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Brother Enemies

by Frank Blighton

AT a distance of ten yards from the cunningly contrived artificial copse of shrubs where Sub-Lieutenant Schneider was crouching, no one would have dreamed of the presence of a human being. Two hundred yards in the rear of the little knot of boughs, the neutral tints of the hangar roofs blended into the landscape where they were erected, with similar elusiveness. The science of protective coloration, from the ground or from the air had been so carefully worked out that, although the forty hangars were undeniably existent, no enemy aviator could have been sure of their precise whereabouts, save from information other than derived by a vagrant downward glimpse from a machine speeding over the spot.

So, at least, Sub-Lieutenant Schneider flattered himself.

How, in fact, could it well be otherwise?

Had not his colonel, after many painstaking experiments, confirmed the selection of the final colors? And was not his superior officer. Colonel Frederick Imman, in command of the base as well as of the entire squadrille of aircraft in the Meuse sector?

Sub-Lieutenant Schneider, therefore, was actuated rather more by a mechanical sense of performing his duty with that thoroughness which is so essential a part of the Teutonic character than he was actuated by the expectation of seeing any possible enemy aircraft, when, for the twentieth time that morning, he applied his eye to the lens of the powerful binocular mounted on the quadrant of the antiaircraft gun where he was stooping, and swept the sun-drenched vistas of westward space between them and the trenches.

A marvelous mechanism—that binocular; dragging distance into the foreground as relentlessly as gravitation dragged a disabled aeroplane earthward; magnifying, with magical distinctness, the details of aircraft on a clear day so that the markings, the types of construction, and, in some instances, the number of occupants were all disclosed.

But the marvel did not end with the binocular—it merely began there; and continued, with that nefarious sureness which all things must possess to be worthy of reliance in this, the hour of the Fatherland's need.

With the exception of one minute

section of the far-flung horizon to the west, there was absolutely nothing in sight. There, a score of miles from the crouching watcher, puffs of dun-colored vapor, shot through with occasional streaks of golden cream, continually appeared with a certain marked regularity; burst into bloom like a head of cauliflower, hovered intermittently and dispersed lazily—as if loath to depart.

Somewhere around and in this sector were many German battle-planes, directing the monotonous but unceasing and frightfully destructive "drumfire" of the artillery engaged in shattering the outer fortresses of Verdun.

But the binocular through which he was peering was not intended to penetrate that gruesome, turgid mass; nor was it any part of the duty of Sub-Lieutenant Schneider to discern the fate of the airmen either on scout at that point, or those engaged in driving back their opponents who were searching the German lines for the information through which alone an intelligent defense of the mighty fortress was possible.

The sub-lieutenant's duty was merely to protect the base of the aeroplanes of the Fatherland from any too inquisitive, predatory airman, who might, through skill or strategy, evade the scouts already aloft, and possibly do permanent mischief by bombing the apparently innocuous open space wherein the German hangars hovered like brooding hens, waiting the return of their errant chickens.

Then, overhead, so high that at first Schneider assured himself that a fleck of dust must have settled on the opposite end of his telescope, appeared a black dot. Almost at once, however, he knew that it was not a fleck of dust, but an aeroplane flying at a prodigious elevation. He knew it, because, had it been merely a fleck of dust, it would have revealed itself on only one of the two lenses through which he was peering; also, it would have remained stationary; whereas, this particular speck was moving—slowly, apparently, due to its great distance from the watcher—yet, nevertheless, it was moving; crossing the minute squares into which the field of vision was divided, with mathematical exactness.

Schneider removed his head from the eye-piece and scanned the spot with his naked eye. He could scarcely be sure, for several minutes, that he had not been the victim of an illusion; then, out of the heart of the sky he could faintly perceive that dot.

Instantly, he again applied his eye to the instrument.

Yes, it was true. It was an aeroplane.

Yet, the longer he peered, the more Sub-Lieutenant Schneider was perplexed. The aircraft was at such a height that it would be impossible for its occupant to discern the slightest variation in the landscape over which he was flying; certainly at that great elevation the pools of water on such a brilliant, cloudless day would turn into mirrors shooting back the shimmer of the sun in shafts of such intensity that they would all but blind the pilot; certainly, also, no road could be seen; no column of troops or convoy of supplies spied out and dispersed by well-directed showers of arrows or bombs.

