept his gaze fixed steadfastly on the U-boat commander, and held the Luger in his hand steady and ready for instant action, if need be. However, there was no need for that kind of action. Perhaps the German read the truth in the Yank's agate eyes, and realized beyond all possible doubt that Dawson would squeeze the trigger of the Luger, if he was forced to, just as sure as the Lord made little apples. Or perhaps the Nazi was still so paralyzed with fear that he couldn't have moved a single muscle, if he'd wanted to, but could only stand there at the periscope's base sight, and stare with glazed eyes back at the man who had him covered.

And then suddenly, the German seaman at the depth gauge board grunted out the fact that the U-boat was awash on the surface. Dawson didn't turn his head to glance over at him. He still kept his eyes fixed on the commander, and spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

"Okay, Freddy," he said. "You, and Squadron Leader Hixon, and a couple of the others go top-side, pronto. Yell back down if you see anything. Better take along a couple of those flares, even if it is daylight. The two who don't go up with you can park down here and help me keep these rats in line. Give them each one of the guns from your collection."

"Right-o, Dave!" the English youth replied. "I'll go top-side and take a look. But if I don't see anything, I think we'd better make use of their radio, what?"

"Bright lad," Dawson grunted. "Okay, get set."

As the Yank spoke the last he leaned forward slightly so that the muzzle of his Luger was just a few inches closer to the spot square between the U-boat commander's eyes.

"Up conning tower hatch, you!" he grated out. "And if we *aren't* on the surface, it's going to be just as tough for you as for the rest of us. So—"

Dave chopped off the rest, swung his Luger in a short arc and squeezed the trigger. A bull-necked Nazi sailor charging through a door behind the commander took the bullet smack in the chest and fell down in a heap. A gun he had half raised bounced when it hit the steel deck, and went skidding away. Dawson swung his eyes back to the senior officer, who was now having all kinds of difficulty keeping his knees from buckling.

"Catch on?" Dawson snapped. "I never kid, stupid, when I make a promise. And I made one to you. Remember? Okay! Up with that conning tower hatch!"

The Nazi could only bob his head up and down violently. Then the words poured off his lips like raging flood waters going over a broken dam.

"I do not lie, *Herr* Captain!" he gasped out. "We are on the surface. Yes, yes! It is so. I would be a fool to drown us all by ordering the hatch to be opened while we are still below the surface. I would be mad to do that. I do not wish to die—that way!"

"Well, there are other ways, if you don't snap it up!" the Yank reminded him with a significant gesture of the Luger. "So step on it, my little Nazi tramp. Step on it!"

The U-boat commander did just that, but during the few seconds it took to issue orders and get the hatch open Dawson's heart stood still, and he held his breath clamped in his lungs. After all, there was just a wild chance that the commander did have a little stiffness in his backbone! However, the man had had more than enough. And like all of his type, when it came to the matter of his own life, he could change from a blustering, arrogant hireling of Hitler to a cringing, sniveling whimperer in practically nothing flat.

And so he did just as he was ordered, and presently the conning tower hatch was opened, and clean, fresh ocean air was pouring down inside to cut the thick, heavy U-boat stench.

"Stop daydreaming, pal!" Dawson snapped, as Freddy Farmer made no move toward the companion ladder. "Get up there and do your stuff, in case somebody has already sighted us. I sure don't want to be kissed now by any made-in-England depth bomb. Scram!"

"You go, Dave," the English youth argued. "You've earned a smell of fresh air. I'll watch these blasted Jerries."

"Nothing doing!" the Yank snapped. "Up with you. This is more fun, see? Maybe some other dope will stick his head through a door. I can do with a little side-arms practice. Get going!"

Freddy didn't bother arguing after that. With Squadron Leader Hixon, and a couple of the Lockheed's crew, he went scrambling up the companion ladder, and out onto the conning tower bridge. Down below, Dawson and the remaining two of the Lockheed's crew kept their eyes and their captured Lugers fixed on the Germans in the central control room. Seconds ticked by to add up to a minute. And the minutes added up to total three, then four. Tension began to tell on Dawson, and a whole flock of little worries and doubts began to play about in his brain. True, he was standing guard over the "nerve center" of the U-boat. And true, his prisoners were the commander and his junior officers. Just the same, he couldn't hope to keep the situation just as it was indefinitely. Maybe the commander and his officers were cringing cowards, but that didn't guarantee that it was the same with every member of the U-boat's crew. Maybe there was a hero or two among them who would rather take death than capture and imprisonment. Or, at least, perhaps there was one among them who might crack easily. One who might go clean off his nut, and do anything, such as open the sea valves, to break the terrific, tormenting strain. And whether a brave hero or a man gone mad opened the sea valves and let the ocean come pouring in, the *result* would be the same!

And so, as each new second ticked by, another little bead of cold, clammy sweat formed on Dawson's forehead. And with each passing instant of time he had to battle harder to keep from showing his nervousness by yelling up to Freddy Farmer to find out if anything had been sighted. Finally, when his nerves were so tightly drawn that they threatened to snap and fly off in small pieces at almost any second, he suddenly heard the welcoming sound of the English youth's voice.

"Cheerio, Dave, old thing!" Freddy shouted down the hatch. "Luck of the Devil for us, for fair. The King's Navy, no less, Dave, my lad. What a beautiful sight to see, and—"

"Save it!" Dawson roared back at him. "What in thunder *do* you see?"

"A British cruiser, of course!" the English youth told him. "Didn't I say the King's Navy? Well, there she is, and coming right for us. Happy days are here again, what?"

Dawson gave a little shake of his head, and dropped the crazy conversation. He realized that Farmer's joy at sighting a British cruiser, which had come up out of nowhere, had sent him just a little joyously haywire for the moment. As a matter of fact, Dawson's own head felt a little light, and he almost smiled at the U-boat commander as he jerked his head upward and gave the order.

"Top-side for you!" he said in German. "A British cruiser is bearing down toward us. Get up there and get an eyeful. Hey, Freddy! Stupid is coming up! Keep your eye on him. I'll be up in a minute."

Right after he had shouted the last in English to Freddy Farmer up on the conning tower bridge, Dave turned to the two members of the Lockheed's crew who had remained below decks with him, and gave them a happy grin and a nod.

"Okay, up you go, too," he said. "And thanks for giving me a hand down here. Too bad we didn't get some—"

"Watch it, sir!" screamed one of the R.A.F. men. "Down with you!"

Dawson had already dropped low and twisted around. He saw the blurred figure of *Herr* Miller charging toward him, and saw the Nazi's outstretched hand spit flame and smoke. Something plucked at his tunic sleeve, and almost spun him around. His feet were too well braced, however. And in the next split second the sound of his own gun blended with the crack of the guns held by the two R.A.F. men. All three bullets hit *Herr* Miller, and the man was stone dead before his feet left the deck as he went toppling over backwards, and down. Dawson swallowed hard and glanced down at the bullet hole in his tunic sleeve.

"Thanks for the yell," he said to the man who had given the alarm. "And thank God he was a rotten shot. Tough that he's dead, though. I've had the hunch that he was Gestapo. I'd hoped to take him alive and learn a thing or two. But maybe it's just as well that he's that way. One less rat to worry about. Well, let's go."

Dawson motioned the other two up the companion ladder, and then, after barking a cautioning word or two to the live Germans still in the central control room, he backed slowly up the companion ladder and then quickly scrambled out of the hatch and onto the bridge. In a flash Freddy Farmer was by his side and pointing excitedly at a British cruiser standing off about a quarter of a mile to starboard while it launched one of its motorboats.

And a little over fifteen minutes later another of Hitler's U-boats had made its last trip, a trip that took it straight down to the bottom of the North Atlantic. Its officers and crew were prisoners of war aboard the cruiser. And in the cruiser captain's quarters, Squadron Leader Hixon was giving a glowing account of all that had happened.

"It was Captain Dawson all the way, I fancy, sir," he finished up with a grin. "The rest of us were simply the audience. But an audience that will never forget his performance, you can be sure. Fact is, when I return to England I'm certainly going to recommend that he be mentioned in Orders, and be cited for a decoration. Truth to tell, sir, it was all so incredibly wonderful that I'm still wondering a little if it actually did happen."

"Well, if it's all right with you, sir," Dawson spoke up, his face flaming red with embarrassment, "let's just say that it didn't, and forget the whole thing. Frankly, it was just bluff, and a barrel of luck. Those two things, plus Jerry brains that can't turn over very fast in the clinches. So if it's all the same to you, sir, I'd—"

Dawson let the rest hang in the air as there came an urgent knock on the door, and the senior radio officer came in with a yellow slip of paper in his hand.

"An answer from your report to the Admiralty, sir," he said, and handed the yellow slip of paper to the senior officer. "But it's from the Air Ministry, sir."

Dawson and Farmer unconsciously stiffened, and exchanged glances. Then they looked at the cruiser's captain. The officer scowled at the yellow slip for a moment, then looked up quickly to meet their gaze.

"Seems that you two chaps were in a bit of a hurry, what?" he said with a faint smile, and tapped the paper with the fingers of his other hand. "This is a special radio request from the Air Ministry—a request to launch you two chaps off in one of our planes, and let you finish your journey by air. A bit of courier work, eh?"

Dawson almost shook his head, but just in time he recalled his little bluff scene with *Herr* Miller in that empty torpedo store chamber aboard the U-boat. At that time Squadron Leader Hixon and

the others had of course tumbled to the fact that he and Freddy were supposed to be carrying something of importance—something that *Herr* Miller had been ready to kill to obtain. So it would be silly to deny it now.

"Yes, sir," he said instead. "Yes, you might call it that, sir. But how did the Air Ministry—"

"Find out about your rescue?" the cruiser's captain interrupted with a chuckle. "Routine, I fancy. Any reports on our aircraft, and flying personnel, we radio to the Admiralty are immediately telephoned over to the Air Ministry. Obviously the Air Ministry wants you to get on with the job at once, and can't wait for us to get to the States. Hence, this request."

"And—and are you granting it, sir?" Dawson asked as casually as his inner eagerness would permit.

The cruiser's captain looked stern, and scowled darkly. And then, perhaps because of the fading hope he saw in Dawson's eyes, he smiled broadly, and nodded.

"I fancy so," he said. "After all, you two chaps have got just so much *leave* coming, you know. Haven't the heart to make you spend any more of it than you have to aboard my ship. Probably never hear the end of it from the R.A.F. chaps. Get enough ragging from them as it is. So right you are, then. You can take one of my planes. But see that you deliver it in New York in good shape, mind you! We'll pick it up in a week or so. Not that a cruiser really needs aircraft, you understand. However, the blasted things do have their uses now and then."

"Yes, of course, sir," Dawson replied, refusing to rise to the bait. "And thank you, sir, for granting the request."

"Quite, sir," Freddy Farmer echoed politely. "At any other time both Dawson and I should love to —"

"Not likely, you would!" the senior officer growled. "You flying chaps hate blue water. Much prefer blue sky. But you're all a little balmy, of course. Give me a good solid deck under my feet, and—But never mind. Birds of different feathers, and all that. Hop along below, and clean up. I'll have flying gear routed out, and one of the seaplanes made ready. Good luck, and all that sort of thing."

A few minutes later Dawson and Freddy Farmer were washing off U-boat dirt and filth in a cabin turned over to them by one of the cruiser's officers. They had set to work on the cleaning job in silence, but presently Freddy Farmer couldn't hold back the words any longer.

"What rotten luck, eh, Dave?" he said with a heavy sigh.

Dawson wiped soapsuds from his eyes and squinted over at him.

"Huh?" he ejaculated. "Rotten luck? You mean to do it in a few hours instead of days aboard this tub? You gone nuts?"

"Of course I don't mean that!" the English youth snapped back at him. "I don't fancy cruisers any more than you do. I'm speaking about that confounded business aboard the U-boat. About that envelope for Secretary Hull. Of course you did the right thing to get rid of it in the bomber. But it would have been wonderful if we could have managed to save it."

"That's what I figured," Dawson grunted through the towel on his face. "So I decided to take the chance, pal."

In a flash Freddy Farmer was across the cabin and had him by both arms.

"What?" he cried. "What did you say, Dave? You don't mean—?"

Dawson shook himself free, and chuckled.

"What else?" he demanded, and picked up his ripped and torn tunic off the bunk. "Sure thing, kid. I took the chance of tossing *Herr* Miller for a loss with a couple of loads of good old Yankee bluff. So I called the turn right on him before he could get set. I told him I'd ditched the thing, and held out my tunic and started ripping open the lining to get him all mixed up. And—well, he was a nice guy and *did* get all mixed up—and dropped his guard, you might say. Gosh, Freddy, just think! That darn letter was right there in the pocket of the tunic I shoved in his face. Maybe he even heard the paper crackle. See? Here 'tis, Freddy. A bit wrinkled, but maybe the Secretary of State will forgive us for its appearance."

Dawson had pulled the wrinkled envelope from the inner pocket of his tunic and was holding it out to Freddy Farmer. However, the English youth didn't touch it. In fact, he backed away slowly and sat down hard on the edge of the bunk. And his face was one great picture of absolute dumbfounded amazement.

"Good grief, good grief!" he gasped over and over again. "Good grief, you actually *did* do it, Dave! Will miracles never cease! Why, I never would believe that—"

"See?" Dawson cut in with a sad shake of his head. "You save the bum's life, and you pull rabbits out of a hat, and the guy has the nerve to tell you he doesn't believe you. He—"

"I didn't say any such thing!" Freddy cried. "I simply said that I—"

"Now, don't try to get out from under!" Dave shut him off and wagged a finger. "I know perfectly well that you—*Blub!*"

The last was as the wet towel came into his face. And for the next couple of minutes the cruiser's captain would have had sixteen epileptic fits if he had stuck his head inside that cabin and seen

those "flying chaps" roughhousing it out with wet towels and gobs of soapsuds!

CHAPTER EIGHT

Home Again

The dimout hour for the eastern seaboard of the United States was not many minutes away as Dawson slid the cruiser's seaplane down to a perfect landing in the La Guardia Airport basin. As soon as he had settled, he taxied over to the mooring ramp where attendants took over and tied up. Then Freddy and he stepped ashore and started for the Customs Office.

"Fine lot we've got to declare!" Freddy Farmer spoke for the first time in quite a while. "What with our bags still aboard that Lockheed, and down at the bottom of the Atlantic. I'll never forgive the Jerry beggars for that dirty trick."

"Nuts to baggage!" Dawson cried cheerily, and sucked air deep into his lungs. "We're home, pal! That's what counts. Hot dog! Get a load of this Yankee air, Freddy. It'll do wonders for that flat chest of yours. It—Hey! What are you grabbing my arm for?"

The English youth didn't answer. He simply grabbed Dawson's arm with one hand, and pointed the other at the door of the airport's Customs Office. The Yank air ace took a good look, and stopped dead in his tracks.

"Holy smoke!" he gasped. "Boy! Do they keep tabs on the comings and goings of you and me, pal! That's Colonel Welsh, of U. S. Intelligence. How in thunder did he know we were landing here?"

"Perhaps that cruiser's radio," Freddy grunted. "Or maybe direct from the Air Ministry. But he's here, right enough. And here he comes. Funny thing, though, Dave."

"What's funny?" Dawson prompted when Freddy didn't continue.

"The feeling I've got," the English youth replied in a low tone. "I suppose it's a bit rotten of me to feel this way, but—well, to be perfectly frank, Dave, I don't think I'm greatly overjoyed that Colonel Welsh is here to meet us."

"Huh? Not glad that—?" Dawson began, and stopped short with a gulp. "Oh-oh! I get you, pal. And check and double check. I've got that same feeling. Colonel Welsh isn't the one to take time out to greet a couple of guys going on leave."

"Of course, he could be just making sure that we carried right on down to Washington," Freddy Farmer murmured.

"Oh, sure, sure!" Dawson grunted. "And maybe, too, he just wants to know how the weather was when we left England. Nope. No soap, Freddy. Much as I like the colonel, and he *is* one swell person, whenever he pops into the picture you can bet your bottom dollar that there's something cooked up for you to do."

"Yes, quite," Freddy sighed unhappily. "But it was a wonderful leave we spent—at sea."

"Couldn't have been better, unless we'd spent it on dry land," Dave shot out of the corner of his mouth. Then, as the Chief of U. S. Intelligence came within earshot, he said, "Well, well, hello, sir! We certainly didn't expect to see you."

"No, Dawson?" the senior officer chuckled as he returned their salute, and then shook hands with them both. "Not disappointed, I hope? Got the flash you'd been launched from that cruiser, and so I flew right up to meet you. Well, you two have been mixing up in it again, as usual, eh?"

"Wasn't any of our doing, sir," Freddy Farmer grinned. "Sort of forced on us, you might say. Forced on Dawson, rather. He's quite a hero. Better than a story book hero, and all that. Why, Colonel, if it had not been for Captain Dave Dawson, we'd—"

"Okay, okay!" Dave interrupted. "The colonel is an old friend, Freddy. He knows us both. Skip it, pal. But, Colonel, is it all right to ask what brings you here?"

For a split second the Intelligence Chief stiffened. His thin face even paled slightly, and he shot a quick glance back over his shoulder.

"You didn't bring it?" he asked sharply. "You lost it, or were forced to destroy it?"

"We have it, sir," Dawson told him quietly, and started to reach for his tunic pocket. "We're to turn it over to you?"

"No, no, don't!" the colonel said quickly. "Not here. Just wanted to know that you have it, so I won't have to make other plans. Well, it's time to eat, I'd say. I've arranged with Customs, and the Military, so come along with me. I've got my car. You're putting up for the night at the Astor. Suite of rooms all reserved for you. So we might as well eat there. And I want to hear of your latest venture, with all the details, of course. But let's get going and—Well, what do you know! I haven't yet said that I'm glad to see you. However, I certainly am—much more than either of you may realize."

Some three hours later, Dawson leaned back in his chair in the Astor main dining-room, and vaguely wondered if his tunic buttons were going to stay on, or pop and go sailing across the room. It was his first made-in-America meal in many, many months, and without any prompting

from Colonel Welsh he had started at the top of the menu card and gone right down the list. Freddy Farmer was still eating, but then, he was starting down the list for the second time.

"Well, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised at anything you two pull off," Colonel Welsh suddenly broke the moment or two of silence. "But this latest is certainly tops for sheer nerve."

"And bluff," Dawson interrupted with a chuckle. "Just plain bluff, and one hundred per cent good luck. And if you want the honest truth, Colonel, if anybody had ever told me I'd try for a crazy long shot like that, I'd have told them they were nuts from away back. And that's a fact."

"Bluff, or luck, you did get away with it, Dawson," the colonel said with a smile. "And that's the important thing. But let's get off the war for a little while. Tell me, how does it feel to be back in the United States, you two? Of course, Dawson, I've got a pretty good idea how you feel about it. What about you, Farmer?"

The English youth smiled and gave a shrug.

"I fancy it's all right, sir," he said. "I've always been very fond of America, and there's no reason why I should change now. Of course, I'd have much rather spent our leave in England, but Dave, here, pulled one of your American tricks on me, and I had to come along."

"He's just a hard-headed guy, sir," Dawson explained as Colonel Welsh looked puzzled. "We tossed for it, two out of three, and I won. He still can't get it out of his head that it wasn't crooked."

"But you see, Dave," Freddy spoke up gravely, "I've known you so long, and so well."

"Ouch!" Dawson cried, and clapped a hand to his jaw. "And to think he's the ungrateful cuss whose life I saved a few hours back. But you can bet your life, Colonel, he wasn't making any of his smart cracks *then*! You should have seen the way he gazed at me. Such dumb appeal, and befuddlement, and helplessness in his eyes. Reminded me of a little kitten I once found lost in a snow bank. Only difference was the kitten didn't give me the high-hat afterward. Okay, my little man! Next time we're stuck aboard a U-boat *you* can get us out of it!"

