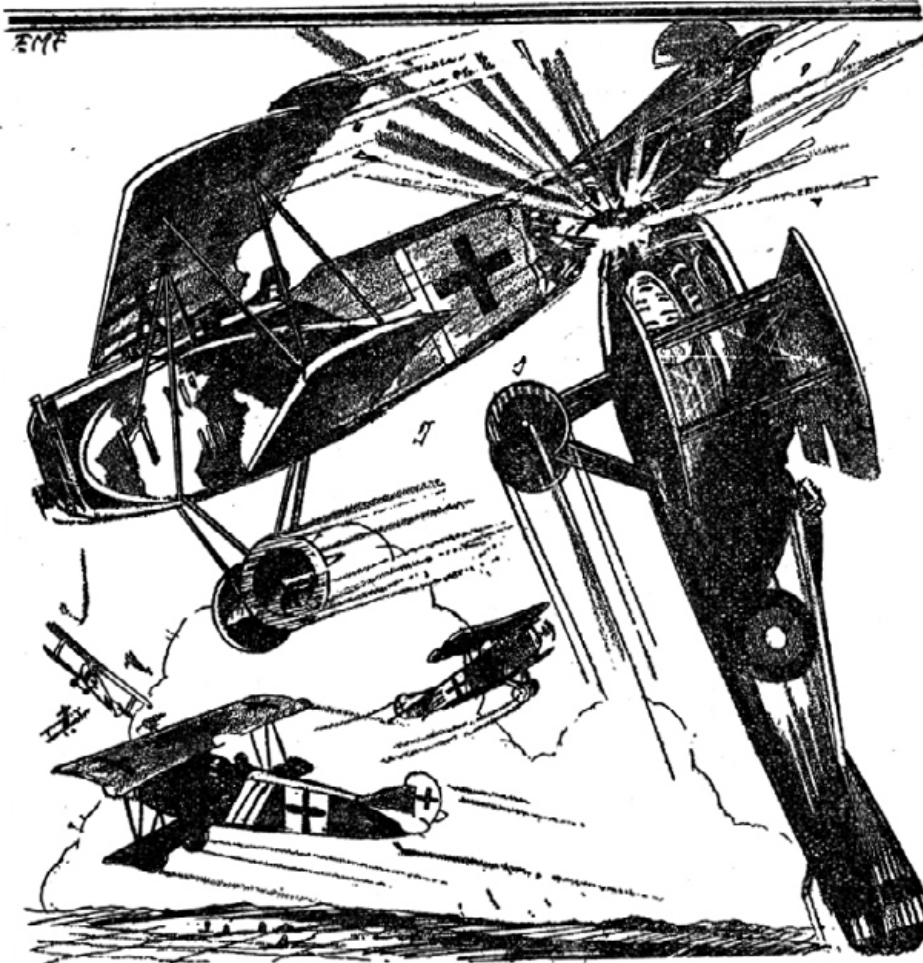


Orders Are Orders



Frantically, the Boche pilot strove to save himself

“Hard-Boiled” Mason Was A Tough Officer—And Red Harvey Didn’t Like Being Bossed!

By JOHN GERARD

Author of “Fast Work,” etc.

“**O**RDERS are orders!” The tall, muscular young fellow with the keen blue eyes and shock of unruly red hair that seemed almost to overflow the small squadron office, stood stiffly at attention and said nothing.

“Well?” rasped Colonel Mason,

commander 87 Squadron, A. E. F., “why don’t you answer?”

“Yes, sir.” “Red” Harvey bit off the words. He was mad clean through. To have been transferred to “Hardboiled” Mason’s outfit was bad enough, but to be hauled up on the carpet and talked to as if he were a damned shave tail with his

uniform newly arrived from the tailor's—

"You were transferred to my outfit, Captain Harvey," the S. C. continued, "because you have an incurable habit of exceeding your orders. If you weren't a damned good flyer, you'd have been discharged long ago. The service needs men like you, but they must learn to remember they're cogs in a machine, not free-lances. I am here to give orders, you to carry them out. And above me there's the staff to give me orders. You understand?"

"Yes, sir." If Red Harvey had spoken his thoughts at that moment he would have made himself liable to a drumhead court-martial.

