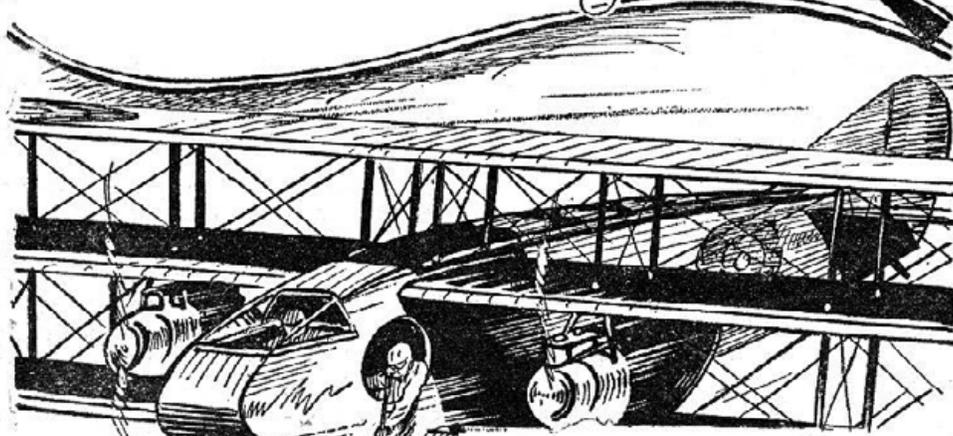


Shotguns for Two



*A Carefully Planned Hun
Maneuver Runs Afoul
of a Trickier Crate!*

By

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"Captain of Death," "Sky Devil," etc.



*German
soldiers popped
at the strange plane
with pistols and rifles*

JUST at dawn, a trim Spad flew over the deserted drome beyond Fleurmont, circled once and dropped a small parachute to which was attached a metal canister. The plane droned off into the distance, the chute fluttered down to land on the shell-pitted tarmac near the weather-beaten ruins of an old hangar.

When the Spad had disappeared into the distance, a man in the khaki of a sergeant of the A. A. C. trotted out on the field, scooped up the message container and raced back under cover. A few minutes later Lieutenants Chris Scanlon and Clipper Martin were eagerly reading the message in the cobwebbed interior of what had once been the Operations Office.

“It’s from Colonel Jackman,” announced Scanlon. “Another of his unofficial jobs. H’m, now, let’s see.” He held the slip of paper to the light and read aloud:

Commanding Officer Squadron Zero, Fleurmont. Proceed at once to Cresance and photograph new enemy gun emplacements, along the crest of ridge south of town. As this sector is guarded by von Keller, use caution. Remember, I accept no responsibility for your actions, but will tolerate no failure. How are you fixed for bacon and beans?

The message was signed with a sprawling “J.”

“That old son-of-a-sin,” chuckled Scanlon. “Did you get that crack about tolerating no failures? That’s just like Jackman. He marks us missing in action and then sends us down to this deserted drome with one D. H. between us and says he wants to use us for unofficial business. If we put the job over we get no credit and if we fail we catch hell from all sides.”

Lieutenant Martin stretched and yawned, loosened his belt. “Chow sure is good here, anyway,” he said comfortably. “We got the best cook this side of Paris. Sergeant Galliger and his grease balls take swell care of the plane. This is a pretty good squadron if you ask me.”

“Beg pardon, gentlemen,” Sergeant Galliger thrust a grinning Irish face through the wrecked doorway. “The D. H. is serviced and ready to fly. But before you take the air, will you come and have a look at something I’ve got down in Number Two hangar?”

Scanlon, tall and lean and wiry, grinned back at Galliger.

“What is it now, Sergeant?” he asked casually. “Last week you rigged up an electric lighting plant from an old motor generator and the week before that you figured out a way to listen in on all

wireless communications. What have you got up your sleeve this time?”

“Too big to go up anybody’s sleeve,” the sergeant chuckled. ““But if you gentlemen could spare a few minutes—”

“Sure, sure,” agreed the two officers.

