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# **DAVE DAWSON, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT**

*by*

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*Author of*

**"DAVE DAWSON AT DUNKIRK"**

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

**"DAVE DAWSON IN LIBYA"**

**"DAVE DAWSON ON CONVOY PATROL"**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *Wings of the Brave*

Squadron Leader Markham, O.C. of the famous Eighty-Fourth Squadron of the Royal Air Force Fighter Command, leaned back in his office chair, dug knuckles into his tired eyes, and heaved a long sigh of relief.

"I say, but am I fed up to the teeth with the blasted paper work that goes with this kind of a job!" he groaned. "Not at all like in the last mess we had with Jerry. A chap could fly every day, then, regardless of rank. That is, up until the last nine months or so. Then C.O.s were grounded, as being too valuable to lose. But still there was no paper work. Not a bit of it."

"True, it is a bit of a task and a bore," Adjutant Phipps agreed from his desk in the corner. "Seems Adastral House must know everything from what the lads have for breakfast to whether or not they wear their socks on the wrong feet. All for a good reason, I suppose. But it does give a chap the writer's cramp. What do you make of this latest memo that came through, sir? Number Six-Four-Two-Nine."

The Squadron Leader pulled his hands down from his face and blinked.

"Eh?" he grunted. "Don't believe I saw that one. Must have passed it over. What's it about, Phipps? Does it make sense or is it like the usual stuff that comes through?"

The Adjutant fished an official looking sheet of yellow paper from a pile on his desk, got up from his chair and crossed the office.

"There it is," he said placing it in front of the Officer Commanding. "Frankly, I haven't the faintest idea, sir. Looks to me like some bloke at Air Ministry wasn't quite recovered from a terrific binge, or something. All a lot of Greek, as they say."

Markham blinked his eyes a couple of more times, leaned forward a bit and squinted at the yellow sheet of paper. The top half was filled with all the routine junk ... code letters, numbers, and file reference marks ... that always accompany official communications. So he gave that part just a sweeping glance. It was the communication itself that attracted and held his attention.

It read:

Reconnaissance pictures considered obsolete as of Twenty-Fifth. Zone K-24 believed to be evacuated. It is essential that confirmation of this be obtained at the earliest possible moment, regardless of cost. Plan X-4-B depends upon complete knowledge of the situation. You are advised to communicate at once with Squadrons assigned to this task, and to make your arrangements as speedily as possible. You are also advised to carry out the assignment on a voluntary basis. Please acknowledge this.

Group Captain Ball  
Air Ministry

Squadron Leader Markham read the thing through three times, then pushed back from his desk and cocked a stern eye at Phipps.

"I'm surprised, Phipps!" he said.

The Adjutant gulped a little and blinked.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" he said.

Markham tapped the paper with his finger.

"About this," he said. "Do you mean to tell me that you don't understand? You don't comprehend?"

Phipps licked his lips, fumbled with a loose button on his tunic, and wondered if he should have enlisted in the artillery instead of the R.A.F. So many blasted mysteries in the Air Force.

"Well, sir," he began. "That is ... I mean.... Well, frankly, sir, I don't think I do understand."

"Don't *think*?" Markham barked at him. "Well, that's the difference between us!"

"Yes, sir," the Adjutant said weakly.

"Exactly the difference!" the Officer Commanding said with a curt nod of his head. Then grinning broadly, "You don't *think* you know, Phipps, but I blessed well *know* I don't know. It's the craziest memo I've ever received. I'd almost say that Group Captain Ball was stone spiffed, but I know him personally, and he never touches a drop. Get him on the wire for me, will you, Phipps? I believe I have half an idea as to what's up."

"You have, sir?" the Adjutant echoed with interest.

"I read lots of detective books," the Officer Commanding said with a wave of his hand. "Fine for taking a chap's mind off this blasted war. Yes, I fancy the postman stopped at the wrong house this morning."

"Eh, sir?" Phipps mumbled with a frown.

"Obvious, I think, Phipps," Markham said and tapped the paper again. "This was supposed to be delivered to some other bloke, not to me. Now, get Ball on the wire like a good chap, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Phipps said and spun back to his own desk. "Oh, quite, sir."

As the Adjutant reached his desk he stopped short and turned toward the window. So did Squadron Leader Markham for that matter. Outside the air had suddenly become filled with the roar of powerful aircraft engines. Markham leaped over to the window and looked out and up at the five plane formation playing tag at some three or four thousand feet over the field. They were Supermarine Spitfires, the new Mark 5 type; the latest and fastest fighter plane off the British aircraft factory assembly lines.

They looked exactly like the old Spitfires, and in many ways they were just the same. But there were also many changes, and improvements. There was more horsepower in the Rolls-Royce engine in the nose. There was more fire power due to the addition of four 20-mm. aircraft cannon to the already standard equipment of eight death chopping machine guns that could blast out bullets at the rate of nine thousand odd per minute. And there were a few very hush-hush gadgets on the new Mark 5 that the Nazi Luftwaffe would sell its soul to have on their planes. But that is the difference between the Royal Air Force and Hitler's Luftwaffe. The Royal Air Force will always be better tomorrow than it is today, but the Luftwaffe gets just so good, and there it stops. There just isn't that something in the Nazi aeronautical make-up that drives a man on to improve upon his best efforts!

"Those Mark Fives!" Markham breathed as his face lighted up with honest pride. "What a plane! And, do I wish I was just a Pilot Officer again, instead of a Squadron Leader. See those two flying Number Two and Three on the right, Phipps?"

"Yes, sir," the Adjutant nodded with a smile. "Flying Officers Dawson and Farmer, aren't they, sir?"

"That's right," the O.C. replied. "And it was a lucky day for Eighty-Four when those two were assigned to us. Just kids, both of them, but worth their weight in gold. They're going far, I fancy. Fact is, if this blasted war lasts long enough, I'll probably one day be giving them the salute, and calling them, sir! Just look at that!"

Phipps was already looking at the five plane formation wheeling around into the wind to come in to land. Number Two and Three planes on the right slid down through the air as though they were wired together. There wasn't an inch change of air space between the two planes as they wheeled around and down. It was precision flying, plus! And Squadron Leader Markham was breathing hard when he finally turned away from the window.

"Born in an airplane, those two!" he grunted. "I swear they must have been. I ... I say there, Phipps, old thing! Did you get Ball on the wire? After all, this crazy paper may be very important, and all that sort of thing. Hop to it, my lad!"

Adjutant Phipps hopped to it, and in less than a minute he had the Air Ministry official on the wire. Markham took the call, and talked with his superior for some ten minutes. Phipps listened to the snatches of conversation he could hear, but it all made very little sense to him.

Eventually the Squadron Leader hung up. That is to say, he banged the receiver back in its cradle, and sat glaring at the instrument as though he would like to hurl it against the wall. Phipps waited a minute or so, and then couldn't stand the suspense any longer.

"Bad news, sir?" he ventured.

Markham snorted and reached for a cigarette.

"You've been in Service long enough to know that every time you talk with Adastral House it means bad news!" he growled. "Blast it! Why did you show me that confounded thing in the first place, anyway? Why didn't you tear it up and throw it away, and say nothing?"

"But, sir!" Phipps protested. "That wouldn't be quite right, you know, sir!"

"There are times when a wrong is perfectly right!" Squadron Leader Markham grunted between puffs on his cigarette. Then with a faint gesture of his hand, "But don't go and shoot your brains out, old thing. Not your fault, of course. Some nit-wit, balmy bloke at Air Ministry who put it in the wrong dispatch pouch. Fact is, I was wrong to have called Ball. Now we're in for it, I fancy."

"A special assignment, sir?" Phipps asked.

"Something like that," the Squadron Leader nodded. "Don't know the details, but I'm quite sure that it'll turn out something very messy. That blasted paper should have gone to Hundred and Seven Squadron, not us. When I told Ball we had received it he was over-joyed, blast his hide. Said he realized that we should have been selected in the first place. And having received the thing by mistake, he is going to assign us to it, anyway."

"To what, sir?" Adjutant Phipps persisted.

Markham sighed and shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "Ball wouldn't give details over the phone, of course. Said he was flying down here, himself. Be here sometime this afternoon. But you can be sure that it'll be something like capturing two whole Nazi Staffels complete with equipment, or kidnapping Hitler, Goering, and Himmler, and bringing them back here to England to keep Rudolph Hess company. And chances are, it'll be something even more difficult. You know, Group Captain Ball has been given a standing order at Air Ministry."

"A standing order, sir?" Phipps echoed with a blank look.

Squadron Leader Markham crushed out his cigarette and stood up.

"I suspect it, anyway!" he mumbled and stared fixedly at the huge pin-pointed map of Europe on the opposite wall. "I believe he has orders to think up the strangest, the riskiest, and the craziest patrol assignments. And then pass them out to poor blasted beggars like us. Well, I suppose a lot of chaps have got to take-off and get themselves killed before this confounded war is won. But it's a rum business, Phipps. Always bear that in mind."

"Yes sir, I will," the Adjutant said and shook his head sadly from side to side as Markham walked out of the office.

When the door slammed shut Adjutant Phipps sighed heavily, leaned back in his chair and stroked his greying hair.

"Yes, I should have joined the artillery," he murmured. "I'm too old to understand these brave young lads who wear wings. They're chaps from another world, I fancy."

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### ***A Present from Satan***

Out on the tarmac of Eighty-Four Dave Dawson and Freddy Farmer stood peeling off their flying gear and feasting their eyes on the new Mark 5 Spitfires. Lights of joy danced in their eyes, and their faces were flushed with excitement and eagerness for the future to become the present in a hurry.

"That *is* an airplane!" Dave cried and slung his parachute pack up into the pit. "That's a dream. The sugar in my coffee. The moonlight on a summer night. The smell of a lovely rose. The goal from the field in the last ten seconds of play. The whozit of the whatzit. And how!"

Freddy looked at him and sighed unhappily.

"And he was such a bright chap before he took that Mark Five up for a test hop!" he murmured. "He could count all the way up to ten. He could write his own name. And he even knew what day of the month it was. But, now.... O well! They say his kind last just so long. And, of course, he's a blinking Yank at heart. So.... Hey! Ouch!"

The swinging Mae West life preserver jacket caught Freddy on the ear, and almost toppled him off his feet. He caught himself in time, ducked as the Mae West came sailing around again, and charged at his best pal. Dave backed up and stepped quickly to the side.

"You had that coming to you, my little man," he said sternly. "You should learn to understand expressions of beauty."

"Sugar in his coffee!" the English youth snorted. "Moonlight on a summer night! Good grief! Whoever heard of such things?"

"Oh, I've got lots more of them," Dave chuckled. "Better ones, too. Listen."

"Don't!" Freddy groaned.

Dave ignored him and stuck one hand inside his tunic and extended the other palm up toward the nearest Spitfire.

"A Mark Five is the lace in your shoe!" he cried. "It is the frosting on mother's cake. It is the apple in her dumpling pie. It is the breath of spring. It is the kiss of your girl. It is...."

Dave stopped short and shook his head.

"No, that's wrong," he said. "No girl would kiss that map of yours, Freddy. They'd.... Hey! So I'm talking to myself, huh?"

It was true. Dave was simply throwing beautiful words at free air. Freddy had left him cold and walked over to Flight Lieutenant Barker, who had led the test hop patrol. Dave went over there scowling.

"Fine business!" he growled. "I try to better his education and he walks out on me!"

Freddy snorted in disgust and Flight Lieutenant Barker grinned.

"You've got a bite, Dawson?" he asked. "Fleas, perhaps?"

"Huh, me?" Dave echoed, and then turned beet red.

He still had one hand stuck inside his tunic. He pulled it out and they all laughed.

"No kidding, though, Flight Lieutenant," he said. "Isn't that Mark Five the best thing that ever came down the pike?"

"Down the pike?" the senior officer murmured. Then brightening, "Oh yes, I get what you mean. Quite! Best bus in the R.A.F. I'm all for having a go at a Jerry or two right now. I think we'll sweep the skies with the Mark Fives. But I hear that even better planes are on the drafting boards right now."

"Phew, that's hard to believe!" Freddy breathed. "I mean, that anything could be better than the Mark Five."

"Shame, Farmer!" Barker said with a grin. "And that statement from the lips of an Englishman!"

"Is he?" Dave asked with a mock gasp.

"Is he what?" Barker wanted to know.

"Is Freddy really and truly an Englishman?" Dave replied and set himself to jump fast. "From the way his eyes slant up, I'd always thought that he was a little bit...."

Dave didn't finish the rest. And it was not Freddy making a dive for him that choked off his words. On the contrary it was the wail of the alarm siren mounted atop the Operations Office. As one man the three spun around and dashed over to the little hut that was the nerve center of the Squadron. And so did every other pilot on stand-to duty.

The Operations Officer met them at the door. He waved a slip of paper at them.

"Zone Ten Spotters!" he snapped. "A single Messerschmitt One-Ten sneaking in from the coast. Altitude twenty one thousand. Course, due west. Intercept and teach the beggar a lesson. Chap's balmy to try it alone these days. Off with you. I'll give you further spotter reports in the air."

The half dozen pilots turned from the Operations Office door and raced back to the line of Spitfires. Mechanics already had the propellers ticking over. Dave skidded to a halt by his ship and practically jumped into the parachute harness and Mae West that his own mechanic held up for him. Then in a single leap he vaulted into the pit, snapped his safety harness in place, plugged in his radio jack, and reached for the throttle.

"Get one of the dirty beggars for me, sir!" the mechanic cried out. "I come from Coventry, you know, sir!"

"Fair enough!" Dave yelled and sent the Mark 5 Spitfire streaking straight out across the field. "One Messerschmitt coming up, for Coventry! I mean, coming *down*!"

Split seconds after the words popped off his lips he was in the air with wheels up, and curving up and around toward Zone 10. He did not have to glance at his map to determine the location of Zone 10. Its location, like the locations of all the zones that Eighty-Four guarded, was stamped indelibly on his brain. Zone 10 was on the coast south of Harwich, and he headed in that direction at top speed.

Out the corner of his eye he saw the other planes of the flight streaking along in the same direction. He grinned and jammed his hand against the already wide open throttle as though in so doing he might get more power out of the singing Rolls-Royce in the nose. And he knew that Freddy, Flight Lieutenant Barker, and the three other Spitfire pilots were doing the same thing. If the alarm had said two or more enemy aircraft were sighted the Eighty-Four lads would have dropped into formations of flights of three with Barker giving the orders for attack and so forth. That wasn't necessary, however, with just one lone Jerry plane in the offing. Instead, it was a case of first come, first crack at the Jerry. And so the six Eighty-Four lads were hopping their planes along as fast as they could so that they might be the one to get first licks at the Messerschmitt. True, that sort of thing wasn't strictly regulations, but the R.A.F. lads did it ... and often.

"Ten shillings says you guys are wasting your time!" Dave shouted happily into his radio mike.

"Ten shillings says you've forgotten there's lots of radios in England, Dawson!" Flight Lieutenant

Barker snapped back at him in the earphones.

Dave gulped and went beet red to the roots of his hair. In his excitement he had clean forgotten that ground stations are tuned in on aircraft aloft all the time. Whatever is said up there goes right into the ears of the big shots, if they happen to be listening.

"I mean when the formation reaches the objective!" Dave said hurriedly. "One Mark Five is more than enough for any One-Ten!"

Barker's laugh came over the radio.

"That's nice quick thinking, Dawson," he said. "No wonder you've got more than a couple of the beggars in your bag."

"Luck! Absolutely nothing else. I was present each time!"

The voice was Freddy Farmer's. Dave opened his mouth to make a fitting retort, but checked himself. At that instant he heard the voice of the Operations officer back down on the field.

"Tiger Flight!" he called, using the code name for the patrol in the air. "Change course twenty degrees north. Clouds ahead of you. Enemy aircraft climbing to twenty-four thousand. Operations to Tiger. That is all!"

"Tiger to Operations!" Dave heard Flight Lieutenant Barker check back. "Changing course. Right you are!"

Dave had already swung his ship around more to the north, and was hunched forward over the stick staring hard at the mountain cloud bank looming up ahead. His eagle eyes swept it from side to side and from top to bottom. But he failed to see a single moving dot that could be the Messerschmitt One-Ten trying to climb up over the stuff. He saw nothing but that bank of clouds and the crazy shadows that marked nature's nooks and crags in the stuff.

And then he heard Freddy Farmer's excited voice coming into his earphones.

"Enemy aircraft sighted! Five more degrees northward. Just under the tip of that finger of the stuff on the left!"

Dave snapped his gaze in the direction indicated, and then suddenly saw the blurred dot curving upward and to the north. He grinned and gave a little shake of his head.

"Old Sharp Eyes Freddy Farmer!" he grunted. "Boy! How does he do it?"

"Simple!" the radio's earphones told him instantly. "I jolly well fly with my eyes *open*. Try it sometime, old bean. You'll be surprised at the difference."

Dave didn't make any comment. At that instant the moving dot moved right into the billowy clouds and was completely lost to view.

"Spread out, chaps!" came Barker's orders. "Don't think the beggar is turning back. Spread out and keep your eyes skinned. And bear northward."

As he was flying on the extreme left Dave cut around sharp north, and stuck his nose down for additional speed. The dot had entered the cloud bank at approximately the same altitude as that of his own Spitfire, but he had the sudden hunch that the Jerry pilot was going to stop climbing. That he was going to go down and try to sneak out from under the cloud bank while the lads of Eighty-Four fruitlessly hunted for him at high altitudes.

"Maybe I'm wrong," Dave murmured. "And that won't be anything new, and how. But if he sticks to those clouds it'll mean he isn't on photo reconnaissance. And if he goes down under the stuff it'll mean the same thing. Right! There's nothing down there that Goering's little dopes haven't taken a million pictures of since they started this cockeyed war. Yeah! It's my hunch that lad is over here on other business."

With a nod for emphasis he steepened the Spitfire's dive a bit and went cutting down across the English sky like a comet gone haywire. In less than practically nothing flat he was down below the altitude of the belly of the stuff. He pulled out and let the Mark 5 prop claw straight forward at an even keel. At the same time he threw back his head and raked the underside of the cloud bank with his eyes.

He saw nothing, however. Nothing but clouds and more clouds. Seconds ticked by to form a minute. He banked slightly and glanced back to see if any of his pals had the same hunch. His was the only Spitfire to be seen, however. The others were way up above him and completely out of sight.

"A horse on you, Dawson," he grunted, "if they smack the guy down, and buzz back for a spot of tea, leaving you to hunt the little man who isn't there. Yeah! It would be.... Hold it! So there you are, my little Jerry!"

A war painted Messerschmitt One-Ten had cut down out of the belly of the cloud bank about half a mile ahead of him and perhaps the same distance to the left. It leveled off immediately once it was in clear air and started streaking to the west again.

"Not today!" Dave shouted and kicked his Mark Five around in a flash half turn. Then into his flap-mike he bellowed, "Tally-ho, gang! Downstairs with you!"

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Broken Wings*

Whether or not the Messerschmitt's pilot saw Dave closing in on him at lightning speed, the German plane held straight to its course westward. Dave frowned and slid off the safety guard on his trigger button, and started lining up the Messerschmitt in his electric windshield sight.

"Of course the guy could have suddenly gone blind," he murmured to himself. "Or maybe he's just sick and tired of this war. Me, I wouldn't know. But ... there's just one thing to do when you see a Jerry lad plowing around over forbidden ground. And so!"

As he spoke the last he started to apply pressure on the little button that would send a shower of machine gun and aerial cannon slugs straight at the German plane. That is, he started to. He didn't complete the action, for at that instant something happened that brought him up straight in the seat with a gasp of surprise.

The Messerschmitt dropped down by the left wing and something went hurtling out through the opened glass "hatch" of the three place cockpit. That something became the figure of a man in the next split second. And in the split second after that Dave saw the white puff and the man's parachute blossoming into being. The tumbling figure was jerked sharply upward toward the sky. It seemed to hover motionless for a brief instant, and then start swinging back and forth like the pendulum of a clock while the air filled parachute envelop drifted slowly earthward.

"Now, ain't that something!" Dave grunted. "The boys start getting scared before I've even fired a shot. Wonder which one he is. The pilot, radioman, or the rear gunner. Anyway, he sure...."

He bit off the rest as he took another look at the figure swaying back and forth at the ends of the parachute's shroud lines. There was something about the man that didn't seem right. But in the next instant Dave realized why. The parachutist was not garbed in flying gear, or even in the uniform of a member of the Nazi Luftwaffe. Instead he wore civilian clothes.

"Spy dropping in broad daylight?" Dave gasped. "Well, I've seen almost everything now! If that isn't a dumb thing to try and pull on us. What does Hitler think we are, anyway? As dumb and thick as his murdering Nazi gang?"

He let it go unanswered. As a matter of fact he didn't bother to give it a second thought. He didn't for the very simple reason that sudden movement of the Messerschmitt showed that the pilot was still aboard. And the sudden movement also showed, rather, indicated, that the German pilot had decided to knock one Dave Dawson out of the English sky before buzzing on back home to Naziland.

At any rate, the One-Ten whipped around in a wing screaming turn, dropped sharply by the nose for a brief instant and then came tearing up at an angle for the belly of Dave's Spitfire. The Messerschmitt's machine guns and air cannon hammered out sound and jetting flame. Not a shot, however, smacked into the Mark 5 Spitfire. Before the German plane started to zoom Dave belted the stick over, jumped hard on right rudder and spun in less than the area of a dime. Before the maneuver was half completed Dave pulled the Spitfire's nose up straight for the sky.

He roared up a good hundred feet, then kicked the ship over on wingtip and dropped straight down like ten ton of brick. Right below him was the Messerschmitt One-Ten, its pilot striving frantically to kick out from under and go skidding away into the clear. He might just as well have jumped out and tried to walk across the sky back across the Channel. Dave had him cold, and everybody concerned knew it.

"Next time, stay home!" Dave shouted and pressed the trigger button.

His guns yammered sound and death. The Messerschmitt took the whole works square in the cockpit. The plane leaped and bolted off to one side as though it had been sideswiped by an invisible express train. For a brief moment Dave saw the pilot and the gunner fighting desperately to shove the cockpit's hood wide open and bail out with their parachutes. Then they became lost to view as sheets of flame belched out from both the port and starboard engines, and the whole plane became a raging ball of fire that went tumbling over and over down toward the ground.

"Another one you won't be using any more, Goering!" Dave grunted and pulled the Mark 5 out of its engine howling dive. "But I wonder why one of those birds jumped so soon? Was he a spy, or was he just too yellow to even be in the Nazi Air Force. Boy! That would be being plenty yellow, what I mean!"

As he voiced his thoughts aloud he started circling about staring downward for a sign of the descending parachute. He spotted it in less time than it takes to tell. The parachutist was still a good two thousand feet from the ground, and a stiff wind was sending it skidding rapidly to the right as the figure at the ends of the shroud lines made no effort to "slip" his 'chute (or spill air from the envelop by hauling down on the shroud lines on that side) to counteract the side-ward movement. As a matter of fact the figure at the ends of the shroud lines didn't seem to be moving a muscle. Instead of the man's hands reaching up to grab the shroud lines and take some of his weight off the harness, the arms just dangled down at the man's side.

"Maybe he broke them bailing out," Dave grunted and stuck the nose of his Spitfire down. "If so, he's going to land with an awful jolt. And that ground wind's liable to drag him half way across this little island of England. Yeah! Maybe you should have stayed put, my little Jerry."



Dave kept his eyes on the seemingly lifeless figure floating earthward with his parachute, and held the Spitfire in its dive until he was down close. There he pulled out, leveled off, and began to circle about the parachutist as a strange sense of weird curiosity got hold of him. And as he cut in closer and closer to the dangling figure his curiosity gradually changed to a sense of utter astonishment. The man in civilian clothes kept his chin sunk down on his chest all the time. He didn't once raise his head to look at Dave's circling plane. And it was absolutely certain that he must be hearing the roar of the Rolls-Royce engine.

As far as that went, however, the man didn't do anything. Any and all movement was caused by the wind whipping at the parachute. The man could well be a sack of wet meal being lowered to earth.

"Maybe he took sleeping tablets before he jumped out," Dave grunted aloud. "Or maybe.... Hey! What gives?"

He shouted the question and sent the Spitfire ripping in so close to the dangling figure that he came within a foot of brushing the man with his wingtip. He veered off just in time but not before he saw that there was a sheet of paper pinned to the front of the man's jacket. Whether or not there was writing on the paper, Dave couldn't see. But that the sheet of paper was pinned there was enough to make up his mind.

"This gets screwier!" he shouted and hauled back his throttle. "Screwy as can be. Maybe I'm all wet, but that lad looks stone dead to me. And somebody has pinned a note on his jacket. Me, I'm going down and find out what in heck this is all about."

Checking the general direction in which the parachute was drifting, Dave then took a look at the ground below. As luck would have it he spotted a field with plenty of room for a Spitfire to sit down. Having spotted the field he slid down, let down his wing flaps, and presently settled light as a feather on an expanse of slightly uneven ground. As he wiggled out of his safety harness, and parachute straps, he heard the sound of another plane tearing down. One look upward showed him a diving Spitfire with a big figure "8" painted on either side of the fuselage. He chuckled and vaulted from the pit to the ground.

"Good old Freddy, the watch dog," he said. "Betcha think the guy slugged me down. Nope, pal. Not yet, anyway."

Not bothering with a second glance at Farmer's plane coming down to a fast landing, Dave broke into a run and raced toward a smaller field in back of a line of trees. The parachutist was just disappearing from sight down behind the trees. By the time Dave reached the field the man was on the ground. All of him on it! He was crumpled flat and the ground wind was starting to fill out the parachute silk like a boat sail and drag it across the ground. Speeding up, Dave tore over and practically threw himself at the shroud lines. He caught them and jerked hard on the underside ones ... the lines extending to the part of the silk envelop that was nearest the ground. The action "tripped" the parachute envelop, spilled the air from it, and caused it to collapse to the ground. As an added precaution Dave darted forward and gathered up the limp folds of silk in his arms.

Then he walked back to the crumpled figure on the ground. The man had his face turned toward the sky. His eyes were closed, and he was dead. A bullet hole square in the middle of his forehead was all the confirmation Dave needed. The Yank took his gaze off the death chilled face, and looked at the sheet of paper pinned to the front of the dead man's jacket. The paper had been torn by the wind, and the landing, but the words written with blue crayon stood out clear and readable. Dave's heart turned cold and his head pounded as he read the words.

British Intelligence:

Take your swine dog back. We don't want him, the fool!

von Peiplow

For a long minute Dave stared at the words, hardly able to believe his eyes. Then he shook himself out of his trance, knelt down beside the dead man and searched his pockets. His "reward" consisted of a small notebook from which half the pages had been torn out, the stub of a pencil, a few French francs, a pocket knife, a clip of cheap German matches, and half a pack of even cheaper German Army cigarettes. There was nothing else. Not a single shred of anything that could tell him the man's identity.

Somehow, though, he felt sure the man was British though the clothes he wore were Flemish peasant, and his face was Teutonic in appearance, being broad and flat, with a low forehead and short, bristling straw colored hair. True, not a thing about the dead man looked British, yet somehow Dave was convinced he was.

"Dave? What in the world?"

Freddy's cry straightened Dave up and turned him around. Freddy Farmer had come to a stop not five feet away, and was standing there gazing at him out of eyes that seemed to pop from their sockets. In the next second Dave realized he still held the dead man's possessions in his hands. He scowled at his pal.

"No, not what you're thinking, you dope!" he growled. "And remind me to bust you on the nose for even *thinking* it! Holy smokes! What do you think I am? A darn grave robber, or something?"

"Of course not, Dave!" Freddy said sharply and pinked a little. "You just startled me, that's all. I mean, bending over him with your hands full of things. I...."

"Skip it, and come take a look yourself!" Dave cut him off, and pointed at the paper still pinned to the dead man's jacket. "Read that! But don't expect me to answer your questions!"