"IN this squadron," Colonel Mason pointed out—quite unnecessarily since 87 had an unenviable reputation throughout the army—"misfits like you are made to adapt themselves. Either I break them, or," he paused significantly, "they break me. And nobody's tried that yet.

"I'm known as Hard-boiled Mason. Get that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. The commander of 'B' flight was killed yesterday, so I shall place you temporarily in charge. Your flight has the dawn patrol. I want a report on the location of an ammunition dump," he hauled out an ordnance map and outlined a rough square, "somewhere within the squares G-1731, 1732, 1737, 1738. I can't give you any more precise directions than that."

Four squares on the large scale map would equal sixteen square miles, Harvey reflected.

"I want a report on its location," Colonel Mason proceeded. "The artillery will attend to demolishing it. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may go. See that you carry out your orders to the letter."

RED HARVEY saluted and left the squadron office. But, once outside, his carefree temperament got the better of his irritation. So old Hard-boiled Mason thought he was going to break him, did he? That was the trouble with having initiative and imagination, Harvey thought.

Like many more famous fighters of history, Red had an incurable habit of holding the telescope to his blind eye like Nelson at the battle of Copenhagen. Nelson, of course, had gotten away with it and been suitably rewarded. Red, on the other hand, had invariably tried to improve on his orders and had gotten away with it about half the time. Hence the captaincy and the neat row of ribbons on his left breast.

The rest of the time he had been bawled out by his squadron commander and cursed by the staff. He recalled the last furious session which had resulted in his being transferred to 87 Squadron. With strict orders to do nothing but patrol, since three of his pilots were replacements fresh from Issoudun, Red had gone out of his way to tangle with a squadron of Fokkers.

True, he had shot down two Boche planes, and the rest of his flight had accounted for three more, but the trio of replacements had been crashed. That had seriously annoyed the uncle of one of them who happened to be an important staff officer.

And this was the result. Harvey lounged over to his quarters to unpack after reporting. Then, armed with two bottles of cognac, he strolled over to the mess to get acquainted.

It was a tough bunch of airmen that made up the squadron. But their

commander was tougher than all of them. It wasn't hard to see that Colonel Mason had licked everyone. Red planked his cognac down on the bar, ordered soda water and told the steward to fix the drinks.

"Colonel's orders, Captain Harvey," one of the pilots said, "that none of the dawn patrol are allowed to drink the night before."

"Oh, yeah? I'm taking my liquor when and as I want it. Anyone joining me?"

PILOTS of the other flights crowded around. Soon Harvey's cognac was no more. Not one of the pilots in 'B' flight dared join him. Red drank, laughed and joked with the others, but watched them narrowly. What in the name of God could it be, he wondered, that had made them so scared of their squadron commander? He was soon to find out.

All at once, the door opened to admit Colonel Mason.

Everyone in the mess sprang to attention.

Hard gray eyes looked over the room, came finally to rest on the glass in Red Harvey's hand.

"What are you drinking, Captain?"

"Cognac, sir."

"Don't you know my orders?"

"Yes, sir."

Colonel Mason came slowly across the room, deliberately took the glass from Harvey's hand and splattered its contents on the floor. "You will go to your quarters at once, Captain," he rasped. "If I find you breaking any of my rules again I shall punish you."

Red Harvey's fists clenched tightly, his blue eyes blazed. Without a word he strode from the mess. But he did not go to his quarters immediately. Instead, he crossed over to the hangars where the

greaseballs were tuning up 'B' flight's ships and gave some orders.

"Colonel Mason's orders, sir?" inquired a sergeant.

"No, mine," Harvey was about to respond, but decided against it. "Yes," he replied and walked off back to his quarters, a grin on his face. If his squadron commander thought he was tough, Red would show him just who was the tougher of the two. His record had proved him worth at least six ordinary flyers.

If they didn't like the way he did things, they could discharge him. But he was pretty certain they wouldn't do that unless he pulled half a dozen boners in succession. And—he had had his fair share of luck!

Locating and reporting ammunition dumps and other sources of annoyance was one of the regular, routine jobs in the air service. Red Harvey had done it frequently, though he had usually managed to add a distinctive touch to the performance by reporting a void where a short time before there had existed a large and potential thorn in Allied flesh.

IT was for the purpose of repeating his usual procedure that he had given his orders. Even Colonel Mason ought to be pleased, he thought, tumbling out of bed the next morning and filling himself with the scalding black coffee brought him by an orderly. He had yet to find out how little he knew Hard-boiled Mason!

