

WHEN SKY CROOKS FALL OUT

RAOUL WHITFIELD

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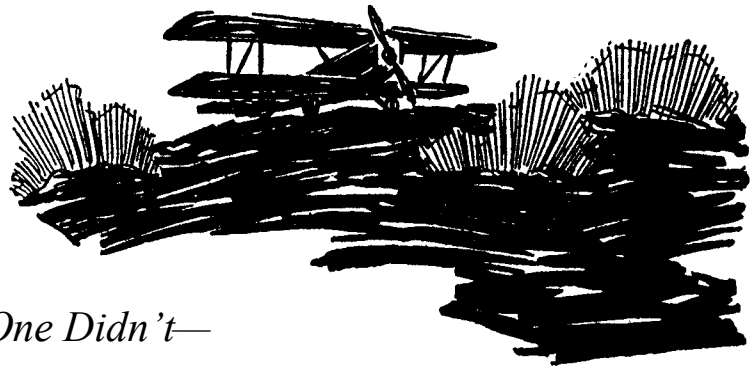
It's a human! I got the words out and watched, grimly, the fall of that object from the sky. The Chief's fingers were gripping my arm tightly. He was staring, too.

It fell about a half mile out on the field; we both turned away before it struck. Then—

When Sky Crooks

By RAOUL WHITFIELD

*They Had a Lot of
Plans—Air Plans—
Some of Them Worked—One Didn't—
What Happened?*



THIS man, Harden, had me puzzled from the first time I laid my eyes on him. Flying men are usually easy to size up. They don't hold much back, because the game's dangerous, uncertain. Here today—crashed tomorrow. Most of the pilots are easy to get along with, pretty frank fellows. But a few of them are the other way.

Harden gave me the feeling that he was one of the few. He came up to the field from Washington with a couple of letters, not exactly official; letters that required a little tact in handling. It seemed that he'd been a War pilot and had a rather sweet record. He'd shot down four enemy ships, officially. He'd been in the newspaper game since the end of the War, but wanted to get back to flying again—a lot of the boys want to get back.

Right at the start, he said that he had a lot of plans, if things worked out. He had too many things on his mind, I guess. That worried me a bit.

Sanderson was away on a fishing trip when Harden arrived at the Field and I was running the flying operation. It wasn't hard work, because there isn't much formality at Rook Field; a few hard and fast rules—and the rest is pretty free and easy. I was reading the report of a ship crack-up that Jake Maron had written and was getting a

good laugh out of it when Harden was shown in.

He was tall and rather thin, but he had those grim, sharply focused eyes that are fairly unusual. We shook hands and he produced a few letters, talking as I read them.