The English youth came closer, bent over and read the words on the paper. It was several seconds before he lifted his head and looked at Dave. And when he did dumbfounded amazement was swimming in his eyes. He shook his head, blinked hard, and took another quick glance down at the paper to make sure.

"Well, strike me pink!" he finally exclaimed in a bewildered tone. "This is the craziest thing ever!"

"You're not telling me anything new," Dave grunted. Then more to himself he added, "So that's why they tried to sneak over? To toss this poor lad out and let him float down to be recognized."

"What's that?" Freddy cried sharply. "You mean he came down by parachute? From what?"

Dave jerked his thumb at the rolled up parachute silk and shroud lines on the ground a few feet from him.

"There it is," he said. "The One-Ten popped down out of the cloud stuff right in front of me. It was duck soup and I was just about to give him the works when one of the crew bailed out. That startled me so that I didn't fire. Then I woke up just in time to see the One-Ten cutting around to give me the business. I was lucky and able to get out into the clear. After a bit the One-Ten's pilot was unlucky. He went down in flames. I saw this lad floating to earth, and he looked kind of funny to me. Didn't move at all. So I came down for a look-see. And there he is. He didn't bail out. He was *thrown* out, with his 'chute opened!"

Freddy whistled softly and rubbed the side of his face.

"I just saw you circling down, and I thought you'd been hit, or something," he said after a while. "So I came down to see if I could help. The others are still upstairs hunting for the bloke. When I realized you weren't with us, I went hunting for you."

"Thanks, pal," Dave grinned and gave Freddy an affectionate slap on the shoulder. "I had another of my hunches and went down under the stuff, figuring he might drop down through. He did. But, if you can help me, I sure wish you would. Explain this business."

Freddy made a hopeless gesture with his hands, and read the note again.

"Von Peiplow?" he murmured aloud and screwed up his face in deep thought. "I think I've heard that name before. It has a familiar ring, or something."

"Yeah, like Smith, or Jones," Dave grunted. "But wait! I.... Aw, nuts! I thought for a second that it was going to jog my own memory. Well, there's no use our standing here. We're only drawing blanks. Catch hold of his heels, Freddy."

"Heels?" the English youth gasped. "Why? You're not going to bury him, are you? I think...."

"Don't!" Dave snapped. "You'll over-tax that pea inside your head you call a brain. Of course I'm not going to bury him. But I'm certainly not going to leave him here, either. I'm going to fly him back to the Squadron. I don't know where that One-Ten planned to toss him out, but I think they tossed him out too soon. We'll take him back to the Squadron and have the O.C. get in touch with British Intelligence. The note's addressed to them, so I guess they'll probably know what it's all about. But I sure hope he's English, and not Nazi like he looks."

"Why?" Freddy demanded. "Why do you hope he's English?"

Dave flung him a scornful look.

"That should be easy to guess," he said. "I'm particular who I ride around in my airplane. And Nazis aren't on my list. Now, catch hold of his feet and help me carry him back to the plane. I'll put him across the cockpit and hang onto him with one hand."

"That field isn't so good for Spitfire take-off," Freddy commented dubiously.

"So what?" Dave growled. "So if I crack up, you can fly both of us back. Now, stop worrying, and lend me a hand, pal."

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Hero's Homecoming*

Dave made the take-off without any trouble, and less than twenty minutes after his wheels had cleared the ground he was throttling the Rolls-Royce engine and sliding gently down toward Eighty-Four's field. Freddy had landed ahead of him and had mechanics and the "fire wagon" ready to dash into action in case Dave had trouble sitting down.

It was a precaution not necessary, however. The Yank born R.A.F. ace put the Mark 5 Spitfire down slick as pie and then taxied slowly up to the hangar line. There waiting mechanics lifted down the dead man from his position across the opened cockpit, and placed him gently on the ground. Dave leaped out to confront the dumbfounded gaze of his fellow pilots and Squadron Leader Markham.

"What's this all about, Dawson?" the O.C. was the first to break the silence.

Dave told his story in as few words as possible. Then everybody stretched his neck to read the

sheet of paper.

"Von Peiplow, eh?" Squadron Leader Markham grunted as he straightened up. "Well, isn't that something!"

"You've heard of von Peiplow, sir?" Dave asked quickly. "Farmer, here, thought the name sounded familiar to him. You know him, sir?"

The Squadron Leader smiled, but it was a tight smile, and his eyes had turned cold and hard.

"I've never met the dirty dog in person," he said. "But I know *of* him, very much. And so do some three hundred and eighty-four thousand members of the British Expeditionary Force that got away alive from Dunkirk. You two weren't in Service then, though the world knows you did a splendid job for England at the time. But it was General Paul von Peiplow who was in charge of Luftwaffe operations during the Dunkirk show. Yes, von Peiplow is a very familiar name to most all of us who were there."<sup>[1]</sup>

Markham paused and stared hard at the dead man as though he hoped to see right into the forever stilled brain and read the man's dying thoughts. Then suddenly he bent down, squinted hard at the bullet hole in the forehead, and lifted one of the man's arms, and let it drop back on the ground. Presently he straightened up and looked at Dave.

"Could be the cold air at altitude, and not genuine *rigor mortis*," he grunted as though to himself. "You're sure he was just tossed out, Dawson? Or do you think he was shot as he tried to go out on his own?"

"He must have been tossed out, sir," Dave answered quickly. "The pilot dipped the wing so that the gunner would have less trouble getting him out the cockpit hatch opening, and not have the prop-wash carry him back into the tail assembly. That's the way it looked to me. Of course, everything happened pretty fast, but I'm sure he wasn't alive when he bailed out, sir."

Dave paused and pointed to the sheet of paper.

"He wouldn't be wearing that, would he, sir?" he said. "No, I think he was shot elsewhere. Perhaps in the plane, and the note was pinned to him."

"Yes, I guess you're right there, Dawson," Squadron Leader Markham said with a frown. "I guess he was killed before he was put into the plane. Yes, they made that flight for the express purpose of dumping him overboard. Well, I'll get in touch with Intelligence at once. Corporal Sharron! You and two men take him over to the hospital hut. And one of you stand guard outside. I'll...."

The C.O. cut himself off and glanced upward as there came the unmistakable sound to every listening ear of British airplane engines. The plane was a Bristol Blenheim bomber powered with two Mercury IV 920 h.p. engines. The craft was not on a bombing mission, however. In fact, it wasn't even attached to the Bomber Command. A single glance at the markings on the fuselage proved that to all eyes. The plane carried Staff markings of the Air Ministry.

Squadron Leader Markham glanced at his watch and grunted.

"Hours sooner than I expected," he murmured. Then with a glance at the pilots gathered about him, he said, "Air Ministry has cooked up a little job for us, chaps. Don't know what it's all about, but that's Group Captain Ball come to tell me. Stay around close as he may want to talk to you. Dawson! And you, too, Farmer. Stay here with me. Perhaps Group Captain Ball may want to hear the story on this business first hand. I suggest the rest of you wait in the mess. I'll send for you later, Corporal Sharron."

The gathering broke up, leaving the O.C., Dawson, and young Freddy Farmer to greet the Blenheim's passengers. The big craft slid down to a beautiful landing, was taxied over, and braked to a stop. The fuselage door opened and two men stepped out. One wore R.A.F. blue, and the other wore army khaki. The former was Group Captain Ball, and Dave recognized him immediately. The latter wore the insignia of a full colonel on his shoulder straps, but he was a total stranger as far as either Dave or Freddy were concerned.

The pair walked over, and the two pilots and the C.O. saluted smartly.

"Glad to see you, sir," Markham said and shook Group Captain Ball's hand. "Didn't expect you so soon. You know Flying Officers Dawson and Farmer, eh?"

The Air Ministry official bored the two lads with a glance and smiled faintly.

"But, of course," he said. "Fact is.... But that can wait until later. Markham, this is Colonel Trevor, of Intelligence. Colonel Trevor, I'd like you to meet Squadron Leader.... Eh? What's the matter?"

The Intelligence officer had suddenly shoved Group Captain Ball to one side and was down on his knees beside the dead man. He crouched there motionless for a half minute or so, then got to his feet and fixed Squadron Leader Markham with a brittle stare.

"How did this man get here?" he asked sharply. "He's been shot through the head!"

Eighty-Four's senior officer squared his jaw just a bit and returned the other's hard stare.

"We noted that fact, too, Colonel," he said evenly. "A Messerschmitt was reported by spotters. My pilots went after it. Dawson, here, made contact with the enemy aircraft. As he was about to open fire this man was thrown out with his parachute opened. Dawson shot down the enemy aircraft, and then noting something peculiar about the man going down by parachute, he followed him to the ground and landed, Flying Officer Farmer landed also. They found the man just as you see him. Dawson flew him back here with the idea of contacting Intelligence. You recognize him,

Colonel?"

The Intelligence officer didn't answer. He turned to Dave, and the Yank born ace couldn't miss the look of worry and strain that had come into the man's dark eyes. He seemed on the point of exploding all over the place, but he didn't. He visibly clamped down hard on his inner emotions and spoke to Dave.

"Tell me the story in your own words!" he demanded.

The Intelligence officer's harsh tone of voice rubbed Dave's fur the wrong way. The Yank deliberately looked at Markham, and waited until the Squadron Leader nodded his head. Then for the third time Dave told his story. The Intelligence officer listened with a face set hard as granite. His only expression was in his eyes. And their expression was that of a man who is helplessly watching the efforts of weeks and months slip away from his grasp and dissolve in thin air.

"Who is he, sir?" Dave couldn't help blurting out as he finished.

"My brother," Colonel Trevor said with startling bluntness. "And the good right hand of British Intelligence."

The man emphasized his words with a curt nod, and then looked at Group Captain Ball.

"This tears it!" he said in a flat voice. "Knocks the blasted props right out from under the whole thing. He was the main link. Everything depended on the messages he could get through to me. That he was caught, and brought back here so that we could confirm his death, means.... Well, it must mean that they've been onto him for some time. Perhaps, even, that he sent me information that they *wanted* him to send. Blast the Nazis, anyway!"

No one said anything for a moment or two, Markham, Dawson, and Freddy Farmer being completely in the dark, kept their mouths shut for obvious reasons. Group Captain Ball didn't say anything because he was deep in thought weighing Colonel Trevor's words. Presently he stuck out his lower lip and gave a little half shake of his head.

"Possibly, Colonel," he said and fixed his thoughtful eyes on the distant horizon. "And then again, possibly not. You forget that we checked everything through other channels, and found it to be true. I fancy the Nazis sent him back ... this way ... in the hope that you would take just that attitude. Would come to that conclusion at once."

The Intelligence officer frowned in perplexity and dragged a thumbnail along the angle of his jaw.

"Then they don't know how much he sent through, eh?" he murmured, as though summing it up to himself. "Then this is a trick to make us believe they've had him under their eye all along, when actually they only unmasked him in the last day or so?"

"Frankly, yes," Group Captain Ball said. "Consider the matter in this light, Colonel. If they have known about him for some time, what was there for them to gain by giving him rope, and letting him send through all that information? They couldn't possibly guess what our objective might be, for the plain reason we haven't yet made up our own minds. No, the risk would be too great, for them. He held too high a position in the Nazi Gestapo. Once caught the obvious thing would be to shoot him on the spot. An old Nazi custom, by the way. Certainly, shoot him and let British Intelligence worry as to what's happened to him. But, no. They shot him and brought him over here so that we could be *sure* he was dead. Why? Because they don't *know* what he was up to. By doing this they hope to convince us they know all about it. You follow me?"

Colonel Trevor nodded slowly, and a tiny glimmer of hope seeped into his eyes.

"Thank you, sir," he said quietly. "I guess the shock sent my brain into a bit of a spin. Right you are. We'll carry on as we planned. Your squadron office a good place where we can talk, Markham?"

The O.C. of Eighty-Four started slightly at the sudden question popped at him, then nodded.

"Certainly, Colonel," he said. "My Adjutant's there, but I'll get rid of him. And ... er, what do you want us to do about your brother, Colonel?"

The Intelligence officer squared his shoulders and forced himself to look down at the dead man.

"If you could have him placed in the hospital hut, Markham," he said softly. "I'll arrange transportation elsewhere, later. Yes, if you could have him taken to the hospital hut. And, by the way, I don't want anybody, not even your medico, to touch him. There'll be an ... er, autopsy performed later."

Markham gave him a shrewd look, and then nodded.

"Just as you wish, Colonel," he said. "I'll give Corporal Sharron instructions, now, and then we'll go along to my office."

The O.C. of Eighty-Four called over the waiting non-com, gave him his orders, and then walked away with Colonel Trevor, and Group Captain Ball. Dave watched them until they were out of sight in the Squadron office. Then he turned suddenly to Freddy and started whipping his hand up and down the front of the English youth's tunic. Freddy knocked his hand away and went back a step.

"You're not my valet!" he cried. "Drop it, my lad. What in the world do you think you're doing?"

Dave grinned and reached out to whip the front of Freddy's tunic again.

"A game that was all the rage in the States," Dave said. "It was called, Handy. You make motions

with your hands and the others try to guess what it means. This one is in two words, Freddy. Guess. I'll give you a tip. It's American slang."

"Good grief, the chap's gone balmy again!" Freddy groaned and beat off Dave's hand once more. "Stop it, you crazy clown. Rubbish to your insane Yank games. What do you mean, two words? What two words?"

"What we just got, Freddy," Dave said. "Come on! Be a sport and see if you can guess it. Then I'll let you try one on me."

"I will not!" Freddy snorted. "Of all the silly rot! But what did we just get?"

"Okay, if you have to act dumb," Dave growled. "The two words are, brush off. That's what we just got. The old brush-off. And not with as much as a thank you kindly. I don't think I like that Colonel Trevor. Too darn chummy, if you ask me."

"He does sort of spill all over a chap, doesn't he," Freddy said with a half grin. Then wiping the grin away, "Can't blame him, though, for being a bit uppish. It must have been a shock, seeing his brother like that. Poor beggar. But, I say, Dave, did you hear Group Captain Ball speak of him holding a high position in the Nazi Gestapo? What do you know about that!"

"Everything, and also absolutely nothing," Dave grunted and looked over at the hospital hut where Corporal Sharron and his detail had taken the dead man. "And did you hear him say there'd be an autopsy later, but sort of stumble over his words? I wonder what he meant by that? The bullet hole is proof enough how he died. This thing has all the ear-marks of a Scotland Yard case, or something. Or is that sort of thing a part of Intelligence routine?"

Freddy Farmer cocked his head to one side and shrugged his shoulders.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "And blessed if I'm going to stay here looking like some department store window dummy. I just realized that I'm very hungry. How about you? Shall we have a spot of something or other before the next scramble alarm sounds?"

"The guy's stomach!" Dave groaned. "Nice juicy mystery on all sides, and the dope can only think of his *insides*! Oh, well. Okay! I'd better go along and see that you leave something for night mess. But take it easy, Freddy. I heard Markham telling Adjutant Phipps something about transferring you to bombers for a spell. I think it was your name he mentioned. Of course, maybe...."

"What?" Freddy gasped in stunned alarm. "Dave! There's a chance I may be transferred to bombers? You heard that? But.... But, why?"

Dave grinned and jabbed Freddy in the stomach with his thumb.

"That," he said. "If it gets too big to fit into a Spitfire, where else can it go but into a bomber, huh?"

Freddy Farmer made gurgling sounds in his throat, and lunged. But Dave slipped away from his grasp and dashed for the mess lounge.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Nazi Intrigue*

With a helpful snack of food safely tucked away, Dave and Freddy were in the mess lounge thumbing through some magazines and papers when the squadron office orderly found them.

"The C.O. wants to see you two officers at once," he said.

"You wouldn't have any idea, eh, Sergeant?" Dave asked and gave him a searching look.

"Did he look mad, or anything like that, when he sent you after us?" Freddy Farmer wanted to know.

The Sergeant grinned and shook his head.

"I don't think so, sir," he said. Then gravely, "Fact is, sir, he struck me as looking a bit worried, if you know what I mean. Like as if something had upset him. But, no, he didn't look mad."

"Well, thank goodness for that!" Dave breathed and looked at Freddy. "I guess it doesn't mean bombers for you yet, pal. Thanks, Sergeant. We're on our way right now. Pull in your stomach, Freddy, and let's go."

"Some day I'll die laughing at your silly jokes!" the English youth growled, but he impulsively pulled in his stomach and pushed back his shoulders as he dropped into step.

A couple of minutes later they entered the Squadron Office. Markham was there, and so were Colonel Trevor, and Group Captain Ball. They started to salute but Group Captain Ball stopped them with a wave of his hand.

"We'll forget formality for the time being, Gentlemen," he said with a smile. "Make yourselves comfortable. We want to talk to you two for a spell. There, that's the idea."

The Group Captain nodded as the two boys seated themselves, then glanced at Markham.

"You want me to do the talking, Markham, or would you rather?" he asked.

The Squadron Leader instantly shook his head.

"You, of course, sir," he said. "You naturally know all the details better than I do."

"As you wish, then," Group Captain Ball grunted, and looked back at Dave and Freddy. "Well, what with the Balkans already in this blasted war, and a Nazi attack on Russia almost certain within a month or so, old Adolf is going to need all the troops he can get."

The Air Ministry official stopped short and smiled at the surprised look on the boys' faces. He chuckled, and nodded.

"Oh, quite!" he said. "We've known for some time that Hitler was going to strike at Russia. When he does it will of course be quite a surprise to the rest of the world. Particularly to your civilian military experts back in America, Dawson. They've been having a jolly fine time on the radio and in the newspapers solving the Stalin riddle. Yes, I fancy they'll be the most surprised of the lot. And they'll be very annoyed at Adolf for not playing the game according to their views. However, be that as it may, we know definitely that Hitler *is* going to make war on Russia, and soon!"

The Group Captain paused and plucked at his lower lip as though deciding upon his next words.

"Tremendous in size as the German army is," he said presently, "it is not big enough for Hitler to wage intensive warfare on two fronts. He has not enough men, or enough material. It will be absolutely essential for him to withdraw a certain number of his forces from the occupied countries. And, when I say forces, I mean the Luftwaffe forces in particular. Now, if Hitler were to withdraw a large portion of his ground and air forces from the occupied countries what, in your opinion, would be the result, eh?"

The Group Captain happened to be looking straight at Dave, so it was the Yank born R.A.F. ace who answered.

"It would present a perfect opportunity for a British invasion of the Continent, sir," he said after a moment's thought.

"And you, Farmer?" the Group Captain asked, turning to the English youth.

Freddy flushed and looked slightly embarrassed, but he nodded his head.

"I say the same as Dawson, sir," he replied. "It would be a perfect opportunity for us to invade the Continent ... *provided* we have sufficient troops, guns, and planes for the job."

"And do you believe we have, Farmer?" the Air Ministry official shot at him.

Freddy opened his mouth to speak, then closed it and shrugged.

"I don't know, sir," he said after a short moment of hesitation. "Frankly, I have not the knowledge whether we are well enough equipped, or not."

"Exactly!" Group Captain Ball cried and poked the air with his finger for emphasis. "You do not know, and neither do thousands and thousands of others. Only a mere handful of men know the true strength of Britain's armed forces today. And Adolf Hitler *is not one of that group*. In other words, Hitler does *not know* whether or not we would strike at him with an invasion of the Continent once he removes the bulk of his forces from the occupied countries. At the same time, though, Hitler is not such a fool ... insane as the man is ... as to leave himself wide open for an attack from our side of the Channel."

"But if he withdraws the troops, and...?" Dave began and stopped short.

"He will withdraw his troops," Group Captain Ball interrupted. "Never fear. The beggar has to, or run the risk of possible defeat on the eastern front. But how can he withdraw the major portion of his forces from the occupied countries, and still feel safe from attack by England? That has been the problem we have been struggling with for the past five weeks. Ever since his bandits marched into Yugoslavia. And we think we've got an inkling of the correct answer."

The Group Captain paused and looked at Colonel Trevor.

"I think you'd better carry on from there, Colonel," he said. "You've been in charge of that end of the thing."

The Intelligence officer nodded, studied his fingernails for a moment, and then looked up. The glint of worry, or sadness, was still in his eyes, but in them also was the glitter of hard boiled determination.

"Some three weeks ago," he began, "British Intelligence received word from one of its members who has been in Germany since long before the start of the war. This communication received was the first that had come through from this agent in some four months. He had been recorded in our files as missing or dead. So it was a great joy to all concerned to learn that he was still alive and operating."

Colonel Trevor paused to crush out the cigarette he was smoking, and clear his throat.

"That agent was my brother," he continued presently. "The dead man you saw thrown out of that Messerschmitt, Dawson. Today ... today was the first time he had been in England for four years! All that time he was in Germany, serving England. He actually became a member of their cursed Gestapo, and as such obtained much information about Hitler's plans that was of inestimable value to us. However, in those days we did not have a government in power that believed Adolf Hitler was nothing but a liar and a dirty murderer. Consequently practically all of my brother's reports were shelved, and ignored completely. He stuck at his job, however, and after we once got into the war ... and there was a fighting Prime Minister at Number Ten Downing Street ... my

brother's efforts began to help us no end. But never mind that, now. It's all past history. It's events since receiving that communication about three weeks ago that we're interested in right now."

The Intelligence officer stopped talking again. Questions hovered on Dave's lips, but he had sense enough to keep his mouth shut. He waited outwardly calm, but inwardly on fire, for the Colonel to continue.

"In that first communication," the Intelligence officer presently took up the thread of his talk, "we learned for the first time of Hitler's plan to attack Russia, and of his intention to withdraw a large portion of his forces from the occupied countries. But, also, my brother included a sharp warning that an attempt by us to invade the Continent would be a risky venture with a very small chance of succeeding in our favor. Naturally, we in Intelligence wondered why our chances would be so slim. Assuming, of course, that we had the guns, planes, and men to tackle the job. However, there was no reason given in my brother's first communication. Only a sharp warning not to attempt the invasion, and a hint that there would be a second message coming through in a short time.

"Well, it was five days before the second communication came through. And as luck would have it, it didn't help us very much. There was a repeat warning against an invasion attempt, but no concrete reason other than a veiled implication that the Nazis had devised a means of defeating invasion attempts regardless of the number of troops, guns, and planes they had transferred to the eastern fronts. My brother could give us no facts, as he apparently was not in possession of any facts, himself. High up as he was in Nazi inner circles, the Nazis' secret of how they would hold onto occupied countries and still wage war on two other fronts was still a mystery to him. However, it was clear that he hoped to learn that secret soon. In the meantime he was warning us against any hasty action."

The Intelligence officer paused to gesture with a hand.

"High Command followed his warning for the plain reason we are not *yet* prepared to launch any kind of an invasion of the Continent," he said bluntly. "Not by sea or land, at any rate. And then, a week ago we received a third communication from him. He spoke of a new secret weapon of *defense* developed by the Nazis. He did not give details, or any kind of a description. He stated only that it was a weapon that guarded the entire coast of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. He said that one General Paul von Peiplow had been placed in complete charge of this secret defense of the occupied countries. He also stated that in his next message he would supply us with complete details of this weapon, and complete information on how to combat and overcome it."

Colonel Trevor stopped short and both Dave and Freddy saw the bitterness and sorrow that flooded his face.

"No other communication was received!" he said in a heavy voice. "And ... and you two know what happened today."

A sense of eager expectation fizzled out in Dave. He felt cheated and disappointed. He looked at Colonel Trevor and waited for the man to continue talking. However, the Intelligence officer was evidently finished. He slowly drew a cigarette from his pocket case and touched a match to it.

"Then you have no idea, sir?" Dave finally ventured the question. "No idea at all what this new secret weapon might be?"

"None," Colonel Trevor replied without looking at him. "We have no idea at all."

Dave bit his lips in thoughtful silence, then started to speak but changed his mind and remained silent. Group Captain Ball, watching him, leaned forward.

"What were you going to say, Dawson?" he asked. "Don't be shy, my lad. Anything may be a help, now."

Dave hesitated and then shrugged.

"I was thinking of this von Peiplow, sir," he said.

"Well, what about him?" the Group Captain pressed.

"Well, I assume he's still connected with the Luftwaffe, isn't he?" Dave inquired.

"Most certainly, and definitely!" the Air Ministry official replied. "Von Peiplow is as close to Goering's job as any Nazi will ever get. So, what about it?"

"Nothing, sir," Dave said slowly, "except that it gives me the hunch that the secret weapon must have something to do with aircraft, being as how von Peiplow is in full charge."

A second of silence hit the group and then Ball broke it by slapping a hand down on his knee.

"By the gods, yes!" he cried. "Yes, I believe you're right, Dawson. It's quite logical, of course, Colonel! What do you think?"

The Intelligence officer had straightened up a bit in his chair and was staring at Dave with an entirely new light in his eyes. There was a gleam of admiration where there had originally been a sort of bored patience. He smiled slightly and gave a little side twist of his head.

"I think Dawson has done more correct figuring in the last seven seconds," he said, "then we of Intelligence have done in the last seven days. But that's the way it is at times in this game. A bloke is so busy digging up the mysterious that the obvious passes him right by. Yes, I believe

Dawson has got hold of something. And that brings us up to the work you've been doing, Group Captain. Does Dawson's remark change anything?"

The Air Ministry official scratched the side of his jaw and squinted off into space for a moment or so before giving voice to his thoughts.

"I don't know," he said, "but I doubt if it does. I've studied those photos until I know every dot and shadow on them by heart. True, we weren't looking for any signs of aeronautical activity, and for that reason perhaps something slipped past us. I doubt it, though. However, the point is, Colonel, as we both agreed, that as of the Twenty-Fifth all photos of Zone K Dash Twenty-Four are obsolete. So I think we can just plain forget them."

Colonel Trevor nodded, and said nothing. Dave waited for perhaps three seconds, and then he couldn't stand being in the dark any longer.

"What photos, Group Captain Ball?" he blurted out. "And where is Zone K Dash Twenty-Four located? I don't believe I've ever heard of that zone, sir?"

The Air Ministry official grunted and settled himself more comfortably in his chair.

"Well, you're going to hear about it now," he said with a quick side glance at Squadron Leader Markham. "Through a slight mistake a certain order of mine was sent to this Squadron instead of the Squadron for which it was originally intended. However, I regard that as a bit of good fortune, rather than bad, because when Squadron Leader Markham told me of the mistake over the phone I suddenly realized that I would much rather have this Squadron tackle the job. Just a minute, now, while I light my pipe."

As the Air Ministry official produced pipe, tobacco, and matches, Dave noticed that Squadron Leader Markham looked far from happy. As a matter of fact, the O.C. of Eighty-Four looked downright annoyed at Group Captain Ball. However, he said nothing and watched in silence while the senior officer lighted up his hand carved "stove."

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## CHAPTER SIX

### *Pilots' Plans*

"There we are!" Group Captain Ball said and tossed the fourth or fifth burnt match into the ash tray on Markham's desk. "Now, about those photo patrols. Well, when we learned that Jerry had developed some new secret weapon that could guard Europe's coastline from the tip of the Netherlands to the south of France, we got to work to find out what it could be. Naturally, the first step was to take pictures from the air. Pictures, and more pictures, until we had found some kind of a clue. Then we would concentrate upon that particular area, and try to learn more.

"Well, under my direction, at least thirty picture patrols a day were made to various points along the entire coastline. Light bombers and reconnaissance planes took the pictures. And a fighter unit or two went along as escort and protection. There were air scrambles, of course, on every patrol. We suffered a slight loss in pilots and planes, but we did get our pictures. Well, for the first few days those pictures told us absolutely nothing that we didn't already know. Then it suddenly became very apparent that there was something going on in Zone K Dash Twenty-Four. That Zone, for your information, extends from Dunkirk to Ostende, to Calais, to Boulogne, to Dieppe. In other words, the strip of Occupied France shoreline closest to the British Isles. There the photos told us that changes were being made every day. Pictures taken on two successive days simply didn't match up with each other at all. Gun placements were different, ammo depots and the like were all changed around, anti-aircraft battery posts, and signs of troops and motorized unit movements were different. In other words, the whole blasted length of shoreline, and inland for fifteen miles or more, was a different kind of a jumble from day to day."