Shrugging into his teddy-bear, Red strode out on to the tarmac. The other pilots of 'B' flight were grouped around their planes, waiting for him.

"All set, fellows?" he waved cheerily. "Then let's go."

His deputy flight leader came up and handed him a short list of the signals in use. Red thrust it into his pocket.

"Hell, I've learned these things long ago. What do you take me for?"

Hansen, the deputy flight leader, a thick-set, blond Swede, grinned at him. "They're different from the regular ones. That's the S. C.'s idea of discipline, making us learn a lot of new stuff."

"Oh, yeah? Okay, if you're used to these damn things I guess I'll have to follow 'em. Listen, men," he went on, "you've got bombs strapped to your undercarriages. You know what to do with 'em, I suppose?"

"Red," Hansen pleaded with him, "if you're improving on Hard-boiled's orders, don't do it. You'll get nothing but a kick in the well-known pants if you do. We're all tough in this outfit, but there just isn't any use bucking the old colonel. He shoots with loaded dice, and he's got the whole damned army to back him up."

Red Harvey's chin jutted out, his mouth closed in a thin tight line. "I'll take the responsibility," he snapped.

WITH a simultaneous roar Hisso engines leaped into action. One after another the six ships of 'B' flight, 87 Squadron, sped down the tarmac to take the air in a graceful climbing curve.

Crouched in his cockpit, Red Harvey grinned determinedly. He'd put some pep into this outfit, show them their colonel was only human after all. He glanced ahead, then up at the sky in which the faint first streaks of dawn had not yet begun to show.

Now they were skimming high over the lines, long, irregular, livid scars against the dark surface of the earth, punctuated at intervals by red and orange flashes. Harvey had flown over this country before and he had his own ideas of where the ammunition dump was situated.

They were well into Hunland when the sky paled, announcing the coming of the

dawn. Harvey glanced behind him at the tight, precise 'V' of the formation. Mason certainly did insist on careful flying!

Pulling the signals out of his pocket, he studied them for a few seconds until he had them by heart. Then he looked at his map. Two of the squares, he knew, could be completely ruled out; there was no railroad near enough to make an ammunition dump worth while.

Kicking the rudder, he swept north and east in a long, shallow curve. The day promised to be clear and cloudless, and that meant added difficulties from Jerry planes, even if the job of spotting the dump itself should be easier. But, strangely enough, the sky around them seemed untenanted.

Near enough to start combing the terrain below thoroughly. Harvey pushed forward on his stick, held it until the needle on his altimeter quivered around 500. Then, eyes straining down to pierce the mysteries of the shadowy landscape, he leveled off and soared on to meet the white, blazing orb of the sun thrusting slowly up over the horizon.

AROUND and around flew Harvey with the five ships of his flight in their compact 'V' behind him, gradually narrowing his circles until he felt he knew every square foot of the territory below. But not a sign of the dump with its deadly cargo. He was about to try the other two map squares as a forlorn hope when suddenly a long line of trucks appeared on the white road far away to his left. He had already flown over it, given up that section as hopeless.

Now he kicked the rudder and swept around in a quick turn to roar over the long line of trucks at full throttle. He cursed himself for not having thought of that thickly wooded valley before. The dump must be there, of course, or damn close to

it. An ideal place, well sheltered, near railhead, with three roads converging half a mile away.

The trucks, he could see, were empty. Well, he could deal with them later. Opening his throttle to the last notch, he thundered on. There was not a moment to be lost since there was a Boche drome in the vicinity.

FORWARD went his stick again, and the Spad plunged earthward in a short dive. Harvey could see the three roads converging below. Then through a little grove of trees that masked it, he caught sight of another, cleverly camouflaged. But there was no disguising the deeply rutted tracks he could barely make out here and there through the foliage.

All at once, an anti-aircraft machine-gun opened up on them from below. Harvey smiled grimly. If he were carrying out orders to the letter, he supposed he'd turn tail and make his report. But Red Harvey had never turned his back on a scrap yet.

Straight as an arrow, Harvey drove on through that hail of lead that tore up at him. Now a whole battery of guns was loosed on them. Harvey side-slipped adroitly, leveled off, zoomed, zigzagged erratically to throw off the enemy gunners' fire.