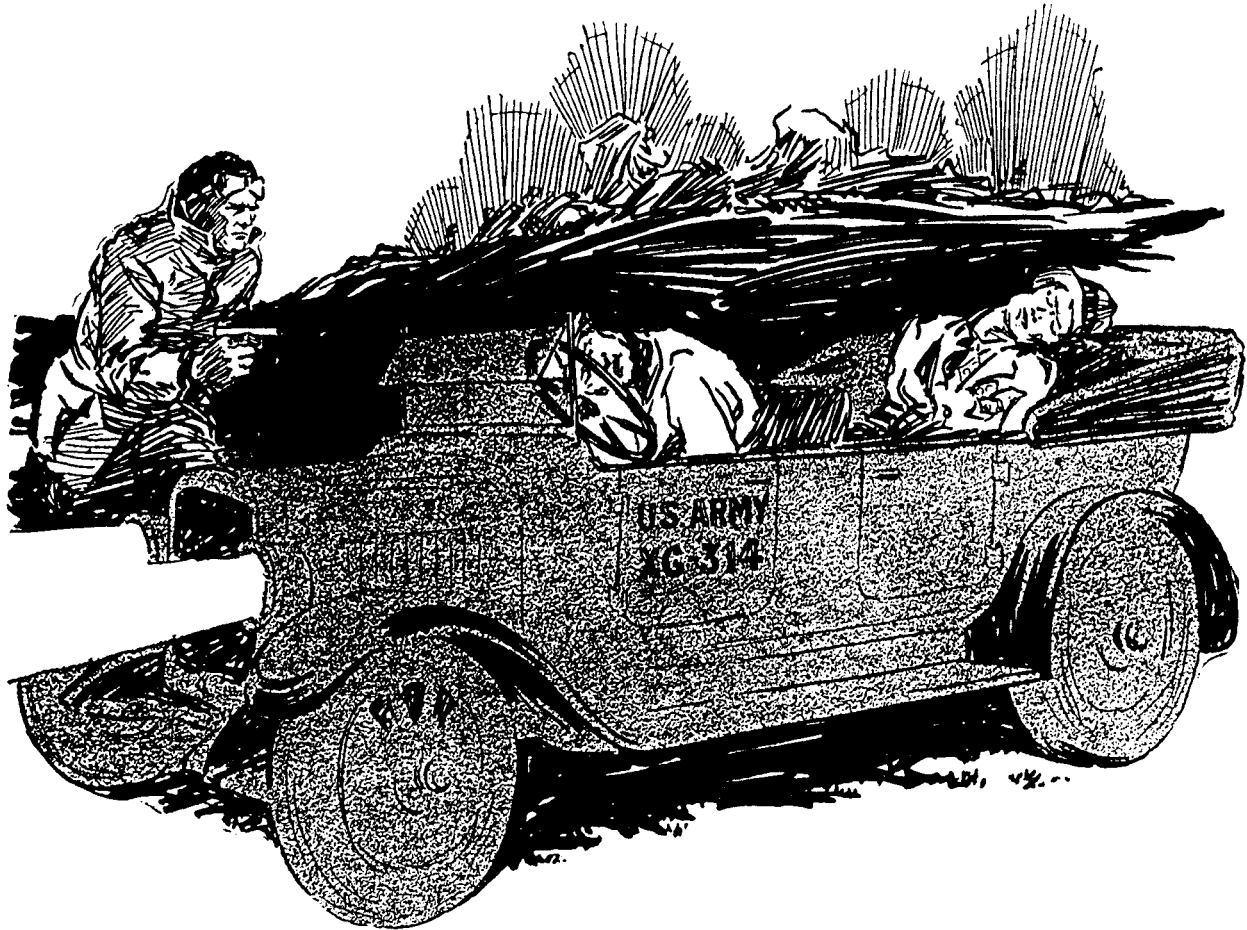
"The idea is that I'm not certain about wanting to fly again. I think I'll like it. Barsonly told me that you could always use a few men who'd had two thousand or more hours in the air and a certain temperament. I thought I could try it for a few weeks and if it worked out—"

I nodded. The letters were all right. Both were from Government men who had something to say about the Field. And both suggested that Harden be given a chance at the regular test-pilot work. If he fitted—well, I got the idea that he'd get a civilian appointment. It sounded pretty fair to me. It was only when I got a look at Harden's eyes that I was a little uneasy. And I put that down as foolishness.

"Supposing," I ventured, "you take a few hops with Williams in some two-seaters he's testing out; dual control, you know, and you can handle them. In a couple of days you can tackle one alone."

"Fine!" Harden agreed, but I noted that he wasn't particularly enthusiastic. At least, his enthusiasm didn't ring true.

FALL OUT



“It may not take me that long. As I said, I may not want to stick at it,” he added.

I nodded. It didn’t matter to me. I figured he might have had a bad crash, just before the War was ended, and that might have got his wind up, to the extent that he wasn’t certain. So we talked over the details and he cleared out. He seemed to me to be pretty nervous and he reiterated continually. Just before he went through the door leading to the porch of the headquarters office, he fixed those dark eyes on me.

“**A**S I said, I may not want to stick more than a few days,” he repeated. “I’m not sure—”

He broke off, smiling a little twistedly, his fingers twitching a bit. I frowned and went back to my old habit of muttering to myself.

“Something funny, at that. He certainly wants me to know that he may not stick. If he told me that once he told it ten times! And those eyes—”

The ‘phone made me snap out of it and I forgot Harden pretty quickly when I heard that O’Malley had cracked up a few miles from the Field and was being driven to the hospital with a broken right arm. We were pretty busy at the time. I was sort of hoping, a little later, that Harden would stick.

It was Tommy Williams who dropped in at the office the next day and gave me the dope. Tommy is a good judge of ships—and that should give him some sort of idea about men. Both are inclined to be temperamental, around a flying field, at least.

