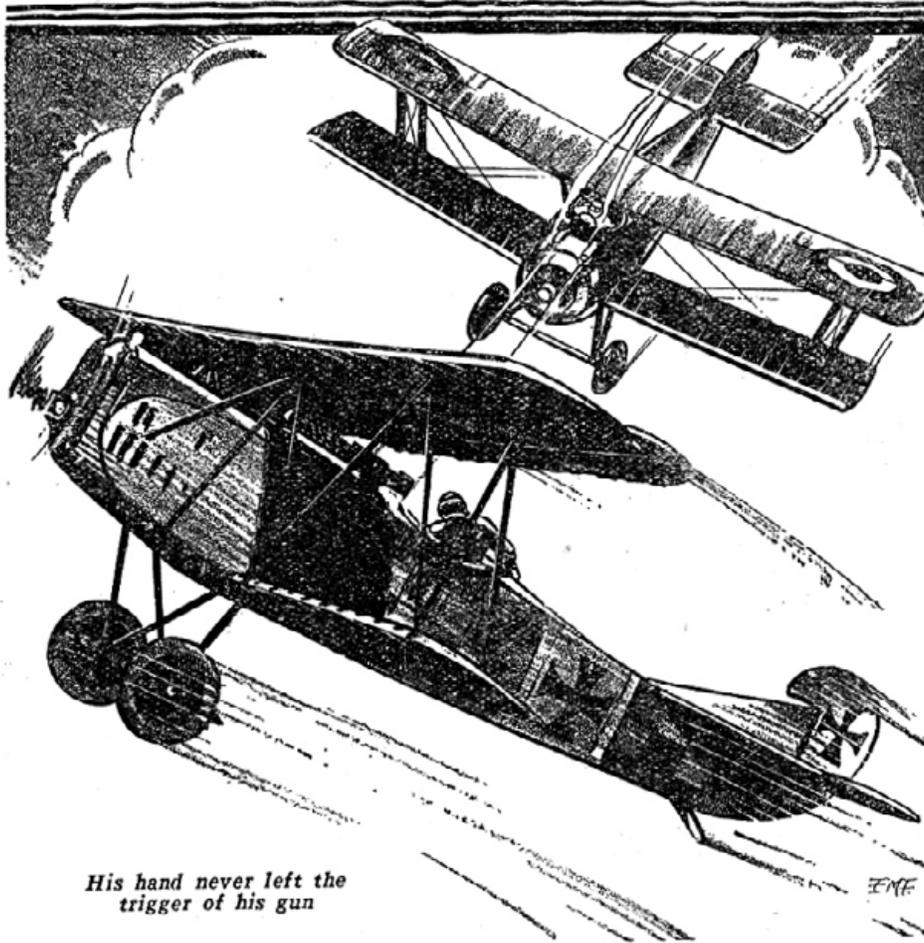


Charmed Crates



*His hand never left the
trigger of his gun*

*Jim Wells Buys a Luck Piece From a Buddy—and
Then Strange Things Happen in This
Exciting Story of the Sky Lanes*

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

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A D. H. 5 limped in from the eastward, slicing down toward the drome of the 87th Reconnaissance Squadron. Everything seemed serene on the Western front—and then it wasn't!

Roaring suddenly out of the low, leaden skies of France came three Fokkers, bent on death and destruction. They flashed downward in full power dives, no

warning burst of machine-gun fire acquainting the pilot of the D. H. of his danger.

It was not until he'd cut his gun to make a landing on the tarmac that he heard the crescendo bellow of the three raging motors. The pilot must have realized the futility of attempting a landing with three blackwings sweeping down on him. For

suddenly the motor of the D. H. coughed, sputtered and beat rhythmically again.

The nose of the D. H. piqued just as three twin-lances of orange-red flame spewed from the noses of the strafing Fokkers. The DeHaviland seemed to shudder slightly as a neat line of holes were sewed across the tilted right wing. Then it seemed to stand almost on tail as it zoomed abruptly.