A glance to his rear told him the rest of his flight were sticking. Even as he looked one plane stalled, then went into a ghastly spin, sheets of flame wreathing wings and fuselage.

Up ahead, tearing hell for leather to meet them, suddenly appeared a flock of Heinies. Red grinned. He ought to be above the dump now, and his eyes peered down in the effort to locate a telltale store of shells through the thick waving foliage.

There it was! He had caught a glimpse of a tarpaulin drawn tight around the

corner of a bulky mass. Yanking out his signal pistol, he fired two blue flares.

Then his Spad came back and over in a swift Immelmann to plunge down on to its quarry with the speed of light.

Spreading out on either side of their leader, the other ships of 'B' flight dove in obedience to Red's signal, each pilot's hand ready with his bomb release.

Harvey waited until the last possible second, then tripped his bombs. The deadly missiles whirled earthward while Red, giving his motor full gun, zoomed up to meet the advancing Hun squadron.

One after the other, the four surviving Spads dipped, sent their eggs whizzing to the ground. Then they tore on after their leader.

SUDDENLY, the earth heaved in a terrific convulsion. There was a thunderous roar, a blinding flash of lurid fire—

Red Harvey's Spad was flung violently upward, rocking like a small boat on the crest of a gigantic tidal wave. Then he felt it sucked down again in the vacuum created by the explosion.

Pulling out just above the treetops Harvey signaled for retreat. The Hun flight he had seen approaching was merely the advance guard of a circus, full thirty planes strong. He enjoyed a scrap as well as the next man, and better, but these odds were a little too steep.

Signaling the flight to go all out, he zoomed up into the sky, turned in a wild split-air and gauged his distance to the first of the oncoming Hun squadron, an orange and black checked Fokker a good half mile in advance of the rest.

The Fokker roared on, its nose tilting suddenly downward in a screaming dive that quickly brought it within fighting range. But Harvey held his fire while glittering tracer streaked close by his

cockpit. He never believed in wasting ammunition. A slight pressure on his stick, and the helmeted head of the Boche pilot was dead in his ring-sights.

For that fraction of a split second Red Harvey's fingers closed on his Bowden trigger. His twin Vickers vomited a short burst, raked the German plane from cockpit to tailskid, riddled the pilot with steel-jacketed death.

LONG experience had told Harvey that he had scored a bull's-eye. Kicking the rudder, he put his Spad into a tight, skidding bank and whirled back to rejoin the four surviving planes of 'B' flight winging swiftly back to their tarmac.

Flashing a glance to his rear, he could see the Hun squadron gaining on him. His duel with the leading Fokker, even though it had been a matter of seconds, had lost him height and time. But between the grim, vengeful flight of Boches and himself a single plane was whirling downward in a fatal spin.

Now he was directly over the road where the trucks had first given him the hunch of the nearness of the ammunition dump. They were still creeping along, snail-like.

Harvey plummeted down, fingers taut on gun-trips, with all the eagerness of a bird-dog flushing game. Long streaks of flame spouted from his guns, smashing into the line of trucks, killing men, wrecking motors, throwing everything into wild confusion.

But his ground strafe had given the Huns behind time to catch up with him. As he zoomed up from his long dive into the air again, scattering volleys of lead hissed around his Spad.

Upstairs, his deputy, Hansen, the big blond Swede, had seen and was dashing to his assistance with the trio of Spads he was shepherding home. Harvey grinned,

dashed the sweat and blood from his face where flying shreds of steel had grazed his cheek. Good old Swede! So their S. C. hadn't disciplined the guts out of these birds after all.

Red zoomed up under the belly of a big green and purple Fokker, holding his stick rammed back into his stomach with all his force. He was mad with the thrill of battle, drunk clean through with the joy of fighting. Right through a vicious crossfire from two more Fokkers he drove his Spad, then, barely fifteen feet from the Fokker's slowly spinning wheels, let go with a terrific burst of bullets.

The Hun crate was flipped up on its nose, hung there for a second. Torrents of black, oily smoke swathed it in a funeral pall.

Then a bright livid flame rent the sable shroud asunder. Slowly at first, then with increasing speed, it plunged earthward, a living pillar of fire.

