



SMOKY SKIES

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Above the smoke of signal fires that rose in the pale moonlight of the desert night, planes battled desperately and machine guns flashed spitefully across the sky.

EDDIE LEWIS met up with Seeb Hallam on the outskirts of Calexico. He wasn't particularly pleased with the manner in which the meeting was effected, but he had sense enough to take it in the right spirit. Raising his hands toward the sky, he kept his gray eyes on the muzzle of Hallam's gun—and waited for the short, stockily built individual to speak. The wait was a short one.

Hallam chuckled mirthlessly, spoke in his hoarse tones. There was mud on the road which Eddie had been traversing, and as Hallam rocked on the toes and heels of his boots, it made sucking noises beneath his weight.

"Goin' back to the ship, Eddie? Now that's just great—I'm going that way myself."

Eddie said nothing. About a half mile to the north of the town was his two-seater De Haviland. He had set her down on the sandy soil only two hours ago, just before dark. It was his idea that very few knew the plane had come in. Seeb Hallam, apparently, was one of the few.

Eddie was on his way with a load of machine

guns for Johnny Leeds in the concession strip south of the border. It wasn't exactly legal, this running guns across to Mexico, but Johnny was Eddie's friend and needed guns for protection against border renegades and raiders. So Eddie was being the friend in need. He now wondered what Seeb Hallam was up to.

The short man stepped up close to him, patted him expertly with his left hand, got the Colt from the holster under Eddie's left shoulder. Slipping it into a pocket of his khaki jacket, he chuckled once more.

"Let's move, Eddie," he suggested. "You lead the way to the plane. You can rest your arms now. How's business?"

Eddie Lewis swore softly. He was tall, rather lean, brown faced. He moved along the road, toward the spot where the D. H. rested.

"You've come a long way since Mac kicked you out of the outfit, eh?" he snapped at Hallam. "Stickup stuff now."

The man behind him swore harshly. His thick-toned voice had a sharp note in it when he

spoke again.

“That’s *my* business, Eddie! What in hell are *you* doin’ in Calexico? Figurin’ on sky hoppin’ some of the boys, I suppose? Playin’ on the level, sure enough. Like hell you are!”

Eddie said nothing. They walked along the narrow road. The stars were bright, but the outline of the ship was not yet in sight. The man behind Eddie swore grimly.

“Get it straight, Eddie—don’t try anything fast with me. I’m wise to you. Over in the Chink’s place last night—a little redheaded runt took too many drinks, and did some talkin’. I’m on to why you set the ship down. Was waiting for you, Eddie—and even the glide-in with the engine cut didn’t fool me.”

Eddie stiffened. “Red” Collins had celebrated at the wrong time—and talked. And because of that fact, Hallam had been able to walk up behind him and pull a gun. Quite a bit of carelessness on Eddie’s part, but he hadn’t been in a border town for many months. And Hallam was a bit cat-footed when it came to getting in close without being heard.

“You’re safe with me, Eddie.” Seeb Hallam was speaking again. There was an edge to his tone. “Know your game, and it’s all right. The boys down in the concession strip can use a few machine guns. Every rebel that gets himself kicked out by the Federal boys goes down there and pulls some raids. They can use the guns, and it’s all right with me, Eddie.”

HE CHUCKLED. Eddie walked on. As yet there was no moon. The road was becoming nothing more than a rough floor of sand. Mesquite dotted the stretches ahead, blue-gray in the starlight. The shape of the plane was to be seen now, off to the right. Back of them gleamed the lights of the town, and of Mexicali, across the railroad tracks from Calexico on the Mexican side of the line.

“There’s just this, Eddie”—Hallam’s voice was low now—“just one little thing. I’m wise to you. I *could* raise hell—if I wanted to do it. But we flew together in the old days, eh?”

There was grim amusement in the shorter man’s voice. He chuckled, then went on.

“You’re taking some machine guns down toward Ensenada, and that’s all right with me. But

I’d kind of like to ride along. An’ when you come back. I’d kind of like to come back along with you.”

Eddie sucked in his breath sharply. So that was Hallam’s game. Kicked out of the Lait’s Air Circus months ago, because of using passenger’s money for bad liquor, he’d got to the point where he was playing loose over the line. Hallam had never liked Eddie; the pilot knew that, and now he was making a direct threat. And the tough part of it was—he knew something.