A TAUT red ribbon of fire connected it for an instant with the foremost Fokker. For a brace of seconds, the twin streamers of the two crates seemed to cross and crisscross unevenly. Then the Fokker's dive became a plunge. A plume of smoke lifted from the under-fuselage, to be quickly pierced with darting; writhing tongues of flame. The D. H.'s incendiary bullets had done their work.

Twisting and turning like a stricken bird in the throes of death, the variegated Fokker swept earthward, out of control. Its nose was buried in the tarmac with a sickening crunch, and a great sheet of flame was wrapped about it as it shuddered in the grip of the earth, its tail-fin raised like a cross over a flaming bier.

Three men stood in a silent huddle at the door of the barracks—three men in soiled flying uniforms indicative of constant service.

"It's Jim Wells, isn't it?" demanded Gil Bloom, the short, fat member of the group. His plump, habitually cheerful face was at the moment white and strained.

"Sure, it's Jim!" said "Blackie" Allen, his handsome dark face working strangely. "Geeze, it's going to be a wash-out for Jim!"

The last member of the trio, "Whitey" Cook, had opened his mouth as if to speak, but the words withered on his lips as the two Fokkers swung over to come down

upon the hapless D. H. at a V-angle whose apex was the plane piloted by Jim Wells.

White-faced men stood at the arches, unable to do anything without the chance of hitting the D. H.

The plane bearing the red, white and blue cockade staggered under the devastating cross-fire. For a moment it knew respite as the pilot side-slipped out of those withering funnels of flame. But respite was brief. The two determined Fokkers corrected their courses, and the blue sky shone through the frayed fabric in dozens of places as the slashing, wrecking bursts of steel-jacketed lead probed for the pilot's cockpit.

S UDDENLY a wisp of smoke issued from the fuselage. Flames quickly licked over the heavily-doped fabric, and the smoke wrought them into weird shapes and figures. The D. H. hung in a momentary stall—then it plunged, spinning wings, making it resemble one of those fantastic Chinese tops.

The three comrades of the man in the stricken plane uttered choked sounds—sounds that in a woman would have been sobs. But suddenly the trio gasped.

For the nose of the plunging crate suddenly leveled out, jerked upward, barely a score of feet above the tarmac. The protesting screech and twang and creak of braces, rigging wires, strained fabric and struts could be heard even above the bellowing of the motors overhead and the throbbing beat of the distant heavies.

It was inevitable that the pilot could not bring his careening bus out at twenty feet. It did go down on a parallel plane, however, but the landing gear crunched under the battered fuselage, and the D. H. nosed up, catapulting the luckless pilot through the wall of flames and then

crashing on its back to paint the hangars a crimson hue as it burned up on the drome.

The Fokkers dived down to field strafe the tarmac or to kill the pilot who lay still on the field. But the men at the archies no longer feared hitting one of their own men. The anti-aircraft shells burst in white puffs near the diving Fokkers. The Jerry pilots pulled out in record time, zoomed with roaring motors, turned eastward and vanished.

THEN a strange thing happened. The big pilot sat up dazedly, tenderly rubbing a bump the size of an egg on his forehead, and grinned cheerfully at the group of men coming toward him across the tarmac.

"I got my first plane!" he grinned.

The C. O.—a man of Napoleonic build with a square jaw, steel-gray complexion and steel-gray eyes—smiled sardonically. "How're you feeling, Wells?"

Jim Wells' large, freckled face relaxed in a smile. "Kind of shaky inside, sir," he conceded, "but otherwise okay, I guess."

"Fine," said the C. O., Major Bradford, in tight-lipped fashion. "Now get in your cot until the doc can look you over. You might be injured internally."

"Ah, hell!" Jim protested. "I feel okay—"

"Do as I say!" the C. O. said testily; and he turned on his heel to stop further argument.

Jim rose to his feet, his face wincing with pain from a score of bruises. He shrugged his shoulders at the group, as if to say: "Well, what can a fellow do?" and strode toward the barracks, and slipped through the flap-partition to experience considerable pain from aching muscles as he removed his clothes. Jim had to concede to himself that he felt considerably better stretched out on the cot.

He immediately received a visit from the owners of the other three cots in that particular flap-partition; his buddies—Gil Bloom, Blackie Allen and Whitey Cook. They were chased out shortly afterward by the M. D. who told Jim he'd be all right if he got a day or so of rest.