The Air Ministry official paused, frowned at his dead pipe, and pulled out some more matches. Dave started to ask a question, hesitated a second, and Freddy Farmer beat him to it.

"That sounds like the Jerries were on to you, sir," he said quietly. "I mean, that they mussed up things on purpose so that you couldn't make out head nor tail of what was going on in that Zone."

Group Captain Ball blew a cloud of thick smoke toward the ceiling, smiled at Freddy, and nodded.

"Good lad, Farmer," he said. "That's exactly the way we figured it. We decided definitely that they were playing a bit of a game with us. Pulling our leg, you know. And then we got pictures on the Twenty-Fifth. That was three days ago. They were the most mystifying of the lot. Every blessed one of them showed definite signs that the Zone had been completely evacuated. Yes, sir! Completely evacuated. Even the pilots taking part in the picture patrol reported they saw no signs of occupancy. True, they were at altitude, and the Jerry planes, of course, were there to give them trouble. But what little opportunity they did have to observe the terrain below resulted in nothing of value. Eye witnesses and photographs assured us that the German forces had just up and cleared out."

The Air Ministry official made a faint motion with his hand, and snorted softly.

"Naturally we suspected some kind of a trick at once," he continued in a moment. "We knew, perfectly well that Hitler wasn't going to up and walk away from ground that had cost him so much in men and guns. No, not that greedy one! No, it was obvious that they had simply dug



places where they could hide during the day, and did their work, whatever it was, during the night. And so we made arrangements to top them on that little game."

Group Captain Ball cut off the last short and stared fixedly at his pipe. It had gone out again, but it was plain that he was not even conscious of the fact. His thoughts were on something completely removed from his hand carved stove. To Dave and Freddy the senior officer's face seemed to suddenly age a dozen years or more. His shoulders sagged slightly, and his lips were pressed tightly together in a grimace of bitter self-reproach. Then presently he lifted his head and got his shoulders back.

"I'd give my life if I could recall that order," he said in a husky voice. "The order was for the light bomber-photo planes to go over at night, as though on a bombing mission. When they were over their objective they were to release the new powerful magnesium flares used nowadays for night photography. They were to dive, catch those on the ground by surprise, and take their pictures."

"The pictures still showed evidence of complete evacuation, sir?" Freddy Farmer put the question when the Air Ministry official stopped and didn't go on.

"There were no pictures," the man said harshly.

"No pictures, sir?" Dave echoed. Then as a wild guess, "Oh, you mean the patrol was washed-out?"

Group Captain Ball turned his head and stared at him out of eyes filled with sorrow.

"I mean that the patrol was *wiped out!*" he said in a heavy voice. "Not a single plane or pilot returned to base. Ten Lockheed Hudsons and not a one of them has been heard from since. They all just completely disappeared!"

The senior officer stopped abruptly and a tingling silence settled over the interior of the Squadron Office. Dave wanted to say something, but he could not think of the right words. A lump of lead was rolling around inside his stomach, and the palms of his hands had suddenly become strangely hot and clammy. Ten Lockheed Hudsons roaring out over the Channel, and on into complete and utter oblivion? It wasn't a pleasant thought. It was the sort of thing that seemed to drain the blood from a fellow's body, and dumped ice cubes on his brain, no matter how many times he had personally battled with death. The known you could always take. It was the unknown, the eerie, and the mysterious that cut your heart up into small pieces, and clawed your nerves to shreds.

"No report at all on what happened, sir?" Dave presently asked, though he knew full well what the answer would be.

"No, none at all," Group Captain Ball replied without looking at him. "The patrol took off, and never came back."

"I might add," Colonel Trevor spoke up quietly, "that Intelligence H.Q. contacted every one of its agents in the Occupied Zones. That is, all whom it was possible to contact. Not one of them could give us a satisfactory explanation."

"I say!" Freddy Farmer suddenly gasped, and then instantly subsided into silence.

Group Captain Ball swiveled around in his chair and shot the English youth a keen look.

"You say, what?" he demanded. "You've just thought of something?"

Freddy started to shake his head, and then to Dave's surprise he shot a guilty look at Squadron Leader Markham. Eighty-Four's O.C. took the look with a puzzled frown.

"What now, Farmer?" he asked. "Your face has a bit of a telltale expression, you know. Spoke out of turn, eh?"

"In a way, sir, I guess," Freddy said with an apologetic smile. "Never thought I'd mention it, but... Well, after all that's been said, perhaps I'd better mention it."

"If it has a bearing on our present problem," Group Captain Ball said sharply, "I'm giving you an order to mention it! And jolly well right now!"

The English youth stared at him and nodded meekly.

"Of course, sir," he said. Then, "It was two nights ago ... Tuesday night ... the photo patrol took off and never returned?"

"That's correct," the Air Ministry official said with a curt nod. "Tuesday night."

"That Zone covers quite a bit of ground, sir," Freddy said next. "Naturally, the patrol didn't expect to photo the entire area. Do you happen to know what their main objective was? I mean, the exact location?"

"Certainly I do!" the Group Captain snapped in an annoyed tone. "The area between Boulogne and Lille. Day to day changes there had attracted our interest the most. We... Now what? What the devil, Farmer? You're turning pale as a blasted ghost. For Heaven's sake, what's on your mind, lad?"

Freddy gulped, swallowed hard, and shot another guilty look at Squadron Leader Markham.

"You won't like this, sir," he said, "but I'd better tell it now. Last Tuesday night I took up one of the night flying planes for a little test hop about the field. You remember, sir?"

"I do," the Squadron Leader said, and fixed him with a hard stare. "You were up almost three

hours. Matter of fact, I've been meaning to tell you to make your night test hops shorter in future. I know that was a special plane with extra tanks to permit lengthy practice. But three hours is too long. Yes, I remember. So what about it?"

"I did not make my test hop within sight of the field, sir," Freddy said as his face turned a bit red. "Fact is.... Well, I sort of went hunting for trouble. I mean.... Well, I came across a flight from our Bomber Command on its way over to Naziland. I tagged along hoping that a Jerry night fighter or two would come up once they reached the other side of the Channel."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" Squadron Leader Markham breathed as Freddy faltered. "Remind me to make an example of you to the rest of the Squadron, my lad. Lots of pilots have been jolly well broken out of Service for less."

"Yes, I know, sir," Freddy said in a crestfallen tone. "I was a perfect idiot."

"You were completely balmy!" the Squadron Leader growled. "But never mind that for the present. Did night fighters come up after the bombers?"

"No, sir!" Freddy said, brightening a little. "There wasn't a single bit of action. Not even anti-aircraft guns or searchlights. I tagged the patrol a bit farther inland, and then turned back and headed for home. I had almost reached the Jerry side of the Channel when there was what seemed to be a terrific explosion to my southeast. The whole earth seemed to explode fire and smoke. It was miles from my position yet the glare actually blinded me for an instant. Then the light died down to a reddish glow in the distance. But, I didn't go and investigate, sir."

"Blessed wonder you didn't!" Squadron Leader Markham said, and hid a faint smile by wiping his mouth with his hand. "You figured the spot where the explosion occurred, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," Freddy replied instantly. "From my own position I judged it to be about half way between Boulogne and Lille. I didn't go and investigate because I assumed that it was the bombers I had tagged blasting some Jerry ammo dump, or something. So I just came on back home, and landed. Sorry, sir, but.... Well, I thought it best I tell you, considering."

"Well, fessing up may help you a little," Markham grunted. "Doesn't excuse your being a crazy idiot, though."

Freddy started to apologize again, but checked it as Colonel Trevor leaned toward him.

"The location of that explosion, Farmer!" he said sharply. "You are sure of it? Positive?"

"Oh quite, sir," the English youth assured him. "Fact is, the blinking glare lighted up some landmarks that I recognized easily. But, as I say, it was probably those bombers of ours giving a Jerry ammo dump, or rail-head, a good drubbing."

"It wasn't!" Group Captain Ball cut in with a violent shake of his head. "The Bomber Command received very definite orders not to send a single unit over that area Tuesday night. It was to be left strictly alone so that the photo patrol planes would be able to work unhindered. No, none of our bombers were over that point Tuesday night."

"By the way, Farmer," Colonel Trevor got in quickly. "Did you happen to note the time of the explosion, by any chance?"

The English youth pursed his lips and squinted his eyes at the office wall in a mannerism of deep and concentrated thought. After a moment he sat up a bit straighter and nodded.

"Yes, of course, I did, sir!" he replied. "I distinctly remember glancing at the instrument board watch. I remember because I was flying with all dash lights out, and the glare of the explosion was bright enough for me to see the time. It was exactly twenty-seven minutes before midnight, sir!"

Colonel Trevor slowly let clamped air from his lungs, leaned back in his chair and looked at Group Captain Ball. The Air Ministry official returned the look and slowly nodded his head up and down as though it were hinged in the middle.

"Yes," he said as though talking to himself, "that time would just about put the photo patrol over their first objective. Yes, that explosion, or whatever it was ... must have been the end of those brave chaps. Blast this war! Blast me for issuing that order!"

No one said anything for a moment or two after the senior officer stopped speaking. Then Colonel Trevor spoke to Freddy again.

"You'd better go into detail on that little off the record night flight you made, Farmer," he said. "Did anything else happen? See anything else that didn't seem quite right to you?"

The English youth went into his thinking act again, and came out of it shrugging his shoulders.

"No, sir," he said. "Can't say, that there was anything else. It did seem a bit strange, though, that Jerry ground gunners and searchlight lads didn't do anything about that bomber flight passing over. And, of course, there wasn't a thing done about me when I returned back over the Channel. Quiet as could be, and twice as dark below. Fact is, I don't recall spotting a single light on the ground. But, of course, that's not unusual. Jerry knows quite a bit about black-out technique, too."

Colonel Trevor nodded, said nothing, and fell to studying his fingernails some more. Dave waited for somebody to say something, and when the silence continued he offered his suggestion to Group Captain Ball.

"If it hasn't already been made, sir," he said, "why not have a daylight photo patrol made over

that area?"

"I thought of that," the Air Ministry official replied with a nod. "In fact I had arranged for a patrol to be made. Only...."

The senior officer paused and smiled at Squadron Leader Markham.

"Only the arrangements went haywire," he said. "My orders came here instead of going to another Squadron. However, as I've already said, I consider that fortunate rather than unfortunate. Frankly, I'd rather have Eighty-Four tackle the job."

"There's nothing particularly hard about escort work, sir," Markham spoke up quietly. "In my opinion any squadron in the Fighter Command is just as good as the next."

"Don't be modest, Markham!" Group Captain Ball said with a chuckle. "I appreciate your desire to keep your squadron working as a unit. However, the job I have in mind is not exactly a routine affair. True, nothing out of the way may happen. On the other hand it is possible that Jerry may be planning something very special, knowing full well that the photo planes are over there to try and find out what happened to the missing patrol. You see?"

The Squadron Leader nodded and smiled faintly.

"I didn't expect you to let us out of it, sir," he said and broadened his smile. "Just the old hen looking out for her chicks, if you understand what I mean, sir. Rather fond of my lads, and want to keep them around as long as I can. However, I have a suggestion to make."

"By all means, Markham!" the senior officer said quickly. "By all means. What is it?"

"Make it a voluntary affair, as stated in your orders, sir," Eighty-Four's O.C. said, "but permit the entire Squadron to volunteer. I know every one of my chaps will be eager to go along. And if there is trouble, and I fancy there will be, then the more escort pilots there are along the safer it will be for the photo planes."

"Splendid, Markham!" Group Captain Ball cried. "A splendid idea. Of course, that means you want to lead the Patrol?"

"Yes, sir," Markham replied. "Naturally, I wouldn't want to ... er, miss any of the fun."

"I suspected as much," the Adastral House official said with a chuckle. "Very well, then, Markham. We'll tackle it on that basis. I'll inform the Fifty-Fifth Bomber Command Squadron that you will serve as their escort. We'll schedule the patrol for first thing at dawn tomorrow, and...."

"Why not today, sir?" Markham interrupted with an apologetic gesture. "We've got all afternoon, and the sooner you get those pictures, the sooner you may be able to find out something ... I hope."

"True," Group Captain Ball said. "Quite true, Markham. On the other hand, delaying things another day may give Jerry the idea we're no longer interested in that Zone. Sort of catch him off guard, you might say. It's a chance worth taking. We jolly well might profit from it."

"Yes, I see your point, sir," Markham said with a nod. "And, after all, we've got a little preparing to do. Checking planes, engines, and all that sort of thing. Right you are, sir. Tomorrow morning at dawn it is."

"Good!" Group Captain Ball said. Then turning toward Dave and Freddy he continued, "And now I have a bit of a surprise for you two chaps. In recognition of your...."

The Air Ministry official stopped short and stared hard at Dave Dawson, who seemed not to be listening. The Yank born R.A.F. ace was gazing out the Squadron Office window with a look on his face that seemed to indicate his thoughts were a million miles away.

Group Captain Ball cleared his throat, and reached out a hand and tapped Dave on the knee.

"Day dreaming, Dawson?" he asked sharply. "All this sort of bores you, eh?"

Dave jumped as though he had been shot, swallowed hard, and went beet red to the roots of his hair.

"No, sir, of course not!" he said hastily. "I was.... Well, I was just thinking, sir."

"Really?" the senior officer murmured. "Mind telling us about what, Dawson?"

Dave turned even a shade redder, and avoided Group Captain Ball's steady gaze.

"About the photo patrol you're planning, sir," he finally said after a couple of false starts. "It seems to me.... That is.... Well, I mean sir, I...."

"Come, come, Dawson!" the Adastral House official jacked him up as he stumbled. "Just what do you mean, anyway?"

Dave hesitated, then took a deep breath, and sort of squared his shoulders.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, "but I'm not in favor of your plan at all. Frankly, I don't think you'd gain any more from it than you have from the others. To tell the truth, I've got a hunch it would be a waste of time, and perhaps a loss of pilots and planes!"

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

## *Dave's Plan*

Had a Nazi Stuka come plowing down through the Squadron Office roof and lighted on Markham's desk the stunned amazement of the others would not have been any greater. Freddy gulped and looked actually scared stiff. Markham, Group Captain Ball, and Colonel Trevor sat up a bit in their chairs and gaped pop-eyed at each other. It was the Air Ministry official who first found his tongue.

"Well, bless me, rather!" he breathed. "In my time I've been told a thing or two right to my face, but.... Well, I must say, Dawson, that once you get started you get right to the point. So my plan is a bit of a wash-out in your mind, eh?"

At that moment Dave would have given a lot if a great big hole had opened up in the floor so that he could jump into it and disappear completely. However, no hole opened up, and so he stuck to his guns.

"Yes, sir," he said doggedly. "I know I'm speaking out of turn, but you asked me, sir. So I gave you a truthful answer."

"The truth is always welcomed, of course," Group Captain Ball said a bit stiffly. "Supposing, though, instead of wasting time defending yourself, you explain why there would be no sense in carrying out such a stupid mission?"

"Just a minute!" Dave said as his cheeks got hot. "I didn't say the mission was stupid, sir. I didn't say, either, that carrying it out would be a waste of time. I meant that carrying it out *as planned* would be a waste of time, in my opinion."

"Why?"

It was Colonel Trevor who shot out the single word. He had leaned farther forward in his chair, and was regarding Dave not out of hostile eyes, but out of eyes that showed frank curiosity, and an earnest desire to learn the truth.

"Because of what's already happened, Colonel," Dave replied. "Look at it this way. Countless photo patrols were made over the terrain of Zone K Dash Twenty-Four. Each time Jerry planes were encountered and there was a scramble or two. At first the pictures didn't show anything of interest. Then suddenly they showed a lot of crazy changes in a certain area. Finally, the pictures gave every indication that that certain area had been completely evacuated. And lastly, a photo flight that went over at night failed to return. You follow me, sir?"

"Yes," the Intelligence officer grunted. "But you're only giving a case history of what's happened. We know all about that."

"Why did it happen?" Dave shot right back at him. "If you want my opinion I think it's because the Nazis *knew all the time* what we were up to. They saw our bombers upstairs, but no eggs were dropped. They saw our bombers circling around over the area day after day, and still no bombs came down. The Jerry fighter pilots tangled with our fighters, and the photo ships still stuck to their job. What in the world do you think the Nazis on the ground were imagining? That we were practicing formation flying or something? The heck they did! They knew darn well that we were taking pictures, and more pictures. And not being exactly dumb, they did the logical thing!"

The ghost of a smile quivered at the corners of Colonel Trevor's mouth. Even Markham and Group Captain Ball were having trouble keeping a straight face. The straight from the shoulder honesty of the young Yank was not exactly an every day occurrence in British Army life, and they were a bit more amused than they were shocked.

"And what was the logical thing for the Nazis to do?" the Intelligence officer eventually asked quietly.

"Kid us along, of course!" Dave cried, warming up to his subject. "Pull the old razzle-dazzle on us, so that we wouldn't know where we were from a three dollar hat. Don't you get me?"

"I was quite a while in the States," Colonel Trevor said with a chuckle, "but I'm afraid I didn't quite pick up all of your American slang expressions. What do you mean by what you've just said, Dawson?"

Dave grinned, and blushed slightly.

"Sorry, sir," he said. "I sort of shoved into high gear without realizing it. I mean, I ... well, anyway, I'm sure Jerry knew what we were up to all the time, so he purposely made things all the more confusing. Matter of fact, I wouldn't be at all surprised but what he kidded us along step by step hoping that we would send over that night patrol."

"What?" Group Captain Ball exploded in a loud voice. "Led us along? What in the world do you mean by that? I think you've gone balmy, my lad. Of all the rot!"

"Maybe so, sir," Dave said evenly and held up two fingers. "But there are two things *we* don't know. One, what the new Nazi secret weapon is all about. And, two, what happened to that night picture patrol. Correct, sir?"

"Unfortunately, yes," the other grunted backing down a little. "But what's that got to do with what the Nazis did? I mean, all this kidding along, as you express it."

"You're pinning me down kind of tight, sir," Dave said with a half grin. "That part is just a hunch that sticks in my craw. I mean, I've got the hunch that there was one thing the *Nazis didn't know*.

For certain, I mean."

Group Captain Ball groaned and threw up his hands.

"My word!" he cried. "More blasted riddles! Come to the point, Dawson. What in the world *do* you mean?"

Dave hesitated a moment and then gave it to them straight.

"The new Nazi secret weapon," he said. "The Jerries were not certain how successful it would be against an air invasion. So they *tried it out!*"

As Dave's echo faded away into silence not a man uttered a sound. Not a man hardly so much as breathed. The exploding verbal bomb shell had driven home a possible truth that not one of them had even so much as considered. Not even so much as suspected of existence.

"By George!" Group Captain Ball finally breathed in an awed tone. "The chap has hit upon something. No doubt about it at all. It's quite possible, this hunch of his. Quite, indeed. The blasted Nazis have been playing games with me to serve their own purpose. Dawson! I apologize for being a bit rude awhile back. You're quite right. I'm afraid we have been wasting our time. And would waste more to make another photo patrol. Blast it, though, we just can't sit back and twiddle our thumbs."

"Perhaps you've got an answer to that one, Dawson?" Colonel Trevor asked.

Dave didn't reply at once. He pursed his lips and stared thoughtfully off into space.

"The original patrols weren't entirely a waste of time," he said presently. "I mean, if for no other reason than the fact we learned that something very mysterious is going on in the area over which the photo patrol was lost. We can be pretty sure there's something there that needs further investigation."

Dave held up a hand as Group Captain Ball scowled and opened his mouth to interrupt.

"Just a minute, please, sir," he shut off the high ranker. "I know what you're going to say. Get along with it! Okay. Here it is. A night patrol, such as the last, is out. Too much of a risk. A day patrol of bomber-photo ships and escort planes is out, too. Sight of us in the sky would simply tell Jerry that we were still ... well, suckers for punishment. *But* two or three *fighter planes* passing over probably wouldn't create any interest at all. And certainly no suspicions. And if there happened to be a couple of Jerry planes in the air to scramble with, then so much the better. Or isn't that clear?"

"As mud!" Group Captain Ball said with a sad shake of his head. "You'd better not ever run for Parliament, Dawson. You'd befuddle the issue. Your colleagues wouldn't know what in the world you were talking about, I'm afraid."

"Then that makes me a swell bet for Congress," Dave grinned. "Seriously, though, sir. Three Spitfires fitted with special cameras could slide over the mystery area and look like they were just passing by. Now, if Jerry fighter planes came up, we could scramble with them, and a couple of us could act like we were going down. Shot down, or the engine quitting, and a forced landing necessary. We could even fake engine trouble without Jerry planes being around. The point is, though, a couple of us could get real low down and snap pictures that would bring out a lot of stuff that the camera wouldn't catch at high altitude. Also, in fighter planes we could cover a whole lot more ground than the slower bomber jobs. But the main thing is, the Nazis wouldn't be wise to what we were doing."

Group Captain Ball expelled air through pursed lips, and gave a little half shake of his head.

"What blasted use I am at Air Ministry, I jolly well don't know!" he exclaimed. "I think you and I should swap jobs, Dawson. Only I'd be a frightful wash-out at yours. You're absolutely correct, though. You've hit upon the only way possible to get a good look at what's going on over in that cursed Zone. Right, Colonel? Right, Markham?"

"Seems that way to me," the Intelligence officer said slowly. "Dawson has at least convinced me that our original plan is no good at all. And the only alternative that seems any good, is his plan."

"I knew it wouldn't be long before Dawson and Farmer were off again on some special mission," Squadron Leader Markham grunted. "But he's quite right. His plan's the best bet. Only one thing I hope doesn't happen, though. Two things, matter of fact."

"Eh?" Group Captain Ball murmured.

"One that they don't run into a couple of squadrons of Jerry planes," Markham said. "And really *get* shot down. And two, that this blasted secret weapon doesn't work in the day time. But one can't be sure of everything, I suppose."

"No, of course not," Group Captain Ball said with a shrug. Then turning to Dave, "Well, naturally, you're elected for one of the trio. Who else? Farmer for one?"

The eager look on Freddy's face was too much for Dave to let slide. He scowled dubiously, and rubbed his chin in mock deliberation.

"Why, yes, I guess so," he said finally. "That is, if he promises not to go off on any little night flying jaunts."

They all laughed. Freddy with them. But the look he flashed at Dave clearly said, "Wait 'til I get you alone, my friend. Just wait!"

"Well, who else?" Markham asked the question.

"I'd like the third one to be Flight Lieutenant Barker, sir," Dave said. "He's tops as a pilot in my opinion. And he can shoot rings around anybody I ever saw in the air, with maybe the possible exception of Farmer, here."

"And yourself, Dawson," Markham added with a smile. "Right you are, then. You, Farmer, and Barker. You take command, and...."

"That's something I wanted to speak about, sir," Dave interrupted hastily. "I happened to think up the idea, but that doesn't rate my being placed in charge of the show. After all, Barker has had more R.A.F. experience than either Freddy or I. He's been in it from the very start. Then, too, sir, the matter of rank. Barker is a Flight Lieutenant, and as such...."

"So are you and Farmer!" Group Captain Ball cut in.

Dave's jaw dropped, and his eyes popped.

"Come again?" he blurted out. "What was that you just said?"

The Air Ministry official chuckled and pulled some papers from his inside tunic pocket.

"That you and Farmer *are* Flight Lieutenants, too," he said, and tossed the papers on Markham's desk. "That's the surprise I was about to mention awhile back. In recognition of your services on that convoy patrol job, Air Ministry has promoted you both to the rank of Flight Lieutenants. It'll appear officially in the London Gazette tomorrow. Meantime, there's confirmation for your files, Markham. Well, Dawson, and Farmer, let me be the first to congratulate you. It's a promotion well earned, and doubly deserved."<sup>[2]</sup>

For the next couple of minutes neither Dave nor Freddy had any idea what they were doing. They were completely swallowed up in a beautiful rosy cloud, and their little world was the nicest thing ever created.

"And so, you don't need to feel any qualms about difference in rank, Dawson," Group Captain Ball's voice finally brought Dave's feet back on earth. "Strictly speaking, he still is your senior, but I'm placing you in command of this mission. And that's that. Now, of course your Mark Fives can't be fitted with cameras in time for you to make the patrol today. But do you think you could be ready by dawn?"

"Yes, sir," Dave answered promptly. "And.... Well, there's one more suggestion, if it ... if it won't drive you crazy, sir."

"I think I can stand just about one more," the Adastral House official said with a faint grin. "Shoot, as you Yanks term it!"

"I think it might be a good idea for a flight of bomber planes to be sent over the area before we arrive," Dave said. "Not right over the area. Have them pass over well south, as though they were headed for some objective farther inland. Then when we appear later Jerry will think that we're just tootling over to meet the bombers and escort them back home. So maybe they won't give us a second glance."

"Right," Group Captain Ball said. "I'll arrange with Bomber Command to do just that. Now, any more suggestions, eh?"

"I guess not, sir," Dave said with a chuckle.

"Then let's all have a spot of tea, or something," the Air Ministry official said, getting to his feet. "We can talk things over again later. Meantime I'm parched, and hungry as a wolf."

Dave shot a glance at Freddy Farmer and saw instantly that his English pal was five hundred per cent in favor of the Group Captain's idea.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *The Dead Speak*

The dawn sun was still out of sight far down below the eastern lip of the world. Not even the first faint glow of its coming could be seen in the sky. On the tarmac of Eighty-Four's field three powerful Mark 5 Spitfires were being warmed up and mothered by mechanics as though they were infant babes in arms. Off to one side, Dave Dawson, Freddy Farmer, Barker, and Squadron Leader Markham, stood waiting and talking of everything under the sun except the special patrol that was soon to get underway.

That was a taboo subject with them. It was for the simple reason there wasn't anything else to discuss. All the plans and preparations had been made. Special high speed cameras, that could be operated from the control stick, had been fitted in the planes. The cameras had been tested and found to be in perfect working order. Each pilot had taken his plane aloft and tested it until he was thoroughly satisfied with every beat of the engine, and every single response to a touch on the controls. Everything that could be done, had been done. There was nothing to do now but wait for the engines to be warmed up ... and then get on with the job.

"Say, Barker," Dave suddenly broke a minute's silence. "Meant to speak to you about this, but we've all been pretty busy. I mean.... Well, darn it, you're still senior officer, and I'm perfectly

willing for you to take over command of this show. Fact is, I think it would be a sensible idea. I...."

"Oh, no you don't, Yank!" Barker cried and laughed. "Decent and mighty sporting of you, old bean. And I like you a lot for saying it. But I've been in command of special shows before. Not at all to my liking. Hate responsibility, you know. I'm always getting things messed up something terrible."

"Yeah, I can guess!" Dave snorted. "He's won the Distinguished Flying Cross, *and* bar! And he says he'd mess things up? Nix on that line, friend. But I really am serious about your...."

"Don't be!" Barker said firmly. "I refuse, flatly. No, my lad. I'm going to tag along obeying orders on this show. And love it, I fancy."

"Then you won't...?" Dave started again and hesitated.

"No!" Barker repeated. "Absolutely not. If it's a success then you get perhaps the Victoria Cross, my lad. If it's not, then you get Squadron Leader Markham on *your* neck. I don't! See what I mean, old thing?"

Dave grinned and looked at his commanding officer who was shaking with laughter.

"Don't mind Barker, Dawson," the O.C. said. "He's an awful one for juggling the truth. Frankly, I've never so much as spoken a harsh word to him since he's been in the squadron."

"But, what you've *thought*, sir!" Barker said and laughed. "Just the same, Dawson, this is your show. And in my opinion you certainly deserve to have command."

"Well, I still don't know about that," Dave said with a shrug. "But.... Hold everything! That's a ship coming down to land, isn't it?"