BANKING, Harvey had slipped beyond to half-roll on another opponent who was driving one of his pilots relentlessly to destruction. For a moment, Red saw Hansen's face, chalk-white and twisted in agony, his hands clenched over his chest. Then his guns were singing a death chant for the Fokker pilot who had crashed his deputy leader.

The Hun ship swayed, veered wildly under the hail of bullets, then plunged down to ram the deputy's Spad. An inextricable tangle of steel, wood, wire and canvas, the two ships hurtled to their destruction on the earth beneath.

But more and more ships were coming up, filling, it seemed to Red, every corner of the sky. He grinned, cursing himself for a damned fool. He'd had no business to stay and tangle with the Boches. But it had been fun while it lasted. If he could only get out of it alive and bring the two pilots

with him safely back to the tarmac of 87 Squadron, it would have been well worth it!

He climbed, banked, rolled, looped, Immelmanned; firing short bursts from his Vickers to make the Huns who hung close on his flanks sheer off. As is always the case where, the odds are heavily in favor of one side, that side begins to be leery of taking chances. And the Fokkers naturally figured the three zigzagging Spads were cold meat.

Protecting his two pilots, Harvey gradually gained altitude, stole nearer the lines. Luckily, there was still plenty of gas left in his tank. But his Spad was a sieve; wings were shredded into long, lacy streamers.

A FOKKER suddenly zoomed up to his rear, then came screaming down in a power-dive, its Spandaus spitting lead, while two more closed in on Harvey from either side to rake him with a furious cross-fire. The Huns realized they were about to lose their quarry, were redoubling their efforts.

Harvey braced himself for the bite of bullets, shrank into his cockpit while he juggled madly with his controls to win out of the flailing vortex of fire. Lead whipped his shredded wings, tore angrily at his fuselage. But the Spad emerged, miraculously unscathed, to gain a few more yards in its fight for life.

Desperately, straining every nerve, Red Harvey was leading the fight in the direction of an archie battery. And, with equal fury now, the swarming Huns strove to head him off. He glimpsed a clear space between two Huns, flashed into it, soaring ahead to come up in a half-loop to avoid the stinging hail of Spandau lead.

Up ahead another of his two surviving pilots flung up his arms abruptly, then in a last dying paroxysm, forced his ship into a

frightful zoom under the belly of a yellow Fokker.

Harvey gasped in horror. The Spad had ripped off the empennage of the Boche plane. Then its nose came over heavily, splintering, rending the bright yellow fuselage; Frantically, the Boche pilot strove to save himself while other ships sheered off hurriedly from the ghastly collision. In vain! Spad and Fokker whirled earthward to their doom.

Quick to take advantage of the distraction, Red and his one remaining pilot streaked for the shelter of the archie battery. Barely were they over it than myriad white puffs mushroomed up into the air. A last vengeful volley, and the Boche squadron turned tail to fly back into Hunland.

LIKE an automaton, Red Harvey flew his Spad back to the home tarmac. Weak and limp from the sudden let-up of the frightful strain he had been under, not to mention the loss of blood from his wounds, he felt like a wrung out rag.

An orderly awaited him with the news that his S. C. wanted to see him in the squadron office immediately.

Colonel Mason's face was like granite. "You've disobeyed orders for the last time, Harvey! G-2's been on the wire, giving me hell. That dump was not to be destroyed. I'm grounding you for two weeks. That ought to give you enough time to come to your senses. Get out!"

Outside again, Harvey grinned ruefully. Mason certainly wasted no time in breaking necks. He wandered over to his quarters for a rest. But his nerves were on edge.

IT was late in the afternoon when Red, who had spent a miserable day wandering disconsolately around from hangars to mess to quarters and back

again, saw a staff car dash up to the squadron office. Three men got out and vanished through the door. Impelled by a sudden hunch, he stole along the wall of the mess by the squadron office and crouched down in the deep shadow cast by the setting sun under the open window.

A crisp, incisive voice was speaking.

“—the destroyed dump was practically empty. It was being prepared to receive a consignment of machinery and cylinders of a new gas, which is odorless, colorless and absolutely deadly. Tomorrow morning at four o’clock our troops are going over the top. They will find the German trenches empty, but they will also find death, a death against which gas masks will be useless.”

Harvey bit his lip, realizing how his disobedience might easily cost the Allies thousands of lives.