And after the doctor left, the flap lifted again, and Stearns Slater thrust a red and beaming face through the aperture. Stearns was one of those greaseballs who get a bigger thrill out of the sound of an airplane motor turning over than out of a jazz band; or to feel thick grease on his face and have to worry about fixing a gummed motor was more exciting to him than a big-league game. That is, when Stearns Slater was sober. But he had his lapses, and now Jim Wells could detect with no difficulty whatsoever the strong odor of whisky.

JIM figured that in his present condition, Slater was as likely as not to cheerfully tap the C. O. with a bottle, and, to save the greaseball from a court-martial, he invited him in for a chin-fest, hoping Slater might thereby be kept from the bottle which cheers—or blears.

Stearns sat down on the cot unsteadily, and his face grew very solemn when he looked at Jim Wells. "You—hic—you don't think I'm dru—hic—drun—hic—that I'm not shober, do you, Jim?" He kept on, while Jim suppressed a grin. "No, Stearns; I don't think that."

Stearns nodded with the maudlin, dignity of a drunken man. "Thash fine!" he said with enthusiasm. "Thash fine, Jim! Now I can—hic—talk as man to man. Now about your crashing and gettin' shot down—"

Jim's freckled face sobered. "Lay off that, Stearns!"

Slater shook his head solemnly. "No; thash what I came to talk to you 'bout, Jim. You're going to be nervous and shaky

in a plane after this. Ish bad luck; I should shay sho! Nex' time you go up, you'll be wonderin' whether you're going to be sky-shy and shot down again—"

"Layoff that!" Jim snapped. "Or you will be having me sky-shy, you sap!"

"Ish too bad," continued Stearns unperturbedly, "to have a good pilot sky-shy so early inna game. I've sheen 'em go that way, Jim—"

"Will you shut up?" demanded Jim angrily.

"**T**HERE'S oney one thing'll save 'em when they get that way," persisted Stearns, unmindful of the interruption. "Thash a charm. Yesh, shir—a charm. Thash saved many a man. 'Sfact!"

"Yeah?" demanded Jim sarcastically. "Well, I don't need any charm. I'm not superstitious!"

Stearns sighed heavily. "Thash what they all shay. And then they go West. Ish too bad! If you'd been here longer, you'd know that every good pilot hash a charm. Shome ushe a stockin' cap, an' shome ushe a pair of old gloves, an' shome ushe a silk stocking for a scarf. Now, me, Jim—I got the besht charm of all. A lucky charm that wash ushed by the Inca of Peru, Atahualpa, before the Spanish conquered him. It had brought hish family luck for hundreds of years."

"Yeah," scoffed Jim; "and the history books say Pizarro and 160 Spaniards conquered an army of 60,000 Peruvians, if I haven't forgotten what I learned. It must be some charm."

"Thash the trouble," Stearns hastened to reassure him. "It wash stolen from the Inca, Atahualpa, by one of hish boys, and sold to Pizarro. And Pizarro conquered Peru with a handful of men, just becashe he had that charm."

JIM'S eyes lighted with interest. "I don't believe you have any charm," he grinned. "But let me see it, if you have."

Stearns' face was aghast. "Show it you? No! I couldn't do that, good fr'en' ash you are, Jim. It'd be worthless to me. Thash one of the funny things about my charm. If ish shown to anyone else, ish no good to the owner no more.

"It can't be shown except when the owner's going to shell it. Of course, I like you, Jim, and I might shell it to you. Course, I couldn't part with it if I wasn't stonybroke like I am now—"

Jim laughed. "So that's what you were leading up to—"

Stearns drew himself up with an appearance of hurt dignity. "Shay no more about it," he said in thickly aggrieved tones. "Ish the oney time I've ever offered to shell thish little Incan god to anyone, and then to be inshulted when I was tryin' to protect you from being sky-shy by shellin' you a luck charm better than any of the great aches have."

Jim laid a restraining hand on Slater's arm. "Forgive me, old man," he said eagerly. "How much do you want for the charm? Perhaps it might do me some good, though I think it's a fake."