All eyes were turned on the star studded sky overhead whence had come the sudden sound of airplane engines. An instant later the sound died down to a purr. And a brief moment after that the darkness was cut by the twin beams of the incoming plane's landing lights.

"Can't see for those darn lights," Dave grunted. "But she sounds to me like a Blenheim."

"It is!" Freddy Farmer echoed. "I can see her, now. I say! That's the same bus Group Captain Ball, and Colonel Trevor, came down in from London. I wonder if they're coming back."

"I wonder, too!" Squadron Leader Markham echoed. And Dave thought he caught just a faint trace of hopefulness in the O.C.'s voice. "Maybe they've decided to wash-out the patrol. Maybe something else has popped up."

As Dave watched the shadowy blur slide down toward the surface of the field, then level off and settle gently, a conglomeration of mixed emotions surged through him. One instant he experienced the familiar eerie tingling at the back of his neck that was always an advance warning of danger just ahead. Then in the next instant a sense of disappointment would flood through him. As though that plane was bringing word that the flight over occupied France had been called off. Then again he was filled with the strange excited feeling of more mystery being added to what already existed. A jumble of emotions and crazy thoughts that plagued him as he waited for the pilot of the Air Ministry Blenheim to taxi up to the line.

When the plane stopped, and the door was popped open, only one man jumped down onto the ground. That man was Colonel Trevor, and he hurried over to the group with a look of marked relief quite visible on his face in the pale glow shed by the two or three flare lights set about on the tarmac.

"Thank heavens, you haven't taken off yet!" the Intelligence officer cried. "Didn't want to waste time trying to get you on the phone. Raid on in London, anyway, and the phone service isn't so good at such times. No, not a hot raid. Just a few Jerry ships up there. And our lads are handling them very nicely. Anyway, I dashed out to Croydon in the blasted black-out and commandeered Ball's plane. I've got a bit more information for you, Dawson. By the way, do you know that terrain between Boulogne and Lille?"

"Fairly well, sir," the Yank R.A.F. ace replied. "I've done quite a bit of flying over that section, now and again. Why, sir?"

The Intelligence officer didn't answer at once. He fished a hand into the pocket of his tunic and pulled out a folded sheet of paper. Smoothing it out he held it to the light so that all could see. A map had been roughly drawn in pencil on the paper.

"A map of a three square mile spot of ground exactly seven miles west of Lille," Colonel Trevor said, and started pointing things out with his finger. "See this? A hill range. Here is the Lille River that flows into the Somme farther south. See this sharp bend in the river? Well, the ground there is thickly wooded, and to the east ... the southeast, rather ... is quite an expanse of swamp ground. Now, just a shade east of the edge of that swamp land is a tiny French village. You can't even find it on a map, but its name is Fleurville. Somewhere in that area, Dawson, is the secret weapon that Hitler plans to use against us. The weapon, I am sure, that destroyed those Lockheed Hudson bombers last Tuesday night."

Dave didn't say anything as the Intelligence officer stopped speaking. He stared hard at the pencil drawn map in an effort to stamp every little detail on his mind. Squadron Leader Markham, however, was not so interested in the map as he was in what Colonel Trevor had said.

"Why do you say that, Colonel?" he asked. "And where did you get this map?"

"I traced that map from one you could only see under a microscope," the other said. "From a map originally drawn almost pin head size by my brother."

Dave jerked his head up, eyes wide.

"Your brother, sir?" he gasped. "But your brother's dead! You mean another communication came through just the same? That he'd sent it on its way before he was captured?"

"No," Colonel Trevor said quietly. "My brother brought it with him. Remember my not wanting anybody to touch the body? Remember my saying something about an autopsy? Well, naturally, I did not plan for any autopsy to be made on my brother. The cause of his death was clear enough. However, in Intelligence every agent has a special way of hiding secret messages in the event he is captured. Some use false fingernails with the message printed underneath too small for the human eye to read. Others conceal the message under a false patch of hair glued to their scalp. And so on. There are a hundred and one different ways of hiding information you've gathered. However, each man's method is a secret between himself and the Chief of Intelligence. Therefore I didn't allow your medico to touch my brother. I wanted to communicate with my Chief first."

Colonel Trevor paused for a moment, squared his jaw a bit, and then continued.

"My brother did bring back information," he said. "His method of hiding messages on his person was by means of a hollowed out false tooth that not more than one dentist in a hundred would detect. In that hollow tooth was a postage stamp size original of this map, and some instructions."

"Dope on the secret Nazi weapon, sir?" Dave asked eagerly as the Intelligence officer paused again.

"Some," was the quiet reply, "but not nearly enough. To be perfectly truthful, my brother still didn't get complete details. He only learned that somewhere in this area covered by the map the Nazis have installed this new weapon, and..."

Colonel Trevor cut himself off short and nodded at Dave.

"Your hunch was a good one, Dawson," he said. "According to my brother's report, the Nazis have installed the weapon there for the purpose of experiments and tests. As I said, he did not know *what* the weapon is. He was only able to find out that it is to be used primarily against aircraft."

"Not against troops?" Freddy Farmer spoke up. "Then how do they expect to beat off an invasion attempt. They...! That's rather silly of me, isn't it?"

"What, Farmer?" Squadron Leader Markham asked with a puzzled frown.

"The question, sir," the English youth replied and blushed faintly. "I suddenly realized that the answer is obvious. This war has proved that the side that has control of the air is the side that comes out on top. So, if the Nazis are able to maintain control of the air over Occupied Europe, all the invasion troops in the world wouldn't of much use to us."

"Right, Freddy!" Dave said with a grin. "Go to the head of the class, my boy. Did you learn anything else, Colonel?"

"Sorry, but that's all, Dawson," the Intelligence officer replied. "But it should help you a little. At least you won't have to waste time buzzing around over the entire area. Concentrate on the spots covered by this map. Here, better take my copy along with you. Well.... Well, good luck, chaps. And God speed back home again."

Colonel Trevor didn't thrust out his hand, or stiffen to attention and salute the three R.A.F. aces. He did nothing but look at them each in turn. That was plenty. His eyes said far more than his lips could have said. Expressed far more than any firm hand shake or slap on the back.

"Thanks, sir," Dave said for the three of them. "You can depend on us to bring back the pictures ... or else."

"Never mind the, or else, Dawson," Squadron Leader Markham grunted. "Just make sure all three of you come back! And, Dawson?"

"Yes, sir?" Dave murmured.

Squadron Leader Markham didn't speak for a few seconds. He stood staring Dave straight in the eye. Then suddenly he raised a cautioning finger.

"In case things don't turn out as you hope," he said eventually. "In case the patrol looks like a complete wash-out, don't get too many of those hunches of yours, will you? There'll always be a tomorrow in this blasted war, you know. Don't try to win it in a few hours, though goodness knows you and Farmer could probably make a fairly good go at it."

"Don't worry, sir," Dave chuckled and tightened the strap on his helmet. "I'll watch my step, and try not to lead with my chin. But if I should get out of line you can count on Barker and Farmer to throw a halter on me."

"Oh, quite!" Flight Lieutenant Barker echoed. "I don't fancy to step out of this war for quite some time, if ever. Don't worry, sir, Farmer and I will keep an eye on this wildman from the States."

"And a good grip with both hands, too, sir!" Freddy added. "But, I've handled the balmy blighter before, and I can do it again."

"Shucks!" Dave said in mock disappointment. "Then what's the sense of my going along, if I can't have fun?"



"Personally, I wish there was no sense in any of you going along," Squadron Leader Markham said gravely. "However, war's war, and that's that. I guess it's time for you to be off. The very best, lads! And happy landings ... on *this* field!"

The trio hesitated a moment, looked at each other, and then as one man turned and walked over to their planes. As Dave climbed into his pit a soothing calm flowed through his body. The calm before the storm, perhaps. But for the moment the excitement of the occasion, the tingling, eager anticipation of things to come, and the myriad little inner fears and doubts, were banished. It was as though he were climbing into his Mark 5 to take it aloft for a joy hop, or a bit of gunnery practice on the field's ground target. That soon he would be leading Freddy Farmer and Barker deep into mystery skies over occupied Europe was as something as far removed as the sun.

A sense of peace and contentment were his as he settled himself in the pit, and made a last minute check of everything. But perhaps the war gods were perfectly willing that he should feel that way for a spell. They knew it would not last long. They knew what awaited those three stout hearted aces of the R.A.F. They knew what was waiting, and what was going to happen. And they clapped their hands and nudged each other in high glee.

"Well, there'll always be an England," Dave murmured and reached for the throttle. "So, I'll be seeing you soon!"

Five seconds later three Spitfire Mark 5s thundered out across the field, cleared, and went zooming up to lose themselves quickly in the shadowy sky. Back down on the tarmac Squadron Leader Markham stood like a carved statue, his eyes still turned upward toward the half night, half dawn sky. He saw nothing but murky shadows, but the drone of three powerful Rolls-Royce engines was still in his ears. He listened until the sound faded away in the distance. Then slowly he clenched both fists and turned to look at Colonel Trevor.

"If they don't come back," he said in a strained voice, "I fancy you and Group Captain Ball had better catch the first boat for South Africa!"

"Amen!" the Intelligence officer said softly.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### *Vultures Over Europe*

Comfortably settled in the pit of his Mark 5, but with every nerve and muscle set for instant action, Dave veered slightly more toward the southeast, and fixed his gaze on the yellow splashed horizon ahead. The shadows of night were now far behind him. And so were England, and the Channel. The Nazi defiled ground of Occupied France was under his wing, and the blinding glare of a new day's sun was directly ahead.

Employing a trick first used in World War Number One, he closed one eye and raised a thumb to a point some three inches in front of the other eye. The ball of his thumb covered the sun and made it possible for him to see around it. In a way it was like making a total eclipse of the sun, and the light that splashed out from behind this thumb was comparable to the solar corona of a total eclipse of the sun. In short, it made it possible for him to search the sun flooded sky ahead without staring straight into the blinding rays of the sun.

The action gained him nothing, however. If per chance there were Jerry planes lurking up there in the sun, he didn't see them. He saw nothing but golden sky marked by golden clouds. Nothing more. The heavens seemed to be still asleep. And when he lowered his gaze and peered at the ground below it struck him as though the earth were asleep, too. True, he was flying at some twenty one thousand feet and the ground below looked little more than a crazy quilt of a million different shades. However, he could detect no signs of movement. No tongues of flame spurting up toward him. And no rumbling *crunch-crunch* of anti-aircraft shells dirtying the clean air with their explosions and black globs of smoke.

"Maybe they're not interested in small fry like us," he grunted to himself. "Or maybe those photos Ball studied weren't kidding. Maybe Jerry has evacuated this neck of the woods."

"And maybe you should stop mumbling to yourself, what?" spoke Freddy Farmer's voice in his earphones. "Spot anything yet, Dave?"

Dave chuckled and put his lips closer to his flap-mike.

"Me?" he echoed. "When I've got you along? Look, pal, I'm expecting you to earn your fare for this buggy ride. You're Little Sharp Eyes, you know. We're counting on you, see? Isn't that right, Barker?"

"Oh, quite!" Barker's voice replied in the earphones. "After all, if the chap can see to find his way over here and back *at night*, then it should be simple for him with all this light."

"All right, drop it!" Freddy shouted angrily. "Knew blessed well I'd never hear the last of that. But what could I do but confess to Markham?"

"Lots of things, my dear fellow!" Dave said sternly. "For one, you could have learned long ago that we've got discipline in this man's air force. And for youngsters to take airplanes up at night and try to do things that grown up pilots wouldn't even...."

"Listen to who's talking!" Freddy snorted. "Why I remember one time when he...!"

"Save it!" Barker's voice cut in excitedly. "What's that about five miles to the northeast? Do I see something moving, or is it just spots in front of my eyes?"

All idea of further horse-play instantly bailed out of Dave Dawson's mind. He turned his head sharply and peered hard in the direction indicated. There was nothing to see, however. That is, as far as he was concerned. Nothing but sun tinted dawn sky, and sun tinted patches of cloud. For a second, though, he thought he did catch a glimpse of something moving. Like a group of small dots that appeared and disappeared in practically the same instant. But when he blinked hard and took another look, the dots weren't there.

"Thought I saw something, too, Barker," he called into his flap-mike. "But I guess they must have been spots in front of my peepers. How about you, Freddy?"

There was no reply from the English youth. Dave turned and glanced over at Freddy's plane to see his pal staring fixedly toward the northeast. Several seconds ticked by and still no reply from Freddy Farmer.

"Hey, Freddy!" Dave called out again. "See anything, pal?"

"Shut up! Just a minute! I don't know, yet!"

A full minute did tick by before the English born R.A.F. ace spoke again.

"You chaps were wrong!" he shouted. "They're not just spots. Four Messerschmitts. One-Nine Fighters, I think. Yes, they're One-Nines. In formation, and heading due west. See them?"

"If you're kidding us!" Dave growled, and stared until his eyes ached from the strain. "I'll... Pick up the marbles, pal. I see them, now!"

"So do I!" Barker cried out. "Let's go after the beggars. There are only four. It should be jolly, eh?"

"It should be, but nix!" Dave snapped into his flap-mike. "They're way off our course. And we're supposed to be making a rendezvous with some bombers, you know."

"See?" Barker called out and chuckled. "Remember my saying I'd make a mess of things? Right you are, *sir*! Quite right. We hold her as she goes, eh, old bean?"

"Cut it out!" Dave growled, but he was smiling. "But we'll let the lugs go. It would be nice, though, if they should come *after* us. I don't count much on just faking engine trouble and going down as though to force land. Jerry knows darn well we make good engines. However...."

"Looks like you get your wish, Dave!" Freddy Farmer's excited voice interrupted. "Guess they've sighted us. They're wheeling around in our direction."

It was true. Dave saw it was true the instant he whipped his eyes around toward the planes again. The four Messerschmitts had changed course abruptly and were headed in their direction and gaining altitude steadily. Dave took one quick look at them and then turned front and peered ahead and down. A night ground mist was fast being "melted" away by the dawn sun, and landmarks were beginning to stand out in clear relief. His heart leaped as he sighted the Lille River, the hill range, and the spread of swamp ground, and woods, marked on the map he carried in his pocket.

Dead ahead, and perhaps two minutes by air, was the mysterious area in Zone K-24. Dead ahead was the sky "graveyard" of ten Lockheed Hudsons. Dead ahead was the testing ground of Adolf Hitler's newest weapon of unrestricted warfare. Dead ahead, life and victory? Or failure, and death?

Those and countless other thoughts whipped and raced through Dave's brain as he stared hard at the "objective" of their special patrol. At the same time he automatically slid the safety catch off the red trigger button on the control stick, and placed one finger lightly against the trigger lever for the high speed camera attached to the belly of the plane.

"Hold her steady, fellows," he spoke into his flap-mike. "Carry right on as though we didn't see them. Let them get altitude, if they want. We should worry. But the instant they start pumping lead start the fancy business. Okay?"

"Right you are!" Barker replied.

"Who fakes being hit first?" Freddy Farmer called out. "That's one thing we forgot to decide."

"I didn't," Dave grunted. "I elected myself. When I go down, start down after me as though for protection. But don't put yourself in a jam to help me."

"That depends," Freddy said.

"Depends, nothing!" Dave barked. "Them's orders, Mister! Keep your own eye on the ball. It's pictures we want, no matter who gets them. Fake all you want to, but don't get behind the eight-ball so's you can't take your own pictures. And one more thing."

"Good heavens!" Barker groaned over the radio. "Hasn't everything been decided?"

"Not this item," Dave replied. "If things get hot, each of us is to hike for home the instant he's used up all his film. Get that? Never mind what's happening to the other two! As soon as you've run out your film, head for home, and in a hurry."

"Cheerful beggar, isn't he!" Barker said. "Right you are, though, Dawson! Home it is when the

photo job's finished. And, here they come! In a bit of a hurry, too!"

Dave jerked his head around to see the four German Messerschmitt One-Nines prop-clawing through the air at top speed. The Nazi craft were a good three thousand feet higher up, and as the seconds ticked by Dave expected to see the four planes drop noses and come down in a gun chattering attack.

No such thing happened, however, and a disagreeable empty sort of feeling came to his stomach. Both hands gripping the stick, and every nerve tingling for action, he watched the Nazi ships roar right up to them, but still keeping their superior altitude. Not even when they were directly above did any of them wing over and come streaking down. Instead, the flight of four ships banked slightly and started circling around in the air as though they were riding escort on a flight of their own bombers.

"Come down, you bums!" Dave grated through clenched teeth. "Come down and let's get going!"

It was just a waste of breath, however. The Nazi planes stayed right where they were, neither gaining or losing altitude. The empty feeling in Dave's stomach started to spread throughout his body. And he felt the familiar eerie tingle at the back of his neck. In a crazy sort of way he imagined the Nazi pilots just sitting up there aloft and laughing at him. Laughing at him while he helplessly awaited the attack that would make it possible for him to spin down low and get close up shots of the mystery terrain below.

"Those chaps are the yellowest Luftwaffers I ever met, I swear!" Barker's voice broke the radio silence. "Altitude, and everything, yet the beggars don't make a move. What say, Dawson? Shall we climb up and mix it with the blighters? We're not getting anywhere buzzing along like this, you know."

Dave didn't answer at once. He took his gaze off the Messerschmitts overhead and looked down at the ground. The mystery area was well under his wing, now. As a matter of fact, in a couple of more minutes the area would be well astern of his tail. If they didn't work it now to go down for pictures they would be forced to turn back and reappear over the area. And that wouldn't seem like an accident to even a Nazi. On the contrary it would be a dead give away that the three Royal Air Force planes just weren't passing by en route elsewhere. It would be proof positive that the British lads had simply over-shot their objective.

"Yet, if we go up after those Jerries," Dave argued with himself, "it may look kind of funny, too. Or would it? Nuts! Supposing we were en route to pick up some of our bombers? It wouldn't look too out of line for us to start a scramble on the way. Heck, no. It.... Nuts! We've got to do it, whether it looks funny or not."

With a nod for emphasis he swung the stick from side to side to waggle his wings.

"Tally-ho, fellows!" he bellowed into his flap-mike. "They don't seem to want company. So they get it. Up and at 'em, and do your stuff!"

The last had hardly flown off Dave's lips before he hauled the Spitfire's stick back into his stomach and went ripping straight up at the vertical. The terrific force of the zoom tried to drive him right down through the floor of the cockpit. The muscles of his chest and stomach were tied into knots, and for a couple of seconds or so a sea of rippling grey light clouded over his eyes. It faded away, however, and he saw the belly of a Messerschmitt One-Nine dead ahead of his nose.

Instinctively he started to jab his trigger release button, but checked himself in time.

"Nix!" he muttered angrily. "Pick him off and the other three may scam. The idea is to get them to tangle with you, and make *you* head for the ground. Darn it, though! What a perfect target that lug's ship makes!"

Dave groaned sadly, and booted right rudder slightly so that the plane above slid out of his sights. Then he jabbed the trigger button and sent a two second burst of machine gun and 20-mm. aircraft cannon shells whanging upward into empty space. As he cut his fire and started to level off at the top of his zoom, he heard the chatter of Farmer's and Barker's guns going into action. And the deeper note of their aircraft cannon. But as he anxiously snapped his gaze at the four Messerschmitts that were now cutting capers in the air he saw at once that Freddy and Barker had also purposely missed.

"You guys will never know how lucky you are!" he shouted at the Nazis. "By rights there should only be one of you up here, now. But, come on. Give us the old razzle dazzle. Mix it up! We've got work to do, and we're in a hurry."

"No use!" Barker's voice sang out over the radio. "Look! The blighters are running away. Four to three, and they won't even take a chance. Of all the blasted scared rabbits I ever saw! Can't help it, Dawson! I've got to settle one of the beggars."

Before Dave could open his mouth, Barker's plane spun around like a top and dropped right down on the tail of one of the Messerschmitts now all diving full out toward the ground below. The leading edges of Barker's guns spurted flame and sound. Tracer smoke cut paths across the air and became lost to view in the fuselage of the Messerschmitt One-Nine. Less than a split second later the German plane shot out crazily to the side as though it had glanced off an invisible guard rail in the heavens. For perhaps fifty feet it slid through the air, then as though by magic the fuselage broke in two right in back of the cockpit.

The two halves of the plane started to fall away from each other. Then smoke and flame belched out of the engine half. In the swirling black smoke Dave saw the figure of the pilot push up out of

the cockpit and dive over the side. The German was like a bound up bundle of cloth tumbling down through the air. Then white puffed upward, was caught by the air, and mushroomed out into a parachute envelop.

"Hey! Look out, Jerry!"

The wild cry burst impulsively from Dave's lips, but even though the parachuting Nazi had heard him there was nothing he could have done. One of the other Messerschmitt pilots, apparently rocketing his plane earthward in terror, plowed straight into the parachute silk of his Luftwaffe comrade. The whirling propeller chewed the silk to shreds, and sliced through the tangle of shroud lines like a knife. By a miracle the blades missed the Nazi pilot. But that didn't help him any. His body turned over once in the air, and then fell like a rock straight down.

"One less, poor guy!" Dave grunted and dropped the nose of his own plane. "But I guess that's the kind of a chance you take when you fly with yellow-bellies. Look at them skip for it!"

Dave spat the last out in disgust as the three remaining Messerschmitts continued racing earthward as fast as their whirling props could take them. Not a single German had fired a shot. Freddy, Barker, and he had done all the attacking, and all the shooting. And now the Nazis were diving downward for dear life.

"A break for us, anyway, fellows!" Dave shouted the thought aloud into his flap-mike. "It's more or less what we wanted. Stick with them but don't pick them off too soon. Okay? Got your camera trigger fingers ready."

"Right-o!" came Barker's voice in the earphones.

"And itching!" Freddy chimed in.

Dave nodded and swept the ground below with his eyes. The altimeter still showed some fourteen thousand feet of air space below him, but objects on the ground were becoming clearer by the minute. With a start of wild excitement he saw that the patch of woods was more than just that. There was something down under the branches of the trees. Several "somethings" in fact, though he could not see clear enough to tell just what.

And as he moved his gaze a bit to the south the swamp ground seemed to look just a bit strange. He didn't know just why. Perhaps it was just a crazy hunch, or his imagination playing him tricks. Or the terrific diving speed of the plane doing things to his eyes. Yet, nevertheless, the expanse of swamp ground suddenly didn't seem to look just right.

There was also something about the hill range to the east that caught his eye. There were three or four blackish smudges on the western slopes. However, as he stared at them the truth leaped into his brain, and the icy fingers of fear began to curl around his heart.

"The Lockheed Hudsons!" he whispered hoarsely. "Those smudges are burnt timber and ground. They probably mark the spots where the Lockheeds crashed and burned up!"

The possibility that such was the truth caused something to snap in his brain, and a film of red rage to steal over his eyes. He braced himself in the seat, and lined up one of the diving Messerschmitts in his sights.

"One more won't change anything!" he grated. "And it will pay back a little for those lads!"

As he spoke the last he jabbed the trigger release button and held it pressed for three long seconds before the sane side of him could force him to quit it. The three second shower of bullets and aircraft cannon shells was more than enough. Though history will never be able to relate it, it is quite possible that the Nazi pilot in Dave's sights never knew what struck him. One instant he was diving for his life, and the next he was still diving, but his life was gone.

"Steady, Dave!" Freddy's voice cried out in his earphones. "What's wrong, old thing? You all right?"

"Much better, now!" Dave snapped back. "*Much* better. Okay! spread out, and each head for the objective nearest him. But get down low, right on top of it before you start working the camera trigger finger. This is what we came for! Let her rip, fellows!"

Without giving the two remaining Messerschmitts so much as another snap glance, Dave jumped on rudder and whipped the stick over a shade and sent the Spitfire Mark 5 skidding crazily far off to the right. When he was directly over the center of the stretch of swamp ground, he pulled out onto even keel and throttled back to the three quarter mark.

Less than five hundred feet of air space separated the underneath side of his wings from the ground. He clamped the camera trigger lever tight against the stick, held the plane steady, and stared at the ground. It was then he saw why the expanse of swamp ground had sort of changed appearance during his dive earthward. Now he could tell that it wasn't swamp ground below him. True, perhaps there was swamp ground *underneath*, but on top was a covering of perfect camouflage. A camouflage covering that completely hid the swamp ground, and which seemed to be suspended above it at a height of several feet.

"Hangars?" Dave choked out the chance guess. "They've drained that swamp, and those are underground hangars down there?"

He didn't have the chance to even guess at an answer to that one. He didn't because at that precise instant came Freddy Farmer's wild cry of alarm in the earphones.

"Dave! Dave! Up above you! The whole blasted Luftwaffe!"

He jerked back his head, looked upward, and a startled shout burst from his lips. The sky above him was literally black with Nazi swastika marked wings. He didn't even try to guess how many planes there were up there. In fact, he didn't even think of guessing. His brain for the moment was too stunned to function. His heart was a cold lump of ice that zoomed upward to clog in his throat. He sat staring frozen eyed at the horde of Nazi wings that came swooping down toward him like a blanket of doom.

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## CHAPTER TEN

### *Doomed Wings*

"Dave, Dave, snap out of it! We're trapped, but let's give the beggars a go for their money. Dave! Wake up!"

Freddy Farmer's screams in the earphone seemed to touch a hidden spring in Dave and release him from his dumbfounded trance. He let out a wild yell, kicked his Spitfire over on wingtip and went whanging around and over to where Farmer and Barker were closing in together. Instinct, and instinct alone had caused him to make the maneuver. The instinct of life preservation.

Individually not one of them stood a chance against the mass of Messerschmitt One-Nines, and One-Tens, cutting down through the air. Individually they would be picked off like helpless clay pigeons. Together as a fighting trio, a fighting unit, they stood some chance of meeting with a little success. That all three would break through that almost solid wall of war wings, and escape back to England, was something that could not possibly happen, miracles or no miracles.

Together as a unit, however, two of them might blast a path through air through which the third could escape. All for one. That was it! All for one, and that one to get on back to England with the pictures he had taken. And, please God, those pictures would tell British High Command at least something of vital importance! Please God, the efforts of the two who remained behind would not be made in vain!

With that prayer on his lips Dave hurtled his plane across the sky and dropped in along side Freddy and Barker. It was then, and then only, he suddenly realized that the swarm of Nazis charging downward had not fired a single shot. As a matter of fact, as he snapped a quick glance upward he saw the leading wave of planes come out of the dive and fly along at even keel. The second wave did the same thing a few seconds later. So did the third, and a fourth wave, until the whole lot were as a tent of wings over the three British planes.

"Come on, you blighters, fight! *Fight*, blast you!"

The voice was Flight Lieutenant Barker's, and before the echo had died away he hauled up his plane on its tail and blazed away with all guns. It was like throwing rocks at a low ceiling. The bullets had to hit something, and they did. A Messerschmitt One-Nine staggered crazily in the air for a minute, then up-ended on wingtip and came tumbling down out of the sky. Hardly had it started to fall than its place was filled by another Nazi plane. And though Barker's plane reached the stalling point, and fell over sluggishly on wing to present a perfect target for the pilots and gunners above, not a single Nazi sliced down in a dive to pick off the Englishman.

As Barker recovered from the stall and zoomed back up to rejoin formation wild hope flared up in Dave. But he felt also the stinging pain of defeat. The refusal of the Nazis to fight unless forced to could mean but one thing. They were under orders to force the three R.A.F. pilots down onto the ground, and capture them alive. But why? The question burned through the back of Dave's brain, but he gave it no serious consideration for the moment. Another, and perhaps a more heart chilling realization came to him instantly. This was no chance accident, the sudden appearance of these Nazi wings. It had been planned. They had been waiting, probably hiding in the sun or behind the clouds while the four original One-Nines had baited the R.A.F. lads to swoop down low. To swoop down low and lose the precious altitude they would need in order to outmaneuver and fly away from this Luftwaffe armada.