“This man Harden’s good!” Tommy stated,

“Damned good! He took that ship away from me, using the dual controls, and put her through some hot stuff for a D. H. His loops were smooth and his landings smoother. And he says he hadn’t been up for six years! Beats me!”

“Not so funny,” I replied “He has that perfect sense, fine coordination of senses, rather. Take him up for an hour this afternoon and, if he’s all right, turn him loose.”

There are three, new, training-field ships set for straight tests. Let him tackle them, if he’s willing.”

Tommy nodded, squinting at me. “Notice those eyes of his?” he asked. “Kind of get you, don’t they. Keen type, I’d say. Does some thinking. Can’t see why in hell he wants to fly this junk we turn out here.”

I chuckled. “Maybe his girl turned him down,” I suggested and let it go at that.

His first name was Brent, I noted by the letters. Brent Harden. Sort of a strong-sounding name, I decided. And it was funny that the puzzled feeling still persisted within me. There was nothing, on the surface, unusual about the coming of the man. He was tired of newspaper work, for one reason or another, and he wanted to try the flying game. He had letters; and he flew a ship well.

“Forget it!” I muttered to myself, but didn’t quite succeed in doing that little thing. It was his eyes, I guess.

Three days after Harden had first arrived at Rook Field, he came into my office and made a request. It seemed that an editor friend of his was coming down this way to visit relatives. He planned to stop off and see Harden and the ex-newspaperman wanted to give him a joy-ride.

“Sure,” I told him. “Go ahead. But before he goes up bring him in here and let me get a release-from-injury-or-death statement.”

Harden nodded and was gone. There was nothing unusual about the request. Often the boys take a friend or adventurous relative up. The Government isn’t crazy about the idea, but there is no iron-clad rule preventing such fun, if you happen to look at it that way.

At two o’clock the same afternoon Harden came in with his editor friend. He introduced him as Mr. Revelier. I shook hands with that short, rather stout individual, shoved across the printed statement and watched the man scrawl his

signature at the bottom. It was a warm afternoon, with little sun and a fair breeze blowing low, gray clouds across the sky. Revelier rose from the chair, in which he had been seated, and smiled at me cheerfully.

“I’ve always wanted a flight,” he said slowly. “It’s a thrilling prospect.”

INODDED. Revelier preceded Harden through the door and the latter turned toward me before going out.

“I’m using Number 6H.2,” he stated; I thought his voice was rather grim. “I tested her out yesterday and she handles easily.”

I nodded again and Harden went through the door and out of my sight. Ten minutes later Sanderson came in and took things over, expressing considerable delight at the fact that the Field had not been completely disorganized during his absence. We talked over a few things and then I told him about Harden. I saw right away that he was puzzled.

“Brent Harden—four planes in the War?” Sanderson grunted. “You’re crazy, Mac. I know the boys who got three or more. There’s no Harden among them; not officially. Let’s see those letters. He must be one of these *unofficial* plane-droppers of the late War. But how he got the Washington—”

I tossed over the letters and the Chief ripped out their folded contents. I hadn’t had them filed with the regular business data. He read them both, then he got to his feet.

“Mac,” he muttered slowly, “there’s something wrong here. Did you confirm either of these?”

I stared, thinking of my own doubts. Then I shook my head.

“Didn’t think it was that important,” I stated. “That’s Livingstone’s signature. I’ve seen it several times, and it’s distinctive. I’ve heard of Bracely. He was on the last Board of Investigation—”

“Livingstone,” the Chief said slowly, staring down at the letter, “sailed for France ten days ago. This letter is dated the eighth. It’s now the sixteenth.”

I stared at Sanderson. Then I remembered seeing that clipping about Livingstone’s sailing on the *Paris*.

“Are you sure of the date he sailed?” I asked.

“He might have dated the letter ahead.”

The Chief smiled grimly. “Maybe I’m wrong,” he said slowly and pressed a button on his desk. “I’ll get a confirmation, by wire, on this Livingstone letter. It doesn’t seem important, but—”

He broke off. “Where’s this Harden now?” he demanded.

I grinned. “Getting a D. H. off the field with a joy-riding friend in the rear cockpit,” I replied. “He asked permission—and I gave it.”