The pilot of the De Haviland halted. The ship was less than a hundred yards away. A voice came down the faint breeze to them.

“That you, Eddie?”

Eddie started to call out, but Hallam stopped him with a sharp command.

“Never mind that stuff! Who you got watchin’ the plane?”

Eddie spoke quietly. “Tex White—flew over from Bakersfield with me,” he said slowly.

“Call him over—and do it nice-like!” Hallam gritted out the words. “Remember, I got *two* guns!”

Eddie Lewis shrugged his shoulders. Hallam was holding his own gun low—at his right side. His left hand reached into the pocket into which he had slipped Eddie’s Colt.

“Come over here, Tex!”

Eddie called sharply, and saw the tall, lean figure of White coming toward him. Seeb Hallam raised his right-hand gun slightly. Tex was within fifty yards before Hallam spoke. His voice was low, level.

“Come on over, Tex—with your hands up!” he ordered sharply.

Eddie Lewis held his breath. Tex hesitated for the fraction of a second—his eyes were on the gun Hallam held in his left hand. He raised his hands, moved toward them. Hallam backed a short distance away from Eddie. He chuckled.

“We change planes—right here,” he said slowly, as Tex reached Eddie’s side, his brown eyes narrowed on the short figure of Hallam. “Guess Tex was goin’ to fly over with you, Eddie—give you a lift with the guns, eh? Well, I’ll do that job. Got ‘em aboard now, I suppose?”

Eddie swore softly. “Tex wasn’t going over,” he said slowly. “I went in to get the landing place dope. Tex was watching the ship. The rear

cockpit's pretty crowded."

Hallam grinned nastily. "I'm small," he stated. "Guess I can crowd it a bit more. What I'm bringing back won't take up much space."

Tex White let his eyes go to Eddie's. He held both hands shoulder high.

"What's the game, Eddie?" he asked in a grim tone. "Friend double-crossing you?"

The pilot shook his head. "No friend," he replied. "I don't mix with dope runners."

There was a sneer in Seeb Hallam's voice. His eyes were narrowed on Eddie's.

"Workin' the line game yourself, ain't you?" he asked. "Funny how one crook hates to help out another."

Eddie grunted. Tex White swore sharply. His eyes went to those of the short, thick-set man.

"Eddie and me, *we're* working this game. You can't tell us where to get off. Put your gat up. After we do this job we'll talk about the stuff you want to bring over. The D. H. is mine—see? I'm hiring Lewis here, to pilot her, that's all."

There was surprise in Seeb Hallam's eyes. A full moon edged up into the sky. There was a silver light over the mesquite and sand.

"*That's* it!" He chuckled again. "Just a hired pilot, eh?" Hallam's eyes met Eddie's. His voice was suddenly knife-edged. "Well, *I'm* hiring you, just now—see? Got her ready for the air?"

Tex White swore grimly. "You can't pull that stuff on me, man!" he muttered. "You wait until we——"

HE BROKE off. Hallam's guns were raised slightly. He walked close to the lean one. And then, suddenly, it happened. Eddie Lewis struck from the side, as Seeb passed him. A glancing right-arm blow; it knocked Hallam off balance and he went to his knees.

Tex leaped at him. There was the sharp crack of the Colt. Eddie saw Tex drop forward, roll over on his back. Hallam faced him, his Colt ready for action. The gun he had taken from Eddie was not in his left hand. He used that hand to steady himself. His face was twisted grimly.

"Walk in—an' you get yours, too!" He breathed heavily, got to his feet, never taking his eyes from Eddie's. "Thought you'd jump me from behind, eh? Damn near worked it—"

He broke off. His eyes were narrowed. With

a swift glance toward the ship, he spoke steadily.

"You get aboard, an' you fly me to where I say! I'll rap the side of the fuselage and point down. And you get down, see? No funny stuff. We'll dump the guns off where I say. An' the first break you make, Eddie—it'll be the last! Get that straight!"

Eddie stared down at the motionless figure of Tex White. Seeb Hallam followed his gaze.

"Let him stay where he is!" he muttered thickly. "It'll mean a split for the two of us—instead of hire money for you. Got 'chutes aboard?"