"Like heck we fooled them!" the words burst from Dave's lips. "They've been wise to us all the time. We took it hook, line and sinker! And now we're stuck!"

The echo of his own words seemed to return in his earphones to mock him. But it was all so true, so horribly true. In cold truth they had been "on the spot" from the very moment they crossed over the Channel to Occupied France. Whether the Nazis had actually known they were coming, or whether they had simply suspected things the instant they had sighted them, were two things Dave did not know. Nor did he waste time guessing. The fact remained that there they were more or less pinned to the ground, and there were the Nazi planes forcing them lower and lower.

Biting back a storm of bitter words directed at himself, Dave glanced downward, and groaned. They were less than three hundred feet off the ground. And as for the ground, it was now practically alive with Nazi uniforms. The grey-green clad figures of Hitler's armies seemed to virtually pop up out of holes in the ground. It was almost like looking down into a swimming maze of upturned faces.

"What say, Dawson?" Barker's voice cut through Dave's whirling thoughts. "Are we going to let the blighters push us down onto the sod? Or shall we give a few of them something they'll remember when they wake up in the next world ... or wherever Nazi rotters go to? Me, I fancy

that, old thing. Let's get as many as we can, while we can, what?"

Dave didn't answer right off the bat. His brain was battling furiously with the toughest problem he had ever faced in his entire life. As commander of the flight it was in his power to order life or death for Freddy and Barker. He could make it life by surrendering to the hovering Nazi wings and letting the Germans take them alive as they seemed to wish. Or he could make it death by agreeing with Barker's suggestions and attempting to fight through the aerial cordon of Messerschmitts until all three of them went down in flames.

The warrior in him was all in favor of that. Why give up without a fight? Why let these darn Nazis push them around like three rag dolls? What was there to be gained by that? Life in a Nazi prison camp at the most. Sure, life! But was that kind of life worth living? It was not! Better to die, and take some of your conquerors along with you, than to simply fold up without a single show of resistance. Heck! That was a coward's way out! That was....

The other side of Dave, though, refused to accept that as the only solution. On a thousand other occasions, sure. Fight until you could fight no more. But this was something different. This situation was the exception. There was far, far more at stake than Freddy Farmer's life, or Barker's life, or his own life. They had come over to do a definite job. They had failed to accomplish that task. They had failed because the Nazis were ready, and apparently waiting for them. Why didn't the Nazis polish them off; finish them right then and there?

It was that single question that stopped Dave from crying out the order to do battle, and let the Messerschmitts fall where they may. That one question that held back the warrior within him; that brought the leadership in him to the fore. Why did the Nazis let them live? There could be but one answer. For a very definite reason known only to the Nazis. But a very important reason, obviously.

Dave glanced once more down at the ground, then up at the mass of swastika wings that hovered just above his head like a cloud. He could almost feel countless eyes boring holes through the air down at him. Those Nazi wings were Hitler's new secret weapon? No! Those Nazi wings were the answer to the mysterious disappearance of ten Lockheed Hudsons? No? The answers were down on the ground below him. Of that he felt positive. And the Nazis wanted him alive. Okay, they could take him alive. While he had life he had hope. And while he had hope there was the chance of 'most anything happening.

That, however, was *his* choice. The choice for himself. But he could not make it the choice for Freddy and Barker. In his heart he could not order them to surrender. Neither could he order them to batter their wings against that wall of Nazi guns. But there was a way by which the thing could be solved. True, it might cost him his own life, but if he timed it just right, pulled the surprise at exactly the right moment an avenue of escape would be opened for Freddy Farmer and Flight Lieutenant Barker.

"Close up, fellows!" he called into his flap-mike. "Close up until you're almost touching my wingtips. Keep your engines at three quarter throttle. Follow me around. I'm going to act like I'm leading us down toward that level patch off to the left. But keep your eyes on me! When you see my nose go up, and hear my guns, pull the plug and fly dead straight ahead for all you're worth. Don't even take time to look back. Get flying, and keep flying. I'll take care of these bums, or bust. Got it straight?"

"See here, Dawson!" Barker's voice cried out in the earphones. "I won't let you throw..."

"You will, and shut up!" Dave roared back. "That's an order, Barker! You refused to give the orders, so now you take them and like them!"

"Right-o, old bean!" Barker replied. "But I won't like them, no fear."

"Just do your stuff when I give the signal, and let everything else ride," Dave grunted. "Okay, close up some more. Here we go!"

"Rubbish to your orders!" came Freddy Farmer's voice out of the air. "I think I know what you're planning, and it's silly. Dave, I just won't..."

"So I've got trouble with you, too!" Dave snarled at him. "Listen, pal! You do as I say, or you're off my list forever. And I mean that, Freddy. This is something bigger than all three of us, and I'm taking a whirl at the only possible way out. I'm not thinking of you, or Barker, or even myself. I'm thinking of Colonel Trevor's brother. We going to let him down? You're darn tooting we're not! Now, button up those pretty lips, Freddy. I mean business, and no fooling!"

"Okay, Dave," came the hoarse whisper over the radio. "Sorry, old thing. And God bless you. I'm ready!"

Dave choked back the lump that rose up into his throat, blinked his eyes hard, and then hauled the throttle back to the three quarter mark, and started to bank around in a slow circle. Sitting tight in the seat, every nerve drawn taut as a piano wire, he scrutinized the mass of planes overhead. It was only his imagination, of course, but the instant he acted as though he were going to lead Freddy and Barker down to a landing it seemed as though every Nazi above him slackened his vigilance and relaxed visibly. But it was not his imagination when he saw three or four of the Messerschmitts drop noses slightly to lose altitude and escort the three R.A.F. pilots right down onto the ground. It was not imagination, it was fact, and wild hope leaped high in Dave's breast.

The four Messerschmitts dropping down left a "hole" in the sky. A hole in the wall of Nazi wings. Quick as a flash Dave shot out his hand and banged his throttle wide open. At the same time he

hauled up the nose of his ship toward the hole, and started hammering away with all guns.

"Freddy! Barker! Get going! Get going and keep going! This is your chance. So long, fellows!"

In the thunderous yammer and clatter of his guns his own voice came back to him as an echo from a great distance. He longed to tear his gaze from that hole to see if Freddy and Barker were obeying orders. To see if they were streaking straight forward at top speed, and just off the ground. But he didn't dare look. In the next few split seconds his piloting ability and his marksmanship would mean life or death for Freddy and Barker.

By charging straight for that hole his plane served as a sort of screen for Freddy Farmer and Barker. The Nazis, seeing him gun blasting upward, would instantly guess that the three of them were trying to skip through the hole in the huge formation of German wings. Guessing that, the four pilots that had dropped down would instantly zoom back up to fill the gap. And some of the others would swing in closer to present a wall of fire spitting guns to the onrushing British plane.

It was that for which Dave fervently prayed and hoped, as he went rocketing upward. And his prayer was answered. As though by magic the hole in the sky became filled with German planes. He saw his tracers bite into a One-Ten. Saw the German plane explode in a thousand flaming embers and go slithering earthward. A One-Nine cutting straight down off to his right caught his eye. Fear chilled his heart. The German pilot had suddenly realized that it was all daring bluff, a daring trick. He had seen Farmer and Barker streaking along underneath Dave and right down under the outer edge of the cordon of German planes. He had seen, guessed, and was high tailing down to cut off the avenue of retreat.

"Leave them alone, bum!" Dave howled and jabbed his trigger release button at the same instant he kicked his Mark 5 around in a flash half turn.

The German pilot saw what was coming too late. He made a frantic effort to pull out of his dive and whirl off into the clear, but Dave Dawson's shower of bullets had the greater speed. They hit the One-Nine like a shower of hot sizzling steel and practically blasted it apart in midair. The Messerschmitt's wings fell off, the fuselage buckled, and the whole business burst into flame and went down ... fast.

No sooner did Dave see that his burst was going home than he tore his gaze from the doomed plane and lined up another Nazi Messerschmitt in his sights. However, before he could jab the trigger button the German pilot wheeled his craft to one side, dropped sharply by the nose, and then came zooming up under the Spitfire.

For a split second the finger of Death was pointed straight at the Yank born R.A.F. ace. Then the danger was passed as Dave went right up on wingtip and around in a tight power turn that scrambled his brains, and made his eyes feel as though they were two white hot coals revolving in their sockets. He opened his mouth to relieve the terrific pressure on his eardrums, and braced himself hard against his safety belt harness in a desperate effort to beat back the wave of inky darkness that would "black him out."

Meantime he let his plane slice around in the wing howling turn, and fervently prayed that no German plane would get in the way. If one did it would be just too bad for the Nazi, and for himself. But perhaps Lady Luck was riding the cockpit with him during those few seconds. At any rate the Spitfire did not plow headlong into a Messerschmitt, and presently the black curtain was drawn away from in front of his eyes, and he could see again.

It was then he realized that the Mark 5 had stalled off the tight turn, and was slanting downward at a comet's rate of speed. Impulsively he hauled up the nose, and started to turn back and give battle again to the Nazi pilot striving to cut down past him and attack Freddy and Barker who were now almost in the clear. A wild cry bursting from his lips, he checked the turning maneuver, and went prop-clawing around in the opposite direction, instead. To have caught the Nazis off guard and opened up an avenue of escape for Farmer and Barker, had been to perform a miracle. And to hold off the mass of Nazi wings so that his two pals could get well under way toward safe air, had also been a miracle in itself.

But neither miracle had been enough. The gods of war, and bad luck, had thrown their weight on the side of the Germans. As Dave came out of his tight turn, that had actually become a power dive earthward, he caught sight of two Messerschmitt One-Nines cutting down through the air far off to his right. Cutting straight down on top of Freddy Farmer and Barker who were right down over the tree tops and racing northwestward at top speed.

One look and Dave's world seemed to come tumbling down around his ears. One look and he knew that all his efforts had been in vain. Being at such a low altitude his two pals were unable to flash maneuver out from under those diving Messerschmitts without catching a wing on the ground, and crashing in. To attempt to zoom upward and away would be sheer suicide. They would simply present better targets for those two vultures of Goering's roaring down. Luck, fate, or whatever you wanted to call it. It made no difference. Freddy and Barker had failed in the last few seconds to make good their escape. They were trapped. They were caught cold ... with no choice save the choice of death!

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## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### *Airman's Courage*

Time seemed to stand still as Dave sat frozen in the Spitfire's pit. The whole world, and the very heavens, seemed to stop and wait for the inevitable. Dave's heart tried to push out through his ribs, and the very air he breathed was like liquid fire in his lungs. To face certain death, yourself, is soul crushing enough. But to sit helplessly by while death reaches out for two of your pals is something beyond words of description. It is like dying inwardly while remaining alive outwardly.

"Freddy! Barker! Get them! Haul up, and get them. It's your only hope. The only thing you can do! Freddy ... Barker...!"

As though from a million miles away Dave heard the echo of his own words that poured from off his stiff lips. In a dazed, abstract sort of way part of his spinning brain was conscious of the fact that some of the other Nazis were dropping right down on his unprotected tail. He even heard the bursts fired past his wing as a signal for him to surrender and go on down to land. Perhaps in the very next second a burst from some Nazi's guns might tear right down through the glass "hatch" over his cockpit, and end up in his body. Perhaps ... but he didn't give it a thought. What happened to him in the next few seconds didn't matter in the slightest. He had ears, and eyes, and thoughts only for Freddy Farmer, and Flight Lieutenant Barker. They were doomed. In the next moment they would be dead men hurtling down the last few feet to the ground. Not even the miracle of miracles could save them, now. The two Messerschmitt One-Nines were too close. A blind man couldn't miss at that distance....

Miracles? So what? A pilot with the fighting heart and indomitable spirit that was Freddy Farmer's didn't have to depend on miracles to get him out of tight corners. No, not that English lad! In his make-up there was that something extra that so few possess. There is no given word for it. Perhaps it is best defined as a resoluteness of soul and heart that cannot be broken in life or in death. At any rate Freddy Farmer possessed it, and to the nth degree.

Through unbelieving eyes Dave saw the English youth suddenly cut upward and over so that he was directly over Flight Lieutenant Barker's plane. Then once in that protective position he hauled up the nose of his plane and went streaking straight heavenward. Rather, streaking straight up into the withering fire that was beginning to pour downward from the guns of the two diving Messerschmitts. It was a suicide maneuver. An absolute suicide maneuver, yet the very fact that it was such was the only help Freddy could possibly expect.

His very daring threw the diving Nazis off whack. His very definite intention of crashing right up into them put the fear of death in their hearts, and instantly brought the yellow in them to the surface. As though worked by strings attached to invisible hands high overhead the two German planes jerked halfway out of their dives, and went careening off, one to each side. The one who went to the right was the unlucky one. The nose of Freddy's stalling Spitfire followed him around. The aerial machine guns and 20-mm. aircraft cannon on the English youth's plane yammered out sound and flame. And in the next split second the spot of air the Messerschmitt had occupied was just a cloud of boiling black smoke.

As for the other Messerschmitt pilot, he was not what you would exactly call lucky. He skidded off a bit, then tried savagely to haul around and fire point blank at Barker's plane. In his desperate fury he over controlled, missed Barker by yards, and was unable to recover from his dive in the distance left between his spinning prop and the ground. He went in nose first and completely disappeared in a fountain of flame and dirty smoke.

"It isn't true! I'm dreaming! I'm seeing things! It just couldn't happen, that's all!"

That and more came spilling off Dave's lips as he gaped pop eyed at Freddy Farmer leveling off onto even keel in the air. A mile or so beyond Freddy, and fast becoming a speck in the distance, was Barker's plane. There wasn't a Nazi pilot close enough to even stand the ghost of a chance of overhauling him. Nothing, now, but clear air between Barker and England. It was simply absolutely impossible, but ... the absolutely impossible had actually happened.

"Sweet tripe!" Dave blurted out. "Jumping cat-fish! Holy smoke, and ... Freddy, *Freddy, boy!*"

Dave screamed the last in frenzied alarm as Farmer's plane suddenly started lurching, and bucking around in the air. Through horrified eyes Dave saw a good three feet of the right wing tear free and go sailing away. The Spitfire dropped sharply down on that side, and terror squashed Dave's heart to a pulp. Hardly realizing what he was doing, he slammed his own nose down and went tearing across the sky toward Freddy's bullet crippled ship, as though his very nearness might be of some help to the English youth.

However, there was still a master pilot riding the cockpit of that Mark 5. With but a few feet to go Freddy somehow managed to get the damaged wing up and leveled off. His whirling prop slowed up to indicate he had cut off his ignition. And perhaps it was fate that put a fairly smooth strip of ground directly in front of the Spitfire mushing sluggishly forward. At any rate the craft settled, hit hard and bounced high in the air. It settled to strike again, seemed to hug the earth for an instant or two, and then sluffed off drunkenly to the damaged side. The broken section of the wing "crabbed" on the ground. The Spitfire bucked and stumbled forward. The nose went down and the propeller blades chewed into the soil. Then the whole thing spun like a top on the propeller hub, and went sliding forward in a cloud of dust. Presently it fell over on its back, stopped moving, and Dave saw the tiny ribbon of fire that started to creep through the wreckage.

The next thing Dave actually realized was that he had his own Spitfire down on that strip of ground. He braked to a stop, and yanked a knob that was connected with the mechanism of a small fire bomb installed in the plane, so that the craft could be destroyed in the event of a forced landing, and not fall into Nazi hands intact. His actions were automatic, however. He didn't even



know that he had released the fire bomb as he vaulted from the pit onto the ground. He had thoughts only for Freddy. And those thoughts were as hot tears flooding his heart.

His legs were working even as his feet touched the ground. He tore over to Freddy's crashed plane at top speed, ripped and heaved pieces of broken wreckage to one side, and flew at the safety harness straps that held the English youth fast in the seat. Waves of hot air from the burning wreckage closed down on Dave like a blanket. He choked, coughed, and gagged, and tugged and pulled at the belt snaps with all of his strength.

Perhaps it was five seconds, or perhaps ten, before he had the last one free, and was hauling Freddy out of the wreckage and well clear. To him, though, it seemed a year. And when he finally laid the English youth gently down on the ground hot tears of rage and bitter sorrow were coursing down his cheeks.

"Freddy, boy, Freddy, boy!" he sobbed as he bent over his white faced pal. "Hang on, Freddy. You mustn't die. You can't die, Freddy! You...!"

And then, suddenly, it happened!

Freddy Farmer's eyes flew open. For an instant they stared blankly up into Dave's. And then they blinked.

"Die?" the word exploded from the English youth's lips. "What crazy rot are you talking, Dave? What...? Good grief! Where am I, I'd like to know?"

Dave went back on his heels speechless, and utterly unable to move as Freddy Farmer sat up and absently straightened his helmet that was askew on his head.

"I say!" Freddy cried as he gaped at the two Spitfires that were now two heaps of seething flame. "What in the world...? Wait! I remember, now. Dave! What about Barker? Did he get away all right? The blighters didn't get him, did they?"

Dave had to try three times before he could unstick his tongue from the roof of his mouth.

"No, they didn't get him, thanks to you, Freddy!" he finally said. "Gosh! That was the finest thing I ever saw in my life. And, gee! When I saw your bus crash in after losing part of the wing, I... Boy! I just don't know how to put it in words. Freddy! You topped anything that ever happened in this war! Or ever will happen, I'm thinking!"

The English youth blushed, made a wry face, and got up onto his feet.

"Rot!" he snorted. "Only thing to do, wasn't it? Couldn't let the blighters shoot us both down, could I? Of course not! They didn't expect me to do anything, so it was easy to fool them. That's all there was to it."

"Yeah, sure," Dave grunted. "But you're not talking to your best girl now, pal. I was there, see? I saw it. And if it doesn't get you the Victoria Cross, then I don't know nothing!"

"Well, you certainly don't know anything about the Victoria Cross!" Freddy said scornfully. "They don't give those away with each package of chocolate you buy, you know. It's the most famous decoration in the whole world. It can only be won on the field of battle. It's never awarded in peace time, no matter what. Why, since it was instituted by Queen Victoria on January Twenty-Ninth, Eighteen Hundred and Sixty-Five, there have been less than a thousand Victoria Crosses awarded. It...."

"Sure, I know!" Dave interrupted with a grin. "I know that it is a bronze medal cast from cannon captured in the Crimean War. And that it is on simple design. A form of Maltese cross with the British Lion and Crown on it. The ribbon is dark purple, and on the medal it says, 'For Valor.' Cut the lecture, pal. The point is, that if ever a fellow rated one, you sure do!"

"You're still talking rubbish!" Freddy snapped, though his eyes were shining. "I've seen you do better than that a half dozen times. Drop it, will you? I'm pleased enough just to be still alive!"

Dave stood up and shook his head.

"Well, I'm still not too sure about that," he grunted and reached out and touched his friend. "I may yet wake up and find it was just a dream. But maybe you are you, at that. One way to make sure. Are you hungry, Freddy?"

"Phew, I'm starved!" the English youth exclaimed before he could check himself.

Dave laughed and took a quick step backward.

"That's proof!" he cried. "It's not a dream. You're still Freddy Farmer. It all actually happened."

Dave suddenly cut himself off short and glanced upward. The smile died from his lips and his eyes.

"Well, I guess you'll have to stay hungry, pal," he murmured. "Unless you can go for the stuff the Jerries call food. Here comes the welcoming committee! And one of them must be a big shot. Look at all the fancy German High Command markings on his plane. Wouldn't it be something if it was Hitler in that ship sliding down our way, huh?"

Freddy Farmer tilted his head and looked up at the four Messerschmitt One-Nines coasting down and around into the wind, preparatory to landing. The plane in the lead had Luftwaffe High Command markings on either side of the fuselage. And as if they weren't enough to signify that some high ranker sat in the pit, a black and white streamer was attached to the radio antenna pole.

"If it is Hitler," Freddy murmured, "it'll be the happiest moment in my life. Among other things about that madman I despise, is that toothbrush affair he wears on his upper lip."

"It would be like socking so much jelly," Dave said disgustedly. "From all the pictures I've seen, he looks flabby all over."

"Particularly upstairs!" Freddy added. Then with a heavy sigh, "I certainly hope and pray that the pictures Barker took back will tell British Intelligence *some* things they want to know."

Dave clenched his fists helplessly, and said nothing. The English youth's words were like a bucket of ice water splashing down over his spirit. They brought him back to earth and stark realization of the situation. And it was the most depressing and disheartening picture he had ever faced. Their special mission had turned out one third successful. Yet had it? Would the pictures Flight Lieutenant Barker had taken be of any use to British Intelligence? What had Barker's camera seen that he, Dave Dawson, had not seen with his own eyes? And what he had seen had been no more than a tremendous expanse of expert camouflaging.

True, the very existence of camouflage proved also the existence of something highly important and secretive. But they had known that before they even took off from Eighty-Four's field. Sure, this area was the key to the mystery. The answer to what Hitler was doing to retain mastery of the conquered countries, and still withdraw large forces of his occupation troops for service elsewhere. Sure, it was the key to the mystery. But what *was* the mystery? What was it all about? Would Barker's pictures answer that for British Intelligence?

Dave hoped and prayed so with all his heart and soul. But deep down in his heart he felt different. Deep down in his heart there was gnawing dread, and doubt. The truth had to be faced. The special mission had failed. Their only bit of success had been Barker escaping with his life. And that had been made possible entirely by Freddy Farmer. Everything else had gone overboard. Face it, Dave! You struck out. You missed the boat. For all you accomplished, you might just as well have stayed put back in England. Your first real command, and you didn't even see the pitch, my boy! It sailed right by, with your bat still on your shoulder!

"Come on, Dave, buck up!" Freddy Farmer's voice suddenly cut into Dave's thoughts. "From the look on your face I can guess what you're thinking. It isn't your fault at all, Dave. We just weren't lucky, that's all."

"Thanks, Freddy," Dave said with a twisted smile. "But in this league they only pay off on results. And I flopped bad. It was all my idea, you know, to make this kind of a patrol."

"Well, it's still a better idea than Group Captain Ball's!" the English youth said stoutly. Then after a two second look at the four Messerschmitts sliding down, he added with a puzzled frown, "There's one thing that's a bit of a mystery to me."

"One thing?" Dave echoed with a bitter laugh. "Boy, you're lucky. I can think of a million things! But what's the big puzzle to you, Freddy?"

The English youth made a faint movement with one hand to indicate the surrounding countryside.

"All this business," he said. "All this camouflage stuff. I can't make head nor tail of it. What do you suppose they're hiding under it? The top of that patch of swamp ground is a fake if I ever saw one. But I didn't get a chance to peek at what was underneath. I was too busy with those Jerries."

"I'll say you were busy!" Dave grinned. Then with a sharp shake of his head, "But I didn't get a good look, either. That might be camouflage covering for some underground hangars. I wouldn't want to bet on it, though. I didn't see any near by strips of flat ground big enough for take-off runways. But that's not the main thing, the main mystery that has me scratching my brains."

"What is, then?" Freddy Farmer encouraged as Dave paused and silently watched the wheels of the first Messerschmitt touch the ground. Then impulsively taking hold of the Yank's arm, Freddy said sharply, "I say, Dave! Don't get ideas of making a run for it! We wouldn't stand a chance. This area is just plain filthy with Nazis. From the air I saw troops all over the place!"

"Don't worry, pal, I'm not that dumb," Dave calmed his fears. "I saw them, too. Heck! If I'd thought we stood a chance of getting away on foot, I wouldn't have stood around gabbing this long. But we wouldn't have been able to go a hundred yards without bumping into a mess of them. Bet you anything you want there's a dozen or more Nazi rifles trained on us right now, only we can't see them."

Freddy swallowed hard and glanced anxious eyes over his shoulder. Dave saw the look and chuckled.

"Keep your shirt on, pal," he said. "Nobody's going to play target practice with us."

"What do you mean?" Freddy demanded wide eyed. "Why not, I'd like to know?"

Dave bit his lower lip and shrugged.

"And so would I," he said. "But the way it strikes me, we're something very special to these Nazis. They had five million chances to clip us upstairs, but they didn't fire a shot until you and Barker started to leave in a hurry. In my book it all adds up that they want us alive. But why, is something I haven't figured out, yet."

Dave stopped talking abruptly as he saw the worried look that spread over Freddy Farmer's still slightly pale face.

"Of course, I can think of one answer," he said lightly, "but I don't know if it's the right one."

"Well, what in the world *is* it?" Freddy asked sharply when Dave didn't continue.

"Well," the Yank born R.A.F. ace murmured, and shrugged, "it's maybe because they got a look at your face up there, and got to wondering if arms, legs, and a body really went with it. Take it easy, my little man! You walked right into that one!"

Dave jumped quickly to one side and escaped Freddy's booted foot swinging up in the general direction of the seat of his breeches. The English youth quickly recovered his balance and groaned heavily.

"And for this did Lady Luck let me escape from that crash!" he growled. "Let me escape to die laughing at all your funny remarks, I *don't* think. A fine time this is for that sort of thing!"

"Well, anyway, it's time for something else," Dave said quickly and nodded ahead. "Here comes the company. And the big shot. He's.... Holy smoke, Freddy! Take a look. That bird in the lead. I've seen his picture in the paper. Hey! Hey, isn't he Colonel Comstadt, the chief of the Gestapo end of the Luftwaffe?"

Freddy Farmer turned his head and looked at the giant of a man in flying gear striding toward them. The man was huge, gigantic. His head was the size of a melon, and his face had all the beauty of the rear end of a truck. His long arms swung at his sides like those of a gorilla, and his legs were like a couple of telephone poles jointed in the middle.

"Yes, he must be!" Freddy whispered hoarsely. "There couldn't be two in the world who look like that. Yes, Dave, he must be that Colonel Comstadt you hear so much about. Good grief, how in the world does he manage to squeeze into the cockpit of a Messerschmitt One-Nine?"

Dave didn't bother to answer the question. As a matter of fact, he hardly heard it. His gaze was rivetted on the huge Nazi striding toward them, and there was a most unpleasant chilliness in his chest. Next to Hitler, and Gestapo Chief Himmler, Colonel Comstadt was reported to be the most brutal man in all the German Reich. Wherever he went, there also went indescribable suffering, and death on a wholesale scale. And it wasn't limited to the enemies of Germany, either. Colonel Comstadt worked within the German Army, and the Luftwaffe, as well as outside of them. His job was two-fold. To create terror and fear in Hitler's legions so that every order of the Fuehrer would be blindly obeyed. And it was also his job to create terror and fear throughout the conquered countries so that the occupation troops would not be molested.

Of late it had been rumored that the man had been assigned to the Luftwaffe operating on the Western Front. The sound beatings administered by the R.A.F. to the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain had thrown Hitler into another of his famous rages. But it had obviously done considerably more than that. The results of the Battle of Britain had knocked a lot of the arrogance, conceit, and cocksureness out of the Luftwaffe personnel. Originally they had gone winging across war skies to tackle a foe sneeringly regarded by "Uncle" Goering as a push-over. Instead, though, they had bumped into a foe who could knock the stripes off any of them. And, what's more, do it with one hand tied behind his back.

It had been a terrible shock to the Luftwaffe pilots to discover that one Royal Air Force pilot was better than any dozen of them. It started them thinking for the first time since falling under Adolf Hitler's spell. And that was the one thing Adolf Hitler feared most. That his human pawns of war might start *thinking*. And so Colonel Comstadt had been sent to the Luftwaffe to "build up morale" with fear, brutality, and the firing squad.

And right now Colonel Comstadt was bearing down on Dave Dawson and Freddy Farmer.

"Easy does it, Freddy!" Dave whispered out the corner of his mouth as he saw the English youth stiffen and half clench his fists. "He has his gang with him, and we wouldn't stand a chance!"

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *The Voice of Death*

Colonel Comstadt, and the three other pilots of his four plane group, walked up to within a few yards of the two boys. There the big man halted, rested his big hands on his hips and stared at them out of eyes that were like two smouldering coals of fire. Then suddenly his thick lips curled back over his teeth in a sneer.