Stearns' flushed face was solemn. "Ten dollars ish my bottom price. Take it or leave it! Ten dollars for my Incan good luck charm an' ish a bargain!"

Jim deliberated. He didn't have too much faith in the luck carried by Stearns' charm. But it was true that most of the aces had some lucky charm which was always with them—a favorite leather jacket, a pair of worn gloves, an old coin—and he had none at all. Besides, Jim had seen little Incan gods of gold in museums, and he knew that either for their gold value or their museum value they were worth more than Stearns was asking.

And there was always the gamble that it *was* the Inca's luck charm—

"There's a ten-spot in my pocket," he said to Stearns. "Now let's see your charm."

STEARNS reached into his pocket solemnly, drawing out a little gold figurine. It had a tiny ring at the top as though it might at one time have hung by a thread like a pendant from the throat of the Inca ruler of Peru. Jim's eyes glowed as he held it in his hand, and his heart beat in queer, jerky fashion. He was immensely pleased with his bargain.

His voice sunk below a whisper. "It looks genuine to me!"

Stearns Slater calmly pocketed the ten-spot. "Don't show it to anyone," he warned Jim, "or it will no longer bring you luck."

"O. K.," said Jim, reaching for his pants and dropping the golden figurine into his pants pocket.

Two days later Jim Wells was striding across the tarmac with his three friends as the first saffron streamers of early dawn were being painted across the eastern sky. The dawn barrage made the earth tremble with its fury. Star shells dripped their variegated brilliance across the fast-lightening sky. The *vooooo* of flying projectiles, the mutter of the heavies, and the clash and throbbing beat of lesser instruments of war sounded like the orchestration of some hellish symphony.

Captain Ralph Bonner, the haggard-faced, grim-eyed Flight Commander eyed the four youngsters who had come down from the training school at Issoudun a week previous. There was undisguised skepticism in his appraising glance, and Jim thought the Flight Commander's thin lips formed the single disparaging word: "Kids!"

But when he looked at the big, raw-boned, blue-eyed Westerner, Jim Wells, there was a slight glint of approbation in his eyes. Something welled up in Jim's heart and his golden luck charm was squeezed tightly in his hand as he instinctively speculated whether or not it would bring him luck on this, his first flight since he had been knocked down after bringing down his first plane.

The Flight Leader removed a watch from his pocket, and his eyes flashed with anger. "Some dog-robber stole my watch-fob!" he grunted; then added, less sharply: "Follow me, men, and watch for my signals."

WITH that, he strode to the battle-scarred D. H. in the center of the V-flight, and hoisted himself into the fore cockpit. Jim Wells climbed into an adjacent DeHaviland, a slight shiver of apprehension racing down his spine as he wondered, for perhaps the hundredth time, whether his luck charm would in reality bring him the luck Stearns Slater had promised it would. He saw his three pals clamber into the remaining three D. H.'s, two of which were lined up on either side of Captain Bonner's.

Greaseballs swung the props, and the crate's caught, and burst into full-throated song. For a time the droning of props and the bellowing of motors was well-nigh ear-splitting as the five men revved up their buses, meanwhile studying air, gas and temperature gauges.

Then the Flight Commander gave a signal to Stearns Slater to kick his chocks, he eased forward on his stick to bring up the tail, and the D. H. trundled down the tarmac and bit into the wind to climb toward the sullen clouds which hung like gray blotches in patches here and there.

JIM WELLS and Blackie Allen followed close behind. And bringing up the end of the V-flight were Gil Bloom and Whitey Cook.

For a while they buzzed over the gashed terrain, criss-crossed with jagged lines denoting trenches, flying like a small flock of migrating ducks. Jim was trying hard to accustom himself to observing things on the earth below, but, as yet, he found it hard. Ere long, however, he saw cross-like shadows where the sun sent golden spokes through the ragged fringe of low-slung clouds.

His eyes were drawn upward as though by a magnet. He saw the flash of the Flight Commander's Very signal, and the tilted nose of the leading crate. And he saw, too, five Fokkers diving for them with spitting guns. Even odds!

Jim's heart trembled with anticipation, and his hand closed instinctively on the little golden figurine in his pocket.