THEY followed the sergeant down the line of aged hangars until he came to Number Two. He threw open the door, led them inside and pointed dramatically.

“There she is. I call her the XYZ. Me and the boys haven’t had much to do around here and we found a lot of extra parts and a few wrecks and put ‘em together.”

The two officers looked and their jaws sagged with astonishment. Before them, towering up into the dark shadows of the hangar roof was the strangest plane ever seen on any front. It was a huge affair with three sets of wings and a broad, blunt body. Two giant Mercedes motors hung in cradles between the wings. The tail was short and stubby, the rudder braced with a webbing of wires. It had a clumsy, heavy look about it, that plane, and it violated every rule of aeronautics. From its appearance, Scanlon guessed that it would never be able to travel faster than ten miles an hour.

“I thought maybe”—Sergeant Galliger hesitated and coughed—“well, I sort of had an idea one of you gents would like to take her up. I ain’t much of a pilot, of course—”

“I thought there was a catch to it,” laughed Martin. “You couldn’t hire me to get into a job like that. Not, while I’m in my right mind. Come on, Chris, we’re due over Cresance. Let’s be on our way.”

“Some day when you’re not busy,” said the sergeant wistfully, “maybe you could just taxi her around on the tarmac and see how she handles.”

Martin winked at Scanlon and said

solemnly, "The lieutenant and I are going over to take pictures of the ridge south of Cresance. If we're not back in an hour, you hop into this flying warehouse and come after us."

Sergeant Galliger beamed, then his face sobered suddenly. "I ain't no pilot, but I've done a little flying here and there. I might be able to get this bus up and I might not. I'd sure hate to disappoint you gentlemen if you need me."

"FORGET it," said Scanlon. "Did you load the camera gun? Good. Up we go, Clipper, and let's see what the colonel's got in store for us today."

Twenty minutes later the D. H. came down out of the clouds over Cresance, banked slowly and went droning along the ridge south of town. The sky was empty, the ruins of the village seemed deserted and, as far as Scanlon and Martin could tell, there were no signs of any gun emplacements along the ridge they'd been sent to photograph. Scanlon shoved the stick forward and let the D. H. slide down another thousand feet.

"Don't see anything," he yelled over his shoulder. "Sure we got the right place?"

Martin consulted his maps and nodded vigorously. "Colonel said to take pictures, so here goes," he shouted back. "Seems kind of silly, but them's orders."

The D. H. wheeled lazily and drifted back over the ridge. Martin leaned over the side, sighted the camera and worked the charging lever, counting between each shot so that the pictures would overlap. Scanlon allowed the big ship to drift through a slow turn, then pointed the nose toward the lines and reached for the throttle.

As he did so, something struck him a violent blow on the arm and he saw one of the dials on the instrument panel before

him melt away into a smear of shattered glass. Behind him, Martin yelled and Scanlon could feel the pound of his twin Lewis guns in action. He looked up and saw three Pfalz scouts whipping down upon them, guns raving.

The next burst from the enemy Spandaus lashed in a storm of fury along the right wing, gouged out a hole between the two cockpits, clawed back over the tail assembly. The D. H. lurched into a roll with Scanlon fighting the stick. The rudder bar was iron under his feet, locked, frozen in position. He kicked at it with all his strength, pulled the stick back into his belly. The D. H. continued on down. She fell heavily, linen flapping from the wrecked wing.

Scanlon saw the brown earth rushing up to meet them, saw a series of little tents scattered along the top of the ridge. As the D. H. sagged lower and lower the tents grew in size and he could make out the fact that they were made of netting, painted every color of the rainbow. Camouflage screens. Now, through the screens, he could see the black snouts of the great guns they covered.

After that he had no time to look at anything. The D. H. took another half spin and went down heavily. The wheels skimmed a low hill covered with underbrush. Scanlon held the nose up with the stick and the big ship leveled off slowly and sank with a roaring crash into a forest of dwarf pines.