"Not a chance!" Freddy said quickly. "Because if I've got anything to say about it, and I hope I'll have, I'm never going to step inside one of those things again."

"Amen to that!" Colonel Welsh breathed.

The trio lapsed into silence for a few minutes after that. Freddy Farmer was content to go on eating, Colonel Welsh seemed to be mulling over some serious thoughts, and Dave was wondering whether or not this was the right place or time to bring up a most important subject. A most important subject, and one that had been worrying him not a little ever since they'd landed at the La Guardia Airport basin. In short, the envelope addressed to Secretary of State Cordell Hull that he still carried in his inside tunic pocket. Rather, the envelope he had transferred from his ripped and torn tunic to the fresh and clean one that had been sent up to the hotel suite.

Apart from Colonel Welsh asking that single question as to whether or not they had brought the envelope, not a word had been mentioned about it. And that fact had Dawson worried, plenty. No, not exactly worried. It had him more bewildered and befuddled. He was sure that the Intelligence Chief had come up to New York to accompany them down to Washington and present them to the Secretary of State. But the senior officer hadn't even said he was going to do that. In fact, he hadn't spoken about anything that he was going to do. He'd simply rushed them over here to the Astor, seen that they were comfortable, that clean uniforms and so forth were sent up, and then had gone away to return in an hour and take them down to dinner. And all during dinner the conversation hadn't once touched on the sealed envelope still in Dawson's pocket.

Was it possible that this *was* just a friendly meeting? Was it possible that Colonel Welsh didn't know anything about the sealed envelope? Was it possible that the Chief of U. S. Intelligence didn't have a darned thing cooked up for Freddy Farmer and himself? Those and hundreds of other questions whirled and spun around in Dave's brain, as he relaxed comfortably in his chair and let his eyes roam absently over the well filled dining-room. He wondered plenty about those thought questions, but there was one thing he *wanted*, not wondered. That was to get rid of the confounded envelope. It had come much, much too close for comfort to spelling curtains for Freddy and himself. He would be glad when he was rid of it, and the sooner that time arrived, the happier he would be.

"That envelope you're carrying for Secretary Hull, Dawson—" The Colonel's words seemed suddenly to explode in his ears. "You've got it with you? Or are you carrying it, Farmer?"

Dave jerked his head around, gulped, and nodded.

"Yes, yes, sir, I've got it," he said.

The colonel reached out his hand as though he were asking for the salt and pepper.

"I'll take it," he said. "Give it to me. You're probably pretty sick of carrying it around by now."

Dawson hesitated a moment, completely at sea as to just what to do. The orders at Croydon Airport had been to deliver it in person to no one but the Secretary of State. Of course, Colonel Welsh was different. If he couldn't be trusted, then—

"It's all right, Dawson," the other's quiet voice broke into his scrambled thoughts. "I realize just what you're thinking. And I don't blame you. However, the Secretary is out of Washington for a few days, so you can give it to me."

"Yes, sure, sir," Dawson gulped. "But—but right *here*?"

"It's all right, don't worry," the colonel said quietly.

Dawson didn't hesitate any more after that. He had been given an order by a superior officer, and there wasn't anything he could do but obey. So he reached inside his tunic, took out the wrinkled and slightly dirtied envelope and handed it over.

"The mailman fell in a mud puddle, sir," he said in a half-hearted attempt at humor. "Sorry."

Colonel Welsh looked at him and grinned. Then as both Freddy Farmer and Dawson stared pop-eyed, he ripped open the flap of the envelope and took a quick look inside. He smiled again, and nodded, and stuck the envelope in his own inside tunic pocket.

"Fine, boys, fine!" he grunted. "This may mean a lot of changes in this war. But let's forget the war. I guess you haven't heard that story that's going the rounds about the private and the sergeant of the guard? It's very funny."

The Chief of U. S. Intelligence made a little gesture with one hand and hitched his chair closer to the table. Then he casually took a cigar from his pocket, and took his own sweet time about lighting it up. And then, just as Dawson was about to explode in confusion, he heard the colonel's low voice carry to him through the cloud of cigar smoke.

"Act as though this one were a howl," he said. "But keep your ears open, and listen carefully. You, Dawson! When I pick up my dessert spoon, let your napkin fall down under the table. Go down after it, and when you get down you'll see another envelope held between my knees. Snake it into your napkin and sit up again. And when you get the chance slip that envelope into your pocket. All right. Here goes with the story. Show lots of interest, and grin and chuckle!"

With that the colonel paused a moment, and then started in on a long drawn out story about a private and a sergeant of the guard. But Dave only heard every other word, if that many. His brain was spinning like a top, and a crazy, cockeyed jumble of thoughts were having a wonderful time playing leap frog. And all the time he watched to see when Colonel Welsh would pick up his dessert spoon. What in thunder was all this about? What other envelope? And why was the Colonel being so cagey about how he was to get it? Holy smoke! Hadn't he just handed Secretary Hull's envelope across the table? Why should the colonel get fancy and make him do tricks to get another envelope he held between his knees? Or was it that something very heavy had dropped down on the Intelligence Chief's head since their last meeting, and the man had gone just a little screwy?

Dawson had no idea, and it was utterly useless even to try to guess. His war experience had taught him to try to take things in stride, and expect 'most anything, and 'most everything. The minute you stopped to figure out the whys and wherefores of things that happened in this crazy war, you were sunk. And so Dawson half listened to the long drawn out story, grinned or chuckled in what he hoped were the right places, and kept half an eye on Colonel Welsh's dessert spoon.

And then, suddenly, the senior officer picked it up and dipped it into the untouched dish of ice cream that was before him. A split second later Dawson gave his napkin a shove so that it dropped off his knees and down under the table onto the floor.

"Excuse me a second, sir," he said, and pushed back his chair a little.

He ducked his head down, and reached for the napkin on the floor. It was there, of course, and so was a letter sticking out from between Colonel Welsh's knees. In one lightning-like motion Dawson scooped up the napkin, flipped it over the extended letter, and sat up in his chair again with the napkin back in his lap, and the envelope safely hidden under it.

"... And so that's why Private Jones swore he'd never be a sergeant of the guard," Colonel Welsh said, and grinned broadly as Freddy Farmer burst into laughter.

"That's top-hole, sir!" the English youth cried. "Very, very funny, really!"

"Sure is a pip, sir," Dawson said as he forced his own lips to grin broadly. "I must remember that one. I sure must."

"I thought it was pretty good, myself," Colonel Welsh nodded. Then, as he seemingly decided against the ice cream, he went on, "Well, how about a walk around New York in the dimout? It's like high noon compared to London and the other cities across the Pond. But maybe you'll get a kick out of it."

"Well, it's New York," Dawson grinned, and pushed back his chair. "So that makes it okay with me. Okay with you, Freddy?"

The English youth cast a fond parting glance at the menu, and shrugged.

"Right you are, then," he said. "Perhaps on the way back we can pop in some place for a midnight bite, what?"

"Not a chance, pal," Dave said, and threw a quick wink at Colonel Welsh. "Wartime rules and regulations. I read about them in England. No male or female over fifteen years of age can have more than seven meals per day."

"*Seven* meals per day?" Freddy Farmer echoed, and looked puzzled.

Dawson nodded at the collection of empty dishes in front of where the English youth had been sitting.

"And if that lay-out didn't total up to *eight* full meals, then I don't know my groceries," he said.

"So come along, before the head waiter hails a cop to haul you in for busting the law so soon!"

"Blast if I wouldn't stay here and wait for him," Freddy said with a long sigh, "if I only knew that the food in your American jails was as good as this!"

CHAPTER NINE

White TNT

After the blaze of lights, the countless intricate neon signs, and the thousand and one other things that made New York night life famous the world around, the dimout condition was a strange thing indeed to witness. Strange, and interesting, and so utterly unreal to a native Yank who had seen the city so many times before Hitler drew his bloody butcher's sword.

Yes, strange, and interesting, and quite unreal. But not to Dave Dawson. Nor to Freddy Farmer, for that matter. For the very simple reason that they were two youths with a great big absorbing problem on their minds. Rather, it was a great big question mark, that neither of them could begin to figure out. And so they could very easily have strolled through the streets of the New York World Fair and not paid much attention to what they saw.

And as they walked up Broadway, and over to Fifth Avenue, and on down around the Grand Central section, it was all Dawson could do to refrain from blurting out the one and obvious question in his mind. In short, what in thunderation was this second sealed envelope all about? Just as the first one had done, this second envelope was practically burning holes in his tunic pocket. It was the same overall size as the other one, but it was considerably fatter than the first. By fingering it he could guess that there were several folded sheets of paper inside. And stiff paper, too, he imagined. This second envelope didn't "give" so much with the movements of his body. Fact was, whenever he bent over quickly a corner of it would stick into his ribs.

And, as had happened once before, his thoughts were all on a certain sealed envelope in his inside tunic pocket when suddenly Colonel Welsh's voice broke right through his train of thought.

"Relax about that thing in your pocket, Dawson," the senior officer said in a low voice. "You'll both get full explanations in a little while. First, though, I want to make sure of something. Take it easy, and let's walk back to the hotel along Forty-Second Street. Good old New York. I'm not a native here, but I always loved this town."

"Me, too," Dawson said with a grin and a nod. "They say that if you hunt long enough and hard enough in New York you can find a touch of every other country in the world in it."

"True as the day you were born," Colonel Welsh agreed instantly. "Including Hitler's Gestapo."

"Eh?" Freddy Farmer gasped out. "What was that you said, sir?"

"The Gestapo," the Colonel repeated in a low voice. "At least, I'm willing to bet my shirt on it. Spotted him in the Astor dining-room, and he's been tagging along after us ever since."

A wild urge to turn around and look back swept through Dawson. However, he killed the urge and kept his eyes front.

"Then he must have seen you take that envelope, sir," he said quietly, "In the dining-room."

"That's what I hope," Colonel Welsh replied quietly. "And the way he's tagging around after us now seems to indicate as much."

"The dirty blighter!" Freddy Farmer muttered. "What's the chap look like, sir? Let's duck around the next corner, and give the beggar something to think about when he comes around. Matter of fact, sir, why have you been letting him tag us around?"

The Chief of U. S. Intelligence didn't answer that question at once. Instead he came to a stop and nodded his head toward a small all-night restaurant on the other side of the street.

"Not that we're hungry," he said, "but let's go in there for a small bite or two."

"A splendid idea!" Freddy Farmer replied enthusiastically.

"It always is, with you!" Dawson growled. "Me, I won't be able to look food in the face again for hours."

"Full up, myself," Colonel Welsh grunted. "But that's a good place to talk. It's half empty now. We can get a corner table where we can keep an eye on the door. Then, if our little Gestapo friend—and, of course, I could be wrong—comes inside, you can get a good look at him. But let's go in and rest the feet, anyway. And I'll try to give you a little bit of the picture."

A few minutes later the trio was seated at a corner table in the all-night restaurant, and the waiter had taken their orders. Coffee and sinkers for Dawson and the colonel, and a three-decker sandwich for "starving" Freddy Farmer.

"First, I'll answer your question, Farmer," Colonel Welsh began in a low voice. "I'll answer it by saying that sometimes it's better to let a spy go free than to throw him into jail, or put him in front of a firing squad. The reason, I think, is fairly obvious. Throw a spy in jail, or shoot him, and he is no longer useful to anybody. But, on the other hand, let him go free, and keep your eye on him, and oftentimes he'll lead you to bigger fish. But in the case of this chap we think is following

us around, I'm not dead sure that he is Gestapo. True, I'm just about as sure as I can be, but we haven't as yet learned exactly where he fits into the Axis picture of espionage in this country. So we've been giving him plenty of rope, in the hope that he'll unknowingly add to our knowledge of Axis activities in this country."

The senior officer paused for a moment to grin, and give a little shrug of his shoulders.

"He's following us around," he said presently, "but one of my men is also following him around. So, as you might say, we're keeping tabs on him both coming and going."

"I had a hunch that was so," Dawson grunted. "Didn't figure you'd carry that envelope around and present your unprotected back to any trailing Nazi. But I still don't get the idea why you had me hand it over in plain view of anybody who was there to take a look."

"Yes, I know," the colonel said with a chuckle. "I've been watching both of you go quietly screwy wondering what it was all about. And—well, what I'm about to say will give you both quite a jolt, considering your little experience out there on the North Atlantic. But before you both hit the roof, give me a chance to explain. The sealed envelope you two escorted across the ocean contains nothing but a few sheets of blank paper. And not blank paper with invisible writing either. Just plain blank paper you could pick up in any ten-cent store."

Both Dawson and Farmer stiffened as though they had been shot in the back. For a long minute both held their breath clamped in their lungs as they stared at Colonel Welsh out of wide, disbelieving eyes. Then, finally, Dawson managed to regain control of his tongue.

"Maybe you'd better repeat that, sir," he said with an effort. "That envelope addressed to Secretary of State Cordell Hull was nothing but a lot of blank paper? And Freddy, and I—?"

"That's right," the other replied quietly. "Just blank paper. And you and Farmer darned near lost your lives over a sealed envelope of blank paper. But—well, it was something like the stunt you pulled on that *Herr* Miller, Dawson. The very fact that you were so eager to have him search you convinced him that you *didn't* have what he wanted. And that conviction baffled him so, that you were able to catch him off guard, and get away with your colossal bluff. In other words, by doing the one thing he didn't expect you to do, you made him believe that you had done the exact opposite."

The Chief of U.S. Intelligence took time out for a moment to light up a cigar.

"Well, we did something the same way, you might say," he continued presently. "But I'll have to give you a bit of history by way of explanation. At a recent meeting between Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt, and their respective staffs, a detailed agreement was reached regarding the vitally important matter of military and economic aid to China. The entire program was mapped out in detail. And after the meeting a pledge was drawn up—a secret pledge to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese peoples. It was perhaps one of the most secret documents drawn up in this war thus far. It contained everything. Amounts of guns, tanks, planes, ammunition, and so forth to be delivered by England and the United States to China. The supply routes to be followed. Dates of arrival. Troop strength, flying strength, and ground crew strength, and so forth. Plus locations of air bases selected by an Air Forces commission recently returned from China. In short, everything that China wants, needs, and wishes to know."

The senior officer paused again to take care of his cigar that had gone out.

"Well," he continued as blue cigar smoke drifted ceilingward, "all that was drawn up here in the States, and signed by the necessary parties. Then it was sent to England for English signatures. Right there we threw Axis rats, who had got wind of the document, off the track for a short time. It seems that they expected it all to be drawn up in England, and sent over here for signatures. So they kept watchful eyes on all our courier planes, diplomatic pouches, and such, ready to leap and strike the instant that document was on its way back to the States. Naturally, for the Axis boys to get their hands on that agreement would be worth a dozen victories in the field. Not only would they learn what we could, and could not, do for China, but they could use it as a powerful propaganda weapon against China. Particularly, the Japs could use it. Imagine how the brave Chinese would feel to find out first from their enemies what their allies were going to do for them! It would put the war in the Far East back a full year, at least. So it was absolutely essential to keep this agreement a perfect secret, get it to Chiang Kai-shek's hands by a fast route the Axis spies would least suspect, and then let Chiang Kai-shek decide what parts of it he would let be made public, and what parts would continue to remain a secret."

"Which, of course, ruled out the usual diplomatic channels," Dawson grunted as the senior officer paused for breath. "Or even a special courier. The Axis rats would probably smell out both angles."

"Exactly as we figured it," Colonel Welsh grunted, with a nod for emphasis. "*But*, to make doubly sure of everything, it was decided to cross up the Axis agents in England. In other words, to actually slip it into a diplomatic pouch bound for Washington by plane, *but* make it appear that we were trying to sneak it out of the country by secret courier. By the way, did you two enjoy meeting Mr. Soo Wong Kai?"

Dawson and Farmer sat bolt upright again.

"And how, particularly Freddy, here!" Dawson gasped. "But—? Oh, so that wasn't just one of those things, eh? He was part of the picture, too?"

"Very much so," Colonel Welsh replied. "And it worked out just as we hoped it would. Axis eyes saw him meet with you. They saw him hurry back to the Air Ministry. They naturally figured that

he was giving his okay on you two taking the document out of the country. They were unquestionably dead sure when they saw an Air Ministry courier later tear out to Croydon Airport. And it's ten to one they actually saw the Croydon commandant turn an envelope over to you. What they *didn't* know was that the real envelope had actually left England by air twelve hours before!"

As the senior officer paused, Dawson gulped and wiped a hand across his forehead.

"Boy! Am I glad I was in the dark all the time!" he breathed. "For a bunch of blank paper I don't think I'd have been so keen to stick my neck out."

"Quite!" Freddy Farmer echoed. "Though, of course, I wouldn't have remained the blasted Nazi's prisoner any longer than I could have helped."

"I know just how both of you feel," Colonel Welsh said softly. "In a way, it was a low-down dirty trick to play on you two. A trick that might have cost two lives the United Nations can ill afford to lose. But if and when you get to thinking about it being a raw deal, try and remember this. You never would have been chosen for that red herring mission if we hadn't had absolute faith that you two would put it across. And that you did simply confirms the faith that the High Command has in you two."

"Well, thanks, sir," Dawson mumbled. "But don't worry about me thinking it over. I want to forget it, and how. From now on every time I see a batch of blank paper I know doggone well that I'll break out in a cold sweat. But just the same, it does make me feel good to know that Freddy and I have that degree of the High Command's confidence, whether we deserve it or not."

"Yes, quite!" was all that Freddy Farmer could add to his pal's statement.

"Well, it's certainly deserved!" Colonel Welsh told them gravely. "No doubt about that. But to get on with the story. While you two were still at sea—and I do mean at sea—the document was received in Washington, and turned over to me. When you arrived on this side we knew that attempts would be made to get to you, if they had not already been made. Which, of course, they were. So I came up to meet you, knowing full well that Axis agents would follow me sooner or later. So I took you to that hotel, and to dinner, with the express idea of taking Axis agents off you. In other words, with the express idea of making it appear to watching Axis rats that you had completed your part of the mission, and were now definitely out of the picture. To make them forget you, and concentrate *on me*. So I had you turn over that envelope right there in the dining-room. I took a chance, yes. But what I hope I gained counts most. In short, they know now that I have it. And they will soon learn, by keeping tabs on me, that I'm returning to Washington tonight. They saw it handed to me. They haven't got to wonder if, or if you didn't, slip it to me when we were alone in your suite before dinner."

As the senior officer paused, Dawson licked his lips, and found it terribly difficult to ask aloud the question that was uppermost in his mind.

"And—and that second envelope, sir?" he finally managed to get out.

Colonel Welsh nodded slowly.

"Yes, Dawson," he said quietly. "It is. And while I am knocking the pins out from under you two, I might as well give you the bad news now. Your two months leave has been postponed—until after you've arrived in Chungking, China, and have seen Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek."

Dawson looked at him for a moment, then turned his head and met Freddy Farmer's eyes. A moment later they both started to chuckle.

"What goes on here?" Colonel Welsh demanded with a frown. "What strikes you so funny?"

"Well, to be headed for Chungking is sort of a surprise, sir," Dawson explained. "But—well, to have our leave tossed overboard isn't. You see, sir, when we first spotted you at La Guardia Airport, we had a hunch that you weren't there just to say hello to us. We were pretty sure that—Well—I mean, that is—"

"That seeing me meant trouble, eh?" Colonel Welsh groaned. "Yes, I understand. It happens all the time. I guess I'm the most unpopular man in the armed forces. And that's one reason why I told you long ago, when we first met, never to let yourself get promoted to a high rank in Intelligence. You either get shot, or avoided by friend and foe alike."