Besides, the fellow, whoever he was, was alone; a peculiar—nay, almost a disquieting—circumstance; for he was not returning toward the spot, where Schneider was now eying him with growing malignancy, by any of the routes which their own aircraft used.

Again he adjusted the eye-piece to accommodate his vision to the swiftly lessening distance.

Next instant he bellowed a hoarse command.

The ground beneath and around him regurgitated men. Toward them Schneider flung barbed commands, without taking his eyes from the lenses. One of them hastily swung back a lever. There was an instant of premonitory quivering, then, smoothly,

swiftly, and silently—save for the snakelike hiss of escaping air below the officer's feet—the gun-platform rose some six feet from its place of concealment; the muzzle of the formidable weapon gently nuzzled aside the protective foliage with which it was draped, and gaped upward at an angle of some fifty degrees.

There it paused, like the throat of a bird waiting a worm from its mother. Came another command, and it shifted a trifle to the north.

Again a pregnant pause.

The officer was now methodically adjusting two large brass screws, by means of which he kept his binocular focused upon the now plainly discernible aircraft.

And, with each motion, however slight, the muzzle of the gun shifted to correspond, synchronizing faultlessly the movement of the spyglass.

Well, indeed, had Sub-Lieutenant Schneider reason to smile, contemptuously; for, with every adjustment of the two screws which he operated, the more nefariously sure became the inevitable fate of the intrepid individual who thus recklessly challenged that combination of science and resourcefulness at the command of the concealed watcher.

"Another half-mile," muttered Schneider to the eye-piece, "and he will be within range." And. again, as before, sedulously watching the approaching aviator through the twin-barrels of his telescope, he twisted the screws, while he voiced another command in an all but inaudible tone.

Even the men below him who slid the vicious, gleaming projectile into the breech of the antiaircraft gun, felt a momentary qualm of pity for the daring man aloft, riding into the jaws of a certain death.

They could see, in their mind's eye, the same as their commander could see in actuality, the twin images which that superb binocular disclosed.

One of these images projected the aeroplane right side up. precisely as it appeared to the naked eye; the other projected it as *upside down*; and the instant those two images superimposed over each other, making one composite image, that instant the latch controlling the firing-pin would be released, and the death-freighted shrapnel projectile would be launched with terrific velocity to an elevation of at least eight thousand feet, exploding directly under or a little in advance of the on-coming aviator.

Already the free hand of the sub-lieutenant was lifted to signal to fire.

When it dropped, it would be the precursor of the fall of that oncoming biplane, as surely as the shell left the gun. For the insouciant chap above was now clearly visible to even the naked eye; and the spyglass revealed, with unmistakable certainty, the hated twin circles, cue within the other, painted on the under side of each wing, proclaiming the machine to be one employed by the Allied Powers, and his fate was sealed.

Next instant the shell left the gun.

And, following the instant of its explosion, far, far aloft, the biplane came hurtling earthward in a dizzying, sickening, headlong dive, almost but not quite straight downward toward the mouth of the gun whose shell had been speeded upward to achieve this very purpose.

Again Sub-Lieutenant Schneider, swiftly twisting the screws of his glass, brought the diving aeroplane into the field of his vision.

Being thus engaged, he did not notice the sturdy, erect figure at the side of the gun platform, in field gray uniform, on whose collar shone the insignia of his rank as colonel, and on whose breast gleamed the iron cross won in another war: else discipline would have stifled the involuntary exclamation which burst from the watcher's lips:

"*Mein Gott! It is Herr Rockwood, himself!*"

At the sound of his voice the gun-crew grouped around the mechanism stiffened into rigidity, standing with averted eyes, as the biplane, now diving with an incredible speed earthward, swept down upon them.

Over the features of Colonel Frederick Imman passed an involuntary spasm of pain: next instant he was again the cold, calm, emotionless, and severe commander.

The aeroplane was within five hundred feet of them now, but, oddly enough, at the very instant it should have come crashing clown to earth, the pilot whipped one arm over the edge of the fuselage—something hurtled downward through the flawless air of the summer morning—and then, to their amazed ears came the renewed and defiant roar of the powerful motor.

Before the first sporadic sputter had grown into the thrumming volley that showed engine unimpaired and pilot uninjured, the thing he had thrown downward was eddying toward the feet of no less an individual than Colonel Imman himself; while the members of the antiaircraft gun-crew, like frightened rabbits, flung themselves into their burrows as one man, all save the commander of the base and the softly cursing officer, who was again twisting the screws frantically that controlled his gun's mechanism.