The next thing Scanlon knew, somebody had him by the shoulders and was dragging him along the ground. He sat up fighting, then saw that it was Clipper Martin.

"Quiet, you fool," gritted Martin. "We've got to find cover quick. We hit right behind the new gun emplacement. A thousand Boche watched us come down. Here's a hole of some kind. Crawl into it

and keep quiet.”

“That was von Keller who jumped us,” muttered Scanlon. “That’s the way he fights. Never gives the other fellow a chance.”

“Who cares?” growled Martin, hunching into the old trench and pulling Scanlon down beside him. “Drag some brush over us. The Boche will come looking for us in a minute and they won’t be any too pleased that we’ve discovered their new gun positions.”

They lay quietly in the old trench and after a while voices sounded in the woods and a squad of Boche infantrymen moved past not ten yards away. Another squad appeared, and still another, and once a man leaped the very trench where the two Americans lay hidden. Then it became quiet and Scanlon crawled up to the edge of the trench and peered through the brush at the fortified ridge before them. What he saw made him gasp. He plucked at Martin’s arm eagerly.

“Come up here, Clipper,” he urged. “Take a look at those guns. Must be thousands of ‘em. They’re all along the top of the ridge and the slope on this side and off to the right as far as you can see. Big guns, too, railway or naval cannon, or I’m a liar. This is what Colonel Jackman wanted us to find.”

“And a hell of a lot of good it will do him.” Martin crawled up beside Scanlon and peered out at the valley. The guns were there all right. Long rows of them, standing hub to hub, their lean black barrels extending up under the camouflage screens.

“The Boche are planning a drive through this sector,” decided Scanlon. “They’ll use those guns to blast a hole through our front lines and then send troops over and drive to Paris.”

Martin sucked in his breath. “Wait a minute,” he gasped. “There’s something

damn funny about this. Take a look at that nearest gun, the one right at the bottom of the hill. Notice anything strange about it?”

SCANLON studied it carefully. “There’re no Boche around,” he observed, “which means that the gun crews are probably hidden in dugouts. The gun is mounted on extra big wheels and the barrel— I get it, I get it!” Scanlon was quivering with excitement. “The barrel is made out of tin! It’s a dummy! Every damn one of ‘em are dummies. Look, you can see where the tin is bradded along the sides. This is a fake emplacement. The Boche have only enough men around to make it look natural. Pictures taken from the air would show all these guns and the nets and would look like a tremendous concentration.”

“But why?” cut in Martin. “This dummy gun trick is an old one, of course, but why should they pull it on us?”

“Don’t you see,” Scanlon cried eagerly. “The Boche are going to drive, all right, but not through this sector. They knew that our observation planes would photograph this ridge and find the guns. As soon as the Yank generals saw those pictures they’d mass every available division on the other side of the lines, which is just what the Boche want. The real attack will fall on the part of the front from which the troops have been removed.”

“Sure,” agreed Martin. “But the Krauts didn’t figure a couple crazy flyers would get shot down and fall close enough to the guns to find out they were fakes.”

“Now that we know about it,” grumbled Scanlon, “what good will it do the Americans? Here we are hidden in an old trench. If we so much as stir out of it, the Boche will fan our pants with machineguns. I guess this is the end of Squadron Zero. We’ll have to get out of

here some time if we don't want to starve, and then the Boche will nab us."

"How about Sergeant Galliger?" asked Martin. "Remember what I told him about coming after us if we didn't show up in an hour. You don't suppose he took that seriously?"

"I doubt if that crackpot plane of his will fly, anyway," Scanlon answered soberly: "A man would have to be either nutty or a genius to get that thing off the ground."

Martin had been gazing out at the valley. He banged Scanlon on the shoulder and pointed.

"Look down there," he cried. "They're coming after us in earnest this time."