Eddie nodded his head. Hallam was staring toward the lights of the town; he was alert, his body swayed slightly as he stood looking toward Calexico.

"Get me one 'chute; make it fast!" he ordered. "You fly without one. I'll wear mine. That'll make it safer—for *me!*"

Eddie moved toward the ship. There had been rumors about Seeb Hallam, before he had come to the flying outfit. It was said that he had killed a man in Texas months before he had turned up. He was a fair pilot; a good stunt man. Eddie swore beneath his breath. He had been a fool to try and slug the man, with Tex right in line of fire.

He got one 'chute from the front cockpit. As he turned, with one foot on the lower wing's footstep, Hallam was beside him. His face was white in the light from the night sky.

"Your pal's dead!" he muttered. "An' you'll get the same dose if you try anything funny. The wind's blowin' toward town. Get her revvin' up an' make it fast. If they heard that shot—"

EDDIE tossed down the 'chute. He climbed into the front cockpit. There were six machine guns packed in the rear cockpit, but there was no ammunition for them aboard. It would be a tight squeeze, but Hallam had room. He snapped the self starter, the prop swung down and the engine spat. She roared as he advanced the throttle, on his left. A voice sounded in Eddie's right ear. Hallam was on the wing-step, staring down into the front of the cockpit.

"I'll be back of you with lead waitin' for a false break—remember that. If you've got a gun in here——"

Eddie shook his head. He shut the engine down to a low rumble of sound.

"I'm not crazy to go out, Hallam," he stated grimly. "I'll fly you across, but we've got to wait for those clouds."

He pointed toward the west. Gray clouds were rolling across the sky; almost a solid mass of them. In fifteen minutes they would be overhead. And on such a night they would need clouds.

Hallam swore softly. "Get *up above*—and wait!" he snapped.

"Border ship might spot us. Bad business, after what you did down here—"

"Up above, Eddie!" Hallam interrupted in a grim tone. "It'll be *worse* business if you don't sky-ride me. I can fly 'em; you know that."

Eddie Lewis nodded his head. He did know that Seeb Hallam could fly ships. There were no blocks under the wheels of the De Haviland; he could not rev the engine up much without turning her over on her nose. He jerked his head. Hallam was already squeezing into the rear cockpit. There was room for his legs to the left of the packed guns; Eddie had left space purposely, though he intended flying across the lines alone.

Hallam was nodding his head. He leaned forward, shouted in Eddie's ears.

"South! And bear over toward the Cocopah hills, when you get across a ways. I'm lookin' for smoke in the skies—and so are you!"

Eddie advanced the throttle. He twisted his head as the ship rolled forward, stared toward the spot where Tex White had fallen. His body straightened in the cockpit. Tex was on his knees—was getting to his feet! Hallam had lied about White being dead.

There was a sharp crack. It sounded high-pitched above the exhaust roar. Eddie twisted his head again. Hallam swung his gun around, held it in the prop wash of the plane. With his left hand index finger he pointed up. Eddie turned his eyes to the front again, moved the joy stick back slightly. The ship rose from the earth.

Hallam had seen Tex getting up; had fired at him again. But Eddie doubted that he had hit the wounded man. Or perhaps Tex had not been wounded, but had faked the fall. Why, then, had Hallam said White was dead? Bluff? Eddie shook his head slowly. More likely he had slipped up on a swift examination.

THE D. H. climbed steadily into the sky. The night would be a bright one; Eddie held the ship north of the lines. There were Border Patrol ships around. If they caught the D. H. in the air, forced him to make a landing, and found the guns in the rear cockpit—

He swore grimly. Smoky skies. Seeb Hallam riding the rear cockpit, with an Irving seat pack 'chute harnessed about him, and a gun in his right hand. Looking for smoke signals, somewhere over toward the Cocopah Mountains. Red Collins talking at the wrong time, about the guns. The whole thing was a mess. He hadn't considered taking the guns into Mexico so bad. There were three American concession holders in the Imperial Valley stretch south of Tia Juana. And Johnny Leeds had flown with Eddie, over in France, during the war. Johnny had the biggest melon concession along the strip. He wasn't sure of his *cholos* and Chinks—and there had been raids. He needed the guns. But Red Collins, who worked for Johnny, had talked. And Hallam had listened. It was a tough break.