"Well, it's okay by us, sir," Dawson put in quickly. "The truth of the matter is that both Freddy and I would go nuts by the time two months were up. Also, we both do want to see China. We said so to Soo Wong Kai. But gosh! Little did we know what *he* knew then."

"Aren't you right!" Freddy Farmer grunted. "And I certainly hope we have the good fortune to meet him again."

"Yeah!" Dawson shot at him with a grin. "Provided, of course, he has a good stock of meat ration coupons! But you say you're heading for Washington tonight, sir?"

"In a little over an hour," the senior officer replied after a glance at his wrist-watch. "But about you two. It will appear as though you're going to carry on with the regular program. The War Bond speeches, I mean. Your first stop is scheduled to be made in San Francisco the day after tomorrow. There's even a piece in tonight's New York papers to that effect. So tomorrow at nine you will go to La Guardia Airport and board a TAT transport plane for San Francisco. Reservations have already been made for you. In Frisco you'll be met by the military commandant out there, Major General Hawks. Ostensibly, you'll be staying at his quarters. But actually you

won't be there long. You'll be loaned a plane for a courtesy flight about the city and Bay. But you'll go on down the Coast to an emergency field that General Hawks will tell you about. There a Fortress will be awaiting you. It will take you to Honolulu, and from there to Darwin, Australia. And from Darwin you'll fly to Calcutta, India. And from Calcutta to Chungking, China. If all goes well you should be in Chungking by the end of the week. So, strictly speaking, you'll be simply postponing your leave one week."

"And I bet we'll want to spend it all sitting in rocking chairs, after that bit of cloud hopping!" Dawson said with a chuckle. "Just a little fifteen thousand mile joy-ride."

"And my prayers are that it'll be just that!" Colonel Welsh said grimly. Then, "Well, we'd better get on back to your hotel. I guess you two can do with some sleep. Any changes, or additional instructions, will be flashed to you en route. And—well, what can I say but the same old thing I've said to you countless times? Good luck, and Godspeed, to both of you. The prayers of the civilized world will be for you."

"Thank you, sir," Dawson said quietly, as they all stood up. "And we'll get to Chungking. You can count on it. But one thing, sir?"

"Yes, Dawson?"

Dave gave the slightest of nods toward the street outside.

"Our little rat pal, if he's still around, sir," he said. "I mean, I hope you'll watch your step going back to Washington tonight. I hope he doesn't try to pull anything on you, sir."

Colonel Welsh grinned, but only with his lips. His eyes held the glint of polished cold steel.

"On the contrary, I hope he does!" he said softly. "I sure do hope so. It's been quite a spell since I've had the chance to chalk up a Nazi rat. Yes, I hope he tries to shoot the works. I could do with a little workout on him, or them!"

CHAPTER TEN

Wings Westward

The sun was a solid red ball of flame balanced perfectly on the western lip of the world, as the Army Air Forces Flying Fortress eased down to a perfect landing at Hickam Field, on the island of Oahu, in the Hawaiians. On the way down, both Dawson and Freddy Farmer took a good look at Pearl Harbor, where on December Seventh of the year before treacherous Jap wings had left their mark of death and destruction. By now, however, practically every visual reminder of that terrible day had disappeared. Sunken and half sunken ships were once again on the surface, or in dry dock, receiving last-minute repairs before steaming out to join the Pacific Fleet and pay back ten times over what they had suffered. And the shambles that had been made of Hickam Field that day was also just a blood-boiling memory. New shops, new hangars, new barracks, and so forth, had sprung up like mushrooms almost overnight. In fact, even to Dawson and Farmer, who had seen that airfield at its worst, it seemed well nigh incredible that it was actually one and the same place. And it was Freddy Farmer who made the first comment.

"Our navigator didn't get us off course, did he, by any chance?" he grunted at Dave, with a gesture of his hand earthward. "I mean, that really is Hickam Field down there, isn't it?"

"It is," Dave grinned back at him. "And some miracle, too, hey, pal? Boy! When they roll up their sleeves around here and get to work, they sure get to work. Last time we saw it a fly couldn't have landed without running into a bomb crater, or a section of blasted hangar, or something. Yup! The Navy and Army boys have sure done a wonderful job here at Oahu. And how!"

"Quite!" the English-born air ace echoed the compliment, and unconsciously braced himself as the Flying Fortress touched ground and trundled forward to a full stop.

A few moments later it had taxied up to in front of the Administration Building, and one of the crew had opened the fuselage door. Dawson winked at Freddy, and grinned.

"Well, so far so good, kid," he said, and pushed up out of his seat. "Just another eight or nine thousand miles, and we'll be there."

"Hardly worth thinking about, what?" Freddy groaned. "Gosh, but the Pacific is a big ocean."

"Yeah, and we've been looking at only the *top* of it!" Dave chuckled. "Anyway, there's one thing we can be thankful for. We didn't have to make any War Bond speeches in Frisco. Major General Hawks was a good guy, and got us out of there fast."

"And if we can get away from here just as fast, it'll suit me fine!" Freddy Farmer grunted. "Not that I don't like flying, you understand. But being a blasted passenger really isn't much fun."

"Check with me, too," Dawson said, and groaned softly as he thought of the countless over-water miles they still had to travel before they'd reach Australia, and the countless miles from Darwin to Calcutta, India. "Oh, well, this trip can't last forever."

"For me, it's jolly well lasted that long already!" Freddy sighed, and climbed down out of the Fortress.

Hardly had both of them reached the ground before a headquarters captain came up to them and

saluted courteously.

"Captains Dawson and Farmer?" he asked with a smile. "I'm Captain Drake. General Stickney wants to see you right away, please. I've a jeep right over here."

"Fair enough, Captain," Dawson said with a grin and a nod. "Lead the way, sir."

A few minutes later the captain ushered them into the office of the Commandant of the Hawaiian Area. He was a big man, and looked every inch his rank, did General Stickney. As a matter of fact, as the general's coal black eyes bored into his, Dawson had the sudden, crazy sensation that he had done some wrong, and was being dragged up "on the carpet" for punishment. It was just a crazy thought, of course, and was gone almost as it was in his mind.

"Sit down, Captains," the general said, and waved them to chairs. "I've been waiting for you. Received a message from the War Department at Washington. Had it decoded for you, and—well, here it is. It probably makes sense to you two."

The senior officer held out a slip of paper. Dawson took it and leaned over so that Freddy could read it, too. It was from Colonel Welsh, and read:

"Boy friend disappeared. Possible he is wise. Suggest utmost caution. Suggest you alter plans of route. Suggest you keep on constant alert. All Army, Navy, and Air Forces units instructed to give you any help requested. Good luck to destination. Secrecy absolutely essential."

Dawson read the decoded message through twice, and experienced the very familiar, and very unpleasant sensation of cold lumps of lead beginning to bounce around in the pit of his stomach. It was easy enough to read between the lines. The Nazi agent had not trailed the colonel back to Washington. And he had obviously shaken off the man trailing him. In short, he had disappeared in thin air. That could mean one of two things. One, that he had given up. And two, that he had not been fooled by the bluff trick, and was somewhere close to Freddy's and his heels.

Yet somehow that last didn't quite seem to check. Nothing had happened during their short stay in San Francisco. Nor had anything happened during the flight down the coast to the emergency field, or during the flight to Pearl Harbor. It seemed just a little crazy to think that the enemy would let Freddy and him get this far without showing their hands. It must be that the colonel had been mistaken about a Nazi agent sticking close to them in New York.

"Maybe, and maybe not!" Dawson grunted softly. "But the colonel's not one to yell wolf unless he feels he has darn good cause."

"Then it is bad news, eh?"

It was General Stickney who asked the question. Dawson looked at him, smiled, and shrugged.

"Not too bad, sir," he said. "But we certainly weren't exactly expecting it."

"Well, I've received those orders mentioned," the senior officer said with a faint frown. "So if you've any requests to make, go ahead and make them. It's obvious that you're on some kind of an important mission, so we'll do all we can to cooperate."

"Thank you, sir," Dawson said. "Right now, though, I can't think of a thing to request. Fact is, sir, I guess the first thing is for Farmer and myself to go into a huddle. To talk things over, I mean."

General Stickney nodded and stood up.

"My office is yours, Captains," he said with a wave of his hand. "Go ahead and talk. And when you've reached some kind of a decision, I'll be waiting in the mess lounge. All right, Captains. I'll leave you to your huddle. Good luck, on whatever it is."

The two air aces saluted smartly and waited for the senior officer to leave. Then they relaxed and looked at each other.

"And what do you make of it?" Dave asked, and tapped the paper still in his hand.

"Don't just know for sure," Freddy Farmer replied with a frown. "But it certainly doesn't make me happy. The colonel's not the one to scare a chap, so I take it that the business is more than just serious. I mean, that that bloke wasn't fooled, and that he's got his eye on us. Yet—"

The English youth came to a halt and gestured helplessly.

"Just what I think, too," Dawson grunted. "If that's true, why did he let us get away out here?"

"Maybe he was forced to," Freddy Farmer murmured, and stared absently out the office window. "Maybe we were a bit too fast for the blighter. *And* maybe his job was turned over to some other chap!"

"Huh?" Dave blinked at him. "How's that?"

Freddy pointed a finger at the message.

"The colonel suggests we alter our route," he said. "There are still such things as secret radios, you know, Dave. But—well, it does seem a little fantastic and story-bookish, doesn't it? After all, the only thing the colonel knows is that the beggar has disappeared."

"Sure," Dawson grunted. "He could have been clipped by a New York taxi, and be in some hospital right now. I wouldn't want to bet on it, though. For my money, I think we'd better take the colonel's warning as real, and act accordingly. Frankly, it would suit me to take off from here and fly non-stop to Chungking, and get it over with."

"In what?" Farmer asked bluntly. "It's only about sixty-five hundred miles from here to the Jap-occupied coast, you know. And several more inland to Chungking!"

"I know, I know!" Dawson growled. "I was only saying what I'd like to do, not what we can do. That's out, of course. Too far, and too many Japs in the way, of course. But we've got to get there somehow, and not by the route we've planned. I—Hold everything!"

"What now?" Freddy Farmer wanted to know.

"The Navy is our best bet, Freddy!" Dawson said as excitement mounted in his voice. "There's a chance that maybe the Navy can make things easy as pie for us. Let's go!"

"Go where?" the English youth demanded. "And what's on your mind, anyway?"

"Later," Dawson snapped, and turned toward the door. "If you should put up an argument, it might convince me that the idea really is dizzy. Besides, I want to mull it over a bit. Come on. Let's get General Stickney to take us to the Navy commandant's office here. He's the one who can make it possible, or impossible. Let's go!"

Freddy Farmer scowled and hesitated, but finally decided that any questions would only fall on deaf ears, and went tagging along after Dawson as the Yank barged out through the office door. And a half-hour later they had the ears and the attention of Admiral Wallace, Naval Commandant for the Area.

"I'm sorry that secret orders forbid us from revealing our destination, or intentions, sir," Dawson spoke for both of them, "but it is essential that we get to the Far East as quickly as possible. And not by way of Australia. Naturally, the trip must be made by air. Can you tell me, sir, if any of your carrier task forces are located at present between here and the China coast?"

The senior naval officer didn't answer directly. He pursed his lips, and quietly eyed the two youths. Then, perhaps, he remembered that he also had received cooperation orders from the Navy Department at Washington. At any rate, he presently sighed, and nodded.

"Yes, two task forces," he said, and pointed at the huge pinpointed map of the Pacific that covered one whole side of the room. "There is one now operating three hundred miles north of Wake Island. And there is another, of lighter strength, west of Jap-held Marcus Island, and just about on the One Hundred and Fiftieth Meridian."

"Perfect!" Dawson cried, and snapped his fingers. "That would be apple pie for one of the Army's North American B-Twenty-Fives. They can land and take off from a carrier."

"What's that?" General Stickney spoke up. "You plan to reach the China coast by hopping from carrier to carrier in a B-Twenty-Five?"

"Not the China coast, sir," Dave told him quickly. "Our hop from the last carrier will be to some spot in the Philippines. There are still spots there that the Japs haven't taken yet. I mean, a couple of our secret emergency fields. We can sit down there for our final refueling."

"Well, I was about to say you'd not have the gas to reach the China coast from that last carrier," Admiral Wallace spoke up. "And you're right, there are still one or two of our emergency fields in the Philippines that the Japs haven't found yet."

"Correct," General Stickney said with a nod. "Received the latest on that matter from MacArthur only this morning. The best one still held by us is just south of Legaspi."

"Fine, sir, fine!" Dawson beamed. "Now, if you'll be good enough to loan us a B-Twenty-Five from Air Forces here? And if you, Admiral, will be kind enough to advise your task force commanders to be on the look-out for us, and to give us fuel, Farmer and I will be getting under way."

"Under way?" General Stickney gasped. "You mean tonight, now? But what about your crew?"

"No crew, sir," Dawson said quietly. "Farmer and I will handle it alone. Don't worry, sir. We'll manage okay."

"Well, you two certainly have the reputation for such things," Admiral Stickney said, and gave them both a hard stare. "But, personally, I'd feel better about this crazy flight, if I knew a little more about what you hope to do."

"Sorry, sir," Dawson said, and smiled.

"Don't worry, didn't expect you to say anything," the other growled. "Orders are orders, and we've both received them. Very well, then. I'll do my part. And you, General, can take care of the rest of it. When do you want to leave, Dawson?"

Dave turned his head and stared out at the shadows of night that had closed down on the Hawaiians.

"Within the hour, if it's possible, sir," he replied, and gave each of the senior officers a questioning look.

They scowled, and seemed not to like it at all, but they finally nodded.

"In an hour, then," General Stickney grunted, and put on his service cap. "I'll go tell Air Forces command to make ready a plane. But you two had better have something at our mess before you take off. You've at least got time for that, haven't you?"

"Oh, quite, sir, and thank you!" Freddy Farmer spoke up before Dawson could open his mouth.

"Then, come along in my car," the Army commandant ordered, and headed for the door.

And it was just five minutes later when it happened!

Just five minutes later when General Stickney was driving them along a dirt road that curved about a dense palm grove. As a matter of fact, the dim shadow of a figure streaked up off the side of the road so fast that Dawson saw the flash of the gun, heard its roar of sound, and felt the white hot spear of pain cut across the top of his left shoulder before his brain could grasp what had taken place. Then, as the gun barked the second time, and the car swerved violently and went hurtling off the road into the ditch, Freddy Farmer, sitting next to Dave, seemed to rise right straight in the air and turn completely over, and his outflung right hand stabbed the darkness with red flame and sharp sound three times in rapid succession. And then the car was in the ditch and flopping over onto its side, as the engine roared in protest, and the rear wheels spun furiously.

A sharp crack on the head had filled Dawson's brain with colored stars and comets. And then the next thing he realized he was sitting on soft ground, and Freddy Farmer was shaking him by the shoulders.

"Are you all right, Dave?" Freddy was demanding. "Did you get hit by that blighter?"

Dawson didn't answer. Reaction brought him up onto his feet fast, and had him reaching for the small automatic he always carried in his tunic pocket. He almost had it out before Freddy Farmer grabbed his arm.

"Years late, old thing," the English youth said quietly. "The dirty beggar is stone dead. Almost got the general, though. You sure you're all right, General?"

"As good as could be expected!" a voice growled close by in the darkness. "Felt the wind of his bullet, though. Confound it! What goes on here, anyway? That would-be killer was one of the Jap farmers from one of the other islands. How the devil did he get over here? And why in thunder was he trying to kill us off?"

Freddy didn't offer an answer, and neither did Dawson. Instead, Dawson walked up out of the ditch, and across the road to where General Stickney, flashlight and gun in hand, was bending over the crumpled and motionless figure of a Hawaiianized Japanese farmer. And three tiny blue holes in his forehead were silent and perfect tribute to Freddy Farmer's deadly marksmanship. Dawson took a good look, was conscious of the slight burning sensation at the top of his left shoulder, and shivered unconsciously.

"Pick out your prize, pal," he grunted at Freddy, as the English youth joined him. "The best is none too good for that kind of shooting. Me, I sure was asleep at the switch."

"Well, it had to be done, so I did it, that's all," Freddy grunted. "A nasty-looking beggar, isn't he, what? Very glad he's dead."

"Well, I've got to look into this right away!" General Stickney snapped. "The man must have gone mad, and escaped, and was running amuck. Darn good shooting, Farmer. Thank God, you got him in time. But why in thunder he came after us—?"

The senior officer finished the rest with just unintelligible sounds in his throat.

"We can walk the rest of the way," he said. "It isn't far to Air Forces H.Q. I'll leave you there, and get right on with this confounded business."

Dawson and Farmer simply nodded, and said nothing as they dropped into step. Perhaps it was all a cockeyed mystery to General Stickney, but it was the handwriting on the wall to them. The confirmation of Colonel Welsh's message, and warning to be on the alert. How that Jap killer had received his orders, and who had given them to him, were two little items that even history would never reveal. But the hows, and the whys didn't matter. The hand of death had reached halfway around the world to get them both by the throat. And only Freddy Farmer's lightning-like action, and perhaps too hasty a trigger finger on the killer's part, had prevented it. But out of the darkness of night the enemy had struck again. Struck to wipe them out, and gain possession of that precious document Chungking-bound.

"And the sooner Freddy and I are air-borne, the better I'll like it!" Dawson echoed the thought softly to himself. "And how! Upstairs, a fellow can at least see what's cooking."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Invisible Chaos

Night was again closing down on the vast stretches of the Pacific Ocean, but this time it found Dave Dawson and Freddy Farmer standing on the flight deck of the Yank Aircraft Carrier Tempest cutting into the wind through the long rolling swells some two hundred miles south-west of the Jap-held Marcus Island. The two air aces were waiting for the twin Wright Cyclones of their North American B-Twenty-Five to get well warmed up, and were stretching their legs a bit before taking off on the long flight through the night to a dawn landing on that secret airfield at Legaspi in the central Philippines. Yes, waiting for the B-Twenty-Five's engines to get clicking, stretching their legs, and trying to remember if it had been a few days ago, or a few years ago, when one Soo Wong Kai had given them a gourmet's treat in the dining-room of the Savoy Hotel in London.

"One more landing at Legaspi, Freddy," Dawson broke the five-minute silence. "Then we gas and hop along non-stop to Chungking. Just two more flying laps, kid, and we're in."

"And may that be true!" the English youth breathed fervently. "I'm so sick of water, and carrier decks, I could almost drown myself. Not that your Navy chaps haven't been wonderful to us. But—well, I never was one for long drawn out jobs."

"Nor me, either!" Dawson echoed the words. "Dance in and smack them, and dance right out again. That's the kind of thing I go for. Praise be, there's no scrapping at the North or South Poles, or we'd probably get sent there."

"I fancy this is the longest courier job on record, no doubt," Freddy Farmer muttered. "And—well, *it's* safe, isn't it, Dave? You know what I mean?"

"Could I miss catching on?" Dawson replied with a grim chuckle. "Yup! We've still got it along. But maybe you'd like to nursemaid it for the rest of the trip, kid?"

"No, by all means!" the English youth said sharply. "I want no part of it. Wouldn't sleep a wink. No, you're the hero, old thing. You carry it, and you deliver it. As a matter of fact, it really is much better that way."

"Huh?" Dawson grunted absently.

"For me, in case we should get captured," Freddy Farmer said, and edged along the flight deck toward the B-Twenty-Five. "In that event I can simply tell them that *you've* got it, and they'll cut you up in pieces and no doubt leave me alone. At the most, keep me a prisoner for the duration. You see?"