Scanlon saw that the Germans had formed a long line, a line which bristled with bayonets and hand grenades. The Boche advanced as soldiers advance in an attack, moving slowly forward, well spaced, every man on the alert. Their intention was plain. They meant to sweep the woods, to comb every inch of the ground. There was no chance of escape from such a search party as this.

"Get out your gun," growled Martin. "They'll get us—but not without a fight."

"How about a quick rush?" asked Scanlon.

Martin shook his head. "Not a chance. Those guys have auto rifles. They'd smack us down before we got started."

The line of Boche entered the edge of the dwarf pine forest. Scanlon and Martin could see the heads of the men bobbing along just over the tops of the shrubs. As they advanced, they poked about with their bayonets, probing into shell holes and trenches. Scanlon opened his pistol to make sure it was loaded. "Eight shots," he muttered. "Well, I can take a nice set of pallbearers when I go."

AND then the sky filled with a queer rattling noise like skeletons dancing on a tin roof. Scanlon looked up and saw a plane. It was a huge affair, and awkward. The motors seemed to be trying to jump off the bearers. The wings sagged and fluttered as the amazing plane cocked over and made a groaning turn.

"Galliger," howled Scanlon. "That crazy bird has come after us."

"He got it up, but can he put it down?" queried Martin. "He'll wash the trucks off of her if he tries to land in the valley."

The strange ship floated over the end of the valley and turned again. It came down with one wing low, bucking the wind like a kite gone mad. Just before it hit it leveled off, the wheels touched and the huge awkward plane went trundling along the ground to stop just at the edge of the underbrush.

"He's done it!" yelled Scanlon.

"Fair enough," agreed Martin. "He's landed the thing, but a lot of good that does us. He knows we're around here—probably sighted the wreck of the D. H. from the air. But how are we going to get through that line of Boche between us and the ship?"

Sergeant Galliger answered this problem in his own way. A door in the body of the plane opened and Galliger's head appeared. A gun slid out and smoke belched from the muzzle. The quiet of the valley was ripped apart, by the boom of a repeating shotgun. *Bang! Bang! Bang!* Galliger swept the line of Boche with charges of buckshot. The grey-clad figures melted away before the terrible blast. Rifles began to pop and slugs thudded against the plane, but Galliger swung his gun and blazed away enthusiastically.

"Hey, gentlemen, this way, this way! I got room for you both. Come on, let's go home."

"A damn good idea," agreed Martin, pulling himself up out of the trench.

The two Yanks sprinted across the intervening space with rifles popping at them as they ran. A squad of Boche appeared out of the brush and charged them, but Galliger saw them coming and blasted them into piles of quivering bodies with the shotgun. At that range he couldn't miss and the German infantrymen knew it. They fell back hurriedly, flinging themselves behind trees and rocks and into trenches in their desperate haste to get out of the way of the mad American whose gun always found its target.

Scanlon and Martin arrived at the plane and Galliger motioned them inside.

"Hop aboard quick," he urged. "These Kraut sharpshooters are beginning to get the range. Lieutenant Scanlon, how's for you to fly this thing back? I ain't a regular pilot, you understand, and this here battleship is a little awkward to handle."

Scanlon flung himself into the pilot seat, grabbed the controls and reached for the throttles. The XYZ bucked forward as he poured the gas into the motors. One wheel chugged through a shell hole, a wing dragged through the brush. The plane gathered speed as it rolled down the valley. Scanlon headed for a lane between the dummy guns. As the strange ship moved faster and faster, men appeared from under the camouflage nets and popped away at it with pistols and auto-rifles. Bullets crackled through the cabin and pinged through the linen of the wings. Scanlon shoved the throttle full on and saw that right ahead of them was one of the camouflage nets under which crouched a huge imitation cannon. If, they hit that thing—

He pulled back on the stick and waited. The XYZ quivered, the wings vibrated, the wheels left the ground and she went up slowly, motors howling with

the effort of lifting the heavy body.

GALLIGER leaned out of the window and emptied his shotgun at running grey figures below.