The D. H. circled, climbing up toward the silver gray sweep of clouds. Eddie stared down over the side of the fuselage, wiped his goggle-glass clear of a splattering of oil. A figure was moving slowly, unsteadily, toward the outskirts of Calexico. Tex White!

Eddie leveled the De Haviland off, banked sharply to the left, watched Tex. He was moving slowly, but he was keeping on his feet. Help? There was nothing Tex could do. He had tried a bluff, saying that he had hired Eddie when he had only been watching the ship while the pilot got final instructions. But the bluff had failed, Tex couldn't get an Army ship up after the D. H. Not with the guns aboard. Regulations were regulations, even though the Army pilots would probably sympathize with the concession holders along the strip.

It would be up to Eddie. And as he nosed the ship upward again, heading her toward the gray of the clouds, he shook his head slowly. Hallam was a killer and wouldn't fool. He wanted something across the line. The machine guns didn't bother him, but he needed the ship. And he wore the 'chute that would get him down safely if he were forced to put a bullet through the back of Eddie's helmeted head. Also, he could fly the plane, if he

wanted to spill lead when Eddie had set the plane down, in the first rise of the Cocopahs. It looked tough, all around.

At ten thousand they hit the first, lower mists of the clouds. Eddie leveled off, flew southward by compass. There was a rapping on the fuselage fabric; he cut the throttle, nosed downward, just out of the white stuff.

“Get in ‘em! Fly south for twenty minutes, then nose her down!”

Hallam’s voice was hoarse. Eddie nodded his head; advancing the throttle, he climbed the ship once more. The roar of the curved exhausts became louder; everything was wet. He was forced to wipe the instrument glass and his goggles again and again. Twenty minutes! That would mean, with the drift wind from the west, about eighteen miles across the line, and over toward the brown-gray slopes of the rugged mountain range which ran near the Pacific and to the west of Mexican Imperial Valley.

Eddie thought swiftly. There was a Chinese concession about that far in—a cotton concession. West of the railroad that ran to Ensenada, and west of the flood road and American Waterway ditch line, was that Chinese concession. It ran almost to the slopes—the eastern slopes—of the Cocopahs. On the other side of the range was the watershed—rich foliage and fruit right down to the blue-green water of the Pacific. There was no spot to set a ship down west of the mountains. But on the east side, in the Valley, there were plenty of landing spots. Mesquite and sand—except where the concession lands were irrigated—and flat, hot country. Seeb Hallam would have him land east of the mountains, Eddie guessed.

THE D. H. roared through the clouds. From time to time Eddie wiped clear the level glass. The ship was not equipped with an inclinometer; it was not modern enough for that. Air speed was seventy-two, altitude was nine thousand. The air was not bumpy; night flight over the valley was easier than day flight. The ship winged through gray blackness; only the instrument board lights gleamed dully. Eddie flew with a highly developed air-sense. Smoke signals—that was what Hallam would be looking for when they came down out of the clouds.

And that meant that Hallam would not be

working alone. Which, in turn, meant that Eddie would be hijacked out of his Browning machine guns, and might get in a jam flying back across the lines. Hallam held the gun; he had Eddie where he wanted him. The chances were that he’d keep him there. Outside help would only mean more trouble. And worst of all, Hallam was ship wise.

Eddie Lewis swore grimly through oil-caked lips. He wiped savagely at the mist on the goggles. The ship was flying with the left wing low; he corrected for it by moving the stick to the right. Smoky skies? He shook his head slowly.

“Black as hell!” he muttered beneath the roar of the Liberty engine. “If I get out of this one I’m good!”

The De Haviland came out of the clouds at the end of fifteen minutes’ flight. The reason was that the ship flew into a break in the gray stuff. There was a rapping on the fuselage fabric; Eddie cut the throttle, nosed the ship down.

“Dive her; jazz the engine; and hold her south!”

Hallam shouted the words. Eddie nodded his head, wiped the instrument board and his goggle glass clear for the last time. There was moonlight on the stretch of mesquite and sand below. The clouds were breaking to the southward. Off to the west he could see the dark slopes of the Cocopahs. The American Waterway ditch, which irrigated the valley, was to the east of the ship’s course. Several miles ahead was a ‘dobe ranch house—the Chink’s place. In the light of the moon the valley surface was silver white. Visibility was very good.