"Just a dear sweet pal!" Dawson growled. "Do that, my little man, and I promise to return to haunt you in your dreams. No fooling!"

"Better think up something worse than that, old bean!" Freddy Farmer shot right back at him. "Right now you haunt me when I'm awake! But let's get on with it, what? The aircraft seems about ready."

"What a tough break I need a navigator!" Dawson growled as they went down deck to the B-Twenty-Five. "If I didn't, I could toss you over the side for that crack, and finish this thing in peace."

"And a jolly, rotten break we're in such a hurry, too!" the English youth got in the parting shot. "It would be amusing to pretend we were lost just to see you sweat—and beg me to locate us."

"That'll be the day!" Dave added one bit more. "And you know what I mean, pal! Beg *you*, even for the time of day? Nuts!"

Some ten minutes later there was no longer any kidding around between the two air aces. Their North American B-Twenty-Five was clear of the flight deck of the Carrier Tempest, and up in the night-shrouded heavens. As a matter of fact, they could no longer even see the carrier. Just as soon as they had left, with the heartfelt good wishes of every officer and man aboard, the carrier had heeled way over and gone pounding around at full speed and onto a new course that would see her well away from that spot, come dawn.

Yes, the Tempest was far behind them, and Dawson and Farmer were just two steel-hearted eagles winging southwestward through night-shadowed skies, with its canopy of a billion or more twinkling stars high overhead. However, those twinkling stars meant far more than just night diamonds of beauty to Dawson and Farmer. To them they were the sign posts to their objective at Legaspi. They pointed the way along the skyway of the gods that they were to travel. To them they were understandable and tangible things. All else about them and below was darkness; the darkness of the unknown.

Relaxing comfortably in the pilot's seat, but with mind and body ready to spring to the alert at an instant's notice, Dawson fed the twin engines a minimum of high test to maintain desired cruising speed, and held the aircraft dead on the course Freddy Farmer had plotted out. With luck they should sight their objective at the very first sign of dawn light. And even then, it wouldn't be any too soon. This was the longest hop of them all to be made in the B-Twenty-Five. And no matter how careful and frugal Dave was with the fuel aboard, it was going to be close. So close, in fact, that they hadn't even considered a direct flight to China, though the coast line was not much farther away than the Legaspi airfield. But that was exactly the point. A landing on the China coast wouldn't do them any good at all. And it could well do them all kinds of harm. At Legaspi there was a field where they could sit down. There was fuel there, and Yanks to help them with the plane. But on the China coast? No such thing! Even though they managed to land still in one piece, it would be dollars to doughnuts that they'd probably land right smack in the laps of the occupying Japs. So it had to be Legaspi next. Legaspi, or bust.

"You mean drown, kid!" Dawson corrected his own thought. "If you run out of fuel, or overshoot your mark, or Freddy gets us lost, some sharks are going to have a swell meal. And no kidding, either!"

And with that not too pleasant thought he lapsed into silence again, a silence broken only every so often when Freddy gave him a change in course. In between times the seconds piled up to form minutes, and the minutes added up to total one hour, two hours, three hours, and four hours. And then, at the end of four hours, the gods of war seemed suddenly to decide that those two daring young sky eagles had been receiving too many good breaks. At any rate, one of those sudden and unexpected Pacific storms swept down on them. And swept down so fast that the B-

Twenty-Five was almost stood up straight on her twin-ruddered tail before Dawson realized what was happening.

True, he did receive a slight warning in advance. An invisible hand seemed to sweep away the stars, and leave a roof of pitch darkness. But it was done in a flash, and as a warning of what was to come it was just about as helpful as seeing the flash of a lightning bolt headed your way. In short, one instant the B-Twenty-Five was rolling along through calm air as nice as you please. And in the next instant invisible forces were trying to tear it apart and throw the pieces all over that section of the Pacific.

Dawson thought he heard Freddy Farmer shout something from his navigator's nook, but he had no time to turn around and yell for a repeat of whatever it was. All the rain in the world seemed to be flooding down on the B-Twenty-Five. And terrific blasts of air were thundering in on it from every conceivable direction. Twice he would have sworn that the aircraft whipped through a full roll. And twice he was as sure as he was that he was over a foot high that the bomber was completely upside down and whanging along on its back. Aches and pains were shooting through every cubic inch of his body, and hanging onto the control wheel, that was whip-sawing back and forth, was just about as easy as trying to hang onto the broken stub of a spinning propeller. In fact, it was all he could do to stop the control wheel from driving back and caving in his chest. It took every ounce of his strength to hold it forward so that the wind-rocketed plane wouldn't go whanging up into a stall. And he was just about spent when Freddy Farmer scrambled forward to lend his strength to the job.

Neither of them spoke a word. In the combined roar of the engines and the raging storm it was all they could do to hear themselves think. Besides, there was no use for words now. Nothing that either of them could say would help any. It was just a question as to whether their strength would outlast the storm, *and* whether the strength of the plane itself would last through the terrific beating it was taking from the storm. A question of man, and man-made things, against the raging fury of the storm gods. And while the great struggle went on, time stood still. For Dawson and Farmer time ceased to exist. They were conscious of nothing else save the use of their combined strength to hold the aircraft as steady as they could. Conscious of that, and of their prayers that this night might *not* be the end of everything for them.

And so it is quite possible that the gods of misfortune looked down from their high places, and were forced to admire the do or die efforts of those two air aces, and were willing to slacken off their fury. Then again, perhaps it was just one of those things that happen to every airman sooner or later. Just one of those freak storms out of nowhere that can not be predicted, or explained after they hit. At any rate, the raging storm was gone just as quickly as it had arrived. Dawson's lungs were burning, his head was pounding, and spots were milling around in a red haze over his eyes. And then suddenly the B-Twenty-Five had shot out into calm air, and there overhead was the canopy of twinkling stars again.

"Take a look, Freddy!" Dawson managed to squeak out past his lips. "Those are stars, aren't they? And we're still right side up, huh?"

"Don't ask me!" the English youth gurgled, as he slumped back in the co-pilot's seat. "If they aren't stars, and we're not right side up, then it doesn't matter. Doesn't, because I haven't one ounce of strength left to do anything about it. Good grief! That was all the storms I ever saw rolled into one!"

"You're telling me!" Dave gulped. "Boy! What rain! And what a breeze. But haul it out of here, Freddy. Get back and check on our position, will you? Heavens knows where that storm tossed us. And—Sweet tripe! Look at that dash clock, will you! That thing lasted an hour and forty minutes!"

"Forty years!" Freddy shouted as he went aft to take their position from the stars. "And I know blasted well that I've got a grey hair for every one of them. Be right back, Dave."

Dawson held the plane at low cruising throttle, and on a general southwesterly compass course for the next ten minutes. Then Freddy Farmer came back with his findings.

"Not too bad, Dave," he announced. "It might have been a whole lot worse, considering. The blasted thing blew us about sixty-five miles east of our true course. Here's your new course."

Dave took Freddy's new course instructions with a heavy heart. True, he was glad that they had survived the terrible storm, and that that howling wind hadn't driven them even farther off course. However, it was bad enough as it was. They were still a good two hours' calm weather flying from their objective, and as close as he could figure it, they had just about an hour and three quarters supply of fuel left in the tanks. Perhaps if they eased up gently for altitude they might make that last fifteen minutes with gliding. But it certainly wasn't a chance for even a fool to bet on.

"Oke, and thanks, pal," he said aloud in a cheerful voice. "Be there presently, I figure. We'd both better keep our eyes skinned, now that it's starting to get light. We're in a Jap-infested part of the world now. And if those rats that have taken the northern sections of the Philippines have got any air patrols out, we may have to do a wee bit of detouring."

"That's quite all right, Dave, old thing," Freddy Farmer said quietly. "Don't try to be a liar, old chap, just to make me feel good. I've done a little figuring myself, Dave. Unless we have the good fortune to pick up a tail wind, we're going to have a very touch and go fifteen minutes at the end of this trip."

"But we'll make it, kid," Dave said grimly. "And that's a promise from me to you. Count on it. Sure

wish we had a load of bombs along, though."

"A load of bombs?" the English youth echoed. "Why in the world bombs? You plan to blast out a spot to land? Say in the water, if our gas doesn't last?"

"I was thinking of MacArthur's boys on Bataan, and Corregidor!" Dawson said grimly. "I'd certainly give plenty to lay some eggs on the little brown rats pestering those fellows. What a scrap they've put up. History that will never die. And even if the darn Japs do finally push them out, it'll be a mighty hollow victory. I bet it's one big surprise to those pint-sized butchers that the Philippines are no push-over."

"No place would be a push-over with General MacArthur in command, I fancy," Freddy murmured. "He's one of the finest generals of all time."

"Check and double check!" Dawson echoed instantly. "And could we do with a dozen like him. But—Hold it! Hold everything, Freddy! Dead ahead, there. Is that landfall, or just a trick of my eyes?"

"It's land, Dave!" Freddy replied in an excited voice. "Land, just as sure as you're alive. And if these charts and maps they gave us at Pearl Harbor are correct, we've hit it right on the nose. That land is the Catanduanes Islands just north of Legaspi. We'll know for sure in another ten minutes!"

Another ten minutes? In ten minutes nations have fallen into the dust. In ten minutes half the world has changed face. In ten minutes a million and one things can happen which normally should take months or years to come to pass. And so, at the end of ten minutes, Dawson and Farmer were suddenly "treated" to a sight that chilled their blood, and sent their hearts dropping down into their boots.

In the pale light of early dawn they saw a flock of birds come sweeping up from that bit of the Philippines known as Legaspi. Only it wasn't a flock of birds. It was a flock of war birds. A flock of Jap Zeros up on early dawn patrol. True, they had half expected to see at least a Jap plane or two, but to see them come up from the ground on Legaspi was like a mule's kick in the stomach. There was no need to wonder, or to ask each other unanswerable questions. There was only to observe, and realize the terrible truth. The truth that Legaspi had fallen to the Japs during the last forty-eight hours, and that the Yank emergency airfield was unquestionably in enemy hands.

And, as though to add a final touch to horrible reality, the port outboard engine of the B-Twenty-Five began to cough and sputter from the lack of fuel in the tanks. And a couple of seconds later the starboard engine took up that soul-chilling song that no pilot ever wants to hear.

"Would you care to get out and walk the rest of the way, sir?" Dawson asked in a strained voice that belied the crooked grin on his lips.

"No thanks," Freddy Farmer came right back at him, with an equal attempt to crack wise. "Just turn about and take me back to Honolulu, please!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

Eagles Can't Die

As a sort of signal to confirm the fast approaching end of the B-Twenty-Five's flight, the starboard engine coughed its rasping note for the last time, and joined the port engine in silence. Dave had already eased the nose down a hair or two to prevent a stall, and like a statue of stone he sat there hunched over the control wheel with his worried eyes fixed first on the Jap Zeros mounting higher into the sky, and then on the stretches of ground below.

The gods had at least been a little kind. The B-Twenty-Five had the necessary height to reach land in a long flat glide. However, there would be little picking and choosing of a suitable place to land. And if the Zeros came tearing in, it would be decidedly a one-sided combat. True, Freddy could work the top turret guns, and he could smack away with the nose guns. But with so much of the bomber left unguarded, it wouldn't be long before Jap bullets and air cannon shells would rip home and pull down the curtain.

"I don't think they've spotted us yet, Dave!" Freddy Farmer suddenly spoke in a low voice, as though he feared the Jap pilots would overhear him. "They seem to be going higher up, and swinging westward toward Bataan."

"I know," Dawson replied in a low voice, too. "Looks that way to me. And here's hoping we're both right. If those tramps only keep out of the way, maybe we'll have a chance. But if they spot us and come a-running, Freddy, it isn't going to be funny."

"Well, if I can get one or two of the beggars," the English youth muttered, tight-lipped, "it won't be so bad. Think I'll go aft and man the turret guns right now."

"No, stick around until you have to," Dave stopped him. "If we're going to crash land, we'd better be up here together. Then one of us can help the other get out, if one of us is—well, you know what I mean."

"Quite," Freddy murmured. "But we haven't crashed yet, so why talk about it?"

"Suits me swell," Dawson said with a dry chuckle. "My error, pal. And, heck, this wouldn't be our

first crash. But what we want is for those little brown rats to keep right on going the way they are."

Freddy Farmer echoed the hope with a grunt, and let it go at that. Both boys lapsed into silence, and sat very still as the B-Twenty-Five slid down lower and lower, and the distant flock of Jap Zeros mounted higher and higher into the Southwest Pacific dawn sky. And then when it seemed almost certain that the Japs were completely unaware of the B-Twenty-Five's existence, one of the formation suddenly cut around in a dime turn and came hurtling back down like a red disc-marked bolt of lightning. One look at that fighter plane cutting down across the dawn sky was all that Dawson needed to realize the bitter truth. And all that Freddy Farmer needed, too. The little game of hide-and-peek was all over. The B-Twenty-Five had been sighted. And not only one Zero, but two others, had cut out of formation and were wing screaming down in a power dive.

"The dirty beggars!" Freddy Farmer grated, and started to push up out of his seat. "See you later, Dave."

But Dawson flung out a hand, caught the English youth's arm, and hauled him back down into the seat.

"Waste of bullets, Freddy!" he barked. "We'll be touching ground any second now. Our only hope is to beat them down to the ground. Stick right here. The crash might buckle the fuselage and cut that turret in two. Stick here—and get set, kid!"

As Dave spoke he kept his eyes fixed on the stretch of lush green ground almost directly below. At the very instant he had sighted the first Zero breaking away from formation he had dropped the B-Twenty-Five's nose to increase her glide speed to the limit. And now it was but the matter of a few seconds as to what would happen first. Whether Dawson could get the bomber down onto the ground, or whether the Japs could reach the aircraft with their murderous blasts and send it to earth a raging ball of flame.

From a point that seemed but a couple of feet from his head, Dawson heard the snarl of Jap machine gun fire, and the deeper and louder note of enemy aircraft cannon. But he didn't waste time to jerk up his head for a look. It wouldn't do any good to *see* the Japs shooting. His ears told him that they were; that at almost any instant death might chop right through to nail him. Just the matter of a few seconds, that was all. A few seconds in which to fight for his life, and Freddy's, and win—or lose.

"This is it, Freddy!" he suddenly yelled, and hauled back on the control wheel column. "Hang on, hard!"

Maybe he yelled the warning aloud, or maybe he simply spoke it in his brain. But either way, there was no time to repeat. The B-Twenty-Five was dangerously low now, and taking up the last bit of its gliding speed to reach a narrow clearing thickly bordered by tropical growth. Maybe the surface of that corridor-shaped clearing was hard and firm. Or maybe it was a narrow strip of swamp ground. There was no way to tell from the air, and no time to do anything about it, anyway. The few seconds had run their course. Time had run out. The B-Twenty-Five had won its race with those diving Jap Zeros, but a crash landing on an unknown strip of Philippine ground was a certainty.

Dawson hung hard to the control wheel to the very last split second. He saw the nose come up, felt the bomber mush forward and start to falter in the air, and he saw that strip of clearing come zooming up toward the belly of the fuselage. And then the B-Twenty-Five touched ground.

Touched ground? The last ounce of its flying and gliding speed spent, the bomber dropped the rest of the way like ten ton of loose brick. Braced as he was for the jolting contact with the ground, Dawson had the crazy sensation that invisible hands grabbed hold of him and started bouncing him around inside the pilots' compartment like a human rubber ball. Freddy, the instrument panel, the control wheel column, and the compartment's windows seemed to parade past his eyes. And then suddenly the roof fell down on top of him, and the next thing his spinning brain realized his head was resting on one of the rudder pedals, and his legs were up in the pilot's seat. And the figure of Freddy Farmer was sitting astride his stomach like a horseback rider.

For perhaps a full three seconds the two youths blinked stupidly into each other's eyes. Then Freddy Farmer choked out a gasp, scrambled off Dawson's middle, and reached down to twist his legs around and his head up.

"You hurt, Dave?" he managed to gasp.

"Don't know, yet!" Dawson replied hoarsely, and kicked open the compartment door with his foot. "Tell you later. We've got to get out of here, kid. This is a swell target for those rats. Here they come down, now!"

There was no need to inform the English youth of that little truth. The ungodly scream of Jap wings in the wind, and the blood-chilling snarl and yammer of their aerial machine gun and aerial cannon fire was enough to make the very ground shake and tremble. Instinctively Dawson reached up, hooked an arm about Freddy and hauled him down onto the floorboards of the compartment. And there they both crouched, breath locked in their lungs, as the Zeros piled down and raked the crashed bomber from twin rudder to nose. Bullets cut through into the compartment, and made a shambles of what was left of the instrument panel. But it was as though the hand of Lady Luck touched each bullet, because neither Dawson nor Freddy Farmer was hit.

And then when there came a lull in the shooting, and the only sound was that of the Zero's engines pounding the planes upward for altitude, Dawson gave the English youth a push and nodded toward the compartment door.

"Wiggle out of here fast!" he shouted. "Then snake across to that jungle growth. Do it fast, kid, before they come down. I'll join you right after their next attack. *Snap it up!*"

Another and a harder shove closed Freddy's mouth, which was half opened to ask questions. He quickly nodded and went out through the compartment door like a shell from the mouth of a gun. Still hugging the compartment floor, Dave watched his pal streak across the bit of open ground and practically dive head first into the thick border of jungle growth. At that instant Dawson was almost tempted to follow Farmer. But at that instant, also, he heard the change in the sound of the Jap aircraft engines aloft. A sound that told him the Zeros had gained their altitude, and were wheeling over and down for a second strafe on the helpless American bomber.

"Stick around some more, please, Lady Luck!" he breathed, and practically pushed his face through the floorboards.

For the next few seconds the full wrath of war snapped, and barked, and howled, and screamed all about him. But once again Lady Luck, or somebody, guided every one of the Jap bullets and air cannon shells clear of Dawson's body. And then once again he heard the pounding howl of the Zeros power-zooming upward. And in that instant he became a whirlwind of action. He shot his body toward the door opening, and at the same time flung out one hand and grabbed up a Very-Light pistol and fired the flare back over his shoulder. He heard the hiss and sputter as he went out through the door and down into the tall grass. And it seemed he had no more than regained his feet and was plunging for the jungle growth when a part of the world in back of him exploded in a roar of sound.

Hardly realizing what he was doing, he jerked his head around and took a flash glance back over his shoulder. The nose of the B-Twenty-Five was spouting livid red flame and smoke high into the air. The back of the aircraft had broken and buckled right at the gun turret, so that the whole thing looked like some weird prehistoric bird of gigantic size flopped down on the ground in mortal agony. One quick look at that heap of aero-nautical destruction, and then Dawson turned his head front, gasped out a sob of pity and sorrow, and plunged head first into the shelter of the jungle growth just as the three Jap Zeros wheeled off their zoom and started down again.

"Good gosh, Dave!" Freddy Farmer was panting in his ear. "Did they hit the gas fume-filled tanks that last time? I almost passed out in fear that you were a goner."

"Not those rotten Jap shots!" Dawson gasped, and rolled off his stomach. "I smacked a Very-Light flare at one of the split fuel feed lines. Just enough gas in the line to start a blaze. Hope it'll call them off, the bums!"

"*Fired* the plane?" Freddy Farmer echoed with a frown. "But why? The thing's a total wreck. The Japs could never make any use of it, Dave!"

"And how they can't!" Dawson grated, and stared sad-eyed at the blazing heap of wreckage. "That wasn't the idea, though. There must be Jap troops close to here. They'll be coming on the run. It won't hurt any for them to think that we burned up inside. See what I mean?"

"Of course!" the English youth replied. "And am I stupid. Smart work, Dave. And by the way, thanks from the bottom of my heart, old thing."