Sanderson narrowed his eyes. Then he shook his head slowly.

“**M**AC,” he ordered. “You trot out on the dead-line and cancel that permit! Be nice about it—make some excuse that sounds legitimate. Then bring him back here. In the meantime, I’ll get a wire through to Livingstone’s secretary. He’ll have a copy—”

He broke off as I started for the door. There wasn’t much time in which to catch Harden and we both realized it.

“Be diplomatic, Mac,” he warned as I got out of the room. “We may be wrong.”

But I had a hunch as I walked rapidly toward the engine-roaring ships on the dead-line, that we weren’t. And, even though I didn’t see any particular reason for it, I was mentally kicking myself for handling the Harden case the way I had handled it. I’d had a hunch that something was wrong—and I usually played safe on hunches. This time I’d slipped.

Number 6H.2 was a thousand feet up when I got to the spot she had held on the dead-line. I borrowed a pair of glasses from Slim White and watched proceedings. Harden was climbing her in nicely banked circles. I could see two helmets above the fuselage streamlining.

It took him about ten minutes to climb up near the clouds, and I was wondering why he didn’t level off and let Revelier get a look at the country. Not that there is anything much to look at around Rook Field, but it’s country from a high altitude, that interests a first-timer in the heights.

Then she was in the light mists, trailing down below the clouds, and I was muttering to myself. What the devil was the sense of giving Revelier a taste of cloud stuff, right at the start? It isn’t a pleasant feeling.

The D. H. vanished from sight as I watched. I

held the glasses on the clouds near which she’d climbed out of sight, thinking she’d drop through again, but she didn’t. Five minutes passed and then I heard a voice at my elbow.

“Get him, Mac?”

I shook my head. “He took his passenger up through the clouds about five minutes ago,” I stated. “I’m waiting for him to drop.”

Suddenly I stiffened. My glasses caught the downward flash of something black and small. I jerked them down, clutching Sanderson’s arm in my excitement.

“It’s a—human!” I got the words out and watched, grimly, the fall of that object from the sky. The Chief’s fingers were gripping my arm tightly. He was staring, too.

It fell about a half mile out on the field; we both turned away before it struck. Then, instantly, we whirled, staring at each other.

“Hell!” muttered Sanderson. “That wasn’t any human!”

I managed a grin. “Let’s get out and see *what*, it was,” I replied. “It sure gave me a jolt.”

The Chief signaled his side-car driver and we both piled in. It wasn’t dignified, but we were both curious. A couple of minutes later we stared down at a pile of clothes. I picked the stuff up from the grass and recognized it instantly: two flying suits furnished by the Field, belted together bulkily.

Sanderson grunted. “Charge to one MacLane—Number 6H.2—DeHaviland plane,” he stated grimly. “Stolen from the field while MacLane was substituting for a *real* operations man!”

I looked at the flying togs I held and then tossed them into the side-car. I stared up toward the clouds. There was no sign of the DeHaviland. I swore softly.

“He faked a couple of letters, stalled around a bit until his friend showed up and then calmly took off with an eight-thousand-dollar plane,” Sanderson muttered. “We’ll have one hell of a job convincing Washington—”

“Look here, Sandy,” I interrupted, “I feel pretty bad about this thing, even though it wasn’t exactly my fault. Suppose you give me a ship with plenty of fuel and a three-day leave of absence. Harden had only ten gallons of gas or so. He can’t get far without refueling—and it isn’t easy to get high-test gas—”

"He don't need high-test gas," the Chief cut in. "And he's got papers on him showing that he's a Rook Field man; that'll make him safe from suspicion with that numbered ship."

"Not if you get the wires busy, it won't!" I came back. "Let me get up in the air right away. He can't get far. Send up some of the boys—in different directions. What in hell does he want with—"

"Paint it up, file off the engine and dial-board numbers and he's got a good ship. It's practically a ten-thousand-dollar haul."

I grunted. "He'll be easy to trace," I stated. "He's got to land. We'll have every one looking for him and that other bird. We've got good descriptions—"

"Have we?" Sanderson's tone was grim. "What kind of clothes were they wearing, Mac?"