"Luck charm!" he said huskily. "If you're any good at all, now's the time to do your stuff."

Doubt of its genuineness flashed into his mind as he flung the D. H. up toward that flight of black-birds which came down with motors moaning and guns belching flame and lead.

Bullets splashed and tore and gashed his wings and fuselage as his rough, powerful hand took a shaking grip on his prop-synchronized Vickers gun. For terrible moments, it seemed that he was flying head-on toward those blinking red eyes on the nose of a green and white splashed Fokker.

Then he heard an explosion like a small cannon, distinguishable even above the howling of motors, the bickering of guns and the hellish drone of whirling props. The iridescent arc formed by the spinning prop of the oncoming Fokker

disintegrated before his eyes and formed thousands of flying specks.

The Fokker lurched drunkenly, the released motor knocking and pounding like a dynamo as it strove to tear itself to pieces. Beads of perspiration forming on his freckled brow, Jim swerved radically in his upward climb as the Fokker came singing down upon him. It flashed past him, and the breath of its passage was cooling to his hot brow.

SOMEWHERE below him, he could see the Jerry pilot pulling out, and knew his antagonist would be forced to land behind allied lines where confirmation of his victory could be had.

His whirling thoughts seized momentarily on the little golden luck charm in his pocket, and his pulses pounded madly. It was all Stearns Slater had said it was; it protected its possessor. In his heart, Jim had known all along that it was a real charm, and his belief was vindicated.

With a hard, reckless laugh, he perceived that two Fokkers were bearing down on Whitey Cook, forcing the tow-headed pilot to side-slip for a precarious distance to escape two devastating streams of steel-jacketed lead which boxed him in on either side. Fear had tugged at his heart-strings a short brace of seconds before, but that victory and vindication of his charm's value had cleared his muddled thoughts as the sun clears away a fog.

Without giving more than a passing thought to a German plane whining down toward his tail, Jim flung the D. H. down with a sharp, forward thrust of his stick. The nose dipped, and the bus vibrated like a nervous thoroughbred at the barrier.

Down—down—down he went, wiggling wires twanging, struts and braces creaking and wailing—down toward those

two Fokkers which were bearing down on the tail of Whitey's diving craft—

A SNARLING gun at his rear warned him of his own danger. Bullets whistled and whined about his head and beat an ominous tattoo on his already frayed and tattered fabric. Wings flapping like some loosely-rigged flying reptile, Jim barrel-rolled out of the lances of lead which menaced his life. A savage burst ripped across his wing-tip, causing his heart to pound heavily.

But the two Fokkers were slashing Whitey's wings to ribbons and it was only a question of seconds before his friend would be shot down. Jim's eyes became hard and grim behind his owl-like goggles and he resolutely clung to the tails of the two pursuing crates while the licking streams of incendiary-sprinkled lead flashed out at him from behind.

His hand leaped to the stick-trigger of his gun. *Tac-tac-tac-tac* it sang, like some deadly typewriter spelling out a death message.

Bullets splashed against his instrument board, and he kicked right rudder bar and pushed his stick sharply to the left, his hand never leaving the trigger of his gun.

Again he squeezed the trigger. His snarling gun sent the lines of lead far and wide, as he could see from the blaze of fire. Kicking right rudder bar—then left—he raked the Fokker with a cross-fire. He saw the pilot crumple in his seat, falling forward an instant later to force the stick forward and the Fokker into a spin. Over and over the black and white checked plane tumbled, its motor whining and wailing, until finally it was swallowed by the sea of cumulus clouds below.

Another siren-like wail turned his blood to ice in his veins. He looked down. A Fokker was tail-spinning down, out of control, and great blood-red tendrils of

flame and smoke shot out above it like the nimbus of the sun as it burned a fiery pathway down the sky.

Jim Wells looked backward to see the Fokker which had been bearing down on his tail, his heart choking up in his throat. But it was there no longer; Captain Bonner was streaking up in a swift arc above him, and Jim knew it was the Flight Commander, coming from behind on that tenacious black-wing, which had saved his life.

HIS eyes were drawn back to Whitey's bus, but Whitey was drawing out, waving his thanks to Jim. The crate which had been hanging on to his tail was streaking eastward, and above it was the remaining Fokker.