Dawson glanced at him and blinked.

"For what?" he wanted to know.

Before answering, Freddy pointed a finger at the crash landing broken back of the aircraft.

"For not letting me go aft to the guns and take a crack at those Zeros," he said. "It was just as you warned. The thing broke right at the gun turret. But for you, Dave, I'd be in two or more pieces right now."

"Skip it," Dawson grunted, and got up onto his feet. "The thing for us to do is to make tracks away from here, before we both get carved up into small pieces. Now, let's see, which way, I wonder?"

"I suggest south, Dave," Freddy Farmer spoke up quietly. "I think that Zero field is in that direction. Fact is, while I've been here I think I've heard air engines toward the south. So?"

Dawson grinned at him, and winked.

"So we think alike, pal," he grunted. "We haven't got anything to fly now. And it's a long swim, and a long walk, to Chungking from here. Right, Freddy. The least we can do is take a look to see if the Japs can help us out any—without knowing it."

"Yes, it's a hope, though a blasted small one, I fancy," the English youth murmured. "First, though, there's this jungle. Dash it all! I never saw stuff grow so close together. Looks like it would take us days to go a mile."

"Then let's get started," Dawson said, and took one last look back at the burning plane. "Remind me, Freddy, to send Air Forces Command at Hickam Field a letter of apology for washing out their ship."

"Right you are," the English youth promised. Then, with a half-chuckle, he added, "And I'll be delighted to deliver it *in person*, if you know what I mean?"

"Way ahead of you, kid," Dawson replied. "*You* just remind me to write it, *I'll* take care of the delivery angle—I hope!"

With a grin, and a nod for emphasis, Dawson turned toward the south and started to push and squirm and wiggle his way through the dense, steaming jungle growth.

Two year-long hours later Dawson stumbled over a hidden root for the umpty-umteenth millionth time, and let his weary body sink down onto the soft ground. Freddy Farmer, right behind him, sank down too, and for a couple of minutes neither said a word. As a matter of fact, neither had the breath to spare for spoken words. Their uniforms were ripped and torn in half a hundred different places. And there were just about as many tiny cuts on their faces and hands. And to top it all off, they were drenched with jungle swamp water, and plastered with sticky yellow mud from head to foot.

"How about taking turns carrying each other piggy-back, pal?" Dawson finally broke the silence. "And you carry me, first."

"Suits me," the English youth came right back at him, "if I don't have to go more than two or three yards. But, gosh, I am tired. And if you want to know my opinion, Dave, I've had the tiny little fear this last half-hour or so that we've been traveling in a circle."

The half-grin on Dawson's dirty face faded, and a grave, somber light stole into his eyes.

"I know, Freddy," he said quietly. "The sun has touched all four sides of us at least once in the last half-hour. I don't think we made so much as a quarter of a mile in a straight line south. In short, Freddy, you and I are very definitely lost."

"Yes, definitely," the English youth echoed with a faint catch in his voice. "However, there's no use crying over the fact, I fancy. The only thing we can do is to rest up a bit, and then keep pushing on southward. This is the Legaspi area, I'm positive. We're not on one of the smaller islands. So if we keep at it long enough we're bound to—"

A lightning-like warning gesture of Dawson's hand stopped Freddy Farmer cold. Both youths froze stiff, and locked eyes as they listened to the sounds that came to them through the jungle growth to the right—sounds that neither of them understood. But they didn't have to, because the sounds were the sing-song rising and falling intonations of Japs talking with one another.

"Close!" Dave breathed softly into Freddy's ear. "Too darn close for my liking, pal. Got your gun ready?"

The English youth didn't answer. He simply nodded slightly and fixed his eyes on the wall of jungle growth that separated them from the little brown butchers of Nippon somewhere beyond.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Blood In The Sky

As Dawson crouched there motionless at Freddy's side, and listened to the Japanese speaking voices that seemed not to come closer, nor to retreat, a crazy impulse caused him to glance down at his wrist-watch. The crystal had been smashed in the crash, and the minute and hour hands were gone. The second hand was still in place, however, and ticking around its little graduated dial. Yet it seemed to stop and wait after each tick as though that were the last, and there would be no more. Then suddenly it would jump around to the next graduation mark, and pause and wait again.

Of course, it was actually moving all the time, but because of the terrible suspense that held him rigid, his eyes and his brain played him crazy tricks. And then suddenly the grip of Freddy's hand on his arm dragged his half hypnotized attention from the watch. The English youth put a finger to his lips for absolute silence, and then pointed ahead and to the left. Dave bent forward to sight along the pointed finger, and caught his breath sharply. He was staring through a small opening in the heavy growth, and there not more than twenty yards away were five squat, chunky, slant-eyed Japs. Each was armed with one of the deadly Jap sub-machine guns, and the expression on each face was that of the lustful desire to kill, and maim, and torture, for the sheer diabolic pleasure of so doing.

The little group had come to a halt and were all sharing something that one of them portioned out from a bag he carried slung over one shoulder. In a dull abstract sort of way, Dawson guessed it was the daily handful of rice that keeps a Jap soldier going when on the march, or on the hunt. However, it was no more than a half-hearted guess, because his attention was not fixed on what they were doing, but on what they looked like. The uniforms they wore, and the branch of service insignia on their uniforms. And though the uniforms were dirty and shabby, and much the worse for constant wear, he knew in a flash that that little group of Japs were aircraft mechanics.

And an instant later when he twisted his head around to meet Freddy Farmer's eyes, he knew that the English youth had recognized that fact, too. Freddy was grinning, and there was the light of wild hope in his eyes. He leaned forward quickly so that his lips were against Dawson's ear.

"No doubt chaps sent out to inspect the crash, Dave!" he breathed softly but with tingling excitement in every word. "And that they've stopped to have a bit of their blasted rice must mean

that they're *on the way back* to their field. Right?"

"Dead right!" Dawson breathed back with a grim nod. "Sure wish I knew the Jap lingo. I'd give a lot to know if they think the B-Twenty-Five's crew burned up in her. But we've just got to hope that's so, and trail them back. Okay by you, Freddy?"

"Where they go, we go!" the English youth replied. "Only I hope it isn't far."

"Something tells me that it isn't," Dawson said with a little gesture. "Just a hunch. Okay, we tag along behind. But watch it! Those little tramps have plenty sharp ears, and our guns can't outshoot what they're carrying."

"You watch your big feet, and I'll watch mine!" Freddy assured him. "Don't worry. And—There! They're moving off, Dave. And, say! I can see it, now. The blighters are following a path. Praise the Lord for that. Make it easier to keep up with them. Come along!"

As the English-born air ace spoke the last he got swiftly and silently up onto his feet and began virtually to squeeze his way through the heavy tropical growth. Dawson followed along right at his heels. And just that, too, for it took all of his efforts to keep Freddy Farmer's heels in sight. The English youth was like a shadow, and just about twice as silent, as he melted forward. In fact, Dawson came within a hair's breath of plowing right into his back when Freddy finally reached the narrow beaten path and came to an abrupt halt. Crouching down low with his pal, he strained his ears for sounds ahead. The sing-song jabbering reached his ears in almost no time at all, and after taking into consideration what heavy jungle growth does to the travel of sound, he judged the enemy patrol to be a good hundred yards ahead. Freddy Farmer figured the same distance and formed the words silently with his lips as he looked inquiringly at Dave. The Yank air ace nodded, and then started stealthily along the beaten path.

For almost an hour they followed the winding course of the path through the dense jungle, pausing every so often to hug the soft damp ground and listen to the incessant jabbering of the Jap patrol ahead. The last time they paused they also heard other sounds. Sounds, however, that were not distinct and clear. In fact, it was a sort of rumbling murmur that made Dave think of storm waves pounding against a rock-bound coast. He glanced back at Freddy, but the English youth was equally puzzled by the sounds.

However, a few moments later when Dawson turned around and started forward again, he suddenly felt Freddy's hand grip him by the arm and jerk him down flat. He squirmed around with an angry questioning look in his eyes. But Freddy's finger to his lips, and the brittle glint in his own eyes, checked any words that might have spilled from Dawson's lips. Then Freddy put his lips close and whispered softly.

"Just a little ahead, there's one of them, Dave!" he said. "Left to stand guard, is my guess. So that means we must be near their field. And—Hear that, Dave! That's what the sound is! Aircraft engines being revved up. This darn jungle blankets sound until you're right on top of it."

"Left one behind?" Dawson echoed, as little shivers began to ripple up and down his backbone. "You spotted him, Freddy?"

Young Farmer didn't answer at once. He motioned Dawson up to a half crouching position, and then pointed a stiff finger ahead, and nodded for Dave to sight along his arm. Dawson did that, but for several seconds he could see nothing but the greens, the browns, and the faded orange of jungle foliage. But all the time he could hear the rumbling murmur somewhere ahead. And he realized at once that Freddy's statement was true. The sound came from revving aircraft engines, but it was muffled and dulled in note by the thick jungle.

Suddenly, though, as he strained his eyes at the twisted mass of jungle growth, he saw something move no more than thirty-five yards from where he crouched. Had he not been peering intently he would automatically have taken it for a tree branch or jungle plant leaf being stirred by a puff of air. However, being on the alert both mentally and physically, he told himself at once that there could be no puffs of air in the thick of the jungle. Only heavy pungent smells that hung motionless in space. And then an instant later his eyes picked out the head and shoulders of a Jap. The little brown man was facing off to the left, and his face was in only one quarter profile. But Dave could see the man's jaws champing up and down on the dry rice he had stuffed into his mouth. And by straightening up just a little, Dawson could make out the butt of the deadly sub-machine gun that the Jap held in the crook of his right arm, ready to whip it up and fire at an instant's notice.

For a long minute Dawson studied the "picture", as a hundred and one conflicting thoughts raced through his brain. Was that Jap simply manning his guard post located close to the field? Or had that Oriental discovered that nobody was aboard the crashed B-Twenty-Five, and was that Jap up ahead but one of many posted here and there to be on the look-out for the survivors of the crash? Those two main questions tormented Dawson's brain, for the simple reason that he could only guess at the answers. But one thing was very certain, though. There stood an armed Jap between them and an enemy flying field ahead. If they were to get closer to the airfield ahead, that armed Jap had to be put out of the war for keeps.

That fact uppermost in his mind, Dawson took his gaze off the munching Jap and looked at Freddy. The English youth returned his look, grinned, tight-lipped, and nodded.

"Remember that Commando show in Occupied France, Dave?" he whispered. "Well, Jap or Jerry, it shouldn't make any difference, eh?"^[2]

"Same thing, pal!" Dawson chuckled softly, and slowly closed the fingers of one hand into a rock

hard fist. "Let's see if we've forgotten any of that sweet technique. Okay, kid!"

With a grin and a nod for emphasis, Dawson twisted around and started along the path again. Compared with their "travel" now, they had been making a noise akin to that of a herd of elephants on the rampage. Like blending shadows, and twice as silent, they eeled and snaked their way forward. Each leaf, or twig, or plant stem was moved cautiously to the side, and held there until they had slid their bodies past. Then, another few inches forward, and another few. Bit by bit creeping closer to the armed Jap, and with no more sound than that caused by the pounding of their hearts.

However, though they advanced completely wrapped in a blanket of silence, the Jap was perhaps possessed of that premonition of danger that science has named the sixth sense. Or perhaps his Nipponese ears were tuned to thumping human hearts. At any rate, when Dawson and Freddy Farmer were but a scant two yards in back of him, the Jap spun around and threw up his sub-machine gun. He was fast, lightning fast, but those two air aces had been trained to throttle lightning on the loose. They both moved even faster.

Dawson's outflung arm was like an iron rod with a ball of steel on the end of it. And that "ball of steel" flew straight to the Jap's Adam's apple to cut off his wind, and paralyze the nerve center at the base of his brain. However, that one blow alone would not have been sufficient, and neither Dave nor Freddy Farmer were counting on it to do the trick. At the same time Dawson slashed down with his gun hand and knocked the sub-machine gun downward. And while that was taking place, Freddy Farmer's flying body caught the Jap across the knees. On the football field that little bit of blocking would have caused the penalty of plenty of yardage. But this wasn't the football field. It was a jungle battle field. And the player to be "taken out" was a ruthless, butchering little brown rat of Hirohito's brood.

And he was *taken out*, and very definitely so. When Dawson and Freddy got quickly up onto their feet again, and Dave even had the sub-machine gun in his own hands, there was no need to give the Jap more than a passing glance. He was out! He was not only out of the war, but he was out of his heathen world as well. A broken neck is a broken neck, whether it belongs to a Jap or anybody else!

Dawson looked at Freddy, but didn't say anything. Whatever might be said was said with their eyes. They simply exchanged looks, nodded grimly, and then stared once more along the winding path with ears tuned to the rumbling murmur ahead that grew louder and more pronounced with every foot forward they advanced. And so it was that at the end of ten or twelve minutes of cautious advancing, they finally reached a point where the jungle stopped, and flat, sun-baked ground began.

The pair stopped just a few feet inside the jungle and peered silently out at the sight ahead. It was one that caused wild hope to blossom within them. But it was also a sight that weighed down their hearts with bitterness and angry helplessness. Though Dawson had been suspecting it all along, it was not until he stared out onto that triangular-shaped patch of sun-baked ground that he knew definitely that Freddy and he had finally reached what had no more than forty-eight hours before been a Yank and Filipino-held emergency airfield.

But it was all Jap now. And the only traces that it had once been Yank-Filipino were the fire and bomb-marked wrecks of American planes caught on the ground by overwhelming Jap bombers, and the gutted hangars and buildings that lined one side of the field. And that it was all Jap, now, was obvious from the Nipponese planes of all types that were lined up on the other two sides. Planes, and Jap pilots and mechanics, and ground troops strutting about. A sight to make any Christian's heart weep blood. And the bitterest touch of all to Dawson and Freddy Farmer was the way the planes were lined up. They were not even dispersed about the field. And that could mean but one thing. That there were no more Yank bombers left in the Philippines to roar back and give those little slant-eyed brown men a taste of their own kind of war. No, the bombers that would some day do that little thing were thousands and thousands of miles away. And a great number of them were still just working blueprints in American aircraft factories!

Yes, a sight to make Christians weep, but also a sight to fan the flickering spark of hope and determination into a mounting flame!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Beware The Sharks!

"The dirty swine! Blast their rotten hearts! Gosh! What I'd give to lead a patrol of bombers right now! Dash it all! I'd even be willing to settle for Hawker Hurricanes!"

The words spilled softly and tonelessly off Freddy Farmer's lips. His eyes fixed on the captured field were bright and brittle, and he was unconsciously thumping one clenched fist into the palm of the other hand. Dawson glanced sidewise at him, grinned, and nudged his arm.

"Check, and double check, pal!" he whispered. "But wishing for the impossible won't help a bit. Besides, we haven't got time to jaw around on such things. Take a look at that spread of Jap planes, Freddy. Which one do you figure should be our baby, when we get it?"

"If we get it!" the English youth muttered grimly. "Of course, I'd much prefer one of those Zeros.

But we couldn't both ride in the same plane. Besides, they don't even carry enough gas to get us across the China Sea, to say nothing of up to Chungking."

"Not a chance in a Zero," Dawson grunted with a shake of his head. "And those Mitsubishi bombers over there are out, too. Take too long to get one of them off. So that brings up the important fact, pal."

"Only *one* important fact?" Freddy Farmer groaned.

"For the present, anyway," Dawson whispered with a grin. "In other words, with what we manage to steal from these little rats, we wouldn't be able to make Chungking non-stop. Our best bet, and the shortest hop possible, is to skip across the northern part of Indo-China, and reach Kunming."

"Suits me perfectly!" breathed Freddy Farmer, his eyes lighting up. "Kunming is H.Q. for those Flying Tiger chaps. We may spot a few of them on patrol to escort us in. Also, to send the Jap johnnies on their way. The ones chasing us, or ones we're bound to run into, I mean."

"Sure, easy as pie!" Dawson snorted. "When we meet Flying Tigers on patrol we simply yell at them that the Jap ship we're in doesn't mean a thing, huh? And they'll catch on, quick? Listen, pal, those Flying Tigers are hot stuff. They don't bother asking Jap pilots for their names and addresses. They just sail in guns blazing. And, bingo! Hirohito has a few less. See what I mean?"

"Well, what do *you* plan, then, Master Mind?" Freddy growled.

"Nothing," Dave came right back at him. "Once we're in the air, all we can do is hope that we can outfly the Japs chasing us. *And* that we don't bump into any of the Flying Tiger boys on the prowl. So I guess that baby over there is the one for our money. It's the closest, and those Jap mechanics wheeling that gas dollie away means that it's just been fueled up. What do you think?"

Freddy Farmer peered in the direction of Dawson's pointing finger and silently eyed the plane indicated on the near side of the triangular-shaped field. It was a Mitsubishi "Karigane" MK-Eleven two-place, low wing monoplane fighter. It was powered with an eight hundred horsepower radial engine of copied American design. And it was reputed to be one of the fastest, and longest ranged two-place planes in the Far Eastern theatre of war. And so Freddy had only to take a good look to be satisfied.

"We should just about make Kunming in it, with luck," he said to Dave. "However, there's the small detail of stealing her, you know. There's plenty of Nips standing around over there. And they all look armed to me."

"They are," Dawson grunted. "But this isn't any walking stick I've got in my hands, pal. Seriously, though, Freddy, I think we can *surprise* those bums out of that plane without much trouble. Look at how cocky they're acting, will you? Well, it's my guess a few well placed bursts from this machine gun could throw the place into a panic. You fast on your feet, kid?"

"Fast as you are if I have to be, I guess," Freddy replied gravely. "But just what do you plan to do? Rush them from here? It's sixty yards, if it's an inch."

"You think I'm that dumb?" Dawson growled, and shook his head vigorously. "No, not rush them from here. Get *them* to come rushing *over* here!"

"Eh, what's that?" the English youth gasped as his eyes popped and his jaw sagged.

He started to say more, but Dawson stopped him by pointing at the little path that turned sharp right and skirted that side of the airfield, just inside the jungle growth. It had obviously been used by soldiers on guard duty. In short, they had used it to reach their posts, instead of crossing the field in the face of planes landing or taking off. It could also be used during a bombing raid when it wasn't good sense to show oneself out on the open field.

"There's where we run, Freddy," Dawson said. "*After* I've blasted a few bursts *back* in the general direction of that Jap sentry we hauled down. My guess, or my hope, is that those over there on the edge of the field will come a-running, figuring his post has been attacked. Well, when they start cutting across the field we'll start down that path, but fast. The jungle growth will hide us, and we can get to a point right behind that two-seater before we'll have to break out into the open. And then—"

Dawson paused, and a tight, hard smile stretched his lips.

"Maybe even then we'll have to knock a few of them off," he said grimly. "But so what? That'll make just less Japs, that's all. Well, okay by you?"

Freddy Farmer shrugged, and gestured with his hands, palms upward.

"Why not?" he grunted. "It's just as insane and foolhardy as anything I could think up. Right you are, then. But let's get on with it. I don't fancy hanging around here any longer than I have to."

"You think I'm in love with the place?" Dawson snorted, and slipped the safety catch off the machine gun's trigger. "Okay, kid. On your mark! Here goes!"

Dawson's last whispered word hadn't even been swallowed up by the jungle silence before he had pointed the sub-machine gun back along the path in the direction of the dead Jap sentry, and pulled the trigger. Three, four silence-shattering bursts leaped out from the gun's muzzle, and a bit of the jungle growth in the line of fire promptly looked as if it had been whizzed through a fine meat grinder. But Dave didn't pause to admire the fire power effect on the jungle target. As the last bullet sped clear, he spun around and snapped a quick gaze out across the field. And for a crazy instant it was all he could do to stop from laughing out loud. Every blessed Jap on the field had frozen stiff, and some of them in the queerest, most unnatural positions.