"Two little boys!" he boomed out in his native tongue. "*Himmel!* Just two little boys. I thought England had *men* in her army!"

"She has!" Dave shot back at him. "Try to invade England any time, and you'll find out!"

Thunder heads showed in the German's face for a moment. Then he laughed harshly and jabbed a big finger at Dave.

"American, eh?" he roared. "Ah, yes! You must be this Dawson swine I've heard tell about. Am I right?"

"Take five points for it," Dave said. "Who cares?"

"What?" the Luftwaffe morale builder bellowed. "What kind of talk is that?"

"I give up," Dave said. "What kind?"

The Nazi looked both puzzled and angry. The look he gave Dave made the young Yank regret just a little that he had spoken in that manner.

"So, you would make a joke of it, eh?" the Nazi suddenly roared. "I advise you not to. I can crush an infant like you with one hand. What were you three doing over here?"

"Three?" Freddy spoke up before Dave could open his mouth. "What three? There's only the two of us."

"I can see that!" the Gestapo Colonel snarled. "I have eyes, you little fool. There was a third plane. The one that *tried* to get away. What were you doing over here, eh?"

Dave's heart skipped a beat. The one that *tried* to get away? Did that mean Barker had been caught and shot down?

"Oh, him?" Dave echoed and forced a grin to his lips. "He not only tried to get away, he *did* get away. Too bad for you. He was the important man in the patrol."

"So?" the German said with a slow smile. "The important man of your little patrol, eh? Then it is too bad for the ones who sent you out here. He will never return to England. He is dead, the swine!"

"You're a cockeyed liar!" Dave shouted at him with more conviction than he felt. "He left you birds fanning thin air, and he's well over England by now."

The German regarded Dave as though he were some strange species of something or other. Then his big body shook with silent laughter.

"You Americans are a stupid people," he finally said. "You have no sense. You do not realize that you are asking for punishment every time you open your dirty mouths. You have to be taught a lesson, *always!*"

As the man shouted the last his big hand flashed out with the speed of a striking cobra. Dave didn't even see it coming. He only felt the stunning blow on the side of his head. And the next thing he knew he was flat on his back on the ground, blinking goggle eyed up at the sky. The toe of a boot dug into his ribs.

"Get up, infant swine!" he heard the voice of Colonel Comstadt. "I hardly touched you. So you are the American, Dawson, I have heard about? Bah! You haven't the strength of a chicken. Get up!"

Dave got shakily up onto his feet. Red fire was sweeping through his brain, and white fury was boiling up in his chest. He had just enough sense left, though, to refrain from hurling himself at the big hulk of a Nazi. You can't chop down an oak tree with a straw, and Dave had enough sense to realize it. However, as he met the Nazi's leering gaze he made a silent promise to himself that if the chance ever came...!

"Now, let that teach you to behave, and answer my questions!" Colonel Comstadt growled. "So! What were you three pilots doing over here?"

Dave didn't attempt to answer. A hunch he had had for some time was growing stronger and stronger. Was the reason the Nazis didn't shoot, when they had the chance, because they wondered what Freddy, Barker, and he were doing over the area? They really *didn't know*, or even suspect?

If that were true then there was even greater hope that he and Freddy might get out of this jam. As long as they kept the Germans wondering and guessing the longer the Germans would keep them alive. There was one thing the war had proved about the Nazi breed. They never threw away a man's life until they had drained the last drop of usefulness from his body. And that went double for espionage agents they caught in their traps.

"We were on patrol," Dave answered the question aloud. "We were on our way to contact some of our bombers."

"That's perfectly true," Freddy spoke up, instantly catching onto Dave's line of thought. "What other reason, for heaven's sake? And why such a lot of you chaps? You certainly do believe in superior numbers, don't you? But, then, you must have learned many startling things about the Royal Air Force, eh?"

The Nazi acted as though he had not heard. He ignored the English youth, and kept his gaze fixed on Dave. When he spoke his voice was surprisingly soft. Yet there was a deadly undertone to it.

"You have perhaps heard of Colonel Comstadt?" he asked. "You have perhaps heard of him?"

Dave plucked at his lower lip and screwed up his face in a gesture of deep thought.

"Comstadt?" he mumbled. "Comstadt? No. I can't say that I've heard of him. Who is he? Hitler's valet, or something?"

The German turned purple with rage, and for a second or two Dave feared that the man was actually going to explode in a shower of small pieces. It was a full minute before the Nazi seemed able to find his tongue. He jerked up a clenched fist, and Dave instantly set himself to duck. No blow was struck at him, however. Instead, Colonel Comstadt beat his fist against his own chest.

"I am Colonel Comstadt!" he thundered. "I am second in command of the Gestapo. In the hollow of my hand I hold the lives of thousands. I have but to close my hand, and they are no more. So, you have never heard of Colonel Comstadt, eh?"

"No, never," Dave lied with a straight face.

The German looked even more disappointed. He actually looked as if he were going to break down and cry. The expression on the man's face, however, struck no funny note in either Dave or Freddy. On the contrary it struck a very chilling note. It was like a file being drawn across their taut nerves. One thing was now definitely sure in their minds. Colonel Comstadt was a madman! He was absolutely insane. Clever, cunning, a great credit to Adolf Hitler, but definitely a crazy man.

"Well, then I will tell you about Colonel Comstadt," the Nazi suddenly said in a friendly and engaging voice. "He has done many great things for Der Fuehrer, and he will do many more. That is as sure as the stars that shine by night, and the sun that shines by day. How, you ask? How has Colonel Comstadt been able to do so much? It is simple. Very simple. I know many ways to make men talk. And when you make a man talk, you learn many things. You understand me, eh? I ask you a question, and you give me a foolish answer. Very well, then. There are many ways to make you talk. And not one of them will be pleasant *for you!*"

The Nazi finished talking with a curt nod of his head, and then smiled in cunning triumph.

"You see?" he murmured. "You understand perhaps now, eh? You are not men. You are mere babies. I could break you both with the fingers of one hand. Well?"

Dave looked at those big hands and gulped inwardly. He imagined them at his throat, or breaking off an arm, and gulped again.

"But what can we tell you?" he cried, stalling for time. "What do you want to know? The location of the bombers? Heck! I haven't the faintest idea where they are now."

"I either!" Freddy snapped at him. "Why don't you go up and hunt for them? We've got other things to do. Something very important."

Dave shot a quick side glance at Freddy, and wondered if he, too, had gone nuts. The English youth was practically begging the Nazi to jump on them and beat out truthful answers. Freddy was just plain baiting the madman into action. Yet, looking at Freddy's face, Dave saw only a look of restrained impatience. Colonel Comstadt saw the look, too, and it puzzled him more than added to his rage.

"What do you say?" he demanded. "You have something very important to do?"

"Oh, quite," Freddy murmured, and calmly brushed some dirt off his flying suit.

Colonel Comstadt choked on something unintelligible, then thrust out a hand and took a bear's paw grip on the English youth's shoulder.

"Speak up, swine!" he roared. "What is this important thing you have to do? Speak, at once!"

Pain showed in Freddy's face, but he squared his jaw and looked the Nazi straight in the eye.

"I'll answer that question to your superior," he said with an effort. "To the man who gave you your orders. And, now, let go of my shoulder, please!"

The Nazi was so jolted that he actually did release his grip on Freddy's shoulder, and dropped his hand to his side. For a full ten seconds he gaped wide eyed at the English youth as though he were somebody from another world. Then suddenly he shook himself and thrust his big flat face close to Freddy's.

"My superior?" he bellowed. "What do you mean?"

"You know as well as I do!" the English youth shouted back at him. "*Your* superior! General von Peiplow, of course. And, you great big over stuffed ox, you'd better take us to him at once. He may tell Hitler on you, and then where'll you be?"

The Nazi choked, sputtered, and tried furiously to get words out of his mouth. When they did come, they came like flood waters pouring over a broken dam.

"You insolent swine!" he raged. "You English dog. I'll teach you to hold your tongue!"

"Freddy, look out!" Dave screamed.

It was too late. The Nazi hit Freddy on the side of the head and sent him spinning across the ground. White fire exploded in Dave's brain and blew common sense to the four winds. He dived forward and swung his fist for the German's jaw with every bit of his strength behind the blow. He felt his hand connect, and it felt like crashing his fist against the side of a brick building. And then the whole world exploded in shattering sounds about his ears. He heard the bellow that came from the Nazi's lips, and then he had the flashing impression that an express train had hit him in the face and not even stopped. After that there weren't any more impressions. That is none, save one. The impression that he was sailing away into eternity on a great big black cloud.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *Satan's Brother*

A distant throbbing beat bored its way into Dave's head and jacked him back to consciousness. He opened his eyes and stared blankly up at ceiling beams. A musty smell was in his nose. A musty smell mingled with the aroma of horses long since departed. As he stared blankly at the

ceiling beams a small part of his brain began functioning. It told him that he was stretched out on some straw. In a deserted stable probably. And when he started to push up to a sitting position stabbing pain in his head and neck told him to take things easy for a little longer.

"Does it hurt much, Dave? I'm awfully sorry. I didn't mean it to work quite that way."

Dave steeled himself against the pain and gingerly turned his head to see Freddy Farmer stretched out on the straw a couple of feet from him. There was a spot of dried blood on the English youth's pale face. His eyes were steady, however. And a grin covered up any aftermath pain he might be feeling. Dave made his own lips grin back.

"What happened?" he grunted. "Were we on a ship and got torpedoed? No, wait! I remember, now. You got that guy mad, and he slugged you. I tried to slug him but darn near broke my hand. He slugged me right back, and broke my head, I think. It feels that way. Does it look broken?"

"Not from here, Dave," Freddy said. "You've got a bit of a cut on your jaw, but outside of that you look fit enough. I'm awfully sorry, though, Dave. It seemed rather a bright idea at the time."

Dave slowly pushed himself up to a sitting position, and then held his head with his hands until things stopped whirling around. When they stopped he saw that he was in an old unused stable. There was a window on both sides, but too high for him to look out without standing on something. The heavy doors in front had been rolled shut.

"There's an armed guard outside," Freddy Farmer cautioned. "So you'd better not try to open the doors."

"Where are we, anyway?" Dave asked. "I guess you weren't out cold as long as I've been. What time is it...? Holy smoke! Is that red glow a sunset?"

Without waiting for Freddy to answer Dave looked at his wrist watch. The hands said fifteen minutes after five. In the evening, or morning?

"Evening," Freddy said, guessing his thoughts. "We've been here all day. I regained consciousness for a moment as they were throwing us inside, here. That's when I saw the armed guard. Then everything went black again. I woke up just a few seconds before you did, I guess. Hear those plane engines? We must be pretty close to a Nazi airfield."

Dave cocked his ear to the sound of engines being warmed up, and smiled sadly at Freddy Farmer.

"Now I know what they mean when they say, so near yet so far away," he grunted. "But look, Freddy! What was all that crazy business about General von Peiplow, anyway?"

The English youth shrugged and sighed heavily.

"I got to thinking," he said after a moment or so. "I mean, there was no telling what that madman might do next. And he is mad, Dave!"

"You're telling me?" the Yank grunted. "You could almost see the bats flying out of his belfry! He's crazy as a coot, and dangerous as a bushel basket of cobras."

"Exactly!" Freddy agreed. "And I was afraid you were going to sting him into losing his temper completely. So...."

"Me sting him?" Dave echoed with a short laugh. "Little man, you weren't exactly complimenting the guy, you know. He didn't like that great big ox crack even a little bit."

"That was stupid of me, wasn't it!" Freddy grunted with a nod. "But it just popped off my lips. As I said, though, I got to thinking. Realizing that he'd been up there in the air and had made no effort to slaughter us ... that is, until you pulled that stunt to help Barker and me escape ... it struck me that he must have had a good reason. And it struck me right after that, that he must have been under orders to capture us alive. It was a wild guess, of course. So I spoke of General von Peiplow as I did. I thought that might stop him from going haywire, and killing us in his rage. I think it did stop him, Dave. The look I saw in his eyes seemed to me to say that I had struck the nail on the head. I mean, that he really was under orders to deliver us to von Peiplow alive."

Dave grunted and gingerly fingered his aching jaw.

"Well, maybe so," he said. "Maybe you stopped him from going the limit on us. But, boy, he went plenty far enough for me, I can tell you. If he'd belted me twice, I... But maybe he did. I sure feel as if I were still bouncing."

"Well, I really am sorry for egging him on too much," Freddy said. "But at least it got us rid of him."

"Or him rid of us!" Dave grunted. "But look, Freddy. Think you can get up on your feet and navigate?"

"I can manage it, yes," the English youth said and got slowly up on his feet. "But where do you expect to navigate to?"

"To that old saw-horse in the corner for one thing," Dave said, pointing. "We'll carry it over under the window, there, and take a look outside. I'm curious to get a look at the scenery around here."

"Wait, Dave!" Freddy cried as the Yank started over toward the saw-horse in the corner. "Are you crazy?"

Dave stopped and turned to look at his pal.

"No more than usual," he said. "What's eating you, though?"

"Never trust a Nazi!" Freddy said sharply. "Good grief, haven't you learned that, yet?"

"Huh?" Dave echoed with a frown. "Hey, what the heck are you going to do? Pole vault through the window? It's too small, fellow. You'd never make it."

Freddy Farmer had picked up a weather rusted old pitch fork on the stable floor. He pulled off his helmet and hung it over the prongs of the fork. Then as Dave stared wide eyed he walked over to the window and pushed the helmet up above the window sill level. A split second later there came the crack of a high powered rifle from somewhere outside, and a metallic wasp whined in through the window opening and went *plunk* into a sturdy wall stud on the far side of the stable.

Freddy lowered the pitch fork and looked silently at Dave. The Yank swallowed hard and grinned sheepishly.

"Like I've always said," he murmured, "you're the one guy I like to have around all the time. Thanks, pal. That makes me the dumb bunny."

"I fancy you'll learn, if the war lasts long enough!" Freddy grunted. "Not that you would have been shot. Only to scare you, and stop you from trying to escape through the windows. However, I don't trust Nazis. Particularly their marksmanship. So sit down and rest, Dave. All we can do is wait."

The two youths dropped back on the straw and stared gloomily off into space. Eventually Freddy broke the silence that had settled over them.

"Do you think that's true about Barker, Dave?" he asked. "I mean, what Comstadt said?"

"I don't know, Freddy," Dave replied with a frown. "Maybe he was lying when he said Barker was dead. Maybe he wasn't. The last look I had at Barker he was out in the clear and well on his way. Of course, though, he might have run into some other Nazi ships that I didn't see. There's one thing, though, that we've got to face, Freddy. Or have you thought of it, too?"

"Barker's pictures not telling British Intelligence anything they want to know?" the English youth replied. "Yes, I've thought of that. And I'm just a little afraid, Dave, that it may be true, even if he does get back to England. I didn't see anything with my own eyes that made any sense. To tell you the truth, I think we could take pictures of this area all day long and not snap a blessed thing except their blasted camouflage stuff."

"That's the way I figure it, too," Dave said in a dejected voice. "So, whether or not Barker got back ... and I sure hope like everything that he did ... I don't think it will make any difference. I mean, it looks like it's up to us, Freddy. You and me, and nobody to help us."

"Yes, I fancy you're right," Freddy murmured. "You don't happen to have an idea what we do next, do you?"

"No," Dave groaned. "The old brain's a blank. I guess we've just got to sit here, and.... No! The heck we have! I'll get us some attention, and I'll get it in a hurry, too. Get over by those rolling doors, Freddy. I got a bright idea."

"You tell it to me, first!" Freddy said and didn't move. "Your last bright idea wasn't so bright, you know."

"But this one is!" Dave cried and pulled a clip of matches from his pocket. "Look! We're not dead, are we? No. They didn't shoot us, did they? No. They just put us on ice in here until they get darn good and ready to do something about it. Well, I'm going to make them get good and ready in a hurry. I'm going to set this straw on fire, pal. You wait. They'll come for us in a hurry."

"But maybe they won't!" the English youth protested. "And, besides, this straw is pretty old and damp."

"So much the better," Dave said, and struck a match. "There'll be a lot of smoke, and no fire. Get over by the doors and down low where you won't have any trouble breathing. Heck, Freddy! Somebody's got to start the ball rolling. Why not us? We can't wait here until the darn war's over. Even if it's only Pumpkin Face Comstadt who comes, that'll be better than waiting here chewing our nails off. Stand back, pal! Here goes the match!"

Dave stuck the lighted match down under some straw that looked fairly dry. The flame came down to heat up his fingers, but the straw didn't catch. He dropped the burnt stub and struck three or four matches at the same time. The larger flame did the trick. The straw caught on fire and got going well enough to keep going when it reached the damp straw. Smoke started curling upward, and by the time Dave had joined Freddy over by the door a good cloud of the stuff was beginning to pour out the window on the right.

"Perfect!" Dave chuckled. "There's enough wind coming in the opposite window to keep it going. There! Hear that yelling outside? They've seen the smoke. And, listen! Here they come! What did I tell you, pal?"

"Oh, I expected them to come!" Freddy grunted. "It's when they *get here* that I'm wondering about. I...."

The rest was cut off short as the doors were rolled back and a figure came rushing inside. The figure tripped over the crouching boys, bawled out a frightened curse, and fell flat on his face. A rifle went sailing from his hands to crash against the stable wall. Dave saw it and his first impulse was to leap for it. The impulse died instantly, however, as a group of figures threw its shadow across him. He looked up into a ring of flat faces, and hostile eyes. That is, all save one man. He

wore the uniform of a General in the Luftwaffe. He was tall and straight as a steel rod. He was very good looking, and he had soft brown eyes that seemed to twinkle with merriment. Dave knew without asking that he was looking at General von Peiplow, of Dunkirk "fame."

The high ranking Luftwaffe officer suddenly chuckled out loud, and made a gesture with the riding crop he carried in his black gloved hand for the two boys to get up.

"You got tired of waiting, eh?" he spoke in English. "So sorry to have kept you waiting so long. A novel way of attracting our attention, however. Supposing, though, we had not come to investigate?"

"But you did," Dave said. "That's what we figured you'd do."

"You are Dawson?" the General asked. Then pointing his riding crop at Freddy, "And this is the English boy, Farmer? Ah! I see that you both have been promoted in rank. My congratulations!"

"Thanks," Dave grunted. And then not being able to choke off the question, "But how come you knew we'd been promoted?"

General von Peiplow chuckled and slowly closed one eye.

"It is my business to know everything," he said. "And let me compliment you two by saying that the names, Dawson and Farmer, are well known in the German Luftwaffe. Frankly, I am very pleased to be able to meet you at last."

The Nazi smiled as he spoke but there was a chill in Dave's heart. It was almost as though he suddenly saw the real man behind that kind smile and that good looking face. Colonel Comstadt was ugly, and animal from the top of his big head to the bottom of his big feet. His brutality, and his murderous instincts were all on the surface for the whole world to see. But not so, General von Peiplow. He was the polished Nazi. The educated and well mannered type of Hitler henchman. In reality, though, he was three times as deadly and dangerous as the lumpy Comstadt. The Gestapo man slaughtered with his bare hands. General von Peiplow, however, killed men with his brains, his treachery, and his diabolical cunning.

"Didn't figure we were that famous," Dave presently said. "So what?"

"So what?" the German murmured and arched an eyebrow. "So, I think it would be splendid if we all had a little talk, don't you?"

A quiver of excitement shot through Dave but he kept his face a blank.

"Suits us," he said with a shrug. "But I don't know what there is for us to talk about."

"Oh, there are lots of things," General von Peiplow smiled. Then gesturing with his riding crop, "Come along with me where it will be more comfortable. Ah, your pardon, Gentlemen! You are perhaps a bit hungry, eh?"

Dave heard Freddy speak, but he could hardly believe his ears.

"Not at all, thank you," the English youth said politely but coldly. "We're not hungry a bit."

Dave gaped at his pal, then looked at von Peiplow.

"You've got a doctor around here, General?" he grunted.

"Why, yes," the German replied quickly. "You need medical attention?"

"I don't," Dave said. "Just wanted to make sure, in case. Strange things might happen. *Ouch!*"

"What's the matter?" von Peiplow asked sharply as Dave bent down and rubbed his ankle.

"Fell over my own big feet!" Dave growled, and shot a withering glance at Freddy Farmer's innocent face. "Well, let's have that talk, if you want."

"By all means," the Luftwaffe officer said. "Come with me."

With a nod at the group of younger officers with him, which said plain as day for them to keep a sharp eye on the two prisoners, General von Peiplow turned and led the way across a strip of open ground to a group of one story buildings set well back under the protection of some woods. Dave took one quick look at those buildings and woods, and knew at once it was one of the spots marked on Colonel Trevor's map.

He cast his eyes quickly about and instantly spotted the bend in the Lille River, the hill range and the stretch of swamp ground. He was suddenly relieved to know that their captors had not taken them away from the mysterious area during their unconscious hours. And then as he heard sound, and saw movement over by the stretch of supposedly swamp ground, he stopped dead in his tracks and gasped in bewildered amazement.

His guess up in the air had been correct. The swamp had been drained, and the camouflage covering concealed a nest of partial underground hangars. They were not hangars for planes, however. Underneath the propped up camouflage covering were hundreds of *gliders!* Hundreds of gliders with no cockpit as far as he could see. And in the nose of each was fitted a small auxiliary two cylinder engine of perhaps ten or twelve horsepower.

Even as he stared a group of mechanics released a pair of the auxiliary powered gliders. They went skipping along a strip of open ground no wider than a city sidewalk and arced gracefully up and into the air. Noses tilted upward close to the stalling point, the gliders climbed up in the sunset flooded heavens until they were no more than a couple of specks in the sky.

"Jumping cat-fish!" Dave blurted out. "Gliders. Auxiliary powered gliders! Well, what do you



know!"

"Ah?" General von Peiplow echoed. "A surprise, eh? Then perhaps our talk will be short and sweet, as they say in your country, Flight Lieutenant Dawson!"

Dave looked at the faint light gleaming in the German's eyes, and would gladly have given an arm and a couple of legs to take back what he had said. It was now plain as day that von Peiplow was worried about just how much Freddy and he knew. To blurt out in amazement at seeing the powered gliders was the same as telling the German they didn't know very much.

The Yank bit his tongue in silent rage. Then suddenly an idea popped into his head. He turned toward Freddy and held out his hand.

"Want to pay it to me, now, or just owe it to me?" he said. "Take a look at those powered gliders. That proves the message wasn't a fake, doesn't it?"

Freddy Farmer looked blank, then caught Dave's quick half wink. He shrugged and made a face.

"I'll owe it to you," he said. "It wasn't a fair bet, though. You know what else the message said."

It was Dave's turn to look blank. He had the sudden feeling that Freddy's last words had been some kind of a tip. That the English youth was trying to call his attention to something else. He took a quick look over at the nest of gliders, but before he could spot anything of additional interest von Peiplow's voice interrupted him.

"A message, eh?" the German murmured. "Very interesting. Well, here we are. Inside, please. Take chairs, and make yourselves comfortable."

Von Peiplow had stopped in front of the door of a square, earth camouflaged building. Its flat roof was covered with cut boughs, even though tree branches were like a tent above it. A few other buildings of the same design close by were also protected in a like manner. It was obvious that the Germans had taken extra precautions that the group of buildings would not be spotted from the air.

"Or by the lens of a camera," Dave said to himself, and stepped in through the door.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *Steel Nerves*

The sudden change from sunset's glow to murky shadows blinded Dave for a moment as he entered the room followed by Freddy Farmer. His vision cleared in a moment or two and he saw that the room into which he had stepped was fitted out like an air operations center. There was every conceivable kind of a gadget. He saw radio sets, plain wireless sets, a row of field telephones, and what-not. Many of the instruments he saw fitted to the walls, or attached to tables, were complete mysteries. The whole scene, however, reminded him of a visit he had made three or four years ago with his father to the experimental laboratory of the General Electric Company at Schenectady, New York. The only difference was that sane men had been in charge at Schenectady.

Suddenly, Dave pulled up short, and the blood pounded in his temples as he saw the big hulk, Colonel Comstadt, seated in a chair in the corner. The Gestapo man was chewing on a hunk of meat he clutched in his big paws, but most of it was on his chin and down the front of his tunic. He paused to leer and make sound deep in his throat.

"So the two little babies finally woke up, eh?" he rumbled. "That is good. I was getting lonesome. Perhaps we can have some more good sport, eh?"

"Sure!" Dave flung at him. "Just as soon as I find me a crow-bar, you lop-sided car barn!"

The Gestapo man dropped his hunk of meat and lunged up on his feet.

"What is that?" he roared. "A cow barn?"

"That'll do even better!" Dave snapped at him, and set himself to dance to the side in case the Gestapo man came after him.

If that was the big brute's intention, he did not have the chance to carry it out. General von Peiplow glided in front of him with the stealthy movement of a jungle panther.

"I will talk with them first, Colonel Comstadt," he said in a voice that was almost a purr. "Perhaps later you will have another chance to ... er, entertain them. For the present, that is all, Colonel."

The Gestapo man's eyes seemed to glow red. He clenched his big hands. He moved his lips but no words came from them. Then slowly he lowered his eyes before the other's steady stare.

"I receive my orders from *Herr* Himmler," he muttered.

"And I receive mine from *Der Fuehrer*!" General von Peiplow said softly. "You will wait outside, Colonel!"

The Gestapo man hesitated a fraction of a second longer, then shrugged and moved toward the door. The look he flung Dave as he passed by was like a white hot knife driving deep into the Yank's heart. In spite of himself, Dave gulped and shuddered slightly.

"A nuisance, but necessary at times, is Colonel Comstadt," he heard von Peiplow say. "But sit down, Gentlemen. Perhaps we will not find his return necessary, eh?"

Dave didn't reply to that, nor did Freddy Farmer. They simply exchanged glances and then dropped into the chairs the Nazi indicated with a wave of his hand. General von Peiplow seated himself behind a huge desk, clasped his hands on top of it, and smiled at them benignly.

"And, now, shall we start our little talk?" he asked after a moment or so.

"Shoot," Dave said and folded his arms on his chest.

"Oh, quite!" Freddy murmured and did the same thing.

General von Peiplow chuckled softly and nodded his head.

"Brave men, both of you," he said. "I admire bravery and great courage, even in my enemies. At times, though, bravery can be utter stupidity. This, I am afraid, is one of those times. Do you want to be brave, or stupid?"

"I want to play around with one of those gliders," Freddy said, and let his gaze roam over the assortment of electrical gadgets. "Do you mind, General?"

"I'm afraid I do," the German replied with a smile. "But I see what you mean. You have sharp eyes, and a great interest in technical things, eh?"

"Some," Freddy replied easily as Dave wondered what in heck the two were talking about. "I'd say, though, that we're considerably more advanced than you Jerries. For one thing, we don't have to use auxiliary engines, at all."

"That is a lie!" General von Peiplow shouted in a loud voice. "I know all that you're doing along that line. *Donder!* You *Englanders* have hardly begun research work in that field."

"Have it your way, if you like," Freddy said with a nonchalant shrug. "Perhaps what I saw them doing at Bristol was simply a mirage, a dream."

"Now, I know you lie!" von Peiplow snapped. "Bristol, England, is in ruins. The Luftwaffe bombers have reduced it to dust. They.... Why do you shake your head?"

"Because I think it's a blasted shame!" Freddy said. "A rotten, mean trick!"

"It is war!" von Peiplow replied curtly. "It is necessary to bomb your cities and towns to make you fool English realize that...."

"I don't mean that," Freddy Farmer interrupted evenly. "I mean it's a dirty shame nobody has told the population of Bristol that their city is in ruins. Imagine living in a house day after day, and night after night, and nobody telling you it's really nothing but dust! They'll be no end surprised, General, when they find out. Or is that a new Nazi technique? You bomb a building flat and don't even tell the people in it? A very queer war, I say!"