The battle had been short and swift, but three Fokkers had been grounded and two of them had gone to destruction. The five members of the 87th still were intact. After a short pursuit which he found futile, Captain Bonner returned from his chase of the Fokkers, and led the little flight back to the home drome after their victorious foray.

All the way back, Jim's big hand was closed on the little luck charm which he fondly believed had brought him victory. His heart was singing within him. As long as he possessed that charm, he didn't believe anything could stop him.

There was a twinkle in Captain Bonner's blue eyes as he walked up to Jim on the drome. "Make out your reports for the two planes you shot down," he said gruffly. "I'll witness them, and I think the confirmation will be in from the front in an hour or so. Keep up the good work, Wells—and you may be an ace yet."

Jim walked across the tarmac with his three friends, all of them in the highest spirits.

"If you can get two more planes, you'll

be an ace!" exulted Blackie delightedly. "Lucky dog!"

JIM grinned his likeable grin and his blue eyes crinkled at the corners in a way they had when he smiled. "Lucky dog is right!" he said exuberantly. "I have the best lucky charm in the world on my person. Nothing can keep me from being an ace now, lads!"

"Let's see it," exclaimed the ever-curious Gil Bloom.

Jim grinned, shaking his head. "Nix!" he said. "That's one of its characteristics. It's only lucky as long as no one else sees it or gets his hands on it!"

"I'll believe it when I see it," said Whitey. "But you sure were lucky today; I'll admit that!"

Jim's luck became the talk of the drome, and the curiosity regarding his luck charm mounted high. But he grinningly refused to permit anyone to see the little Incan god of gold or to even admit that it was an Incan figurine. As long as no one knew what his lucky charm was, there was little chance of it being stolen by someone who wanted his luck.

Whitey attributed it to Jim's boots, and stole them one morning when he was going out on a dawn patrol and Jim wasn't. But he came within an ace of being shot down, and had to admit his mistake. Gil thought the lucky charm must be a photograph of a girl Jim carried—until Jim told him he could carry it, if he thought it'd bring him luck.

And Jim's luck continued to be phenomenally good. Once he was caught by a German patrol, his motor filled with bullets which conked it and his gun jammed when the grease congealed from the altitude he was carrying at the time. Despite the fact that he was over the German lines at the time, he squeezed the D. H. into a long glide and managed to

scramble into his own front line trenches when the crate finally cracked-up.

AND on another occasion he was about to be rubbed out by a German patrol which leaped down on him unawares, only to be saved by three French Nieuports which joined the dog-fight and enabled him to turn defeat into victory by bringing down his fourth plane.

Two days later, he bagged his fifth plane, an Albatross, and the confirmation automatically made him an ace.

Jim freely attributed his success to his lucky charm and not to his own skill.

And one morning when he went out on a patrol, he felt in his pocket and found the Incan charm gone! He rushed back to the barracks and searched frantically, but could not find his charm.

Captain Bonner sympathized with him. "There's a dog-robber in this camp!" he said sourly. "First my watch-fob is stolen; and now it's your luck piece. If I can catch the crook who's taking things around here, I'll break his neck."

Whitey smiled. "I don't know where your charm has gone, Jim, but if you'll tell me what it was I'll try to find it."

Jim only grunted; that would steal his luck if it was found!

"Never mind!" Whitey said soothingly. "I got a lucky charm myself. I got it last night. And, if I do say so myself, it's a damn sight better than that charm of yours."

Jim only grunted disconsolately; but the others laughed. Whitey's showing as a war-bird hadn't been particularly promising, and the idea of him showing up the others -was to them amusing.

YET that day he saved Jim's life and shot down his first plane. His luck became as much a topic of gossip as Jim's had been. In the next three weeks, he

knocked down four additional planes to make himself an ace; while Jim brought down only one in that length of time. Gil Bloom brought down two and Blackie Allen, one.

Then, as mysteriously as Jim's luck charm had disappeared when he had become an ace, Whitey's vanished and no amount of searching would locate it.