I groaned. They had been wearing the flying togs when they had come into the office a half hour ago. I hadn't the slightest idea as to what was underneath. And the flying clothes had been dropped.

"We're wasting time here," I muttered. "We should get started. They're clever, Sandy. They got rid of the flying togs right away, all but helmets and goggles."

The Chief nodded. "Pile in!" he ordered. "We'll get things going. You're one hell of an operations boss! Letting a couple of crooks come in and steal a ship from right under your nose!"

I SAID nothing. There was plenty of thinking to be done and I started as the motorcycle driver headed for the Chief's office. When we got there I'd reached a couple of decisions. I was sure that Harden was a crook. I was fairly certain that the man he'd called Revelier was a second crook. Yet it seemed to me a bit risky—the way he'd come right into the Field on a bluff and stolen that ship. He might have worked it with less trouble.

"Wait about five minutes," Sanderson advised as we arrived in front of the Headquarters Building. "You can't climb up above the clouds quick enough to pick him up, anyway. He dropped the flying stuff and headed for one of the horizon directions. Then he probably dropped into the clouds, or just below them, after ten minutes or so of flight. It'll be a blind hunt."

I nodded. We went into Sanderson's office and found a wire from Livingstone's secretary,

who had remained in Washington.

"No filed introductory letter for man named Brent Harden," the Chief read aloud. "Must be mistake or fraud case."

I swore. The Chief did the same. He shook his head slowly.

"It's a mess," he muttered. "I'll get the wires working, Mac, and you pick out some of the boys, put them wise and tell them to keep quiet about it. Then let them start a search for the ship. But don't do any talking. The press would eat this thing up. They'd think it was some joke."

I smiled grimly. "Sandy," I said slowly, "you can't make me believe that this fellow who calls himself Harden would steal that ship just to paint over and joy-ride in. He took a big chance and he got away with it. But he and that friend of his are up to something. They wanted that plane for a purpose. And it wasn't a good purpose; you can bet a little something on that."

"WE'RE talking too much and not getting busy," the Chief muttered. "We may get this bird yet, Mac. You know what they say. The best laid plans—"

The Chief broke off. He had got a line through to the Field telegraph operator and was commencing to put out the net. I started for the dead-line to round up some of the boys.

I had a hunch that something was going to break—something bigger than the stealing of an eight-thousand-dollar Government ship, although that was bad enough—for me. I could see the man who had called himself Harden and those grim eyes of his. One thing was sure; he couldn't get rid of those eyes as easily as he had the flying togs.

"He's going to pull some sort of a stunt with that D. H.," I muttered. "If he isn't, why the devil did he wait for his pal, that stout bird he called Revelier?"

I quit thinking and got the boys together. They were considerably surprised at the stunt, it being about the first time a crook had pulled such a nervy thing on a Government field. I told them not to talk, knowing that the press would get the news off the wire, in any case, by following the Chief's instructions. Then we climbed into our ships and hit the air.

We hadn't any idea of the direction taken by the man who called himself Harden. He had a half

hour's start and ten gallons of gas. In the small amount of fuel lay our one hope. If we could blunder upon him after he was forced to land or if the Chief's use of the wires caused some sheriff to blunder upon him, well, I might hold my job, after all. But it looked tough. The man with the dark, grim eyes was no fool. I remembered what he had said about not staying more than a few days. He had possessed a sense of humor, I reflected. A sense of humor, a knowledge of flying and some information about the big boys at Washington. In this case, the combination had been successful.

The spit-spit! of my engine told me that I'd have to hit dirt and take a look. I was about thirty-five miles to the northeast of the field, over a section not too thickly populated, and below was a country crossroads, a barnlike structure near it and the red gleam of a gas-pump. It was the latter sight that cheered me. I'd been in the air more than four hours, never getting beyond the thirty-five-mile radius away from the Field, and I was nearing the time when I'd have to cut into the emergency supply. No good pilot likes to do that.

I cut the engine and came down three thousand feet in an easy spiral. The crossroad stretch was level and wide. I hit it, nosed into the wind and the D. H. pulled up a hundred yards or so from the pump. Jerking the goggles and helmet from my head, I climbed over the side. I was thirsty and tired—and hadn't caught a glimpse of No. 6H.2. It was almost seven o'clock and the sun would be down within two hours. That would mean the end of the search.