"And very amusing, your little joke, Flight Lieutenant Farmer!" the German said tight lipped. "We *know* what happened at Bristol. We have cameras and reconnaissance planes, too, you know. Enough of this foolish talk, though! There is something else much more important. Flight Lieutenant Dawson! What about the message you mentioned? What message?"

Dave scowled and acted as though he were reluctant to answer the question. General von Peiplow leaned forward on the desk and fixed Dave with a steady stare.

"Do we need Colonel Comstadt's help to refresh your memory?" he murmured softly.

"Take it easy," Dave grunted. "I'm just thinking up the answer. A message, you say?"

"A message," the Nazi repeated quietly. "You three pilots came over here for a special reason. The reason was to take photographs of this area. Ah, yes! I examined your burnt planes personally, and saw the fire charred camera in each. There was also a camera in the third plane. The one that was shot down in flames on its way back to England. Yes, you came over to take pictures. Naturally, we Germans always prepare for the unexpected. And so we were prepared to greet you three R.A.F. gentlemen. My pilots could have shot you down with no trouble at all. However, I was curious. I desired to find out how you happened to come straight to this area."

"I should think you could guess that!" Freddy Farmer suddenly cut in scornfully. "The chaps in the plane that returned last Tuesday night told us some funny business was going on at this spot. So, Air Ministry simply ordered us to buzz over and take a picture or two. Dave and I met up with a bit of hard luck. But the third chap's pictures will tell Air Ministry all it wants to know. If you're a brainy chap, General, and I must admit you don't look a bit like Colonel Comstadt, you'll evacuate this area in a hurry."

General von Peiplow smiled at Freddy, but there was no warmth in his smile, and less in his eyes. The deep rooted hatred for a superior race glittered in their depths.

"It is plain to see that you are truly English to the very core!" the German presently snapped. "Nothing but lies, and more lies, come from your lips. No wonder your country is doomed to defeat by German arms. I will correct your lies. Not one of those British Lockheed Hudsons returned to its base last Tuesday night. They were *all* destroyed. I saw that with my own eyes, for it was I who had charge of destroying them! And Air Ministry did not send them over to *this* spot. They were high and on their way farther inland when they suddenly met their doom. No, it was something else that sent you three straight to *this* area today. As for your comrade, the third one? Believe he escaped back, to England, if you wish. I am telling you, though, that he is dead!"

General von Peiplow directed a curt nod at Freddy Farmer, and then turned his attention to Dave.

"And now that message," he said. "What message? Where did it come from, and who...?"

The German suddenly stopped, and his eyes flew open wide in amazed consternation.

"That swine I sent back?" he choked as though questioning himself. Then with a vicious shake of his head, "But that is impossible! Impossible! He was dead, and he had been thoroughly searched."

Dave leaped at the opportunity presented as General von Peiplow let his voice trail off and sat scowling into space.

"Stay with it, General!" Dave said. "You're getting close! You're getting mighty warm. Just stay with that poor fellow you murdered and dumped out over England. Give up? Want a little bit of a clue?"

The Nazi Luftwaffe high ranker seemed not to hear Dave. He stared at space for a moment longer, then suddenly dug two fingers into his tunic pocket and pulled out a wrinkled bit of paper. Dave, seeing it, caught his breath sharply, and impulsively started to reach into his own tunic pocket. The paper von Peiplow held in his hand was the pencil drawn map Colonel Trevor had given Dave before the take-off from Eighty-Four's field. It didn't require a single guess to know that Freddy and he had been thoroughly searched while they were unconscious.

Von Peiplow studied the map a moment and then looked up at Dave.

"And the message that went with this?" he asked. "The information it contained?"

Dave swallowed hard and steeled himself. He reached up and tapped a finger on his head.

"In here," he said evenly. "And you can whistle for it. But don't *you* know what's going on over here?"

"I'm afraid that won't work either, Flight Lieutenant Dawson," the Nazi said in his soft but deadly toned voice. "The spy we caught and sent back to England with our compliments could never have taken this map back with him. He was searched too thoroughly."

"Who says he brought it back?" Dave taunted him. "So you give up? You don't want that clue?"

"Clue?" the German muttered with a frown.

"Sure, clue!" Dave said lightly. "Don't you want to find out how you stumbled? How all the dope about this place dropped into the hands of British Intelligence? All the dope on your new weapon you *think* is going to make it possible for you to hold the occupied countries no matter how many troops your boss, Hitler, withdraws? Gosh! You're not *really* surprised, are you? You mean you didn't even *guess* that British Intelligence was wise to you? Freddy! That's another bet you owe me. My hunch the Nazis were completely in the dark was absolutely right."

"Good grief, yes!" Freddy Farmer gasped. "But I would have been willing to bet anything, Dave! I was sure that they...."

"Silence!" von Peiplow thundered. And for the first time uncontrolled rage showed on his good looking face. "What clue? Tell me, or I'll call in Colonel Comstadt this instant!"

"Call him in, the big ox!" Dave snapped back. "But I'm giving you the clue, anyway. Here it is. Have you got false teeth, General von Peiplow?"

The Nazi stiffened in his chair, and for a second his eyes went glassy, as though he had received a terrific punch on the nose.

"False teeth, false teeth!" he sputtered. Then slamming a clenched fist down on the desk, "So that was it? He had a hollowed-out false tooth!"

"Hand him the gold medal, Freddy," Dave said out of the corner of his mouth. "You're nearer than I am."

If General von Peiplow heard the remark it bounced off him like a pebble off a tin roof. He was shaking his head like a boxer getting up off the floor at the count of nine. For a moment or so Dave and Freddy could have been a thousand miles away for all the attention the Luftwaffe high ranker paid them. Presently, though, the muscles of his face ceased jitter-bugging around and he fixed them both with a brittle stare.

"So that swine did carry information back to England?" he said in a voice that promised death for those who had searched Colonel Trevor's dead brother's body. "That was the message you spoke of, eh? Well, I must thank you for mentioning it. Now, you will tell me what it said. Exactly how much did that swine find out?"

Dave shrugged and folded his arms across his chest. Freddy also shrugged and calmly scratched an imaginary mosquito bite on his right ankle. The corners of von Peiplow's mouth tightened slightly and his clasped hands whitened a bit at the knuckles.

"I have already said I admire you two as brave men," he said evenly. "And I have also said that courage can also be stupidity. You two are young. You have your whole lives before you. True, you are my prisoners, and I cannot permit you to return to England. However, I can make you very comfortable on this side of the English Channel. And I can give you my word that once Germany has won the war we will see that you are given high and most satisfactory positions in the Reich's commercial air industry. Now, would that not be better than ... than suffering tonight

at the hands of Colonel Comstadt? Would that not be far better than perhaps not seeing tomorrow's sunrise?"

"It might rain tomorrow, and there wouldn't be any sunrise," Dave grunted.

Von Peiplow whistled air through his clenched teeth.

"A man is a fool to joke with death!" he bit off. "It is regrettable that you are but mere boys. But you have taken up arms against a Germany struggling to live, and so your young age cannot save you. You play at being grown men, and so you shall be treated as grown men. Answer my question or I will order Colonel Comstadt, and his men, to force the answer from your lips. *How much does British Intelligence know?*"

Dave's head was roaring and it felt as though in the next second it were going to fly off his shoulders. His heart was a lifeless lump of ice in his chest, and the very air he breathed seemed to burn the walls of his lungs. Just the same he closed his lips tight and stared defiantly back at General von Peiplow. He heard not so much as a murmur from Freddy Farmer. So he knew that his pal was also giving the German the silence treatment.

Von Peiplow glanced first at one, then at the other. After a moment or so he bobbed his head and banged both hands palms down on the desk.

"Very well, then!" he barked and pushed up from his chair. "You wish to be fools, so...."

The Luftwaffe high ranker did not finish the rest. He cut himself off short as there came a sudden mighty bellow of wild alarm from outside. Before the cry had been lost to the echo Dave heard the high keyed whine of something tearing down through the air. Von Peiplow roared a curse, leaped for the door and yanked it open. The terrified face of Colonel Comstadt loomed for an instant in the doorway, then he came lunging inside, almost knocking General von Peiplow off his feet. Dave snapped his eyes out through the door opening just in time to see one of the gliders dive straight into the ground not fifty feet from where he stood. A loud explosion smacked against his eardrums, and the blast almost knocked his feet out from under him. A flash of flame, a spouting cloud of smoke, and then there was a five foot crater where the glider had struck the ground. And there wasn't even a splinter of the glider to be seen.

"Swine fools!" von Peiplow bellowed and shoved Colonel Comstadt to one side, as he leaped toward the door. "Do you want to kill us all? Where is Captain Meuller? Where is...?"

The Luftwaffe general choked off the rest as a white-faced Nazi flying captain came rushing up and practically slid to a stop on the heels of his polished boots.

"Ah, you are safe, Herr General!" he gasped. "Praise be to the gods for that. I have never known such fear as this last moment. I...."

"Shut your mouth, you blabbering imbecile!" von Peiplow thundered at him. Then with a savage gesture of his hand, "What is all this? Who was at the control board?"

"I was, Herr General," the Captain said and wrung his hands. "But something went wrong. The glider would not respond no matter what I did. It went into a dive and I could not right it. Neither could the pilot of the control plane in the air. The power glider went into a dive, and never recovered."

General von Peiplow tilted his head and stared up at the faintly red tinted sky. Unnoticed, Dave and Freddy had walked close to the door. They looked up, too, and saw the Messerschmitt One-Ten that was sliding down out of the air, obviously toward a landing field on the opposite side of the woods.

"Who is in that plane?" von Peiplow suddenly snapped at the Captain.

"Lieutenants Himmer and von Lisk, Herr General," the other replied. "They were up for a test. But I swear, Herr General, I did not know even a small charge was in the glider! I gave definite orders that all charges be removed for the test. It is the fault of Sergeant Reuter. I will deal with him at once, Herr General. This thing will not happen again! I...."

"I will deal with Sergeant Reuter!" von Peiplow snapped. "As for you, Captain Meuller! You will leave tonight and rejoin your Squadron on the Balkan Front. Fool! It was for you to make sure with your own eyes that *no* charges were in the glider. What if the thing had crashed down into the underground hangars? There are enough high explosives there to blow this part of France from off the face of the world. Now, get out of my sight before I change my mind and have you shot for such disregard of duty."

The German captain's mouth worked like a fish out of water, but he said not a word. He shivered and his eyes went glassy with fear. He hesitated one brief moment and then turned and slunk away like a dog with its tail between its legs. Von Peiplow said something savagely under his breath and swung around to re-enter his office. It was only then he seemed to remember that Dave and Freddy were still there. He shot them each a blazing look of annoyance and hatred.

"Well?" he boomed at them. "What have you to say? Go ahead, speak!"

"About what?" Dave stalled for time. "Gosh, General! What happened? It's knocked everything right out of my head."

Freddy Farmer groaned softly, and put a hand to the side of his head.

"Something hit me," he mumbled. "I feel dizzy and faint."

General von Peiplow's lips curled in a sneer.

"You both lie, of course!" he snapped at them. "I know perfectly well that you are only making believe. However, I have no time to fool with you, now. I have other important things to do. So I will give you a few hours to recover from your *injuries*, and decide whether or not you wish to tell me the truth, or die!"

General von Peiplow emphasized his words with a curt nod, and swung around to Colonel Comstadt.

"Take the prisoners and put them in the old repair shed!" he ordered. "It has no windows. Only a door. You will stand guard at that door, personally, and see that they do not attempt to escape. I am holding you responsible, Colonel. If they try to escape ... you will stop them! You understand, eh?"

The huge gorilla like Nazi smiled broadly and rubbed his two hands together.

"Perfectly, Herr General, perfectly!" he said. "I will take the best of care of them. And if they do not behave ... it will be a great pleasure to teach them a few things."

General von Peiplow flashed the boys a cold smile, and then nodded at Colonel Comstadt.

"Good!" he grunted. "Now, take them away!"

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *A Chance in a Million*

Dave Dawson sat on an old oil soaked workbench beside Freddy Farmer and absently rubbed his left arm where it still ached from the steel fingered grip of Colonel Comstadt. That was a good hour ago, but he could only tell that by looking at the radium painted dial of his wrist watch. It had been light right up to the moment the Gestapo man had more or less hurled them inside the old repair hut. Then when he had slammed the heavy door shut darkness had enveloped them. As von Peiplow had said, there were no windows. And the only door fitted too snug all around for any light to come through the cracks. And so they had groped about for a place to sit, found the workbench and climbed up on it for no other reason than to get off the cold damp dirt floor. Once settled, each had been content to remain silent and battle with his own thoughts.

"Powered gliders loaded with explosives?" Dave broke the silence as he mumbled the words aloud. "That doesn't make sense to me. It... In fact, Freddy, something you said still doesn't make sense to me. What was all that stuff about Bristol, and the English being more advanced than the Nazis, and stuff? I thought for a while you were just giving him double-talk, or something. But doggone if you both didn't seem to know what it was all about. What...?"

"If you'd just let that tongue of yours run down, I'd tell you!" the English youth interrupted. "Certainly we both knew what the other was talking about. I thought you had guessed it, too, Dave. The stuff I said to General von Peiplow was just to see if I had the right idea. And what he said to me was proof that I had. Blast the Nazis, anyway. Trust them, the cunning devils, to be the first to adopt a new weapon!"

"Pardon me, old thing!" Dave grated at him. "Would you like me to leave so you can go on having a nice little conversation with yourself? Snap out of it, Freddy! Stop talking riddles! You're driving me bats. What the heck are you driving at, anyway?"

"Those gliders, you idiot!" Freddy hissed at him. "Didn't you see with your own eyes, Dave? Don't you know, *now*, how those Lockheed Hudson bombers were so mysteriously destroyed last Tuesday night?"

Dave took a deep breath, and slowly counted up to ten.

"No," he finally said with forced patience. "I don't catch on to a thing. Now, for cat's sake stop beating around the bush, and put it in words I can understand!"

"Very well, then," Freddy said. "Be quiet and listen. Each of those gliders, or soaring planes, is powered with a small auxiliary engine, and enough gas to take it up to very high altitudes. Instead of a pilot the glider is loaded with high explosives. When the thing reaches maximum altitude the engine cuts out, and from then on the glider is radio controlled. Understand, now, Dave? *Radio controlled!* Every air force in the world has been working on that for years, and it looks like the Nazis have been able to make it work on gliding, or soaring planes. And they've got hundreds of the things in those underground hangars. This area, here, is the testing and experimental ground for radio controlled auxiliary powered gliders. You see?"

Dave sucked air into his lungs and sat perfectly motionless. His brain was whirling, and drops of cold sweat oozed out of his face.

"Sweet tripe!" he suddenly ejaculated. "Am I dumb, and are you one bright lad, Freddy, to catch on so fast! Gosh! They can fill the air with those things, and...."

"Exactly!" the English youth interrupted excitedly. "Fill the air with hundreds and thousands of the things the factories can turn out like hot-cakes. Each glider carries a load of sudden destruction for anything that bumps into it, and the whole lot can be maneuvered from a radio control plane in the air, or from the ground. Right from von Peiplow's office, too, I fancy. I've fiddled around quite a bit, and, although I'm years and years from being an expert, I knew at

once that all those gadgets in von Peiplow's office had to do with the radio control of planes, or something."

"Those Lockheed bombers of flare picture patrol last Tuesday night!" Dave breathed softly. "The Nazis heard them coming. Maybe they can even spot and locate planes at night by radio, just like we can in England. Maybe they have a hush-hush radio plane locator just like we have. Anyway, they spotted those Lockheeds and sent up a flock of their TNT gliders. It is a million times better than a balloon blockade, or wire nets, and that sort of stuff. A wall of TNT loaded gliders swinging around in the night sky in solid formation. All of them controlled by radio. The Lockheed boys probably never saw them. Flew right into them and were blown to bits. That's the terrific explosion you must have seen, Freddy!"

"I'm sure of it!" the English youth said through clenched teeth. "Hitler's new weapon is a radio controlled glider loaded with TNT, or some other high explosive. They cost little to make, and they can be turned out in great quantities in almost no time at all. No need to train pilots. No costly guns and instruments, and the like. No worry how many of them are destroyed. Always hundreds and hundreds coming off the factory line to fill up the gaps. And, Dave!"

"What?" the Yank asked as Freddy stopped short.

"Perhaps von Peiplow's experiments here on this glider business, mean much more than simply holding control of the air over the Occupied Countries!" the English youth said in a strained voice. "Think, Dave! Think of thousands and thousands of those gliders being directed across the Channel to England! It would be like trying to shoot down a swarm of bees. Every time you got one there'd be three more to fill its place. Dave! That can't happen. It *mustn't* happen!"

"You're telling me?" Dave grated and clenched his fists in helpless rage. "You're darn right it mustn't happen. We've got to do something, Freddy. We've got to do something that will make all of von Peiplow's tests and experiments go up in smoke. And.... Hey! That's it! The whole works go up in smoke!"

Dave had lowered his voice to a whisper as he spoke the last. Freddy Farmer leaned close to him and whispered back in the darkness.

"Are you crazy?" he hissed. "What in the world are you talking about? It's impossible!"

"Nuts it's impossible!" Dave shot back. "Von Peiplow let the cat out of the bag, only I'm just realizing it. Remember his bawling out that scared pink captain? Remember his saying it was a break that crashed glider didn't hit the hangars? How there was enough stuff there to blow the works right off the face of the earth? That's all we've got to do, Freddy. Blow this whole place right clean out of sight. Von Peiplow, Ox Face, the hired help, and all the radio equipment, and stuff, going sky high, and not coming back. That's it, Freddy!"

"Oh, quite!" the English youth groaned. "Sounds so terribly easy, too! What would you suggest we do first? Walk out of here and bash Colonel Comstadt over the head? I'm sure he must be fast asleep, and we'd have no trouble."

"Go sell it up the next street, and shut up!" Dave growled. "Give a guy a chance to think. I'll figure something."

"Take all the time you want, little man," Freddy grunted. "There's no hurry. Seriously, though, Dave, if we only could think of some way. If.... What's the matter?"

Dave had reached out in the darkness and gripped Freddy's arm.

"Just keep talking," he whispered. "Talk about anything. Tell me a story. Anything, but just keep talking. A half baked idea is beginning to buzz in the old dome. I'm going to prowl around a bit, and...."

"Dave, you madman!" Freddy hissed. "You can't get outside. You're no match for that big devil. He'll...!"

"Keep your shirt on!" Dave choked him off. "I'm not going outside. I'm going to prowl around inside, and try to find something. You just keep talking, pal. Ox Face can hear through that door, so I want your voice to cover up any sounds I make. Okay. Start talking!"

Dave gave Freddy a reassuring pat on the knee and glided away in the darkness. He heard the English youth start telling about an experience he had when he was learning to fly, and then Freddy's voice became no more than a constant murmur in Dave's ears. He was down on all fours and creeping around on the dirt floor and concentrating every bit of his attention on his task. Seconds ticked by to form a minute. Then two minutes, three, four, and on up to ten.

By then Dave had explored every square inch of the dirt floor with his hands, one side wall, and the rear wall. A cloud of bitter defeat was crowding into his heart, and it was all he could do to stop from pulling a clip of matches from his pocket and striking one into light. There had to be something he could use in this deserted repair shed. There *had* to be something! An old rusty wrench, or a length of stout timber. Something he could use as a club. Even a rock would do the trick. But his hands touched nothing that wasn't nailed or bolted fast. The dirt floor was smooth as glass, and entirely unbroken by a corner of rock jutting up.

More agonizing minutes ticked by and hope began to fade in Dave's heart. Then, suddenly, when he had reached a point but a few feet from the workbench upon which Freddy sat, his groping hands touched something that electrified him with wild joy. The something was an eighteen inch length of lead pipe that stuck out from the side of the repair shop. He explored it with his fingers and hope leaped even higher. The length of pipe, which he guessed had served as a conduit for

electric wires, was not screwed tight in the connecting joint set flush with the shop wall. After several twists with his hands he had the thing free. He hefted the pipe in one hand and grinned happily in the darkness.

"Lady Luck, give me just one whack!" he breathed softly. "Just one whack, that's all!"

With a nod for emphasis he got to his feet and moved over to Freddy. The English youth cut his monologue off short as Dave touched him on the arm.

"What is it, Dave?" he whispered. "Good grief! What's that? It feels like lead pipe."

"It is," the Yank whispered back. "Now, listen, Freddy. I've got a hunch. I'll bet you anything you like, part of Ox Face's job outside is to listen to us ... in case we spill something talking to each other. Von Peiplow is worried, plenty worried. If he wasn't, he would have put bullets in us long ago. And, if you ask me, one reason he is worried is because Barker *did get through!*"

"You think so, Dave?" Freddy questioned eagerly.

"I've got a strong hunch he did," Dave replied. "Anyway, von Peiplow is in a spin, or I miss my guess. He's darn sure we know something he wants to know. So he's keeping us on ice here to break us down with fear of what Ox Face would do to us, if von Peiplow should give him the green light. Also, it's a good bet von Peiplow is playing a hunch that you and I will get talking and spill something for Comstadt's ears. Okay, now. Here's my plan.

"You and I are going to talk, see? We're going to have a sweet argument. I'm going to be in favor of spilling what we know, and saving our skins. You're to be against that, and get real sore, see? Give me the works, and shout that you'd kill me before you'd let me say a word. Got it? Raise the roof!"

"Yes, but why?" Freddy whispered. "What do you hope to happen?"

"I'm hoping that Ox Face will come barging in here to break it up," Dave said. "And the instant he sticks his head in through that door he gets this lead pipe, but good! Then we beat it."

"To where?" Freddy wanted to know. "What do you expect to do? Throw a firecracker at those hangars and blow up the TNT loaded gliders?"

"Certainly!" Dave snapped in sarcastic tone. "Didn't you know I always carry a pocketful of firecrackers around with me? No, you dope! We head for the landing field on the other side of these woods. Where we saw that Messerschmitt One-Ten go down."

"Then what?" the cautious English youth wanted to know.

"For cat's sake, how do I know?" Dave groaned. "We'll blow up that bridge when we come to it. The main thing is to put Ox Face bye-bye, and get out of here. Are you with me, or not?"

"What a blasted silly question!" Freddy growled. "Of course, Dave! I simply wanted to know what we were to do afterward, that's all."

"Well, that's one I can't answer, yet," Dave grunted. "The instant we're out of here just hang onto my coat tails, pal! We'll be going places, and fast. Now, hold everything for a second or two, then play right up to what I say. And, luck, little man!"

Freddy didn't say anything. He simply reached out quickly and pressed Dave's arm hard. The Yank pulled his arm free and moved over to a point a foot or so to the right of the door. There he stopped, turned toward Freddy and cupped his hands to his lips to make his voice sound as though it came from the rear of the repair shop.

"But you're nuts, Freddy!" he said in a loud voice. "What's it going to get us? A bullet in the head, after that big baboon gets through tearing us apart. Well, nix on that for me! I say, tell von Peiplow what we know, and at least go on living. Heck...."

"Never, Dawson!" Freddy Farmer shouted back angrily. "And I thought you had courage, and were ready to die for England? Why...!"

"Not this way!" Dave snarled. "Not in a rotten dump like this. Okay, so you're an Englishman. Well, go ahead and get your own head beaten off. I'm not going to. I'm going to tell von Peiplow, and that's final!"

"No, you're not!" Freddy bellowed. "You may have been my best friend, Dawson, but I'll kill you before I'll let you say a word to von Peiplow. I warn you!"

Dave sensed rather than heard movement just outside the door. His heart was trying to burst out through his ribs, and the blood racing through his veins was like liquid fire.

"Yeah?" he yelled back at Freddy. "You and who else? You dumb dope, what good is it for us to be dead? None! We're sunk, I tell you! Von Peiplow has us both right behind the eight ball, and.... Easy, Farmer! Stand back, I'm telling you! Lay a hand on me and I'll belt you right through that wall!"

"Then go ahead and belt, you yellow coward, you traitor!" Freddy screamed. "I'll shut your mouth, if it's the last thing I do! I'll...."

The English youth screamed other things but Dave didn't bother listening. He heard the sound of the bolt outside being snapped back. A second later the door handle rattled, and the door was pushed open. A shaft of light from a flash in Colonel Comstadt's big hand cut the darkness and started sweeping the interior.

"Stop it, both of you!" the Gestapo man's voice roared. "What is all...?"

At that exact instant Dave brought the lead pipe down on the big head that had moved past the edge of the door. Every ounce of Dave's strength was in the blow, and when he connected the jolt almost tore the length of lead pipe from his grasp. Colonel Comstadt didn't so much as let out a tired sigh. He folded to the floor in a heap of motionless bones, flesh, and fat. Dave bent over quickly, snapped off the flashlight, and wrenched it from the Nazi's stiff fingered grip.

"Phew, you hit him a terrible one!" Freddy Farmer breathed in Dave's ear.

"I hope to kiss an alligator, I did!" Dave panted. "It even bent the pipe. Come on! Help me haul the rest of him inside. Then we lock him up for the night, and get going. Boy! Would I like to do that over again half a dozen times, the big lug!"

In the matter of a few seconds later the two boys had hauled the unconscious Gestapo man all the way inside the deserted repair shop, and bolted the door on the outside. For a moment more they crouched there motionless in the darkness of night straining their eyes and ears. They saw nothing but a couple of faint lights in the distance that probably came from General von Peiplow's office. And they heard nothing but the distant throbbing note of night flying Nazi planes far, far to the north. Then Dave reached out and took hold of Freddy's hand.

"To the right around this hut, Freddy!" he whispered. "Then straight through the woods to that landing field. And pray hard we have some luck when we get there!"

"Right you are!" the English youth whispered back. "And I'm jolly well afraid we're going to need a lot of it!"

Dave didn't make any comment to that. There was nothing he could say. They were free men, but that was only the beginning. With every step they took they might be moving a step nearer to final failure, and certain death. No well laid plans and preparations, now. Everything that happened from this instant on, was in the laps of the gods!

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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *The Gods Laugh*

Fifteen minutes, fifteen weeks, or was it fifteen years since Freddy and he had left the old repair shop and entered the woods? Dave couldn't tell, and he didn't bother to guess. Every muscle and bone in his body ached from bumping into tree trunks and huge boulders that loomed up without warning in the darkness. And his face and hands were scratched from bramble thickets that tried to hold him back and pin him helpless.

How long had they been groping blindly through these darn woods? He had no idea. Perhaps the woods were endless. Perhaps ... and the sudden thought chilled him to the core ... they had simply been wandering about in a circle, and didn't know it. However, there was at least one tiny thing for which to be thankful. They had not bumped headlong into any Nazi patrols. As a matter of fact they had not heard a thing nor seen a thing to make their hearts loop over with fright. It was as though this section of Occupied France had gone sound asleep.

For that possibility Dave was thankful. Yet, at the same time it caused his worry to mount. In the back of his head was the faint hope that they might be able to steal that Messerschmitt One-Ten they had seen sliding down to a landing, and escape back to England. That von Peiplow had said it was a radio control plane made things that much better. No doubt British radio engineers would like very much to examine German radio control equipment. Yet, escape was not what Dave wanted most. Escape would save Freddy's life, and his own, but, it would mean leaving this area, the Nazis' testing ground for their newest weapon of war, untouched. True, a swarm of British bombers could be sent over to blast it off the map. But *could* they? What if swarms of TNT loaded gliders, and soaring planes, were sent aloft to bar the way? To not only bar the way, but be radio directed right into the R.A.F. bombers before they could be shot out of the skies by the British gunners? But, more likely than that, supposing before the British bombers could come over von Peiplow moved all his gliders, soaring planes, and equipment elsewhere? What then? The job would have to be done all over again. Von Peiplow's new hide-out would have to be found ... and there would still be the terrible danger of not being able to wipe it from the face of the earth. Still the danger that von Peiplow's new weapons would prove their full worth and destroy all British aircraft sent against them. True, perhaps von Peiplow's experiments and tests were far from being completed. Perhaps there was much more he had to do before this new deadly weapon was ready for continued active service. However, what happened to those Lockheeds last Tuesday night proved that the new weapon was far enough along to spread doom throughout war torn skies. It was....