"Here's another one!" He handed one of the deadly weapons to Clipper Martin. "I borrowed 'em from some doughboys when they wasn't lookin'." Scanlon jockeyed the plane carefully. He could tell by the way the thing flew that if it ever fell into a spin there would be no chance to pull it out. They went up in slow spirals with oil bubbling from the motors as they labored under the tremendous load. The ridge dropped away below them, the netted guns faded into the background.

"Nobody will believe this," said Martin. "This plane just won't fly, that's all there is to it."

"It sure looks that way," agreed Galliger, "but here we are in the air. What's more, unless we run into trouble we got a good chance to get back to the drome. Almost anything will fly if you got big enough motors to pull it."

"Trouble?" echoed Scanlon from the pilot's seat. "Take a look at what's coming down on us from behind."

Martin hung out of the window and looked up. He ducked back in a hurry and grabbed for one of the guns.

"Von Keller and a couple of Pfalz scouts," he announced grimly. "And all we've got is a couple of shotguns to fight him off."

"You take the window, I'm going up on the top deck," said Galliger. "I got a little seat built up there with a life belt so I won't blow off."

"Von Keller is the finest marksman in the Imperial Flying Corps," Martin reminded him. "He'll burn you up with tracer if you show yourself on top of the plane."

"Most likely he'll get us all anyway,"

said Galliger philosophically, scooping up an extra box of shells. "I'll have time for a couple of shots with Old Betsy, anyway."

He opened a trap door in the top of the plane and pulled himself up. He sat with his feet dangling down into the cabin and a broad life belt buckled snugly across his lap.

Then Scanlon heard the wail of diving motors and felt the XYZ shudder as von Keller's Spandaus poured lead into it. Galliger's shotgun barked and a smoking empty shell bounced down into the cabin. Martin leaned out of the window and saw a Pfalz swooping up from below, its propeller a sparkling circle of light. He leaned the barrel of the shotgun out of the window, cuddled the stock against his chin, took good aim and fired.

The prop disappeared in a blinding flash of light.

As the Pfalz rolled over, Martin pumped two more charges into it and could see a great ragged hole appear in the belly of the enemy ship where the buckshot landed. The Pfalz went on over and stood on its tail, the motor racing madly. Martin could see the pilot's face, could read horror written there. Then flame boiled out of the overheated motor and the enemy ship plunged out of sight, trailing black smoke as it went down.

Galliger began to yell, punctuating each remark with a blast from the shotgun.

"Come in close!" he invited. "Just edge up a little so there won't be no chance to miss. Shoot at me with them Spandaus all you like!" *Bang! Bang!* "Only give me a chance to get a bead on you!" *Bang!* "That's all I want!"

SCANLON looked out the window in the front of the cockpit, saw that they were over the front lines. He looked hurriedly around and located the deserted drome beyond Fleurmont. It seemed

incredible, but they had managed to cross the lines during the fight.

Van Keller whipped past the XYZ just out of range of the deadly shotguns. He turned and poured a smashing cone of tracer into the slow-flying plane, wheeled through another turn and ripped a ragged hole through the left wing with a long chattering burst.

"Come in close!" raged Galliger. "You yellow-bellied son-of-a-supply sergeant, come in close and give a guy an even break!"

Von Keller kept his distance, hurled his Pfalz into a steep climb, cocked one wing over and came down with a rush. Scanlon felt the pound of slugs on the roof of the cabin, heard Galliger grunt as something slammed into him with a meaty sound. But again the shotgun banged out lustily. Again empty shells rattled off the wings of the XYZ as the sergeant blazed away at the darting enemy ship.

Martin's gun was in action now, and the sound of enemy engines was so loud that they drowned out the thunder of the XYZ's own howling Mercedes. Scanlon pushed the stick forward and started down. That the Boche fliers would get them he had no doubt. And he knew that if the XYZ ever caught fire it would blaze like a hay pile. There was some vague idea in his mind of getting as close to the ground as possible before the inevitable happened.