Captain Bonner and Jim swore vengeance if they could catch the thief, and bewailed the fact that there was a crook in their midst. But Whitey was not to be comforted. He was certain that it was a bad sign; that he was going to be shot down that day.

"Don't worry!" Gil said. "I saw the luck you guys got with your charms and I got myself one that'll beat the luck you guys had with yours three ways for Sunday."

"Oh, yeah!" said Whitey and Jim sarcastically.

Gil Bloom's prophecy saw fruition that day. He brought down two German crates and brought his total up to four victories. And Whitey limped in as white as his nickname, bleeding profusely from two scalp wounds and with a plane which fell apart when he set it down on the drome. The next day Gil raised his total to five, and automatically became an ace.

But the next morning Gil's plump face drained of its color when he reached into his pocket to assure himself that his lucky piece was with him. "Geeze!" he said faintly. "My charm's gone!"

"It's all right—" Blackie started to say, and then sneezed violently.

He drew his handkerchief out of the pocket of his jacket, and, unknown to him, a little golden figurine fell out on the ground.

"There's my luck piece!" shouted Gil exuberantly. Then his face clouded.

"Blackie, you crook, you're the one who stole it from me!"

BLACKIE'S darkly handsome face flushed with anger. "Stole it from you. Why, it's mine, you' fat-headed, son of a sea-cook—" And he picked it up.

By this time Whitey Cook had seen it, and he let out an excited yelp. "You're both dog-robbers!" he cried. "It belonged to me first!"

"Since when?" exploded Jim Wells. "I had it before you ever saw it, Whitey. I'm thinking that all three of you are crooks. Whitey stole it from me, and Gil stole it from Whitey, and Blackie stole it from Gil."

"And you stole it from me," said a quietly severe voice.

They all turned startled eyes at the stony-faced Flight Commander. Captain Bonner went on to explain. "That's my watch-fob, you dumb eggs! Can't you see that little ring at the top? That's to hang it to a ribbon."

"But," Jim protested, his face blanching. "Stearns Slater told me it was a good luck charm which had once belonged to the Inca of Peru."

"And that's what he told me, too," chimed in Gil. "And me, too," Whitey and Blackie added.

"Say, you cuckoos!" Bonner growled. "Can't you tell a Chinese joss when you see one? I paid two bucks for this in 'Frisco's Chinatown."

"Whew!" Jim said, mopping his brow. "I paid ten for it!" "I paid fifteen!" growled Blackie. "And I paid twenty!" wailed Gil Bloom, wringing his hands.

Stearns Slater had been listening from some distance, and now he began to sneak away. But Bonner's eagle eye espied him.

"Come here, you crook!" he snapped.

STEARNS SLATER shuffled up, grinning sheepishly.

“What do you mean by stealing my watch-fob and selling it for an Incan idol?” said the Flight Commander fiercely.

Stearns kicked at a chunk of mud. “I didn’t steal it,” he mumbled. “I found it here on the drome. I was broke at the time, so I got the idea of selling it to Jim for a luck charm. The others saw what luck it brought him, and so they paid me better prices for it each time. ‘S far as that goes, Captain, I’d be the last one to say it wasn’t a lucky charm. Didn’t it make three of those guys aces?”

“And now we’ll go up and not have any lucky charm to pin our faith on!” exploded Jim.

Stearns grinned sheepishly again. “‘S far as that goes, the luck charm will still be with the squadron, only it’ll be serving as the captain’s watch-fob. All you guys

needed, anyway, was something to give you a little faith in yourselves; and that did it. You were pretty raw youngsters, and I kinda thought that might buoy up your courage until you could stand on your own feet. But, hell, Jim! You guys are so good now you don’t need no charms or other nonsense to depend on. It was O. K. to believe in that hoey until you got your spurs. But you’re dry behind the ears now, aces in your own right. You should know your own abilities well enough by now to realize you can give the Jerries hell in their own skies.”

Jim grinned. “Let’s go, gang! I think Stearns is an old dog-robber, but he can spit out a mouthful of hard common sense when he isn’t ranting nonsense about Incan idols. I guess he’s right when he says we don’t need any charms to give the Jerries a taste of their own kind of hell!”

“You said it!” laughed Whitey and Gil.