However, they did not remain that way for long. A high-pitched sing-song voice hit the air, and it was as though many invisible strings had been jerked. The Japs snapped up straight, grabbed for their side arms, or caught up their rifles or machine guns, and came tearing across the field, screaming at the top of their hideous-sounding voices. But by the time the first of them had taken one step, Freddy and Dave had taken two steps along the hidden path. And they kept right on adding more and more driving power to their legs.

In almost less time than it takes to relate it they had covered those sixty odd yards of jungle path, and were directly behind the two-seater Mitsubishi MK-Eleven that they figured on "borrowing." Yes, directly behind it, but they still had some fifteen yards more of open ground before they could reach the plane's cockpit. Just the same they didn't hug the ground and waste time contemplating that final dash across open ground. They simply waited long enough for Dave to sprint in front with the sub-machine gun, and then off they went on the final lap.

Final lap? It was only fifteen yards to that MK-Eleven. Four good running broad jumps would cover the distance easily. But to Dave those fifteen yards seemed more like fifteen hundred. As he had half expected, and half feared, not all the Japs in that corner of the field had gone tearing over to investigate the mystery of the firing machine gun. A half dozen or so of them, all mechanics, had remained where they were. And it so happened that their sharp eyes caught sight of Dawson the very instant he broke out into the open. Blood-curdling screams of rage smote the air, and were instantly punctuated by rifle fire. But also in the same instant Dawson had dropped to one knee and was sweeping his bullet-spitting machine gun to left and right.

A couple of the Japs instantly went flat to the ground, and right out of the war and the world forever. And the others spun around and leaped for the protection of a nearby bomber's fuselage. That was okay by Dawson. It was just what he wanted. He slammed a short burst under the bomber's belly, and yelled to Freddy.

"Jump for it, Freddy!" he cried. "Into the rear cockpit, and be ready to catch this gun and cover me as I pile in. Get going!"

The last two words were quite unnecessary. Freddy Farmer wasn't taking precious split seconds out to do any arguing this time. As a matter of fact, he had already leaped past Dave as the Yank ace shouted the order. And in another couple of leaps he had reached the side of the MK-Eleven and was virtually throwing himself into the rear cockpit. Dawson saw Freddy make it out the corner of his eye, and slapped one more burst to kick up dust under the bomber's belly. Then he sprang to his feet, and dived for the MK-Eleven himself. As he reached its side he threw the sub-machine gun straight at Freddy. The English youth caught it in his hands, and was pumping bullets over at the bomber, behind which the Japs were attempting to hide and fire, in the single bat of an eyelid.

In what was practically a continuation of a wild leap into the pilot's cockpit of that Jap MK-Eleven, Dawson whipped out one hand to knock up the ignition switches, and stabbed the other thumb on the starter button, and kicked off the wheel brakes with his foot. As the Jap-copied American aircraft engine caught on the first time over, and roared up in a full throated song of power, he blessed the odd simplicity of Jap instrument panels and engine gadgets. There were not more than six or seven of them, and though they were printed in Jap sign writing, it was easy enough to guess their uses and functions. And so as the MK-Eleven quivered and trembled for a brief instant and then went rocketing out across the field like a comet gone haywire, he did not jab or pull one wrong thing and put an end to their little bit of war thievery right then and there.

On the contrary, he was able to nurse the last ounce of maximum power from the roaring engine, and Jap-fired bullets had hardly begun to twang and whine past his ears before he had the wheels clear and was hauling the speedy little craft straight up toward the sun-flooded Philippine sky. And he kept it going right on upward until he had more than enough altitude under him. Then he whipped over and around onto even keel with the nose pointed diagonally across the northern reaches of the Philippines toward the South China Sea beyond.

Then he turned around and grinned happily at Freddy Farmer.

"Just like robbing the cradle, hey, pal?" he bellowed.

The English youth made a wry face and flung a pointing hand toward the south.

"Not quite over yet, old thing!" he shouted back. "Here come some of the blighters, for a starter. Too bad we didn't also steal their blasted radio station!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Aces Think Fast

As Dawson swung his head around the other way and stared to the south, he saw the swarm of Jap wings prop-clawing along on a line intended to cut him off from in front. A second glance, however, told him that his stolen MK-Eleven held a slight edge. Told him, also, that his path and the flight path of those other Jap planes would cross at a point several miles out over the South China Sea.

"But those bums are going to cross our path *behind* us, if I've got anything to say about it!" he told himself grimly. "I've got enough worries about whether this crate will make Kunming,

without having those bums give me grey hairs!"

With a savage nod for emphasis, he shot another look toward the Jap planes boiling up from the south, twisted around to give Freddy Farmer a reassuring grin, and then turned front and concentrated every effort on getting every ounce of speed out of the MK-Eleven. Some fifteen minutes later, when he took another look at the Jap planes, a tight grin stretched his lips, and he gave a little nod of approval. He had managed to gain on them considerably, and it looked now as if the little brown men of Nippon were just wasting gas and oil. And in addition to that helpful fact, cloud banks were beginning to form in the heavens ahead. Just let him reach them, and the whole darn Jap air force could try to hunt him out, if it wanted to.

"And so that is just what we'll do!" he murmured softly to himself. "We'll beat those little tramps to the clouds, and—"

A sharp rap of Freddy Farmer's fist on his shoulder cut the rest off short. He jerked his head around and started to bark the obvious question, but the English youth was already talking, and pointing.

"I fancy the Japs back on Legaspi have been using their blasted radio some *more*, Dave!" Freddy shouted. "Look up there to the north! More of the blighters. Guess they must come from Jap air bases on Hainan Island. Up to you, old thing. Can we still make those clouds?"

Dawson didn't answer at once because at that moment he had impulsively glanced to the south-west. And there in the distant sky he picked out more Jap planes racing up to join the other two enemy forces. He studied them for a moment longer, and then turned front, eyes hard and lips pressed into a thin grim line.

"We not only can," he grated presently, "but we're *going* to, if this thing'll just hold together. They figure to pull the old three-way squeeze on us, but the bums have got another think coming. Hang onto your hat, Freddy! This air buggy is going to go places, but fast!"

And then began a sky race against overwhelming odds. With the heel of one palm jammed hard against the already wide open throttle, Dawson hunched forward and kept his eyes glued on the clouds ahead. To reach them he had to sacrifice precious speed by gaining altitude. But there wasn't anything else he could do about it. To out-race the Japs cutting down from the north was just plain out of the question. If they didn't pile down into him eventually, the Japs coming up from the south-west would. So his only hope lay in reaching the safety of the clouds ahead, in gaining altitude, and slicing into those clouds before any of the enemy planes could get within range.

It was nip and tuck every foot of the way. And when the most optimistic of the Jap pilots opened up with long range fire, every crack of their guns was like a tiny little knife of frozen ice jabbing into Dawson's heart. Not once, though, did he take time out to glance at the diminishing distance between the planes. He kept every bit of his attention riveted on his own aircraft. When the Japs got too close, the yammer of Freddy Farmer's rear guns would tell him that it was time to forget the race, and concentrate on fighting for their lives.

However, Freddy Farmer's rear guns did not speak once as Dawson sent the MK-Eleven ripping through the air high above the South China Sea. And then, when it seemed that at least ten years of his life had come and gone, the plane reached the first of the clouds and went prop-clawing into them, and out of sight.

"Cheers for you, old thing!" Freddy Farmer cried as the fleecy whiteness closed in all about them. "We made it, for fair!"

"But only just!" Dawson called back to him. "And don't thank me. Thank this Nip sky wagon. Okay, start navigating, pal. We stick right to our original course. Ten to one they'll think we'll try to fool them by doubling back. Kunming! Here we come!"

As Dave yelled the last there was a smile on his lips, and the warmth of great happiness in his heart. The end of their journey halfway around the world was almost in sight now. All that was left was the small matter of sitting down at Kunming without getting shot down for a surprise raiding Jap plane, gassing up there, and racing on to Chungking. At Kunming he'd have word flashed ahead that they'd be arriving in a Jap plane. Or perhaps it would be better to borrow a Flying Tiger ship at Kunming and not run the risk of being taken for a Jap. However, that was a minor point. Just one more landing, and then Chungking next stop!

"And it won't make me mad to get a little rest from barging about the sky!" he grunted with a nod. "Yeah! It will be all to the merry to feel how it is to walk on the ground for a spell, and not crawl on hands and knees, or wiggle around like some darn snake. Nope, I won't mind it a bit."

And with those and other very pleasant thoughts rippling through his brain, he sent the MK-Eleven charging dead ahead on course through the clouds. Every so often they came to a hole in the stuff, and they could look down through and see patches of Japanese-occupied Indo-China. And on a couple of those occasions Freddy Farmer was able to accurately determine their position from land marks below. And each time it was proved that they were right smack on course.

Two, three, four hours dragged by, and then suddenly the Mitsubishi MK-Eleven ripped out into clear blue air just as suddenly as it had gone ripping into the clouds. The instant they were out in the clear both Dawson and Freddy Farmer made a swift study of the rugged and most uninviting terrain below. However, its ugliness did not beat down the great satisfaction that swelled up in them. They were dead on course still. Some fifty miles ahead was the China border, and about as

many miles to the left was the point where the borders of China, Indo-China, and Burma met. A little under an hour, now, and Kunming would be under their wings.

Yes, it was a very wonderful and soul-satisfying realization, but it lasted just about long enough for them to stop looking at the terrain below and make a searching sweep with their eyes of the surrounding sky. It was then that the gods of war screamed with laughter and the heart-stopping truth was revealed. In short, there was a swarm of Jap planes to their right, another one to their left, and a third one directly behind. True, all of the enemy aircraft were well out of range, but it took only a flash study of their angle of approach to realize that the enemy pilots would reach the China border long before they did. Reach it and form a winged barrier of flame and death-spitting aerial machine guns and cannon.

"Blast them!" Freddy Farmer's voice thundered in Dawson's ears. "Go right through the blighters, Dave! We've got to. It's the only thing we can do. Blast through them, Dave, and I'll keep the beggars at a distance!"

Dawson heard the words, but he paid little attention to them. He was studying the Jap planes closing in from three sides, and with heavy heart he realized that these planes were new. That is, they were not the ones that had taken up the chase originally. And that fact confirmed what he already believed to be the truth. The Jap forces in the Far Eastern theatre of war had practically gone nuts with the radio, and summoned every Jap plane over an area of thousands of square miles to hunt down the thieves of a single Jap MK-Eleven. But its meaning held more than just that for Dawson. It seemed almost insane to credit it as truth, but facts pointed to the obvious: that the Japs here, halfway around the world from London, knew who Freddy and he were, knew the object of their mission, and knew where they were headed. Yes, it seemed incredible and utterly fantastic. But hadn't that little adventure with one *Herr* Miller in the middle of the North Atlantic seemed equally so? And that close brush with death when they had been ambushed on the way to Hickam Field with General Stickney? It just went to prove for the umpty-umph millionth time that anything can happen in war. And that the smart soldier should expect it, and be ready.

Perhaps it took all of three seconds for those and other thoughts to whip through Dawson's brain. And then in the fourth second he saw something that made a decision for him. That "something" was a small group of dots at a point in the air right smack over the Burma border. They were several miles away, but Dawson's eyes were sharp enough to pick them out for what they truly were, and an unconscious shout of joy spilled from his lips.

"Lifesavers, Freddy!" he howled back at the English youth. "Over there! See? That's a patrol of Flying Tigers! Those are shark's head-painted Curtiss P-Forties, or I'll eat my shirt. Take a deep breath, Freddy! Everything is going to be okay!"

"Yes, I see them!" the English youth shouted back. "But *they* don't know who *we* are, you know. Head for them and they'll blow us to bits before we can even flash them a sign. Good grief! What are you doing now?"

The last was because Dawson had deliberately hurtled the MK-Eleven around toward the south and was tearing full out straight for the nearest of the Jap planes roaring up from that direction.

"Our best bet!" he yelled at Freddy. "Get set with those rear guns. We'll give those Flying Tiger boys a sign that'll leave no doubts that we're not Japs. We smack one of them down, Freddy. Make it two. That'll tell the Flying Tiger boys as plain as writing them a letter. Okay, pal! Make it perfect as I tear in and out. Here we go!"

To any unsuspecting observer, that lone MK-Eleven racing straight toward a swarm of Jap Zeros must have looked like a sheer suicide maneuver. At least, it must have looked that way to the Zero pilots who knew who was in that MK-Eleven. At any rate, the suddenness of the mad attack threw the slow thinking Japs off balance for a few split seconds. And for two sky warriors such as Dave Dawson and Freddy Farmer a few split seconds is sometimes as good as a whole lifetime. And that was so in this particular case.

While the brains of those slant-eyed sons of the Rising Sun groped for the true meaning of this unexpected maneuver, Dawson cut the MK-Eleven in at the leader at rocket speed. In the last second allowed he feinted as though to bank around and retreat. And that little act was curtains for the already befuddled brain in the leading Zero's cockpit. Its pilot started to pull over, but Dawson cut right back in again and jabbed the trigger button on his stick. The savage bursts from his guns caught the Zero broadside, and the Jap probably never even knew that he was dying for his so-called Heaven-born Emperor. At least he didn't know it until he was dead, and was falling earthward in a ball of raging flame.

Nor did a second Jap Zero pilot who happened to "get in the way" of Freddy Farmer's rear guns. The only difference was that he didn't go earthward in a ball of flame. Freddy's first burst caught his fuel tank. There was a sheet of mounting flame, and great belching gobs of black-smudged white smoke. And then there was just a shower of pieces going downward.

The time it took for all that to happen was perhaps no longer than the time it would take you to blink one eye. In fact, almost before both planes started down out of the war, Dawson had sheered off at lightning bolt speed, leaving the rest of the Japs still brain-groping and automatically fanning their guns at thin air. As a matter of fact, practically all of them had unconsciously swerved off in the opposite direction, and so when Dawson finally straightened out they were no longer to the south of him. They were behind, and well out of range. And six Curtiss P-Forties with their shark-painted noses were less than a mile dead ahead.

"Start waving, just to make sure, Freddy!" Dawson roared, as he booted the MK-Eleven toward those gallant American eagles who had come thousands of miles to fight and to die for China's great and worthy cause. "Stand up, and start waving. They might think it was just some dizzy Jap trick."

"Not a chance, I fancy!" the English-born air ace shouted back. "Those Jap yellow beggars have seen *them*! Take a look for yourself!"

Dawson gulped, "Huh?" as he jerked around in the seat. But that's all he said, because in the next second he was bursting with laughter. He was, for the very funny fact that every Jap-flown plane in the surrounding skies had about-faced and was making tracks for any place that would be far away from those dead-aim pilots who flew those terror ships of the Chinese Air Force. At least a hundred Jap pilots were streaking for safety from six hard-eyed, steel trigger-fingered knights of the air. Just one more proof that though Jap pilots fly in bunches, they know they will die the same way if they make the mistake of getting too close to the guns of the Flying Tigers!

"Boy, oh boy! Look at them scoot, will you!" Dawson chuckled. "Praise be to Allah for the Flying Tigers. It's just about all over but the shouting, Freddy. Better start brushing up on your Chinese, pal, if you know any!"

The English-born air ace laughed at that remark. But so did the gods of war up in their unseen high places. Not, however, for the same reason. They laughed because they knew that Death was only taking a breathing spell; that Death would return again, and soon, to claim its victims!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Warriors' Duty

With a grin on his lips, and a happy song in his heart, Dawson rocketed the Jap MK-Eleven across the sky toward the six P-Forties. And Freddy Farmer half stood up in the rear cockpit and waved a wild greeting to the Flying Tigers. The pilot of the lead plane waggled his wings in reply, and then he and his five buddies swept by the MK-Eleven and came about fast to take up escort positions. Dawson glanced over at the leader and grinned broadly. The Flying Tiger returned the grin, and then made signs with his hands to inquire how much gas Dawson had left in his tanks. The Yank air ace took a quick look at the gauge and gulped. True, he had some gas left, but not nearly enough to get him to Kunming. In fact, he had only fifteen minutes or so of flying time left. Unless there was a field within fifteen minutes range, he and Freddy were still going to have trouble on their hands.

Turning his head toward the Flying Tiger in the leading P-Forty, he lifted up his free hand and opened it and closed it three times. The Flying Tiger nodded acknowledgment, gave Dawson a reassuring wave with his hand and then pointed ahead and to the north. And just twelve minutes later the pilot waggled his wings once more, dropped the shark's-head nose of his plane, and went sliding downward. Dawson took a look downward and swallowed hard. As far as he could see there wasn't the sign of a field below. There was nothing but lush green jungle and cliff and crag-studded hills and mountains. He knew they were over the Burmese border, but at just what point he could only guess.

"I hope that guy isn't kidding!" he grunted absently. "You could break your neck without any trouble landing in that stuff down there. Oh, well. Here's hoping, anyway."

There was no need for Dawson to be worried, however. A little under a minute later, the leading P-Forty eased off the angle of its glide, and slid around the corner of a hill range and settled down onto a small, level field, that looked like anything else but from the air. The other five Flying Tigers went down in rapid succession to show Dawson where he should land. And then, just as the Jap M-Eleven's engine was sputtering out the last of its song of power, Dawson whipped off the ignition switch, and coasted down the rest of the way.

No sooner had he touched ground than a couple of Flying Tiger mechanics rushed out and waved him over to the side of the field where heavy tropical growth grew like a solid green wall. They grabbed his wing tips, and helped him wheel-brake the plane in under the edge of the stuff. And when Freddy and he finally legged down onto the sun-baked ground, there wasn't a single plane left out in the open for prowling Jap eyes to spot from above.

"Wonder what this place is?" Dawson grunted, as he and Freddy watched a dozen or so youths in American Volunteer Group uniforms come running over to them.

"I think it's near Menglien, in Burma," the English youth replied. "Between the Indo-China border and the Salween River. But what does it matter? We're in very safe hands, and praise the good Lord for that!"

"Check, and double check!" Dawson echoed the statement. "Now, just one more hop, and this crazy messenger boy job will be all over."

Freddy Farmer started to comment on that but checked himself as the group of Flying Tigers arrived. They were all American boys, and a warm, satisfying feeling flooded through Dawson. One of them, a tall, dark-haired man with a major's insignia on his shoulder straps, flipped a hand up in friendly salute and acted as spokesman.

"Welcome to Burma, Captains Dawson and Farmer!" he said. "How's one of those Jap crates fly? And did you really swipe it in the Philippines? Oh, yeah. I'm Major Brown, Fifth Group Commander. I'll introduce you to the boys later. But welcome, anyway."

"Thanks, Major," Dawson said with a faint frown. "How come you know who we are, and that we swiped this MK-Eleven in the Philippines? We didn't think anybody knew it, except maybe some Japs."

"That's just the point," the major replied with a chuckle. "Some Japs *did* know it, and now the whole world knows it, maybe. At least, if they've been tuned in on the Jap radio in this neck of the world. Darned near the whole Jap Air Force has been looking for you for hours. I guess some of them must have got close, eh, to force you this far south. According to the Jap radio, you two were supposed to be headed for Chungking."

For a couple of seconds neither Dawson nor Freddy Farmer could say a word. Their feet, figuratively speaking, had been knocked right out from under them. The fact that their supposedly secret journey to Chungking had been publicized just about as much as Santa Claus' yearly trip on Christmas Eve left them speechless, and gaping at the Flying Tiger C.O.

"Jap radio, sir?" Freddy Farmer finally found his voice. "You mean, the Japs have been broadcasting this thing?"