Dave cut short his rambling thoughts as Freddy Farmer suddenly checked his forward movement and pulled him down onto the ground.

"What, Freddy?" he whispered excitedly. "See anything? Hear anything?"

"Shut up!" the English youth hissed in his ear. "We're practically on top of the spot. Look ahead, and just a shade to the right. See the glow of light between those trees? That's a tarmac oil-pot flare. And a light means somebody's there keeping guard. And...."

The English youth stopped short and squeezed Dave's hand hard in his mounting excitement.



"Look, Dave!" he whispered again. "See them? A half a dozen planes, pulled up under the trees! They look like Messerschmitt One-Nines to me, but I can't say for sure!"

"Boy, what eyes you've got!" Dave breathed and blinked hard. "So help me I can't see a thing but shadows. I... Hold it! Yeah, I can see a faint glow of light, but nothing else. Looks about fifty yards from here. What do you say?"

"Yes, just about that," Freddy replied. "We'd better keep down on all fours, now. Here, better let me lead the way. But don't go crawling up my back, old thing. And for Pete's sake, don't make any noise!"

"I promise not to bust out singing!" Dave growled. "Get going, you old Eagle Eye."

Making far less sound than a jungle panther stalking its prey the two R.A.F. pilots wormed their way forward, inching under bramble branches, sliding around tree trunks, and gliding past huge hunks of rock that stuck up out of the ground. Dave didn't dare raise his head once to glance ahead. He spent every instant of the time sticking so close to Freddy Farmer's heels that his nose almost touched.

As a matter of fact, after a thousand years or so his nose did touch Freddy's boots. He bumped his whole face smack into them as the English youth came to a sudden stop. Dave swallowed the groan of pain that came to his lips, and lifted his head. Freddy had come to a halt directly in back of a clump of thick bushes. But they were not too thick for Dave to see what was beyond. The sight set his heart to pounding, and the blood to surging through his veins.

Not fifteen yards away was the first of a row of six Messerschmitt One-Nine single seater fighting planes. They were hauled back partly under the overhanging branches of some trees, and in the faint glow cast by a small oil-pot flare set out in front of them in the middle of the row the craft looked like prehistoric vultures crouched and ready to spring into the air. Dave gave them but a single glance. What caught and held his attention was the figure of an armed Nazi Air Force mechanic comfortably slumped in a canvas chair to one side of the oil-pot flare. He was smoking a cigarette and seemingly staring up at the night skies. Propped against an arm of the chair, and within split seconds reach was a high powered German Mauser rifle. And as Dave strained his eyes he saw the usual half dozen or so hand grenades hooked to the German's belt. That the German was armed with both rifle and hand grenades made it obvious that General von Peiplow was taking no chances of loyal French peasants in the area committing any acts of sabotage.

Dave took another good look at that rifle and hand grenades, and groaned softly.

"Think we can sneak up on him, Freddy?" he breathed softly.

"We won't have to," came the startling reply. "I can take care of that chap. What makes me mad is about that Messerschmitt One-Ten. Look, Dave, it's way around in back of the One-Nines. We couldn't hope to get it out in front where we could take off without waking up half of France. Blast it! I was hoping we could get that bus back to England!"

Dave stared at the shadowy shape of the three place Nazi plane completely blocked off by the row of single seaters. He started to nod his head in bitter agreement, and then cut it off short.

"Nuts to the three seater, Freddy!" he whispered excitedly. "I've got it!"

"Got what?" Freddy demanded.

"The solution to the whole works!" Dave said. "It all depends on nailing down that Nazi mechanic before he can let out a peep. Darn! If we only had a gun!"

"We have," was Freddy Farmer's startling reply. "I thought you saw me, Dave. Before we left Ox Face I took his Luger out of its holster. Here it is, now, right in my hand."

Dave touched the smooth metal gun Freddy thrust at him, and chuckled inwardly.

"Pal, do you think of everything!" he breathed. "What would I do without you!"

"Make a blasted mess of things, no doubt!" Freddy hissed in his ear. "But, what's your plan? What were you going to say?"

"Two Messerschmitt One-Nines, and those hand grenades that guy has!" Dave said. "We gag and tie up that Nazi. Then we take off in a One-Nine apiece. Then we tear for those camouflaged glider hangars and let fly with the hand grenades. Their explosions will touch off that TNT, and the whole works will go sky high."

"Us, too, I fancy," Freddy Farmer murmured.

Dave swallowed hard and nodded.

"Yeah, probably, Freddy," he said and pressed the other's arm. "We'll have plenty of company, though, so what the heck? But wait, Freddy! I got a better idea. We don't have to fly too low over that drained swamp to toss the grenades overboard. First we get plenty of altitude, and then let the things go. A couple of them are bound to hit, and two will be plenty. That's a pretty fair sized area, and hard to miss."

"No, getting altitude won't do!" Freddy Farmer objected. "The instant we start those engines and take off the whole place will be alive with Nazis. In case you didn't notice they've got a lot of anti-aircraft guns around here. I saw them from the air. And, Dave, another thing. Once we're in the air von Peiplow will be able to spot us with his radio plane locator. He has equipment to do that just as we have to locate Nazi bombers coming in off the Channel. In less than a minute, Dave, they'd know exactly where we were in the air, and where we were headed. Our only hope is to

skim back over the trees and let those gliders have the hand grenades from fifty feet. And that will finish things for us, of course."

The English youth paused and sighed faintly.

"Oh, well," he murmured. "There'll always be an England!"

"Hey, cut out that stuff!" Dave growled and affectionately patted Freddy on the arm. "Don't be so anxious to die, pal. I've got an idea. Look, they can't locate a plane with that new radio stuff when the engine's off, can they?"

"No, at least not anywhere near as accurately," Freddy replied. "It's sort of tuning in on the engine's ignition that really does the trick. But what do you plan to do? Fly without an engine?"

"That's it, little man!" Dave whispered. "Look, Freddy. The second we get off the ground we climb like the dickens in the general direction of the English Channel, see? Go up just as steep as one of those Messerschmitt One-Nines will take you. The Nazis when they tune in on us, or whatever it is that they do, will think that we're legging it for England and safety. *But*, we won't be doing that little thing!"

"No?" Freddy Farmer echoed.

"No," Dave said. "When you and I reach an altitude of eighteen thousand feet, we level off from the climb, and cut out the engine dead. Then you swing around to the north in a glide, and I'll swing around toward the south. Hold her in an easy shallow dive. From eighteen thousand it will be a cinch to glide back over this area and not lose more than ten or twelve thousand feet. Then at the right moment, we cut in our engines, power dive down another thousand feet, let the grenades go over the side, and pull up and away and thus not be right over the place when comes the explosion, see?"

"I think I do," Freddy whispered and nervously fingered the Luger he held in his hand. "But it sounds a little difficult. For one thing, what about the right moment? How am I going to know if you're down low enough? And how are you going to know that I'm over the target and down low enough? If we're to stand any chance we should toss the hand grenades over at the same time."

"Sure, and it can be done," Dave said. "Radio, pal! It's a cinch there's radio in those One-Nines. And this won't be the first time you and I have worked a German radio. See? As for being over the target. You can't miss it from under ten thousand feet because that bend in the river stands out like a sore thumb even at night. And we both know those underground hangars are just east of the bend in the Lille River. Okay! Set your plane's radio, Freddy, at a sixteen hundred and twenty-five wave length reading. I'll set mine at the same reading. When you reach a point seven thousand feet over the target give me a signal over the radio. I've got it! Yell, '*Ox Face*.' That ought to make any Jerries listening in on that wave-length wonder what the heck. Yell, Ox Face, and hold as near as you can to your altitude until I yell, Ox Face, back at you. Then dive and open up your engine. I'll do the same, and the exhaust plumes from our engines will show each of us where the other is so's we won't go bumping into each other. Okay?"

"Okay, fine, Dave!" Freddy whispered eagerly. Then, "But hadn't we better get as much altitude as possible before we turn to glide back?"

"Too risky," Dave replied. "Eighteen thousand is safe enough. Any higher might not be so good. We haven't got our helmets, or oxygen masks. Von Peiplow, and his bums, must have swiped them for souvenirs when they searched us. Or would you like to go back and ask them for them, huh?"

"I'm laughing my head off at your funny remarks!" Freddy growled. "All right, eighteen thousand feet it will be. Now, let's not waste any more time. First thing you know, it'll be morning. We've got to get busy."

"Just one more thing, Freddy," Dave breathed. "The instant you let go with your hand grenades ... and don't forget to yank the string that will make them explode when they hit ... climb like the dickens and head home for England. I'll do the same. Now, just how do you figure to take care of our little friend over there having a smoke?"

"Easy!" Freddy whispered. "Just follow me, and keep your mouth shut. This is something I *can* do, without any suggestions. This is one thing I can do on my own. Now, shut up, and follow me!"

"You bet, pal!" Dave chuckled. "But don't flop it, for cat's sake. This guy's only the beginning of things!"

Freddy Farmer grunted scornfully, and then started to worm along the ground to the left, and around in back of the parked planes.

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *Midnight Madness*

Dave's whole body was trembling from wild excitement and torturing suspense before Freddy Farmer came to a halt right under the wing of one of the Messerschmitt One-Tens, and not an inch less than fifteen feet in back of the armed Nazi guard comfortably slouched in his canvas chair. For one awful second Dave was afraid that Freddy was going to attempt to creep right up

to the man, but the English youth stopped a good fifteen feet short.

In the glow thrown by the oil-pot flare Dave had a good look at the German's profile. It wasn't, however, anything very pleasing to look at. The man had the hawk like features and weak undershot chin, so common to Nazi soldiers. His neck was much too small for his head, and looked like a stick poked up out of a hole formed by the collar of his cheap cloth tunic with a lump on the top. However, funny and dopey as the man looked, there was nothing funny or dopey about the rifle in his hand, or the hand grenades hooked to his belt. Those were certain death if he were given even a second in which to use them. There was also a question of the Nazi's mouth. One startled roar and his mates would undoubtedly come on the run.

Dave scowled in the semi darkness and suddenly wished he'd made Freddy tell him of the plan. If that Nazi let out a yell, or if he had just enough time to grab up that gun, it wouldn't be so good. Freddy would be forced to fire, and the sound of shots would surely bring other Nazis before they could leap into those planes, kick the engines into life and get away. Maybe he'd better...

Dave cut off the thought and checked his hand reaching out to touch Freddy as he saw his pal lift up the Luger and draw a dead bead on the back of the Nazi's head. A second later the English youth spoke in German and his voice was like steel hitting against steel.

"Don't move, or you're a dead man, soldier!" the words came off Freddy's lips. "My gun is pointed right at your head, *schweinehund!* One move and there'll be a bullet in it, I promise you!"

The Nazi stiffened. The half smoked cigarette dropped from his fingers to fall into his lap, but he made no move to brush it off. Freddy Farmer sighed faintly, and then he was away from Dave like a shot leaving the muzzle of a gun. Dave hardly had time to blink before he saw the English youth half crouched right in back of the Nazi and with his Luger pressed against the man's head. Dave leaped to his feet and dashed out just as Freddy snatched the Nazi's rifle away.

"Boy, that was fast, Freddy!" Dave panted. "Just keep him like that, while I unhook those hand grenades. Hot dog! Eight of them. Two more than I counted on!"

While Freddy held the gun hard against the Nazi's head Dave bent over him and unhooked the eight hand grenades from the man's belt. As he placed them gently on the ground to one side, the Nazi made a faint gurgling sound in his throat.

"What is this?" the fear whitened lips gasped. "You are *Englanders!*"

"And plenty homesick!" Dave grunted. "Now out of that chair and down flat on your face. Hurry, before I kick you out of it. Face down, and hands behind your back!"

The Nazi didn't need any urging by Dave's foot. He quickly slid out of the chair and stretched out face down on the ground with his hands crossed behind his back. The man's belt, his handkerchief, and strips torn from the canvas chair did the trick. In less than two minutes he was gagged and tied up tight as a drum.

"Okay, Freddy!" Dave said and gave four of the hand grenades to him. "Three loud cheers for us. You take the end plane. I'll take the next one to it. Don't forget our arrangements! And ... and the last one back to England is a dope. Be seeing you, pal!"

The pair clasped hands quickly, looked deep into the other's eyes, and then without another word between them turned around and sprinted for the two end Messerschmitt One-Nines. Dave leaped into his, fumbled for the safety belt harness in the shadowy darkness and fastened it securely about him. Then he ran his eyes and hands on the instrument board and gadgets to familiarize himself quickly with their various functions. Then he slipped the cockpit set of radio headphones over his ears, and reached for the throttle and starter button.

He did not press the starter button instantly, however. He rested a finger on it and turned his head and peered through the bad light at Freddy Farmer in the next One-Nine. The English youth had apparently done things at top speed, too, for just as Dave turned his head so did Freddy, and their eyes met.

"Tally-ho, Dave!" Freddy shouted.

"And how!" Dave roared back.

A split second later the starting gears on both engines whined out their unpleasant note. And a few split seconds after that both twelve cylinder liquid cooled Daimler-Benz engines roared into life. The instant Dave's caught he throttled it slightly and raised a hand to wave to Freddy to take off first. And at that same instant a savage blast of rifle fire broke out from somewhere behind. There was the blood chilling clatter of a machine gun, too. And Dave felt the Messerschmitt One-Nine tremble slightly as bullets tore into its tail.

He didn't waste time to turn his head and investigate. He simply snapped a glance to the side to make sure Freddy's plane had started moving forward, then kicked off his wheel brakes and rammed the throttle all the way forward. The plane lunged ahead as though tightly coiled springs had been released. The engine howled out its note of mighty power, and the yammer and chatter of machine gun and rifle fire from behind seemed to double in fury. Yet, clear above the inferno of sound came an unintelligible roar of rage that made Dave's heart start violently in his chest.

"Ox Face!" he gasped and hunched himself low over the controls. "Has he got a head of cast iron! He shouldn't be waking up until sometime next week. Okay, girlie! Off you go!"

As he spoke the last he hauled the stick back, cleared the ground and went prop clawing straight up toward the night sky. Just off his right wing and flying in beautiful formation was Freddy

Farmer climbing upward right along with him. Dave grinned and felt a surge of pride in his breast.

"Good old Freddy!" he whispered. "Gosh! What that lad has done today would fill a book. A couple of them. He...."

A crash of sound and a blaze of light off to his left cut off the rest and jerked his head around. The glob of red and orange in the night sky was a familiar sight to Dave, and he recognized it instantly. Anti-aircraft gunners on the ground were groping for them in the black sky. A second glob of red and orange flame appeared in the sky, but twice as far away as the first, and Dave's heart slid back down out of his throat.

More anti-aircraft bursts appeared in the sky but as none of them was close Dave didn't give them a second look. He held his ship steady, prop-clawing upward and straight westward toward the English Channel. A couple of minutes later the anti-aircraft fire was far behind and rapidly giving it up for a bad job. At just about that same time Dave saw that his altimeter needle was right on the eighteen thousand foot mark. He automatically leveled off from his climb and turned his head to see the shadowy blurr that was Freddy Farmer's plane doing the same thing. For perhaps five seconds the planes roared straight ahead on an even keel, then Dave saw the exhaust plumes from Freddy's plane wink out, and the craft start turning around in a wide arc toward the north. The English youth had killed his engine and was starting the long silent glide back that would take him over the glider hangar area from the north. Dave swallowed a lump in his throat, cut off his own engine and went gently gliding around and to the south.

"Luck, old pal!" he spoke in a husky whisper. "We're going to make it okay. I've got the old feeling, Freddy. The old hunch. Be seeing you soon in dear old England. Yup! The home of tea and crumpets!"

Dave grinned in the darkness, and nodded for emphasis, but he couldn't kid himself. There was an icy emptiness in his chest, and the eerie tingling sensation at the back of his neck. In fact, for one crazy moment he was filled with the almost uncontrollable urge to call out to Freddy over the Messerschmitt's radio and suggest they call all bets off, and go streaking home to England, instead. He angrily killed the urge even as it was born in his brain, squared his shoulders and held the plane in its long flat glide southward and around toward the east. In spite of it being night he could clearly see the hair pin bend in the Lille River. And as the Messerschmitt's wings whispered their way lower and lower down through the air he caught sight of a few lights spotted here and there on the murky carpet of ground below.

He imagined that one of those lights came from General von Peiplow's test laboratory, and office, in the patch of woods. He imagined the Luftwaffe high ranker at the open door and scowling in savage defeat up at the heavens toward England. He imagined those things, chuckled softly, and made a face earthward.

"Just stick around, von Peiplow, old sock!" he grunted. "The old balloon's going up any minute, now. Any minute, now!"

As he spoke the last he squinted at the altimeter dial that was just faintly visible in the pale glow of the single instrument board light. The needle had moved down to close to eight thousand feet. That fact startled him for he felt he had started his downward glide but a couple of seconds ago. But it had been more than that. And as he took another look down over the side at the guiding bend in the Lille River, he saw that he was in correct position to the south of the glider hangar area. It was time to glide around due north and ease down the last thousand feet or so before Freddy's signal would come over the radio on the agreed wave length reading he had tuned at several minutes ago.

Banking gently around and down, he reached out with his free hand and made sure his four hand grenades were still in an empty map box where he could reach them without wasted movement. His own safety, and Freddy's too, rested in their getting rid of those hand grenades fast and clearing out from over the area twice as fast. If their planes received the full force of the explosion's concussion, the wings would be torn off like paper, and....

Suddenly, without the slightest sign of warning, the inky darkness of night was shattered apart by a thunderous roar of sound and a seething ocean of red, yellow, and orange flame that seemed to come boiling upward from the ground below. The plane bucked, and shivered, and lurched crazily forward. And for one horrible second a mighty invisible force tore Dave's hands from the controls. Head whirling, and his lungs seeming to burst right out through his ribs, he fought with every ounce of his strength to keep the plane from plunging wildly downward out of control.

Freddy Farmer! Where was Freddy? Did he get through? Was Freddy all right? The radio! Was it working? Would that signal come through from Freddy? Darn the blasted thing! Would it never speak?

Those and countless other thoughts spun and raced through his brain. Then a planet of fire rushed up out of nowhere. It seemed to crash straight into the nose of the Messerschmitt and explode in a roar that shook the very heavens apart. Dave felt as though unseen steel claws were tearing strips of flesh from his bones, and hammering his brains to pulp. He didn't know what it was. He didn't know what had happened. He only knew that he was spinning down into a limitless void of roaring thunder and boiling flame. Down ... down ... down into the raging inferno of another world.

"Ox Face! Ox Face! Dave! Are you okay? *Ox Face, Dave!*"

Like a half drowned man he faintly heard the voice of Freddy Farmer in his ear phones. For a

split second he thought he was simply hearing things in his dreams. Thought that he was dead and simply hearing the echo of Freddy's voice reaching across the great void between life and the hereafter. But he wasn't dreaming, and he wasn't dead. Far, far from it, in fact. The Messerschmitt was in a crazy spin, but it was slowly spinning down through clear night air. High above him the sky was splashed with red, orange, and yellow fire. And as he snapped a glance up toward it he realized what had happened. By accident ... or perhaps Nazi anti-aircraft gunners below had spotted the moving silhouette of his plane against the faint light of the stars ... the Messerschmitt had been caught cold in the bracket fire of several bursts of the famous "flaming onion" type of anti-aircraft shell. The crazy sea of colored flame, the roar of sound, and the terrific concussion of the shells exploding practically on the propeller hub had thrown him haywire, and tossed the plane into its crazy spin.

The Messerschmitt, however, still had plenty of flying in her bones. He realized that the instant he touched the controls and started to pull out of the spin. Then out the corner of one eye he caught the flicker of twin exhaust plumes etched against the darkness of night. And a split second later came Freddy Farmer's repeated cry in the earphones.

"Are you all right, Dave? Ox Face, Dave!"

"Ox Face, pal!" he roared into his own mike. "Down, and let them have it!"

Even as the last burst from his lips he kicked the Daimler-Benz into life again and stuck the Messerschmitt's nose straight down. The engine screamed out its song of power, and the wings shrilled their high note as they sliced down through the air. Body hunched well forward, and every muscle braced, Dave fixed his gaze on the ground below, and held his breath. Split seconds, infinitesimal periods of time ticked by, but it seemed as an agonizing life-time to Dave before he clearly saw the wide expanse of ground hangar camouflage below him. He snapped a glance at his altimeter and saw that the needle was at the five thousand foot mark.

"One thousand feet more, Freddy!" he screamed into his radio mike. "We'll make sure we don't miss with any of them. Luck, pal!"

"Luck, Dave!" came the faint reply in his earphones.

And then the altimeter needle was at four thousand feet! Dave tore his hands from the controls for a brief instant, grabbed up the hand grenades, jerked the little strings that freed the detonating pin, and hurled, the lot over the side. The split instant they left his hands he grabbed for the controls again and started to haul up out of the vicious power dive.

The plane jerked and bucked, and fought savagely to stay pointed downward. But Dave battled with it tooth and nail, and got the nose to swinging upward. Terrific pressure pressed him down in the seat. He felt that his neck was going to snap in two, and that his backbone and ribs were going to be forced right down into his thighs. Glaring white light filled his brain, and there was the roar of a thousand Niagaras in his ears. For perhaps ten full seconds he was completely "blacked-out" by the terrific pressures exerted on his body. Then the white glare faded away from his brain, there was less roaring in his ears, and the Messerschmitt was streaking straight forward toward the west on an even keel. He forced himself up from his half crouch and glanced to either side for sight of Freddy Farmer's exhaust plumes.

He saw them off to his left rear, perhaps a quarter of a mile away. And then suddenly it happened ... down below!

There were a half dozen spurts of flame that shot upward from the night shadowed ground. Then quick as a flash a pool of flame spread out in all directions. It came spouting upward as though the very earth had split apart and the raging inferno of flame at the core of the universe was belching up through. A beautiful and terrifying spectacle of Satan's fireworks spreading across Occupied France. And then came the sound of the explosions! There are no words to describe it. It was like the whole world blowing up. It was like a thousand worlds blowing up at the same time.

The bellowing blast seemed to drive Dave's eardrums right into his head though he was thousands of feet up in the air. Wave after wave of concussion swooped up to catch the Messerschmitt in its grip and toss and whip it about in the sky as though it were a leaf caught in the vortex of a tornado. For a moment Dave fought to keep control of the plane, but he might just as well have put out both hands and tried to push back those mounting waves of explosion blast. He was forced to let go of the controls and use both hands to hang on and keep himself in the seat.

The Messerschmitt danced and spun all over the inferno lighted sky. Unseen fists pounded and hammered every square inch of his body, and seemed to drain every drop of blood from his brains. He didn't wonder if he was going to live or to die, because his brain was too stunned, too befuddled to even begin to function properly. Like a man bordering on complete unconsciousness he did what he could to stay with the plane as it whipped up on its tail, nose pointed straight toward Heaven, one second, and went spinning drunkenly over on its back the next.

And then slowly the plane stopped banging around the sky. It fell into a half power dive and stayed there. Invisible giants stopped thumping Dave's body, and his concussion dulled brain began to work once more. With a mighty effort he dragged air into his burning lungs, and clutched hold of the controls and started to get the nose up.

"Freddy!" he mumbled thick tongued into his radio mike. "Are you okay? Okay, pal?"

Three seconds ticked by, but they were three eternities to Dave. Was Freddy gone? He had been

farther behind. Had the explosion caught him, and was Freddy dead? The horrible thought made Dave cry tears of blood in his heart. He jerked both hands from the controls and grabbed the radio mike between them as though that would help to carry his voice out over the air.

"Freddy!" he bawled at the top of his voice. "Freddy! Check back to me! Are you okay? Are you still around?"

"I think so, Dave!" came the voice in the earphones, and tears of joy streamed down Dave's cheeks. "Yes, I guess I must be. I hear your voice, see your exhaust plumes, and this bus is still flying. Yes, I fancy I must still be alive. But, good grief! It was like the end of the world, wasn't it? And, look down, Dave! It's as if all of France were on fire!"

Dave had to wipe the tears from his eyes before he could take a good look. And when he did a shudder ran through him. The ground behind and below was like a lake of liquid flame. Flames of all colors danced across its surface, and great columns of dirty white smoke, tinged a weird pink at the base, reached up high into Heaven.

"The lot of them gone, and good riddance!" Dave heard his own voice speak out grimly. "Okay, Hitler, think up something else new to toss at us. And we'll knock that forty ways from Sunday, too!"

"Jolly well right!" came Freddy Farmer's voice over the radio. "But, I say, Dave! Let's head for home, shall we? This business may bring some Nazi night fighters for a look, and I think I've had enough excitement for tonight. How about you?"

"Check, and double check!" Dave shouted. "Give her the gun, pal. England, here we come!"

A little under an hour later two German Messerschmitt One-Nines dropped down out of the night sky onto the home drome of the Eighty-Fourth Squadron of the R.A.F. Fighter Command. A group led by Squadron Leader Markham rushed out as the wheels touched and the two very battered looking planes were braked to a halt. When Dawson and Farmer climbed wearily down from the pits Markham's eyes popped wide, and his jaw dropped down on his chest.

"Dawson, and Farmer?" he cried in stark disbelief. "You two? Great guns! Where did you come from? We thought you were dead. Barker reported that you both had gone down. In an hour we were going to lead Fifty-Seventh Bombers over there and blast that spot from the face of France. Barker's pictures didn't show a thing, but we were going to bomb it anyway, and ... God be thanked! You two are still alive!"

In his great joy Squadron Leader Markham leaped forward and bear hugged them both before they could do anything about it.

"Now, tell me all about it?" he demanded.

"Could we sit and eat a bit first, sir?" Freddy Farmer asked in an apologetic voice.

Dave chuckled.

"For once I agree," he said. "It's a good idea, sir."

"Well, blast my eyes for being so selfish!" Markham shouted. "Of course, of course, chaps. You can talk while you eat."

Some thirty minutes later Dave poured his third cup of tea.

"And so that's how it was, sir," he said. "We were lucky as all get out. But von Peiplow, that Colonel Ox Face Comstadt, the hired help, and all that glider and radio stuff, just isn't around any more. I've got a hunch that Hitler will kind of give that glider idea up as a flop. You got anything to add, Freddy?"

"Not a thing," the English youth said through a mouthful of food. Then turning to the Squadron Leader, "But don't believe all that rot about what I did, sir. It isn't true. Phew! The way Dawson talks you'd think he was just along for the ride. Just twist all that praise around to him, and you'll be closer to the truth."

Markham smiled, sighed, and gave a little shake of his head.

"What you two will be doing next!" he grunted. "I don't dare even guess."

"Well, please count me out," Flight Lieutenant Barker broke in with a laugh. "I was the one who really just went along for the ride. I could just as well have stayed home."

"No, I don't think so," Dave said with a grin. "I'm sure that the fact that you did escape stopped von Peiplow from jumping on us before we had a chance to get away. Yes. I think you were really his big worry, Barker. And he held off on us until he could think things over. And his taking that time out was our lucky break."

"Well, maybe," Barker said with a shrug. "Just the same, I'm serving notice, old bean. I don't want to be picked for another one of *those* shows."

"Quite!" Freddy Farmer chimed in. "Don't ask me either. I fancy this one will last me until long after the war's over."

Dave snorted and dumped some sugar in his tea.

"What do you mean, ask *you fellows*?" he grunted, then grinned. "I hope to kiss a pig I'm not even going to ask *myself*!"

**THE END**

[1] *Dave Dawson at Dunkirk.*

[2] *Dave Dawson on Convoy Patrol.*

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DAVE DAWSON, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT \*\*\*

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