Eddie held the D. H. in a fairly stiff glide. His eyes traveled over the mesquite and sand ahead, then moved to the westward. He stiffened in the cockpit. Perhaps three miles southward and as many to the west there was a gray haze in the sky. It was moving from the slopes of the Cocopahs, blown by the wind. Smoke!

Above the shrill of the wind through the flying wires and struts, the voice of Seeb Hallam sounded.

“Ease up on the glide—and listen!” he shouted.

Eddie moved the stick back slightly and the nose of the plane came up. The shrilling of wind through the rigging diminished in tone. Hallam

was leaning over toward the front cockpit.

“Get down to about two hundred feet and fly toward that smoke southwest of us. See it?”

Eddie nodded his head. There was a little silence, then Hallam spoke again. There was a grim note in his voice.

“What I’m looking for; it’s down there, Eddie. Know what it is?”

Eddie twisted his head. “Dope?” he snapped back.

Hallam swore harshly. “Gold!” He shouted above the wind shrill. “Mexicans handing out good old U. S. A. coin. Guess why?”

Eddie shook his head again. They were down within a thousand feet of the sand and mesquite; he banked the plane to the southwest, toward the smoke in the sky.

“Tell you why, Eddie.” There was a note of mockery in Hallam’s voice. “They want—machine guns!”

EDDIE LEWIS stiffened. Eyes to the front, toward the throttled down prop, lips pressed tightly together, he understood, for the first time. Seeb Hallam was taking the machine guns he had intended for Johnny Leeds and the other boys. Hallam was hijacking him in the air, and taking the guns to raiders, perhaps. To the very man against whom Johnny and the boys wanted to use the Brownings!

Behind him Hallam laughed. It was a nasty, sneering laugh. It came hoarsely above the faint wind shrill through the rigging, above the throttled down rumbling of the D. H.’s engine.

“Soft for me, Eddie, but it ain’t much of a walk back. We’ll turn you loose—an’ I need the ship!”

Eddie Lewis’ fingers tightened until the knuckles were white over the wood of the joy stick. Hallam was stealing the plane! Turning him loose in the valley; flying out in the plane! He would be miles distant; the ship could easily be abandoned before Eddie could get word to the authorities. And even then—what could he say? How about the cargo he had been carrying?

He advanced the throttle, pulled back on the stick. They were two hundred feet above the sand and mesquite. The smoke was rising from the flat surface, perhaps two miles distant. The valley was almost as light as day. The full moon shone down,

with the clouds through which they had flown drifting eastward, and a clear sky to the west.

Eddie Lewis groaned. He thought of Red Collins, when he had seen him an hour ago. Red had been able to talk, then. He had told Eddie where the guns were to be landed. But it had been plain that he had been drinking heavily. It was just a tough break that Seeb Hallam had listened in on Red’s words, had worked fast. Six Brownings and the D. H. And if Eddie didn’t like it—well, there was lead in the gun Hallam held. Lead that the short, heavy set man was not afraid to spill.

The De Haviland roared over the dumps of mesquite, flashed across the black ridges of a section of cultivated cotton soil. The Chinese ranch house was behind them now; the Cocopahs were ahead. And the nearest American concession was fully forty miles distant.

The smoke seemed all about them now. Eddie could taste it as the propeller flung back wisps of the gray stuff. He felt a touch on his right shoulder, cut the throttle, nosed downward.

“Hit the sand—quarter mile ahead! Don’t nose her over or try tricks!”

Hallam’s voice was cool, steady. He was leaning forward in the rear cockpit again, the upper portion of his body exposed to the rush of night air, the prop wash. Gleams of red shone through the smoke. Eddie cut the throttle, glided the plane down the remaining distance toward the surface of the valley.

For seconds he stared through the smoke. Then the air ahead was clear; the Cocopahs rose plainly, not far distant. The ship was less than fifty feet above the sand and mesquite. Hallam’s voice sounded harshly.

“Set her down, damn you! Set this baby down or—”

EDDIE was pulling the stick back toward his khaki shirt now; the plane was losing flying speed. He gave her the gun, got her over some mesquite that might easily have nosed her over, cut the engine off again. Wheels and tail-skid struck in a perfect three-point landing. She rolled forward, slowly in speed. She stopped.