My feet touched the road and then I stiffened. My eyes were looking into the muzzle of a firmly gripped automatic, held in the right hand of a dignified, old, white-mustached gentleman.

"Stick 'em up!" he commanded agreeably enough. "I'm looking for two gents flyin' in a two-seater numbered 6H.2 and stolen from Rook Field not long ago! I'm Sheriff White."

I couldn't help grinning at that one. But I stuck my hands up with a right good will, contemplating my captor.

"That makes *two* of us," I observed, "doing the same thing, Sheriff! I'm from Rook Field, and if you look closely you'll note that the ship I'm flying—or was flying—is not Number 6H.2."

The Sheriff shrugged his shoulders. "Don't mean much," he countered. "Easy enough to change numbers."

I saw right then that the Chief had advised care in his wires. But it didn't take me long to convince the Sheriff that I was on the level and not one of the crooks. Then I got another jolt.

"**T**HAT bank over to Holdenville has offered a five thousand dollar reward," the Sheriff observed. "And I can use the money as well as the next guy."

I stared. "Reward?" I muttered. "What for?"

The Sheriff regarded me suspiciously. "For that cashier, Brown," he stated grimly. "He walked out with fifty thousand in large bills, stuck in his coat pocket, him an' a fellow named Pullen, who was hangin' around the town for the last few weeks. The bank sent out a discription of 'em both and some one at that field of yours checked up an' figured they was the same birds that got off with a flyin' machine."

I blinked. Then I nodded my head slowly. It wasn't very mysterious, at that. Two crooks, robbing a bank from the inside and using the ship for a get-away. Or, perhaps, the tall man, with the eyes that had bothered me, was the real crook. And the stout fellow who had scrawled the name of Revelier on the release-from-injury-damages blank might have been, must have been the cashier—a weakling whom the other man had used as a tool. In any event, I now knew the real reason for the stealing of the DeHaviland.

"I left the Field," I explained as the Sheriff stowed his automatic away in its holster, "before they got together with the bank on the descriptions. I gave Sanderson descriptions of both men—he's the field boss, you know—and he's checked up. Where can I get a 'phone?"

The Sheriff pointed. "General store right there, Mister," he stated, and I thought there was disappointment in his tone. "You're kind of blocking the road with this machine of yours."

I nodded. "I'll be in the air in ten minutes," I promised. "And a car can get around, with a little effort."

Then I headed for the general store. I wanted to talk to Sanderson. The Sheriff's information made the thing a lot more serious. A couple of crooks might not spill lead over a plane. But when they had fifty thousand in their pockets, it was very likely that they would do just that thing. I wanted to see what the boss thought about it.

SANDY'S got a good head, and I was a little doubtful about my own ability to reason. These crooks had nerve, coming into a Government field and swiping a ship. But they possessed cunning, too. And the man who had called himself Harden was a skilled pilot. It was a good combination, but not for the pursuers.

Ten minutes later I was back at the DeHaviland, trying to fix a clogged feed-line. I had plenty to think about while doing it. Sanderson had given me the full dope.

The stout man, whom the flyer had introduced as Revelier, was none other than James Brown, the cashier of the Holdenville National. He was missing and so was fifty thousand in large bills. He had been seen, several times in the past week, on the streets of the town with a man who answered to the description of the man who called himself Harden. The police had checked up. Livingstone had fired a secretary six months ago, an ex-flyer of the War, named Tulong. There had been some mix-up over funds, but Livingstone had dropped charges. Tulong had been picked up in Cleveland, two months after his let-out, by Livingstone, on a charge of fraud in connection with some so called, flying school. He had wriggled out of the thing and left the city. That was the last heard of him until now. A hasty check-up led police and federal authorities to believe that Tulong—his first name was Marvin—had been the brains of the get-away stunt.

"And, Mac," Sanderson had finished up, "I've got every ship in flying shape in the air. If we don't land them by dark—well, they can get far enough away to lay low for some time. The money wasn't marked and it wasn't in new bills either. They must have known just what they were up to, only they figured on getting farther away before the Field got wise. My coming back gives us a slim chance. But I'm not worried about that coin; it's the D. H. we want."