"Well, mainly for Jap Air Force consumption, I guess," the major replied. "But anybody who tuned in, and understood Jap, could have got the story. Part of it, anyway. We've got a radio here, of course, and one of the boys understands Jap. So we learned that Captains Dawson and Farmer are wanted plenty bad by the Japs. It seems they are believed to have stolen a plane near Legaspi, in the Philippines, and are undoubtedly headed for Chungking. All available Jap pilots were ordered into the air from Hong-kong to the Burma border to find these two wanted lads, and force them down and take them prisoner. *Force* them down, not shoot them down. Maybe you know why. I don't. Anyway, we were out on patrol when our ground station relayed to us that the Japs had sighted you, and where. Seemed as if you might get into trouble, so we busted out a ways to help if we could."

"And how you did, Major, how you did!" Dawson exclaimed. "And thanks from the bottom of our hearts. Yes, we do know why the Japs want us alive. We—well, we've got an important date in Chungking. I can tell you that much, anyway. But it sure is a shock to learn that the Japs over here knew all about us. We'd been thinking we were pretty slick to have given them the run-around."

The Flying Tiger C.O. grinned and shrugged.

"Things like that happen, and often," he grunted. "It sure does beat all how secrets get around in this darn war. But they sure do. And from my experiences with the Japs I've learned that Hitler's trick Gestapo hasn't got a thing on the little brown slant eyes when it comes to espionage and stuff. But here, here! You two must be about dead on your feet. We can compare notes later. You'll be wanting food, and rest. Or—or are you really in a hurry to get to Chungking?"

"Frankly, we are, sir," Dawson told him. "We began this trip from London four nights ago, and—well, there's just one more hop to make, and we'd sure like to get it over with, if you get what I mean? So we were wondering if you could spare us gas for this MK-Eleven to get us to Chungking?"

Major Brown scowled and shot a worried look up toward the clear blue sky.

"We've plenty of gas," he said presently. "It isn't a case of that. But this MK is a marked ship, Dawson, and there are flocks of Japs on patrol between here and Chungking. You'd never make it unless some of us went along as escort. And—"

"Well, could we borrow a couple of your P-Forties, sir?" Freddy Farmer interrupted politely. "Then the Jap beggars probably wouldn't suspect. And we'd bring them right back. Not necessary for us to remain in Chungking for any great length of time, you know."

The Flying Tiger C.O. sighed heavily, and looked very sad. He gestured toward twelve Curtiss P-Forties well dispersed about the edges of the small field.

"Those are all the ships we have," he said. "And just enough pilots to fly them. At any other time, I'd say take a couple and luck to you. At any other time, too, I'd radio Kunming for permission to have us all escort you up there, and you could fly the MK. But both of those things are out now. Maybe this mission of yours is plenty important, but—"

The senior officer paused and shrugged again.

"But we've got an important mission coming up 'most any minute, too," he continued presently. "A matter of some twenty thousand Chinese soldiers caught in a trap, and about to be slaughtered by the Japs. Sometime today every A.V.G. unit within reach is going to try and fix it so's those Chinese soldiers can get out of the trap. If they don't make it today, they're sunk—every one of them!"

"Good gosh!" Freddy Farmer breathed. "Twenty *thousand*, you say, sir?"

"And maybe more!" the other said grimly. "Northwest of here, about sixty miles. At a bend in the Salween River. The Chinese are on one side, and a much larger Jap force on the other. A surprise move that caught the poor devil Chinese cold. The river is shallow there, but right behind the Chinese is a five hundred foot cliff. They came down it by small road and foot path. Just infantry units, with no artillery support at all. Meantime, the Japs had closed in on the other side of the

river, *with* plenty of artillery. So the Chinese are caught both ways. If they try to retreat up the cliff roads the Japs can pick them off like flies. And if they try to cross the river and get at the Japs with their machine guns and rifles, the Jap artillery can drown them like rats—by the thousands. We *hope* to ground-straft and light bomb the Japs so much they won't have time to let the Chinese have anything before the Chinese have been able to force the river crossing and can come to close grips with them. If we don't do that today, Chiang Kai-shek's boys are lost. The Jap artillery will have all been moved into position by nightfall. So you see—"

Major Brown gestured, and left the rest hanging in mid-air. Both Dawson and Freddy Farmer nodded, and showed their understanding and sympathy with their eyes.

"Well, in that case, sir—" he began, and stopped.

He stopped because at that moment three things happened all at the same time. First, an A.V.G. orderly came pounding up on the dead run.

"Word's just been flashed, Major!" he panted. "Group take off and proceed as ordered!"

The second thing that happened was the ungodly wail of the air raid siren mounted atop a small shack on the far side of the field. And the third thing that happened was the sudden, lightning-like appearance of a lone Jap Zero wing screaming around the corner of the hill range, and straight down toward the field.

Dawson had hardly spotted it before he saw the jetting streams of orange-yellow coming out from the leading edges of its wing. It swept down low until its belly was almost touching the field, and it came straight for the group near the MK-Eleven. Dawson heard Major Brown roar out for everybody to duck for cover, but the order was quite unnecessary. Everybody had done just that, and as Dawson tried to bury his own body deep in the sun-baked ground, his ears were filled with the savage snarl of the Zero's gunfire. It was as though the plane were sitting right on top of his head, and its guns pumping bullets straight into his brain. And mingled in with the chattering roar was the sound of fire from ground guns posted about the field. Then suddenly there was silence, to be shattered almost immediately by a terrific explosion just overhead.

Impulsively Dawson twisted over and stared up to see what was left of the Jap Zero about six or seven hundred feet up in the air. Ground gunners had obviously caught it cold, and its gas tank had blown it into all those flaming splinters that were now arcing out far and wide. Its dead pilot, however, had seemingly fulfilled his suicide mission. As Dawson twisted over he saw that the MK-Eleven was on fire and blazing fiercely. That fact snapped him out of his trance and brought him leaping up onto his feet with a cry of alarm struggling up his throat.

It was then, though, that he realized there was no gas in the MK-Eleven for those raging flames to explode. And it was then, also, that he saw the terrible look on Major Brown's face. Wild, seething rage, and bitter, heart-crushing agony flamed on the senior officer's face. Dawson leaped over to him and grabbed his arm.

"You hit, sir?" he shouted. "Where? Take it easy, and—"

"I'm okay!" the other snapped. "But Stevens, and Gregg. They caught one. They can't go. That leaves only ten of us to do a big job. I wonder if—"

"Ten nothing!" Dawson roared as he saw the two wounded Flying Tigers stretched out on the ground. "You've *still* got twelve. What do you think Farmer and I do for a living? Drive tanks?"

"But, but Chungking!" Major Brown sputtered. "I can't ask you two to—"

"And you can't stop us, either!" Dawson cut him off. "Chungking? Listen! Twenty thousand trapped Chinese soldiers are worth making Chungking wait! Heck! You think Freddy and I would sit here and cool our heels while all those Chinese lads are trapped? And by dirt rotten Japs? Nuts! What two planes, Major? Point them out, and let's go!"

"Over there, numbers six and ten!" the Flying Tiger leader cried. "And good—!"

"Same to you!" Dawson snapped and started running. "Come on, Freddy. Shift it! We've got some *real* flying to do for a change!"

Not over two minutes later twelve shark head-painted Curtiss P-Forties went roaring up off the surface of that field, slid in close in formation, and went cutting around and up toward the northwest. Flying at number three on the right, Dawson turned his head and grinned over at Freddy Farmer flying the same formation position on the left. The English youth seemed to feel his look, for he turned his head and returned the grin. They both nodded silently and immediately returned their attention to the business of flying.

"Tough on those two lads hit!" Dawson breathed to himself as the formation went ripping along over the uninviting terrain of North Burma. "But what a break for Freddy and me. Once again going into action with the Flying Tigers. Hot dog! And here's hoping that this time things will turn out even better than that other time, which was plenty, what I mean!"^[3]

With a grim nod for emphasis, Dawson twisted the little button on the stick to "Fire" position, and made sure that everything was set to release the cluster of twenty small strafing bombs fitted to the under side of the wings. Everything was in order now, and all that was left was the passing of time, and the arrival at the objective.

And that arrival seemed to become a fact almost before Dawson could blink his eyes and take a deep breath. As though by magic, three more Flying Tiger Groups materialized in the Burma sky. And just ahead at a hair pin bend in the muddy Salween River, the ground on both sides was

beginning to belch up flame and smoke. But most of the flame and smoke came from the north side of the bend, from the heavily fortified Japanese positions. And it seemed to be no more than a couple of split seconds later that Dawson was wing-screaming his Curtiss P-Forty practically down at the vertical.

In his earphones he heard Major Brown bark orders for two of the Flying Tigers to stay top-side to ride herd and watch out for Jap planes. But he didn't turn his head to take a look at the two who were to remain aloft. He kept his eyes fixed on the picture below, and his blood boiled with anger. Trapped was right! And how! It was like a small edition of the beach at Dunkirk, during the British evacuation of France back in 1940. Thousands and thousands of brave Chinese troops were huddled in the shore growth with the suicide cliff at their backs. And across the river's bend in the low hill, thousands and thousands of little slant-eyed rats of Nippon were hurling death and destruction into the midst of those Chinese. The foothills seemed to explode shell fire every three or four feet in any direction. And trailing backward along the narrow roads were columns of supply trains moving upward with more horror and more death for those helpless Chinese.

All that and more Dawson saw and absorbed with his eyes as he went roaring downward. And then he was within range of the Jap forces, and all thoughts of everything fled from his brain. That is, all thoughts of everything save the constant thought of hammering those hordes of slant-eyed rats into the ground as long as he and his plane and his guns could hold out. Here was a chance to pay back for some of the things he had seen and had suffered himself. Here was a chance to fight for a gallant nation; a nation that had held its own against the Tokyo vermin for so many years. Chungking? Sure! Freddy and he would get to Chungking presently. Right now, though, the lives of twenty thousand Chinese soldiers hung in the balance. The lives of twenty thousand Chinese soldiers, and some thirty odd shark-painted Curtiss P-Forties overhead to do something about it!

"Don't worry, pals, we'll blast them out for you! We'll blast the rotten bums out even if we have to come down and do it with our bare fists! And how, pals! And how!"

Silly, crazy words? Certainly! But Dave Dawson's brain was afire with the excitement of battle. And besides, words shouted and screamed aloud are simply a warrior's escape valve in the heat of conflict. Sure! Crazy, silly, inane words! But there was nothing crazy or silly about Dawson's guns, or the light strafing bombs fitted under his wings. Nor was there anything silly about the way he and the others tore right down until their props were practically flipping off the helmets of the Jap troops. And nothing silly about the way they blasted ammunition truck after ammunition truck on the roads, and knocked scores and scores of the little brown devils out of the world at practically every tick of their wrist-watches.

Before those Flying Tiger P-Forties had arrived, the Japs had been turning the opposite bank of the river bend into a smoking, blazing graveyard. But now it was all very different. The graveyard had been moved to the other side of the Salween's bend, and the Japs were getting the savage, relentless back-fire of something they had started.

"So? Think so? Well, think again, but good!"

The words automatically burst from Dawson's lips as he caught sight of two heavily loaded ammunition trucks rocking down one of the roads straight for the river's bend. Chinese troops relieved from the terrific pounding of Jap fire were starting to swarm across the shallow river and get at close quarters with the enemy. Some Jap officer had spotted them, though. Or perhaps it was just a suicidal idea of the drivers of those two ammunition trucks. At any rate, the two trucks were hurtling down to the river's bank to plow into the water among those swarms of Chinese troops, and blow them all to bloody pieces.

That was the mad Jap suicide idea. But two steel-eyed eagles spotted what was taking place. Two steel-eyed eagles who had been feasting on juicy roast beef in London just four nights before. And down they streaked like two man-made birds of vengeance straight for those two trucks hurtling toward the river's edge. And when he was little more than a few feet over the leading truck, Dawson dumped the last of his light strafing bombs, and instantly nosed upward for altitude. On that load of exploding death he could practically have dropped a lighted match!

Hardly had his P-Forty started to prop-scream for the sky before the whole of Burma below him exploded in a world-shattering thunder of sound. He had purposely dropped down low so that he would be sure not to miss his target. And so his zooming plane was caught by a thousand invisible hands, spun around like a top and flung high and far across the sky. Instinctively he tried to battle the helpless plane, but he might just as well have tried to jump out into thin air and hold it back with his two hands.

Earth, sky, fire, smoke, and sections of airplane spun around in a mad race before his eyes. He saw the Jap hordes retreating from their positions in mad, frenzied flight. He saw wave after wave of Chinese soldiers swarming across the river and lighting out after the heels of the fleeing Japs. He saw a section of his left wing let go, and go sailing off into space. He even saw Freddy Farmer's P-Forty come tumbling down past him. And a split second later his own plane broke in two right at the cockpit, and popped him out into thin air as a pea pops out of a pod.

In a dazed, abstract sort of way he knew that he was falling through space. He knew also that his right hand clutched the rip-cord ring of his parachute. He thought, but he wasn't sure, that he had yanked the ring, and that the lifesaving white parachute silk was billowing upward. He had just a vague idea that the parachute had mushroomed out, and that his fall had been checked. However, there was no time to get control of his neck muscles and twist his head around and up to look. There wasn't time because at that instant jet black night sky seemed to drop straight

down on him—and he knew no more!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Lightning Wings

The music was soft and soothing; like no other music ever heard on earth before. And all about was beauty far beyond the reach of words, or the brush of an artist. Everything was so wonderful, so perfect, and so—

But into Dawson's throbbing, pounding head slipped a tiny inkling of the stark naked truth. There was no soft, soothing music. And there was no breathtaking beauty. In fact, nothing was wonderful, or even approaching perfection. All was Death! Horrible, lingering, painful death that comes to a man lost and unarmed in the steaming lush jungle of northern Burma.

Yes, it was just his brain, and all of his senses playing him tricks originated by the Devil. Tricks to make him let go, and just relax peacefully—and die! But he wouldn't let go. And he wouldn't die. He couldn't! There was too much to—

The roaring whine of aircraft engines pulled his head up out of the jungle mud and slime. He rolled half over on his back, gritted his teeth against the pain that movement caused, and peered up through the canopy of jungle growth at four Jap Zeros cutting across the blue-white sky toward the north. For a moment or so he blinked up at them stupidly. And then, like flood waters storming over a broken dam, memory came rushing back.

"Freddy!" he gasped, and pushed himself painfully up onto his feet. "Freddy! I saw him bail out! Or did he?"

The thought seemed to catch hold of his brain and twist it savagely. White hot fire shot across the backs of his eyeballs, and the mass of lush green jungle all about began to swim around and become as so much churned up pea soup. He grabbed hold of a hanging vine for support, closed his eyes tight and fought grimly to drive back the wave of black oblivion that tried to engulf him. After a few moments his brain cleared a little, and his thumping heart eased off considerably.

"Easy does it, pal!" he told himself, tight-lipped. "Don't go off half-cocked. It'll just get you that much more trouble."

The sound of his own voice seemed to soothe his jangled nerves. He nodded, and slowly looked about him.

"One thing at a time is the way," he went on talking to himself. "First, get out of this spot. Pick some high ground, and head for it. You can't be so very far away from the Salween. Pick a hill and maybe you'll spot the river. But take it easy, and don't break a leg getting there. You—"

A thought suddenly cut into his head and froze his brain solid. And for a long minute he just stood there hanging onto the vine as he mentally died a thousand times over. Then, with an almost superhuman effort, he reached his right hand inside his tunic. When his fingers touched the stiff paper of the sealed envelope, tears of utter, inexpressible relief sprang to his eyes, and a great big lump clogged up his throat. Praise be to God! The sealed envelope for Chiang Kai-shek was still safe! But for a moment—

He shook his head, refusing to finish the horrible thought. It did little good, however, to brush that unfinished thought from his brain. Another one popped right in that was equally heart-stopping. The thought, the realization that he was completely lost in the North Burma jungle with no telling what was lurking in wait for him. If he didn't get out and complete his trip to Chungking, it would be just the same as though Freddy and he had been killed in that German U-boat, or by that Jap near Pearl Harbor, or by the little brown rats at Legaspi. Yes, to fail now would be just as bad as failing right at the very start. And he might—

"Cut it, cut it!" he rasped savagely at himself. "Words won't help a darn bit. Action is what's needed! Snap out of it, you sniveling punk. Get going! Stop crying for your Mama! Get going!"

The commands from his tongue put his muscles into action. He took a quick glance at the position of the sun, and then headed north, and slightly to the east. He had a hunch that the Salween River lay in that direction, and until he was proved wrong the only thing he could do was to play hunches.

An hour later, though, the soul-crushing torment that comes to men lost in the jungle was closing in on him from all sides like an invisible army of demons. With every step he had practically walked hand and hand with Death. Every step? His travel through the thick jungle growth could hardly be called steps. It was more falling forward, scrambling forward, lurching, twisting, and virtually clawing and tearing his way through the hanging vines. Hard ground would be beneath his feet at one moment, and in the next he would be up to his knees in muck and mire. Clouds of insects attacked him every inch of the way, and there was the constant danger of the needle fangs of deadly snakes. He spotted at least a dozen of them in the nick of time. But as the year long minutes dragged on and on, he ceased to care about what might be in his path. And there was so much pain in all parts of his body that he would have been unable to feel any new pain from the fangs of a striking snake, or any other jungle animal.

And then, when his brain as well as his body was hovering on the verge of a complete breakdown,

he stumbled out onto open ground. But for a moment or two his befuddled brain was unable to grasp that truth, and he continued lurching and reeling forward until his foot tripped over a stone, and he fell flat on his face. It was the sharp, jarring pain of meeting hard ground that shook the red cobwebs from his brain, and pulled away the grey-green curtains from in front of his eyes. Yet even then the brain was not quite ready to function as it should, and he stared blankly up the bare slope of a hill without realizing what it was.

Eventually, though, it registered on his brain. And he also took note of the fact that a thin column of oily black smoke was mounting high into the still air from around the left side of the hill. A little door in his brain seemed to open up and tell him that that smoke must be from a burning plane. His plane, or Freddy Farmer's? He didn't know. The thin column of smoke was simply a welcoming beacon. Something tangible between a lost man and a world he had once known. He only knew that tears were streaming down his cheeks, that gagging sobs filled his throat, and that a pair of legs that had been on the point of quitting completely a moment or two before were carrying him at full speed around the base of the hill.

The gleefully jeering gods of war refused to let him alone, however. As he skirted the base of the hill, jungle growth leaped up in front of him to block off what was at the ground end of that mounting column of smoke. It forced him high and higher up the hill, and made him travel a good two miles toward a spot that was actually a short six hundred yards from his starting point. But eventually he reached a spot where the heavy growth ceased abruptly, and he found himself staring down the hill at the burning wreckage of a plane on the edge of a fair-sized plot of barren level ground. It was as though Nature had taken a pair of shears, started some three hundred yards back in the jungle, and cut a perfect swath through the jungle and right up the side of the hill.

Yes, that's what it looked like, but Dawson didn't tarry one fleeting instant to observe and marvel. He didn't for the simple reason that he saw the figure of Freddy Farmer standing a little off from the burning wreckage. Freddy Farmer spotted him at almost the same instant, and started jumping up and down, waving his arms wildly, and shouting like a maniac. But Dawson didn't wave or shout back in reply. He didn't wave because he was using his arms to pump his body down the hill. And he didn't shout because the air he sucked into his lungs was needed to keep his piston rod legs going at full speed.

As a matter of fact, when he finally reached Freddy Farmer and practically fell into the English youth's arms, there wasn't the air in his lungs to permit him to say anything. Nor could Freddy speak, either. The emotions of both of them had hit an all-time high, and they could only cling to each other and struggle for control and sanity.