Eddie snapped his safety belt, turned his head. Seeb Hallam had a leg over the side of the fuselage; his eyes met Eddie’s. They held a grim smile.

"Hop down, Eddie!" he ordered. "Like oldtimers, you flyin' me. Only the stunt I'm pullin' this time is kind of different, eh?"

Eddie slid over the side to the sand. Hallam was holding his gun low, in his right hand. Figures were running toward the plane, from the direction of the rising smoke. Eddie jerked off his helmet and goggles. Hallam had flown without any head or eye protection; his dark hair was mussed badly, his eyes were rimmed with red. He grinned.

"Eddie"—his voice was mocking—"what'll I do to a guy that knows too much?"

The pilot steadied his voice with an effort. He could guess what Seeb Hallam would do. He fought to speak calmly.

"Hell, man, I don't know *anything!*" he stated. "I didn't hand out cash for the guns, and you didn't murder Tex White. I saw him moving toward Calexico, as we climbed into the sky."

Hallam chuckled mirthlessly. "So you saw him, too," he muttered. "An' you don't know anything, eh? Well, Eddie, I'm not takin' chances, I'm not—hello, Juan!"

The Mexican who came up first was short and swarthy faced. His black, narrowed eyes went to Eddie, then met those of Seeb Hallam.

"In the rear cockpit back there!" Hallam pointed with his gun. "Get your boys busy an' count out the cash as soon as you grab a look. Make it fast, too!"

The short Mexican called shrilly to several comrades running up. They moved toward the rear cockpit of the D. H. Hallam's eyes were on Eddie's again.

"Just toss over the helmet and eye-protectors, Eddie; I can use 'em in my business."

The pilot tossed them at Hallam's feet. His eyes went to the gun held in the other man's right hand. Hallam wasn't exactly careless with that gun, and even should Eddie trick him, there were the Mexicans.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Rotten place to leave me, Hallam," he said slowly, keeping his voice steady with an effort, and looking beyond the shorter man. "You might set me down nearer a ranch house."

Hallam grinned. The Mexicans were getting the guns out, chattering in shrill voice. There were four of them by the plane now.

"Not leavin' you, Eddie." Hallam's voice held the same mocking note it had held before. "Takin' you along, for a *little* way. Kind of like air company."

Eddie stiffened. The guns were out of the ship now; the short Mexican who was the leader came to Hallam's side. He handed the hijacker a roll of bills. Hallam backed a short distance away from the Mexican, counted them carefully, his gun held in his right hand as he did so. Then he nodded his head.

"Right, Juan. My compliments to *El Jefe*, and tell him I'll be up north somewhere for a while. It ain't healthy down here—not now."

He stuffed the bills in a pocket of his khaki jacket. The Mexican moved off, bearing the guns with them. Eddie's eyes were narrowed. Hallam spoke sharply.

"Get a 'chute for yourself! You ride the rear cockpit; I'll take her off. Stay down in the seat, back of me. I'll be turnin' and watchin' you. If you make a move I'll fill you up with lead. And where I'll land you, after that—you'll be plenty safe. If you're good—"

Hallam grunted, breaking off. "Get the 'chute!" he ordered grimly.

EDDIE got the 'chute, strapped it on. He climbed into the rear cockpit. Hallam jerked the goggles down over his eyes, climbed into the front cockpit. He advanced the throttle; the plane rolled forward, into the wind. The take off was fairly good; the bank, off the surface of the valley, was shaky. But the ship didn't slip off on a wing. Hallam steadied her, climbed up into the sky. The clouds had drifted to the eastward. There was smoke in that direction—the signal smoke.

And there was something else, too. Less than a mile to the north, flying down the valley at about five thousand feet, were two planes!

Eddie stared at them, his heart beating rapidly. And at the same instant Seeb Hallam saw them. He banked to the southward, roared the D. H. up into the sky wide open. Jerking his head, he shouted two words at Eddie.

"Sit tight!"

Eddie Lewis smiled grimly. One of the two ships was diving down toward the smoke of the signal fires; toward the Mexicans who had the guns. But the other was winging straight on

toward the D. H. And she had altitude. Better still, she had a gun swung on a bracket in the rear cockpit!