Von Keller fired again, a long, savage rattle of sound and the XYZ rolled over on its side under the impact. Galliger's shotgun answered, quick, sharp blasts as the Pfalz wheeled on one wing to get out of range. But von Keller had come a little too close this time. In his eagerness to knock down the clumsy Yank ship he forgot the man who rode the top deck, shotgun in hand.

Scanlon got a glimpse of the enemy plane as it turned over. He saw the black

crosses on the wings, saw where a charge of buckshot had cut a great ragged hole through the bottom of the cockpit. Then the Pfalz rolled over and Martin leaned out of the window and fired at it as it slid past. Scanlon threw the plane into a quick turn—and almost lost a wing.

But both Galliger and Martin were well within range now. Their shotguns spoke together and von Keller's Pfalz was caught in the tearing, rending cone of buckshot which drove through his ship, the leaden pellets bounding off the motor, smashing their way through the instrument panel, battering into his own cringing body. Black freckles appeared on von Keller's face. His head flopped back and the Pfalz wheeled and fell off into a spin.

Scanlon saw a brown field rushing up at him, saw battered, seemingly deserted hangars under his wheels. The XYZ was falling, one motor had stopped, the other was stuttering.

He missed the first hangar, managed by a desperate effort to leapfrog the second. Then he came down heavily and right ahead of him was a hangar wall. The plane rushed at it. There was a mighty crash as the wings folded back and the engine plowed through the rotten wood. The XYZ rolled over on its side and stopped, inside the hangar.

Scanlon found himself on the pilot's seat, his legs dangling into space. The entire belly of the plane had been ripped away by the crash. He unbuckled his belt and dropped to the ground. Clipper Martin was sitting in the dust, bruised.

"Where's Galliger?" cried Scanlon. "He was on top when we hit. He's probably smashed to pulp."

"Not me." Galliger's voice came floating down from the lofty ceiling of the hangar. "I tripped my belt just before we hit and bounced right up into the air. Lucky there was a two-by-four I could

grab. Wait a minute, gentlemen, and I'll be with you. What happened to the plane? The XYZ was sure a good ship. It would be sad if she got busted up."

Scanlon surveyed the smoking wreck which had been the XYZ. "From junk it came and to junk it has returned," he announced. "Well, the colonel is probably waiting for us."

"You hit?" Martin asked Galliger. "I thought I heard a slug slap into you while you were up there riding the roof."

Sergeant Galliger slid down a beam and walked across to the two officers, still carrying his trusty shotgun. "That wasn't me, it was Old Betsy. A bullet went right through the stock. That will sure make me a swell souvenir."

Colonel Jackman was waiting in the wrecked Operations Office. He seemed to have a strange knowledge as to when the two Yanks would be back from their unofficial missions. The colonel had a habit of prowling around the front on a motorcycle.

"Did you find those guns?" he demanded briskly. "Yes, yes, I saw you fly that wreck in. Don't bother to explain the details. What I'm after is results."

"Guns," snorted Martin. "They're nothing but dummies. Thousands of 'em, parked over there to fool us."

The colonel grunted. "I suspected something like that," he snapped. "A lot of dumb pilots have been flying over that place taking pictures and insisting that half the cannon of the German army were concentrated in that sector. I thought there was something funny about those pictures, so I sent my two trouble-shooters to find out the truth. Good! Now we'll know what to do for the Boche. They're planning a drive; but I think we can locate it."

"Listen, Colonel," began Scanlon earnestly. "Couldn't we go back to a real squadron for a while to get some rest?"

This unofficial business is a little trying on the nerves.”

The colonel leaped to his feet. His eyes twinkled wickedly.

“Certainly not,” he barked. “You two gentlemen are invaluable. Squadron Zero

is the most efficient outfit on the front. So you stay right here until I need you. I’ll send you a new plane tomorrow. There’s work to be done, gentlemen!”