"Freddy, Freddy, boy!" Dawson finally managed to force out past his lips. "Am I happy to see your ugly mug! Say, am I happy?"

"Not half so glad as I am to see you, Dave!" Freddy panted, and pounded him on the back. "I thought it was all up for fair. And it was a horrible thought I never want to have again, old thing. Another five minutes and I'd have given you up for good, and tried to find my way out of here. But—but you did see this smoke, and my prayers were answered. Why, you old good-for-nothing blighter, I never dreamed I'd taken such a fancy to you!"

"Me, too!" Dawson grinned at him. "It had to take something like this to make me realize you're not such a bad guy at times. But hey! That burned crate was the bus I was flying, wasn't it?"

"That's right," Freddy told him. "My aircraft didn't burn. And I bailed out near this spot. I saw this smoke and headed for it, hoping that you'd sight it, too, and we'd meet. And we did. But, good grief, Dave, what took you so long? I've been here almost an hour!"

"What took me so long?" Dawson echoed. "Look, pal! I've been crawling through stuff that you just can't crawl through, if you get what I mean. Sweet tripe! After this little adventure a desert is sure going to look wonderful to me! I'll be tearing vines aside in my dreams for years to come. Holy smokes! Just look at me!"

"I am," Freddy Farmer said with a grin. "And not to be impolite, I'd suggest a good bath for you, old thing!"

"It'll take a day of just soaking to get off the first layer!" Dawson said as he stared down at his mud and slime-caked hands, and at his uniform that just wasn't a uniform any more. "But let's cut the horsing around. We're still in a spot, Freddy. I haven't any idea which way is out, have you?"

"Just a half-belief that the Salween must be east of here," the English youth said. "But goodness knows how many of the Japs may be in between. And—"

"Plane engines!" Dawson barked, and grabbed Freddy's arm. "Probably the Jap patrol I spotted when I woke up. This burning ship. They see the smoke. Let's duck, Freddy! We'd be sweet targets for those rats out here in the open!"

Freddy Farmer didn't reply. He simply nodded and started running with Dawson for the bordering jungle. But when they were a few yards from it some impulse caused Dawson to turn his head and glance back up over his shoulder. A wild cry burst from his lips, and he skidded to such an abrupt halt that he almost tripped over himself to go flat and haul Freddy down with him.

"*P-Forties!*" he gagged out. "Hold everything. P-Forties! Not Zeros, Freddy!"

The English youth had skidded to a halt, too, and both boys stood gazing unbelieving up at three Flying Tiger P-Forties ripping into view over the brow of the hill. And the next thing Dawson realized he was racing back out onto the field again, jumping up and down and waving both

hands over his head. And right beside him Freddy Farmer was doing the same thing, if not a little more violently.

But for one heart-shriveling instant the three Curtiss P-Forties, with their shark-painted noses, went banging right on across the field, as though their pilots hadn't sighted a thing of interest beneath their wings. However, when they reached the far end, two of them came curving around and down, while the third went up for a bit of altitude, and started circling about.

"They're landing, Freddy, they're landing!" Dawson screamed crazily.

"I know, I see!" the English youth screamed back, and pulled on his arm. "So get out of the way, you blasted idiot, before their props chop your head off!"

That bit of sanity registered on Dawson's happy merry-go-round brain, and he let Freddy Farmer pull him clear of the path of the two landing P-Forties. But as soon as they had touched earth, and were wheel-braking to a halt, he broke away from Freddy's grasp and went pounding over. The pilot who leaped out of the first P-Forty was Major Brown, and he let out a warwhoop of greeting.

"Chalk one up for Lady Luck!" he boomed, as the two youths came racing up. "I would have bet my shirt that—But never mind. By luck we spotted this smoke, and came for a look. Thank the Lord for small things, but this isn't small. Heavens above, Dawson! What mud hole and bramble patch did you fall into? But skip the answer. You two got the strength to hang on for a piggy-ride back?"

"If we haven't, we'll find it somewhere!" Dawson grinned. Then, sobering quickly, "But do you think you can get off here with the extra load?"

"If we don't," the other Flying Tiger, a freckle-faced red head, spoke up, "then there'll be four of us stuck here. And after what I saw you two guys do today, you're swell company any place, in my book."

"And that feeling is mutual," Dawson grinned at him. "But tell me, how did the scrap come out? Did the Japs—?"

"Still running, those that aren't dead!" Major Brown said grimly. "Yeah! Another headache for Tokyo, and more coming up. But let's can this chatter session. The Japs occupy this neck of the woods, and they'd be very happy to catch us here with our pants down. So let's get going. Sweeney! You take Farmer, and don't let him fall off, see? Come along, Dawson. Nothing like an airplane ride in the open air!"

Just four minutes later Lieutenant Sweeney, of the American Volunteer Group in China, sent his P-Forty rocketing down the length of the level patch of Burmese ground. And standing on the left wing butt, with his head and shoulders and arms inside the cockpit, Freddy Farmer went along as passenger. The savage prop-wash caught at Freddy's legs and tried to pull them out from under him, but he was well braced, and his hands had an iron grip on the inside of the cockpit. So he stayed put, and the veteran Flying Tiger lifted the fighter plane off the ground at the right moment, and nursed it up over the rim of the jungle and on up toward the blue-white sky.

And thirty seconds later Major Brown took off with Dave Dawson as his "strap-hanging" passenger. When that plane was well clear of the ground, the P-Forty that had been left top-side to ride cover slid downward, and the three planes slid into formation with their noses pointed for the home field at Menglien some eighty odd miles away.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Satan's Last Gasp

A new day's sun was climbing up over the eastern rim of a whole world embroiled in total war. A new day that would see small triumphs, and big ones, at one front or another. And a new day that would see more war miracles performed, and more fading life for some, and sudden violent death for countless others.

A new day of war, but for Dave Dawson, and Freddy Farmer, it was not the beginning of something new. Rather, it was the beginning of the end of something old. Before that sun set in the west again they would be in Chungking, the secret document would be delivered to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and a mission that had carried them almost two-thirds of the way around the world would be all over but the shouting—and the great and deep sighs of utter relief.

"Don't say it, Dave!" Freddy Farmer spoke up as the pair stood on the edge of the Flying Tiger field at Menglien while mechanics warmed up the engines of six Curtiss P-Forties. "Don't say it, for Heaven's sake. It's brought us too much bad luck already!"

"Okay, I won't say it," Dawson grunted, and gave him a side-long look. "But off the record, just what in blue blazes are you yapping about?"

"Your favorite speech ever since we left Colonel Welsh!" the English youth shot back at him. "Remember? Three more laps, Freddy, old kid. Two more laps, Freddy, my boy. Just one more hop and we'll be there. And so forth, and so on? And each time you've made that little speech we've barged straight into bad business. So, for goodness sake, spare us this time. In fact, my good man, shut up, will you, until *after* we've landed at Chungking?"

"Okay, okay!" Dawson growled. "But just the same, it's practically in the bag now, and so—"

"So shut up!" Freddy ordered him. "Will you please stop defying the gods?"

"Sweet tripe!" Dawson snorted. "What a superstitious mug you turned out to be. But okay. Maybe we won't ever reach Chungking! There! Does that make you happy?"

"Makes me feel worse!" the English youth snapped. "Because there's no telling but what you might be right, at that!"

"Oh my gosh!" Dawson groaned, and shook his head sadly. "I wonder what kind of a bug did bite you there in the jungle anyway? My guess is that the natives around these parts call it the Coo-Coo Bug. A variety of the Screwy Family, probably!"

Freddy Farmer didn't make any retort to that, because he didn't have time to. At that moment Major Brown, Lieutenant Sweeney, and two other Flying Tigers came over to join them. The A.V.G. commander looked at Dawson's hastily washed and mended uniform, and grinned.

"Sorry our home-made steam laundry couldn't do better, Dawson," he chuckled. "But this is Burma, not China. Still, even at that, you'll be one of the best dressed people in Chungking, I guess. Their wardrobes have been Jap-bombed and blasted around plenty, too."

"I'm not fussy about my looks, Major," the young Yank air ace grinned back at him. "Even if I get to Chungking in a barrel, it'll be okay by me. Yeah! Just so long as I get there."

"Well, don't worry about that!" Major Brown said with a vigorous shake of his head. "We're practically there now. Just one more hop, and—Say! What's the matter, Farmer? You swallow something the wrong way?"

"No, no, sir!" Freddy hastily assured him, as the blood started up his neck. "Just had a bad memory for a moment. No, I'm quite all right. Quite!"

"Okay, then," the Flying Tiger group leader grunted, and glanced over at the warming up P-Forties. "Let's get this joy hop underway. We've got about eight hundred miles to go, but it'll be a cinch with those extra tanks fitted aboard. However, some Japs will be on the prowl, no doubt. So we'd better get on with it, so that we can get it over with, or something like that. Anyway, into your sky hacks, Gentlemen. See you all on the Chungking field, eventually."

"Fair enough!" Dawson sang out happily. "Just one more—Oops! Sorry, Freddy, old pal!"

"That's more like it!" the English youth muttered, and ran over toward his plane.

If one could study the Japanese Air Force records for that particular day, one would undoubtedly find that numerous Nippon planes were in the air between Menglien, Burma, and Chungking, China. However, if one could talk with the little slant-eyed pilots of those planes, and get them to tell the truth—which, of course, would be an out and out impossibility—one would unquestionably learn that although they were in the air, the terrible fear of shark head-painted Curtiss P-Forties was in their black hearts, as well as in their heathen-brained heads!

At any rate, no Jap plane came within radio distance of that tight six-plane formation that roared up out of Burma and across the South China border. And if they did, they spotted those Flying Tigers first, and made tracks for more distant places. Twice Dawson thought he saw a few dots or so hugging some scattered clouds high up in the brassy sun-filled sky. But he couldn't tell for sure. And they might well just have been tricks of his imagination.

So finally the six-plane formation reached the broad and much bombed expanse of the Chungking Airport, circled it twice in salute, and then slid down to a perfect landing. A few moments later the pilots had taxied up to the tarmac line, and had legged out to stretch cramped and aching muscles. As for Dawson, it was all he could do to refrain from leaping out and kissing the ground, he was that joyously thankful that all was at an end, definitely. Or so he *thought!*

However, he curbed his impulse. He climbed down with the others, grinned happily at Freddy Farmer, and then turned to stare at the small group of Chinese military officials walking out to meet them. One, however, was in civilian clothes, and as Dawson spotted him the Yank's heart executed a perfect outside loop in dumbfounded amazement. The broadly smiling Chinese in civilian dress hurrying toward them was none other than Minister of War Soo Wong Kai!

"Good gosh, it can't be!" Dave heard Freddy Farmer gasp at his elbow. "Why—why, we left him in London!"

"Yeah, I know," Dave grunted. "But I just happened to think, pal. R.A.F. planes make this hop by way of Gibraltar, Cairo, India, and so on, you know. And *he* didn't have any tough luck to hold him up places, probably. But heck! *You* should feel happy to see Soo Wong Kai, kid!"

Dawson would have said more, but at that moment the little group reached them, and the beaming Soo Wong Kai was wringing them both by the hand.

"My blessings and those of all my countrymen upon you, my dear Captains!" he said. "There are not the words in all the world to express the overflowing happiness in my heart. Even death at this moment would be but death for a man whose cup of joy is filled to the brim. Again, Captains, the greetings and blessings of all China. You two shall live among her heroes forever."

"Thank you, sir," Dawson said with an effort. "And I can assure you that there are not the words either to express how glad Farmer and I are to be here. Tell me, though, sir—just how much did you beat us by?"

"By only a few hours, Captain," the Chinese said with a laugh. "I was delayed a short time in

Calcutta. However, we meet again, and all is as it should be."

"And how, sir!" Dawson replied fervently. "I—Say, I beg your pardon, sir. Permit me to introduce —"

"Major Brown, and these other Flying Tiger heroes?" Soo Wong Kai interrupted pleasantly. "But I already possess the high honor of knowing them, Captain Dawson. In fact, all of the gallant Flying Tigers are my friends. How are you, Major Brown? And you, Gentlemen?"

"Very well, thank you, sir," Major Brown replied for himself, and his pilots. "And delighted to meet you again. But may I ask if your journey to London was successful?"

For a moment Soo Wong Kai looked at Dawson and Farmer. Then he turned to Major Brown and smiled.

"Successful countless million times over, my dear Major Brown," he said. "But I, too, must beg pardons. Permit me to present these military officials of my country. Then we will proceed to the Generalissimo's headquarters. He and Madame Chiang Kai-shek are eagerly and anxiously awaiting us at this moment."

It took a few minutes for the introductions to be made, and then all walked over to where several Chinese Army cars stood waiting. Soo Wong Kai, Dawson, Farmer, and Major Brown rode in the first car, while the other Flying Tigers and the Chinese military officials rode in the other cars. And then for the next half-hour Dawson and Freddy Farmer forgot all about the hardships and nerve-racking trials through which they had passed in the last five days, and lost themselves completely in the many and varied sights of the Far East that greeted them as the motor cavalcade made its way through the throng-packed streets of Chungking.

And then finally they approached the building that housed Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters. Suspended from poles above the broad steps leading up to the main doors were all the flags of the United Nations. And as Dawson caught sight of Old Glory among them something swelled up in his heart, and his eyes grew bright with deep and reverent pride.

"All for one, and one for all!" he said softly.

"Eh, what's that, Dave?" Freddy Farmer grunted in his ear.

He turned and grinned at his English pal.

"I said, this is it, kid!" he chuckled. "The last stop. The end of the line, and—"

But Dawson never finished the rest of that sentence. At that exact instant a fiendish scream of rage rose high above the general murmur of the throngs gathered in front of the Generalissimo's headquarters. A horrible unearthly scream of satanic madness that chilled Dawson's blood, and made his flesh crawl. And in almost the same instant a human body came hurtling through the air. The violent movement was so sudden and so utterly unexpected that Dawson couldn't so much as move a muscle as a berserk jungle beast in human form crashed down on top of him, and drove him hard against the back of the car seat.

For one fleeting tick of a second his brain was a completely stunned blank. And then his eye caught the flash of a thin, gleaming steel blade held poised above him. But instinct was taking charge of him even as his eyes were registering the terrible truth upon his brain. Instinct that made him twist violently and crack up with one arm with every ounce of his strength. And as his upflung arm caught that screaming object under the chin, he brought up his clenched right fist with terrific battering-ram force. Pain from the blow shot clear up his arm to the elbow, but his was the fierce satisfaction of seeing that poised steel blade go flying off into space. And of seeing, also, a hideous face horribly distorted by excruciating pain.

Then in the next second he was not quite sure of just what he did see. Rather, so many things happened, and so fast, that it was practically impossible for one pair of human eyes to follow them in detail. But he did see Freddy Farmer lunge upward and grab for the choking, squealing figure still sprawled on him. And he did see the short, rotund Soo Wong Kai transform himself into a veritable pin-wheel of stabbing lightning. As though by magic, a similar steel-bladed knife appeared in Soo Wong Kai's hand. And as though by magic, also, the blade disappeared straight into the chest of the squealing, gasping figure on top of Dawson. But in the next instant the squealing figure was lifted clear by Soo Wong Kai, and hurled down onto the street beside the car. And the third bit of magic was when Chinese headquarters guards virtually materialized out of thin air and completely circled the car to protect the occupants from the chattering crowds striving to press in close.

"Holy smoke!" Dawson was conscious of his own voice choking out. "What was that? And where in thunder did it drop from? What gives, anyway?"

"A last gasping effort by Satan himself!" he heard Soo Wong Kai tell him. "And praise to all the gods that he failed even in this his dying effort. But his blade did not touch you, Captain?"

"Not—not quite!" Dawson gulped. "But I wouldn't want it any closer. But—My gosh! A *Jap!*"

Dawson popped out the last as he saw the face of the limp figure stretched out on the street beside the car.

"He is a Jap, isn't he?" he said to Soo Wong Kai. "I mean, he has the face."

"He is," Soo Wong Kai told him gravely. "The face, the black heart, and the mad brain of the hated enemy of my country. But cunning and great cleverness was his, too. Knoye Kyoto served his Emperor long, and well. But as to all such as he, failure and death can be his only rewards in

this life."

"I say, sir!" exclaimed Freddy Farmer. "You know him?"

Soo Wong Kai smiled as he nodded, but his smile was one of sadness, and a little pity.

"For as many years as you have fingers on your two hands," he replied. "But no, not personally. I have known only of him, and of the real truth of his life in Europe, where he has resided for many years. There are many devils like Knoye Kyoto. To you they seem outcasts, men without a country. However, for every minute of their lives they remain obedient slaves to their masters. Yes, many of us here in China have known of Knoye Kyoto, but there was nothing we could do, and less that we could say—because it would not have been believed. However, the gods turned their smiles upon me. Quite by accident I saw Kyoto in London. It was the day after you had left. It was the day I started my journey home, with my heart bursting with prayers for your safekeeping, and arrival."

The new Chinese Minister of War paused for a moment and turned reverent eyes heavenward.

"I saw him, and then flew away in my plane," he went on presently. "Then in Calcutta only yesterday I saw him again. No, that is an untruth to say that. Rather, I thought I saw him. And a great worry was mine. Could it be that he, too, was bound for Chungking? Had he slipped out of England to the Germans in France, and had they provided air passage to Calcutta? Was he bound for Chungking to strike his final blow when you two did arrive? To kill you in your moment of great glory? I asked myself that many times. And the answer was the same. It could well be true, for to the Japanese brain defeat and revenge are the same. I am as sure as I am that he is there dead in the street that Knoye Kyoto gave the orders meant to doom your mission in failure. And that he came here to get his own personal revenge in the form of your lives in the face of his own defeat.

"Yes, I thought I saw him in Calcutta yesterday. So I remained there overnight, and I sought the aid of many friends of China who could accomplish in a few hours what I personally could not have accomplished in weeks and months—a search of the city for this Knoye Kyoto. But he was not found. I realized now that he had perhaps already left before my friends started the search. But—Forgive me, I beg of you, my true and dear friends; I did not dream that he would not strike his blow until this late moment. At the airport? Yes. A possibility. But here, at the very steps of the Generalissimo's headquarters? I am overwhelmed with shame for what has happened. And I can but offer you the humble apologies of my entire life for the thoughtlessness, the stupidity, and the humiliation that I have—"

"Hold on a minute, sir!" Dawson stopped him, and grinned. "It wasn't your fault at all. Not a bit. The truth of the matter is that I've got you to thank for *my* life for the *rest* of my life. No fooling, sir. If it hadn't been for you, why—well, believe me, I—"

"Quite, sir!" Freddy Farmer spoke up as Dawson stumbled over the words to say. "But for your brilliant thinking and action, there would have been terrible tragedy at the very last moment. Yes, quite!"

And then, staring hard at Dawson, the English youth added:

"Yes, tragedy for a blasted, balmy idiot who can't seem to get a bad luck speech out of that lame brain of his. This was it, was it? Last stop, eh? End of the line, was it? Why, you blithering—"

But Dave Dawson wasn't listening to Freddy Farmer. Instead he sat stiff and straight with one hand impulsively pressed against that part of his half washed and hastily mended tunic that covered the thick sealed envelope in his inside pocket, and watched with shining eyes as two of the world's most honored people, living or dead, came slowly down the steps of Chinese Army headquarters at Chungking. The Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek!

THE END

[1] *Dave Dawson at Singapore.*

[2] *Dave Dawson With The Commandos.*

[3] *Dave Dawson at Singapore.*

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DAVE DAWSON WITH THE FLYING TIGERS

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