Eddie twisted his head, watched her come in from an angle of the tail assembly. He could see, in the moonlight, the helmeted head of the rider in the rear cockpit. And the ship was gaining fast on the climbing De Haviland. Eddie smiled grimly. Tex White had got back into town. He had got help—and not Army help. Army planes would not come across the lines, and risk international complications. But there were other ships around Calexico and Mexicali.

Hallam jerked his head again. He cut the throttle, glided the plane, losing precious altitude.

“Stand up!” he shouted. “Face ‘em! Let ‘em see who you are!”

Eddie shook his head. That would mean that the pursuers might not tackle the D. H. And if Hallam could get altitude, then fly eastward into the clouds, he might lose them. The chances were he *would* lose them. Clever, Seeb Hallam was. Fighting until the finish.

The D. H. was flying with her left wing low; Hallam twisted in the front cockpit; raised his right arm. The Colt gleamed in the moonlight, its muzzle leveled at Eddie’s head.

“Up!” Hallam shouted hoarsely. “Get on your feet!”

Eddie snapped the safety belt, stood up in the prop wash. The wind tore at his khaki shirt. The other two-seater was close in. Hallam’s eyes gleamed; he turned his head to the front of the plane. Eddie Lewis drew a deep breath. He waved a hand. The man in the rear cockpit of the other ship waved back. The two planes were flying very close now. Eddie pointed toward Seeb Hallam.

Seeb Hallam looked at Eddie and grinned; then his eyes shifted momentarily toward the other plane. And in that second, Eddie jumped.

Straight toward Hallam he jumped; even with the ‘chute holding him back and the wind tearing at him, he plunged ahead, his hands shooting out with a lightning-like clutch. One hand knocked the Colt aside; the other found Hallam’s shoulder, fastened to it with a death grip, and Eddie hauled himself by main strength across the intervening space.

But the surprise was good only for a second. Hallam let go the control stick completely and

with an oath of desperation turned to fight his enemy. Eddie barely had time to grab the fingers that clutched the Colt and crush them and the butt together in an iron grasp before Hallam was at him like a wildcat, tearing, scratching, striking.

NOW the fight was uneven because Hallam was safely belted in, whereas Eddie naturally had had to loosen his safety belt before leaving his seat. Hallam, finding his gun-hand held fast, used his other hand, hitting furiously at Eddie’s head, his eyes, his mouth. He clawed with his fingers and fingernails, raking the skin from Eddie’s face in long scratches.

Against that free hand Eddie could but duck his head down and bury his face in Hallam’s shirt and against his chest. One of his hands was holding that deadly gun-muzzle away from him, trying to wrest the weapon completely away from Hallam. The other arm was fastened around Hallam’s body in a desperate clench, helping Eddie to hold himself in the jerking plane even as his right knee crooked around Hallam’s leg helped.

For by now the plane was out of control altogether. It had nosed down and was twisting and lurching toward earth in sickening fashion. At one moment the two clenched fighters were hurled forward against the instrument board, the next moment they were being dashed sideways against the rim of the cockpit. The air shrieked in Eddie’s ears, tore at his body, and every now and then he felt a sickening lightness as the force of gravity loosened him from the solid structure of the cockpit.

But in one way Eddie’s very defenselessness was a help, for it forced him to keep his head ground hard into Hallam’s chest. And with every ounce of strength within him he was struggling, butting, crushing Hallam against the instrument board, dashing him against the side framing. He heard Hallam grunt, he felt him jerk with sudden pain as he came into violent contact with something solid, and it served to invigorate Eddie to further effort.

In his first attempt to snatch Hallam’s pistol Eddie had failed; he had hoped to capture it and force Hallam at gunpoint to land. Now Eddie fought to keep Hallam from breaking loose and killing him, as undoubtedly he would do.

The thrashing and lurching of the plane, too, now brought the realization of additional danger. They had not been any too high to begin with, and the machine had been falling now for some time; just how long, Eddie himself did not know. They must have lost altitude rapidly; perhaps even now the crash was inevitable. A plane spinning as this one was doing could not be brought out of it in a second.

And then Eddie caught a glimpse of the ground. It seemed frightfully close; it was hurtling toward them at terrific speed, seeming to spin around and around like a giant top. There might not be time even now for a parachute to open.