As unerringly as a pointer indicates the covey of birds for his master, so, with fairly frantic swiftness the gun again revolved in a semicircle until it pointed eastward at the fleeing aeroplane, and again the bellowed command of the sub-lieutenant brought the gun-crew back to their duty.

The aeroplane, like a fleeing vulture, was now darting in abrupt angles, this way and that, but rising constantly. Its pilot had hurdled the concealed gun emplacement like a thoroughbred taking a barrier only a second before. But, for him now, of a surety, there could be no respite. Already the second shell was in place, the breech locked, the wicked blue eyes of the sub-lieutenant were glued to the orifice of his binocular, waiting until the twin images grew yet a little smaller, ere he annihilated the reckless airman whom surely a miracle had preserved before.

Then, abruptly, at his feet came a quiet command in tones he well knew:

"Sub-Lieutenant Schneider, you will not fire again at Aviator Rockwood. You will, instead, by wireless, give him safe conduct back to his own lines."

Mechanically the subordinate saluted.

Inwardly, he told himself Colonel Imman had gone mad.

Then he flashed a swift, sidewise glance toward his superior, who was standing, with bared head, gazing after the fast disappearing aeroplane—the pilot of which was triply hated.

Hated, first, because he was their enemy.

Hated, again, because he was a volunteer aviator, from America.

Hated most of all by Schneider and his men, and more intensely than any other aviator flying for the Allied arms, because he had shot down no less than a dozen of their own airmen—this blood-glutted American who had wantonly crossed the seas to help to crush the Fatherland they were sworn to defend to the death!

"Yes, he must be quite mad!" muttered the sub-lieutenant to himself, walking away, before the crackle of the wireless key, conveying the mystifying order to all the German arms, broke out of the adjoining shrubs next to that where the antiaircraft gun was concealed.

He glanced again covertly toward his chief.

Colonel Imman, his head still bared, was bending over toward the ground. Then he stood erect again, replaced his cap, and

walked swiftly toward the rear of the group of half-invisible hangars, glancing neither to the right nor the left.

Toward a slight, new-made mound he walked, a score of yards behind the hangars; then paused and gazed down at it with brooding, misty eyes.

After a short space he raised his head and glanced around.

Aviator Rockwood, now a tiny fleck of gray-black against the flawless ambient, was winging his path back toward his own lines—this time at a much lower elevation than before.

Colonel Imman's enigmatic order to spare the aviator, whom the whole corps of flying men attached to the army group of the Crown Prince before Verdun both despised for his nationality and feared for his prowess, was not based upon any ignorance of Rockwood's antecedents or exploits.

The amazing accuracy of the German secret agent is proverbial; in this, as in all other branches of the service, the passion for detail and completeness is no less in evidence than in the other classifications of the Germany army organization.

Ten days before, within a hundred yards of the mound at which he was now standing, the commander of the Verdun aeroplane base had been hastily summoned to receive a messenger from no less a personage than the division commander on the Meuse sector, ranking next to his royal highness. The message which was given him on that occasion was of such tremendous significance that Colonel Imman immediately summoned all of the aviators whom he could possibly spare from the front that day, including several youths who had not yet received their brevet, but whose skill must now be relied upon for crucial test, if he was to comply with the imperative demands suddenly made upon his already attenuated corps of flyers.

Sixteen of these young airmen had gathered around him to receive the hurried orders which he gave to them in person; among them his own son, Flight-Lieutenant Imman, who would nominally command the squad, on the desperate and hazardous mission which the corps commander unfolded with precise, terse instructions.

The element of time was so pressing that scarcely six minutes elapsed between their assembling and the moment when they were scurrying toward their respective hangars.

Eleven machines were run out of the neutral-colored hangars an hour before dawn; six of which were amazingly swift Fokkers, whose velocity forbade more than one occupant; the remaining five were the slower type of Rumpler "dove" biplanes, with their characteristic aileron on the upper wing shaped like the tip of a pigeon's wing, for greater stability and swifter response in maneuvering, although at far less average speeds than their Fokker comrades. Each Rumpler machine carried a pilot and an observer or machine-gun operator.

Sixteen intrepid and devoted airmen flashed from the earth into the teeth of the dawn on that ever-memorable morning; flying eastward, instead of westward or northward—where the enemy aircraft were usually found.