I chuckled grimly as I worked on the clogged feed-line. An hour and a half of light! There were several little details, however, that made me disagree with the Chief. In the first place if this Marvin Tulong *was* the man they suspected it was easy to see how he had faked the letters and how he happened to be good in the air. But, also, I didn't figure him so clever as the others did. He'd dropped flying togs right down on the Field, instead of hanging on to them for a while. That

would be bound to cause considerable interest. Pilots don't toss their flying stuff overboard without some reason.

Again, he must have known that when a crook mixes up with the Government he lessens his chances of escape greatly. The Government hangs on the trail for years, while local authorities forget, after a time. By stealing a Government ship this crook was exposing himself to a bulldog pursuit.

"Funny!" I muttered to myself. "Why the devil couldn't this cashier simply jump a train with that coin or split it with Harden—or Tulong—and both of them jump trains? Why all the trick stuff at the Field?"

By the time I had the D. H. refueled with low-test stuff and the gas line was cleaned out, I was ready to give it up. But I was certain of one of two things; either the man with the grim eyes was a super-crook or just plain stupid! It looked to me as though he'd gone to a lot of trouble for nothing and when it looks that way to me I usually figure the other way.

I said goodbye to the Sheriff and climbed into the front cockpit. While there was light, I was determined to look around for that DeHaviland. The crooks couldn't have got far without gas. The Canadian border was nearest, so I decided to fly to the north, but my hunch was that a landing had been made and the ship abandoned. It was only a hunch—but it was strong. I'd had one hunch during the week and had failed to play it. This time I would not fail.

I got the D. H. off the road and climbed to the north. And, remembering that fifty thousand dollars was a lot of money, I tapped my automatic holster, beneath the flying coat I was wearing.

"The best laid plans—" I muttered and let it go at that. I'm not much on classical quotations, or any kind, for that matter. But I still had an idea that two crooks could slip up somewhere along the road—or in the sky.

I was within two miles of the Field, flying at seven thousand in the dark, when the engine started to miss. There was the emergency tank and I cut it in right away. She picked up nicely and I decided to investigate some bright lights, congregated at a spot along the east road, about a mile from the Field. So I cut the switch and spiraled down to a thousand feet. Then I pushed the throttle over and nothing happened!

I wasted three hundred feet of altitude trying to find out just what was wrong, then I quit and looked for a landing spot. I'd got away from the road in the last five-hundred-foot drop and the best spot I could see was some rough ground and Kelley's Creek. The creek was wider in most places and the ground was rougher. So I banked her over sharply, released a flare and headed for the creek surface.

I hadn't expected the flare to work—and it didn't. Set for a bigger drop, before automatically lighting, it simply splashed below the surface of the water. But there was some light on the water, reflected from the sky, and I made a good, pancake landing.

That is, it was good for *me*. The landing-gear cracked up and the ship's right wing collapsed. I scrambled down from the cockpit, walked along a wing surface and jumped for the shore. Then I drew a deep breath.

"Sandy might just as well charge two ships to me today!" I muttered, limping a bit from a battered right knee.

BUT that wasn't quite so. The D. H. was in a few feet of slowly moving water and was not badly damaged. Evidently, there had been something wrong with the emergency feed-line, or else there had been only a little gas in the tank. I remembered the lights I had seen back along the road and started in that direction. Fortunately I wasn't far from the Field.

As I neared the east road, moving slowly over the rough ground which I had avoided by landing in the creek, I noted that the lights were gone from the spot at which I had seen them.

But I kept on going. The east road was little used. It was rough and in generally bad shape. My eyes picked up the bulk of a car and, at the same instant, I heard the crash of a shot.

Instinctively, I dropped and lay still. My heart beating fiercely, I reached for my automatic and got it out of the holster. Then I remembered what had happened back at the crossroads. Was this another case of mistaken identity or—

There were more shots; dirt was kicked up near my left elbow. Then I heard the engine of the car start. My next action was instinctive. I raised the automatic, fired four shots in succession, low and at the white of the tires. Then I crawled about ten feet to my right.

But there were no answering shots. The car remained the same motionless bulk. After five minutes or so I crawled forward. I stiffened as I neared the car. It was one of those used at Rook Field!—painted khaki color—and numbered!