Another voice, muffled and indistinct, which Harvey strained in vain to hear, took up the thread. Then, the same crisp tones he had heard first, cut in with staccato emphasis.

“We can work all that out later with Captain Buell. But here’s the situation in a nutshell. The Germans are no fools. Therefore, they’d have another dump ready for this machinery in case the first was blown up, and it would have to be fairly near because of the extensive piping to the fire-trenches.

“Also, they wouldn’t move the stuff up until the last possible minute. That means unloading at the same railhead, it also means a strong cordon of troops thrown around the station. All our agents have orders to do their best, but we need a man like yourself, Buell, who has initiative—”

“Give me a Boche private’s uniform, sir, with a Red Cross brassard and—”

Red Harvey had heard enough. Besides, a group of men were coming in his direction across the field. He stole

swiftly away, cursing. So they were entrusting Eddie Buell with a job of that importance. True, Buell knew German; so did he. But Buell was a big four-flusher with excellent connections.

THE sky had been black for an hour when Captain Buell, well fortified by liquor, strolled into the hangar where his Spad was waiting. A mechanic approached.

“All set to go?” Buell inquired with a negligent nod. “Here,” and he tossed the greaseball a package, “you can help me on with these dirty rags. Hate to put ‘em on before I must, but—” He never finished, for a wrench, swathed in rags, descended with stunning precision on the back of his head. He crumpled to the floor.

With a grim smile the mechanic ripped off his coveralls and hustled into the Boche uniform provided for Buell. Scooping up a pair of automatics, he leaped into the plane’s cockpit, opened the throttle wide. Red Harvey had seized his opportunity.

Half an hour later he cut his throttle and volplaned silently down out of the dark sky. He had picked, for his landing-place, a field near the dump he had destroyed that morning, reasoning that, of all places, it would be the most likely to be deserted, since its usefulness was gone.

The Spad’s wheels jarred on the hard earth, rose, bumped again. Difficult to gauge distance in the uncertain light even though the moon had peered for a moment from wisps of ragged cloud, Red juggled with stick and rudder to bring his ship as close as he could under the shelter of the trees that bordered the field, strained his eyes ahead.

He wanted to be certain of a speedy take-off.

HE jumped out, drew a deep breath and plunged into the camouflaged road that led to the crossroads which had afforded him his clue. Now for it! To his left loomed a huge, dusty crater where there had existed an ammunition dump. He looked at it, wishing he had not exceeded his orders. The damage had been devastating!

At the cross roads he struck out for Bouvier, the railhead where the deadly machines were to be unloaded. It was five miles off.

Two staff cars roared by, then a truck came lumbering along. It stopped. A friendly voice inquired in a thick Bavarian accent if he wanted a lift. Red climbed aboard and tried some discreet pumping while the driver chatted amiably. But the German clearly knew nothing worth while. They were nearing Bouvier when a sixth sense warned Red of impending danger.

"I don't have to report to the hospital until midnight," he said with a wink. "There's a very sweet little girl—" and he gestured vaguely into the darkness.

"You're in luck, brother," the driver slowed down. "I'm new here myself. *Auf wiedersehen!*" he called after Red's leaping figure.

"Thanks for the lift," and Harvey dived into the underbrush at the side of the road.

Ten seconds later he blessed his hunch. A peremptory challenge sounded a few yards ahead of him and to the left. He could make out shadowy figures, suddenly sharp and distinct in the white beams cast by flashlights; evidently a guard posted to examine all traffic passing into Bouvier. He crouched, every nerve taut. There was the click of heels, of men coming to the salute, a sharp command, the roar of an engine bursting into speed. Before Red could move on, another car drew up in obedience to barked order.

THE officer in charge of the guard demanded passes, then Red heard him order a man out of the car, caught the order to strip and search him, finally the single ominous crack of a gun.

Some poor devil of an Allied agent who had tried to break through the cordon and paid for it with his life, Red reflected, worming his way through the wood away from the guard post that bristled with danger.

Just how thorough the Boche precautions were Red discovered when he mingled with the crowd of soldiers thronging the streets of Bouvier. A cordon of infantry was drawn tightly around the railroad station, the men standing shoulder to shoulder with bayonets gleaming at the muzzles of their rifles, while N. C. O.'s walked up and down the steady line examining anyone who approached.