East and south they flew, on the wings of the morning, in a slight haze which made their departure invisible to the skulking enemy aircraft from the Verdun fortress, who, as usual, were abroad at that hour.

And east and south they flew for many a weary league, until, in the hour when the August sun bleached the tenuous, dewy curtain of their concealment into nothingness, the eleven were hovering far in the rear of the German lines in Alsace and Lorraine—circling like buzzards who scent a cadaver.

The low-lying clouds which blanketed the peaks of the ranges where France and

Switzerland join, however, once gained, served to further aid the lurking airmen to make sure the ambush which they had prepared; and when seven battle-planes from the enemy lines had groped their way through the cloud-hung dawn, following the lead of three high-speed machines which acted both as scouts and pilots, ere they could demolish the munition depots far, far behind the German trenches on this remote corner of the five-hundred-mile battle line, Flight-Lieutenant Imman and his comrade aviators pounced down upon them.

The numerical superiority of the one machine which the Allied aviators faced was more than compensated for by the armored construction of their own heavier battle-planes; in fact, the battle in the air at once took on an analogy not unlike a combat at sea; in which swift but sparsely armored cruisers engage the slower-moving dreadnaughts.

There was one exception, however, to the comparison—an exception which Colonel Imman, even in his haste, had not failed to make plain to the men he was despatching to meet and drive back the raiders. That exception was the character of part of the "useful load" with which the slower Allied biplanes were carrying that morning—consisting, in part, besides the usual complement of machine-guns and ammunition in the fuselages of each machine, of numerous large bombs, upon which the major destructive power of the raiders depended.

These bombs were of a type known as "percussion contact bombs," a term signifying that they would explode upon contact with whatever object they struck when dropped. For convenience, and also to facilitate the "balance" of the aeroplanes which the Allies were using on this occasion, as well as to allow the pilot of each and its machine-gun operator the fullest latitude for fighting off the aeroplanes if attacked, these bombs were distributed at various points along the lower "bed rails" of the lowest wing of the biplanes, at regular intervals: and the method of dropping them was controlled from the fuselage by the observer, who, when over the munition supply base, or the railway station, or the town which was the objective sought, he could, by Simply jerking a cord, release each projectile in turn, so that it would drop upon its intended target.

All of which, in detail, was known to the German commander; all of which was communicated to the aviators who had been hurriedly despatched to head off and disperse, if possible, the other machines, after they had crossed the German lines in the darkness.

The furious onslaught which immediately followed, therefore, had not alone for its object the disabling of the Allied biplanes by the usual method of killing the pilot or shooting the propellor of the enemy machine to bits or disabling the engine: any part of the aeroplane offered rich possibilities, if one of the bombs they carried could also be struck.

In that case, the terrific explosion to follow would surely demolish the aircraft, if, indeed, it did not blow the pilot and his defender out of the machine in fragments.

There is a strategy of the air as well as of the sea: and this strategy, to no small degree, consists in the advantage which an opponent secures when he is above his adversary.

Hence, Flight-Lieutenant Imman and his ten machines came swarming down out of the clouds, in "fan-formation," blazing death and destruction to the Allied machines below, at their first volleys.

Three of these went incontinently down, then the others rallied, and a German machine hurtled earthward under the concentrated fire which three of the enemy aircraft focused upon it as one man; in another minute of fighting two more German planes were out of the engagement as well as a fourth

Allied machine. But the appearance, far to the west, of several other German aircraft, sent to overhaul if possible the raiders from the Alsace lines, seemed to determine the ultimate issue of the engagement in favor of the Central powers, for they were coming up fast and relentlessly.

Then occurred an extraordinary thing.

A small, swift biplane, which Flight-Lieutenant Imman divined contained the brains of the expedition, bolted out of the mist and, single-handed, engaged two of the German machines.

With uncanny maneuvers of the most reckless and daring character, its pilot manipulated his machine, darting this way and that, like a hawk attacking two robins. Imman himself was for the moment engaged in regaining his elevation, so that he could swoop down again upon another of the enemy planes in his deadly Fokker; and as he climbed he thrilled to the stupefying audacity of the leader of the raiders as with astounding skill and marvelous bravery, one after another he disposed of the two German machines. In two minutes more, however. Imman had swept down in dizzying spirals and fatally disabled the other machine, which he had singled out as his personal prey; and the count now stood with five Allied machines down and a like number of Germans accounted for.