The prospect lent Eddie sudden superhuman strength. He fairly hurled Hallam from him, smashing his face with a terrific punch as he let go. Then without waiting to see the result, without waiting for anything, Eddie scrambled out. Somehow—he never knew exactly how—he worked clear, hurled himself out and away from the plane with all the force within him.

Something shot past him by inches; then he was somersaulting down through the yellow night. His fingers gripped the ripcord of the Irving ‘chute. He did not wait to count five; he counted three, and jerked.

There was the crackling of the pilot ‘chute as it sprang free. His breath was almost gone. Then came the greater crackling of the large spread of white silk. The harness tightened about his body, the risers came up and he was drifting as one sitting in a swing—drifting down toward the valley surface. Shaking the tears from his eyes, he stared around for the D. H.

To his surprise it was still spinning fiercely. He had thought to see it already begin to ease up, to level out, as Hallam brought it under control.

But no, there was no leveling. And then Eddie’s surprised eyes caught sight of something dark working out of the cockpit, out onto the wing. For a second it hung. Then it too shot out and clear. Seeb Hallam also had jumped! Evidently something had gone wrong—the controls damaged, jammed—and Hallam had chosen the ‘chute jump rather than the risk of staying with the plane.

The valley surface was close now, striking up at Eddie. He wondered if Hallam’s ‘chute had opened in time, as the wind twisted him around in

the harness. Then he was drawing up his legs to break the force of the drop; was striking sand. He went to his knees; rolled forward. He saw the plane, still spinning, dash earthward. A crash sounded.

The wind started to drag the spread of silk; Eddie’s fingers ripped at the harness buckles. He was out of the harness before he had been dragged into the nearest clump of mesquite; held the shrouds until it had collapsed. Then he straightened, stared toward the red flames and black smoke rising from the wreckage of his ship.

Silhouetted against the flames was the figure of Seeb Hallam. He was less than a hundred yards from Eddie, and even as the pilot stared, Hallam swayed; fell heavily forward.

Eddie Lewis hesitated. The two-seater which had chased the D. H. was landing into the wind, not far distant. Eddie had no gun. Hallam had collapsed—but was it a trick?

He moved forward swiftly. Trick or no trick, he would risk it. He would give Hallam no chance to recover from the fall of the ‘chute, and perhaps hide the money the Mexicans had given him. He was within ten feet of the short man when Hallam got to his knees. There was red across his face, across his eyes. As he got to his feet, Eddie leaped at him and struck savagely with his right fist.

Hallam crumpled beneath the fury of the blow; fell heavily. He lay on his face, motionless. Eddie stared down at him, breathing heavily. When he raised his eyes the first thing he noticed was smoke from the burning D. H. mingling with the signal smoke in the sky.

TEX WHITE grinned at Eddie. Hallam, his hands and legs tied tightly, was propped up against a wheel of the Waco two-seater. Beside him, lying flat on the sand, were two Mexicans. One was the shrill voiced leader of those who had waited for the plane.

“Hallam figured he’d got me, and he did get some lead through my rib flesh. Not enough to stop me, though. Got to town just as two ships dropped down on that old landing field. They were watching the D. H. head south. Stuck some bandages around my ribs, and rode with Cy here. Jake Connely tackled the cholos. A few got away, but we got the guns.”

Eddie grinned at Jake Connely and Cy

Harris. It was Jake who spoke.

“Johnny Leeds wired us to come down with some guns, if we could get across the line. Then Tex got to us, just as we landed to look things over. The D. H. was flying over, so we came along after her. Lost her, of course. But we saw smoke in the sky—and that helped us to pick her up again.”

Eddie nodded. Hallam swore bitterly. Tex White passed the bills around.

“You keep the coin the Mex gave Hallam, Eddie. It’ll help pick up another ship. We’ll all go

down to Johnny’s place and see what he wants to do with Hallam and the breeds. We can’t take ‘em across the line. Johnny’ll know what’s best. He’s had this concession here a long time. He knows his Mexico.”

Eddie grunted. “From what I’ve seen,” he said slowly, “the guy that doesn’t know this valley doesn’t last long. It isn’t exactly”—he grinned, his eyes on Seeb Hallam—“clear skies down here.”

Tex chuckled. “Sort of smoky,” he agreed cheerfully.