Hopeless to try to get through that barrier of steel, Red knew. His half formed plan died. He turned away, then, on a sudden inspiration, started walking quickly through the town. It might be possible to drop off an embankment about half a mile south right onto the roof of a box-car of an incoming train and get into the station that way.

He was already out of the town and was marching briskly along a dark road when a hail made him freeze in his tracks, heart pounding.

A trio of officers emerged out of the darkness.

"Here you are, my man," one of them gave him an envelope. "Deliver this letter to *Hauptmann* Wolfthal at the station. Hurry!"

Red saluted and ran off.

"Message for Captain Wolfthal," he announced importantly, coming up to a *feldwebel* patrolling the approach to the station.

"Let this man through," called the N. C. O., and two soldiers stepped swiftly out of the ranks, leaving a space for Red.

He walked on uncertainly, the note in his hand, eyes darting this way and that. A few paces more, and he had rounded the squat freight shed to see a body of men working like demons transferring long metal cylinders from cavernous box-cars to trucks that stood three deep in front of the tracks where sweating men hauled the deadly cargo. A staff officer came up with a young, stocky, black-haired man who wore a captain's insignia.

"I will give orders for the Cerveau road to be cleared in an hour, Captain," Red heard the staff officer say.

"You see how those poor devils are toiling, Colonel," the younger man replied. "We can't do any more." He turned, catching sight of Red, frowned. "Who the hell let you through?" he snapped.

"A MESSAGE for Captain Wolfthal, sir," Red held out the envelope.

"Oh thanks, that's for me." The captain shouted an order. A corporal ran up. "Pass this man out and don't let anyone else through the cordon. Bring all messages to me yourselves."

Red was jubilant. So the trucks would be moving along the Cerveau road. He forged ahead as quickly as he dared, taking the road toward the wood at the fringe of which he had heard one luckless spy meet his death. The trees thinned, and Red cautiously drew near the road itself, which glimmered like a faint ribbon of white in the darkness. He glanced at his watch. Another fifteen minutes, and that long convoy of trucks would come rumbling along. And the rearmost would have an extra passenger if he had anything to say about it!

He pressed on in the ditch at the side of the road until he came to a winding

stretch between two curves. There he crouched down, every nerve and muscle tense.

ALL at once, a motorcycle swept around the far curve, its siren clanging forth short, imperious blasts. Once more silence, broken only by the dying wail of the machine clearing the way ahead of the convoy. Then, a deep, earth-shaking rumble.

Red peered from his hiding-place, to see the first of the trucks sweeping around the curve, the second a scant twenty feet behind it. He cursed in silent, vicious rage. His attempt was foredoomed to failure. Over the backboard of each truck he had seen two figures.

As if that were not enough, the last truck had just reached a place in the road opposite him when a touring-car with bright headlights, unlike the dim glow of the trucks' lamps, came around the bend.

Furious at this endless series of obstacles, Red jumped out of the ditch and shook his fist at the dwindling red tail-light of the touring-car. He had failed! There was no possible way by which he could discover the grim secret of the location of the gas cylinders in time to get word back.

He was still standing there, wracking his brains for a next step when a motorcycle dashed round the curve in the road ahead and slowed down to stop at his side. A Luger covered him, a voice spat:

"WHAT the devil are you doing in this road at this time? Report to me instantly, give me your papers!"

Red's trembling hand fumbled inside his shapeless uniform, came out steady as a rock, fingers pressing the trigger of a gun. He hurled himself sideways as the German's gun barked, let fly again. The man toppled off his motorcycle and lay

motionless.

A rebirth of hope surged through Red. He ripped leather helmet and tunic off the dead man, trundled him into the ditch, threw himself onto the motorcycle and roared down the road in pursuit of the trucks.

At a discreet distance from the ruby light on the touring-car trailing the convoy Red throttled down. A few miles farther on he turned abruptly down a side road to come suddenly to a skidding halt as the long line in front of him stopped. Dark forms sprang toward the trucks ahead, voices rapped orders.

The touring-car backed and turned, its lights playing for a second on the gray, unpainted side of an enormous barn. Red had seen enough to be certain. That barn, with its peculiar, high gable and desolate appearance, was two and a half miles north-east of Cerveau, three miles from the German support trenches, and as many more from the dump he had destroyed that morning. He had patrolled this sector often.

A grin of satisfaction on his face, Red kicked his machine around in the narrow road.