The maneuver of dispatching his own antagonist had necessitated Imman's retiring some distance from the scene of the other contest, occurring about two miles to the south and east of his own latest victory; and as he again circled and swept up the invisible staircase of the air to regain his advantageous altitude preliminary to a further descent, the German commander saw, to his grief and chagrin, that while all the remaining machines of the Allied fleet save one solitary biplane were now in full flight—and likely to be cut off and annihilated by the reinforcements coming up from the west—that the intrepid airman in the swift biplane had again attacked and again disposed of another German aircraft—single-handed.

A blast of wind sweeping a sheet of mist down a mountain gorge blanketed the German flier's vision for a moment. When he again emerged into the uncertain light of the forenoon, to his renewed rage and horror, another German plane was failing, under the deadly, unerring gunfire of the solitary Allied aviator.

Imman judged that he must now be at least fifteen hundred feet above this satanically skillful aviator, who alone had shot down four of the eleven aeroplanes which had expected to annihilate him and his companions scarcely twenty minutes before.

So far as the prime object of the German ambush was concerned, that had been attained; the precious munition-supply depots would not be bombed this morning—not by any of the ten raiders in this group at least.

But owing to the unsuspected prowess of this lone aviator, there would be a sad story to tell to his father when he returned to the base behind Verdun; and with a determination as fiendish as the skill which the other had displayed, the German commander began his headlong spiral down upon the unprotected, devoted pilot of the biplane, resolved to end his career then and there.

Again, however, fate or luck seemed to be with the other airman. The dense, swirling fog-bank enfolded him as tenderly as a mother wraps her babe in a downy quilt just at the instant that Imman was about to open fire.

Instantly the German commander cut off his engine and volplaned down, as silently as the mist-breath itself, in the direction in which his intended victim had disappeared.

"I'll follow him to hell!" grated Imman, as, with a backward flip of his ear-protectors, he strained forward in the fuselage to catch the sound of the other's motor, beneath and to the southeast of him when last

seen.

A grim smile lighted up his own visage as he discerned it, exactly where he believed it would be. He again threw in his motor, and dived headlong down through the mist, firing like a demon in the direction of his invisible enemy.

Again he cut out his engine and listened.

This time he heard no sound.

Again he volplaned downward into space, this time plunging out of the cloud-bank and emerging into the radiant forenoon at the lower level.

Not a hundred yards away was the Allied aeroplane, coming toward him with a venom fully comparable to his own.

And simultaneously they opened fire together.

Next instant, also simultaneously, they whirled downward.

Imman was unwounded, but his engine, after a convulsive shudder, had stopped dead. There was nothing whatever to do save point her nose toward the ground and make a landing, if possible, in the midst of the forbidding mountainous country over which he found himself.

It was some small satisfaction to know, even though he himself was in difficulties, that his antagonist was similarly situated, for he likewise was making a forced landing.

Twenty seconds later they came to earth in the midst of a small glade entirely surrounded by high peaks and enclosed by trees, whose majesty of size suggested that they had been growing since the beginning of time.

It was, strangely enough, the only possible landing-place for either machine without smashing to bits. And into the solitude of this tree-girt, mountain-bound enclosure they dropped, almost simultaneously, and, even more oddly, within two hundred feet of each other.

Imman saw, however, that he had made the better landing of the two, and as he leaped from his machine he whipped his Luger service pistol from his belt and ran forward toward the other's.

The menace in the frowning muzzle brought no responsive token of surrender, however. The pilot of the Allied biplane merely laughed pleasantly, showing a remarkable set of teeth in a mischievous smile, the smile of a prankish schoolboy who knows he has the best of things.

"Put up that plaything, Lieutenant Imman," said he jovially. "We've drifted over the frontier into Switzerland. You can see the mountains back there not fifty feet away. My word, old man, what a busy morning!"

Without lowering his pistol lest the statement should be merely a ruse to divert his attention, Imman complied. It was true. He replaced the weapon, and as the other descended from the fuselage he came forward with his hand outstretched.

"We're brother airmen for a little while, I take it." said the German in faultless English. "May 1 have the honor of inquiring your name?"

"Kane Rockwood, brevet *sous*-lieutenant, attached to the French division usually at Verdun. Great guns, man, what a surprise you gave me. I didn't dream of finding you down here! Why, only day before yesterday we exchanged visiting-cards on the Verdun front!"

"Yes," said Imman. "I might have known it was you. You shot down Schemmerhorn and Laub the day we engaged, didn't you?"