Face downward, with chest across the wheel, was the slumped figure of a man.

FOR seconds I stood motionless, trying to get courage enough to see whom I'd shot, perhaps killed. I never was a marksman and I noted now that the tires were all filled with air. Then I moved forward, cautiously, with my automatic ready for action. But it wasn't needed.

The dial-board light, inside the machine, was off and I snapped it on. Then I stared at the face—what I could see of it—of the unconscious figure. It was the face of the man I'd known as Revelier!

Spilling from his pockets were bills—bills of a high denomination. The loot from the bank! Bills were strewn on the floor of the car.

I swore softly, my eyes widening. Sprawled in the rear seat of the machine lay another form, face upward to the stars, his forehead spotted with red. Harden! One swift glance showed me that he was dead.

There were more bills in the back of the car and Harden was clutching one in his left hand. His right, thrown out from his side, held an automatic.

I don't know how long I stood there, staring, trying to think things out. But after some time I got the small-caliber weapon from the right hand of the man seated back of the wheel. I made sure that the man I knew as Harden was dead. Then I raised my own automatic and fired a few shots. I remember, while waiting for some one to come, muttering to myself.

"A Field car—and what has happened to Number 6H.2?"

Sanderson grinned at me. "It was a good stunt," he stated cheerfully, watching Doc working over the former cashier of the Holdenville Bank. "You heard what Brown was saying. They had gas and oil cached up north of here—and, just about at the mileage limit of the D. H., Tulong knew how much gas these test ships carry, of course, and he planned accordingly. He figured you wouldn't get wise for an hour or so and then you'd only think the plane was down somewhere with engine trouble. Neither Harden nor Brown knew that the bank bonding company

was watching Brown, simply because of his association with Tulong.

"They'd have been across the Canadian border if things had worked right, but they didn't. They'd planned to get rid of their flying togs right away, so that if they did have a forced landing and were seen before they got clear of the plane, they wouldn't answer to any possible description we might have sent out—if we were wise.

"Tulong was probably out of his overalls before they'd climbed to three thousand and then, when they got above the clouds, Brown dropped them over the side too quickly. He said he was pretty scared, anyway; and that made Tulong sore.

"Right on top of that the engine went bad. Tulong decided to dive to the south, which he did. I came down through the clouds slowly—and you and I were watching the overalls fall and looking in the other direction, when he came through. It was hazy to the south, anyway, and there are the trees, you know, to the south of the Field."

I nodded. I hadn't heard all that Green had said and the Chief's words were filling in the gaps.

"None of the boys at the Field saw him come down, but even if they had, they wouldn't have bothered much. You know how often ships dive through clouds around here. It isn't rare and we were the only ones interested—at that time.

"They hit the level field by that burned barn, off the east road. Tulong made a good landing and taxied the ship around to the side of the barn. The trees are thickly-branched there and he got Number 6H.2 perfectly camouflaged. Then they both crawled into the barn and waited."

The Chief smiled grimly. "And *that*," he stated, after a brief silence, "was the big slip-up in

their plans. You can picture them—forced to wait for darkness, each of them with twenty-five thousand on his person—and aware that the other had a similar amount! Both were armed. They would have to separate, in any case."

"Each wanted it *all*," I muttered.

"Just that!" Sanderson cut in. "And after six hours of waiting, thinking, scheming for a way, who comes along but Cromwell and leaves one of our cars out on the road, while he looks around for the plane a farmer has seen drop down near the barn."

Sanderson paused. They were carrying Brown on the stretcher, sliding him into the Field ambulance.

"**T**HEY made a break for it," he went on, "and got the car going. Then *you* winged along—coming back home—and seemed to be heading right down on them. They didn't stay cool, too much coin on them. Tulong shot first—at Brown. And that crook came right back at Tulong. You heard those shots. Each man figuring he'd have a better chance for a get-away by himself—"

"And that he'd have *all* the coin," I cut in. "They figured I'd spotted them from the sky, in spite of the car being from our Field."

Sanderson grinned. But his eyes held a grim expression.

"They had a lot of plans," he stated slowly. "Sky plans. Some of them worked. *One* of them didn't. That one licked them."

I nodded. "I was suspicious of him from the beginning," I said slowly. "He didn't seem—air sized."