"*Was müssen Sie hier?*" a low voice hissed. "What's your business?"

"An important message for Captain Wolfthal," Red snapped back, glancing out of the corner of his eye at the touring-car which was just starting off toward him. His fingers tightened around the butt of his Luger. "That's not Hermann's voice, even if it is his machine, and," the light of a flash played over Red for a second, "by God! It's not—"

RED'S gun barked once. A dimly seen form crashed to earth. Then, bending low over the handlebars of his machine, he was plowing his way desperately along the road. Cries of alarm resounded from the

touring-car, hoarse orders were bellowed. Bullets sent the earth spurting up around the fleeing man. Like a red hot whip on his neck, lead grazed him to spend itself harmlessly in the dirt beyond. The motorcycle bucked, and plunged over the rough surface.

He skidded wildly into the main Cerveau road, headed back down it at full throttle. Faster and faster his machine hurtled along the white highway with Red leaning so far over at the curves that the motorcycle almost shot out from under him.

Another frantic skid-turn at the crossroad, and he was bumping along the camouflaged road over which he had flown that morning. If luck held he'd soon be taking off in his Spad bearing the secret that meant all the difference between success and failure to the Allied arms in the offensive so soon to be launched!

But, even if he had outdistanced pursuit, Red was to find his means of escape cut off. He had hurled himself off the saddle of his motorcycle and was running hell for leather to his plane, when he was brought up short by the points of two bayonets prodding his chest. A pair of Hun soldiers had stepped from the shelter of the trees.

"*Hande hoch!*" a voice barked. "Stick 'em up!"

A wave of crushing disappointment, of sickening futility, overwhelmed Red. To have planned carefully, to have endured everything he had been through that night, and then, at the very last minute, to be captured! Suddenly, it came to him! The magic name might work again, gain him an instant's respite as it had done before. But, he stiffened with apprehension at the sound of an approaching car, it would have to work damned fast!

"You idiots!" he barked. "I know all about that plane. *Hauptmann* Wolfthal

sent me here to get it. I'm to fly it back to Bouvier at once. Here," he rushed on, not giving the bewildered sentries time to think, "one of you swing the propeller for me. It's just a matter of seconds if we're to catch that damned Allied spy!"

The bayonets wavered uncertainly. Red followed up his bluff by pushing them confidently aside and running on towards the Spad.

"If the captain sent you, it must be all right," one of the soldiers replied, stepping up beside the cockpit into which Red had already jumped while his companion seized the propeller.

The car, and Red was sure it was that infernal touring-car that held his pursuers, was plowing along the camouflaged road now. He talked animatedly to the man beside him, while he waited in an agony of suspense for the cold engine to spring to life.

AT the very instant it caught, men came plunging through the trees lining the field, yelling orders. The expression on the face of the man beside Red changed to one of panic-stricken determination. He stretched out his arms to drag Red from the cockpit. But an iron fist crashed into his jaw.

The Spad taxied down the field at full throttle. Red prayed the ship would lift him, held his breath as the not yet warm Hisso missed, sputtered, then burst into roaring life.

BEHIND him the Boche threw themselves down on the earth, took

careful aim at the speeding plane. One bullet tore its way through Red's shoulder, smashing him forward against the dash.

With inches to spare the Spad's undercarriage scraped over the topmost branches of the trees, lifting into the black sky for a swift zoom. At five hundred feet Red leveled off, glanced at his compass and headed for his home tarmac.

He was faint from loss of blood when the dim yet familiar outlines of his tarmac appeared below the entering edge of his lower wing. He tossed out a flare, pushed his stick forward, cut his throttle just as the flood-lights were switched on, bathing the field in their white radiance.

Recognizing his plane, "Hardboiled" Mason himself and an officer from G-2 had rushed out.

Without a word Red Harvey leaned out of his cockpit and handed them the large-scale map on which he had picked out the position of the farm-house on his way over.

"There's your objective," he said laconically.

The staff officer grabbed the map and hurried off to telephone. Hard-boiled Mason stared at Red's worn, hollow-eyed face for a long moment. Then, he held out his hand.

"Harvey," he said slowly, "you're the first man to lick me! Well, all I can say is that any man who's got the sheer, blind guts you have is worth having in the army whether he obeys orders or not. Come and have a drink!"