"The fortune of war, lieutenant," quietly admitted Rockwood. "I say, old man, that was great work you did, coming down behind me and shooting off my propeller when we engaged. What did I do to you?"

"Come over and see." returned his late antagonist. "I haven't an idea yet. My engine

went dead on me, that's all."

As amicably as if both were members of the same club they inspected the Fokker. One of Rockwood's bullets had severed the cable of wires leading from the magneto to the engine. Imman laughed, opened a kit in his fuselage, and immediately began repairs, with Rockwood assisting him.

"And now." said the German when this had been completed, "let's see what you must do to get out of Switzerland."

They walked to the biplane, where Rockwood procured a wrench from his tool-box and stripped the wrecked propeller-stump from the engine-shaft. Then he produced a duplicate from beneath the lower wing, where it was carefully bolted to the reenforcement of the lower bed-rail.

"A leaf out of the German treatise on efficiency," said Rockwood with a genial smile, as Imman himself shoved the propeller into place, adjusting the holes to the shaft, while the young American slipped the seven huge bolts into place, and secured them with a mechanical exactness which brought a gleam of silent admiration into the eyes of his late opponent.

"Pardon me, Lieutenant Rockwood," said Imman, stiffening suddenly. "unless we both wish to be interned in Switzerland for the balance of the war, it is time we left here. There is a patrol about five miles away coming down the mountain-trail yonder."

"Yes," said Rockwood quietly. "And once over the frontier—"

"We are enemies as before," said Imman more stiffly than formerly.

"Enemies to be sure," laughed Rockwood; "only, *mon ami*, I am at rather a disadvantage, since I have run entirely out of ammunition."

"But I have not," countered Imman. "You are the enemy of my Fatherland; you are an American who has come over to fight us, and once across the frontier—"

"But," interposed the other, "how are you going to get out of Switzerland, Lieutenant Imman?"

The German gave a surprised gesture.

"In my machine, of course, the same as you will. Come, we must make haste."

"But you're almost entirely out of gas. Go over and look at your gauge," laughed the American. "We're both in the hole, old man. I've got practically no ammunition left—shot it all away, you saw me. You've got practically no gas. I can get away; that is. I can get over the Swiss frontier. You can't. Now listen. I know how you feel. I don't blame you. Some day somebody—who knows?—maybe it will be you—but some day somebody will bring me down, just as surely as somebody will bring you down some day. See, here's a way out. Across that boundary we're enemies. All right. Here we're brother airmen, eh? Both in difficulties. Now, I'll swap you two gallons of gas for all the cartridges you have left. Your cartridges won't work in my gun. The reason is that your Fokker Shoots through the propeller-shaft; my weapon is a Lewis automatic, operated from the fuselage. You fellows drumfire us by simply spiraling down on us. We've got to admit you have a clever device, and a deadly one. You think you're fighting a just cause. So do I, and as gentlemen, if we both get safely out of this, we can meet—well, somewhere else some day, eh?"

"Sir," replied Imman punctiliously, "you are a gentleman of discernment and a brother airman—here. Elsewhere you are my enemy. I accept, sir; but I warn you that I shall use that gas to fly to Strassburg, where I shall obtain fresh fuel and munitions. And I can be in Strassburg from where we are now in half an hour."

Rockwood grinned.

"And while you tank up in Strassburg I shall be hitting the high lanes for the Allied lines. Come on; I have a small collapsible

bucket. While you get your gas from my tank, I'll get my cartridges from your fuselage."

Colonel Frederick Imman, standing by the grave of his only son, seemed again to hear his beloved boy's accents as he recounted the story after his safe flight back to the Verdun base.

So vivid was the old veteran's reverie that he could scarcely believe that his son was not yet actually speaking to him. So many things were so unreal since this grim and ghastly struggle had commenced that even the fresh mound of earth at his feet appeared at times a fantasy.

Yet his beloved son lay there, despite the fact that he was the most expert airman in the German army. Twenty-seven enemy aeroplanes had gone down before the hellish blast of his machine-gun, blazing amazingly certain destruction through the hollow propeller-shaft. Flight-Lieutenant Imman had only to bestride his meteorlike machine, whose speed in still air was one hundred and twenty miles per hour, climb high, and spiral down upon his objective.

Nevertheless, three days after his return from Alsace he had been shot down on the north bank of the Meuse—by Rockwood.

Hate hung fire, however, that sun-drenched August morning, although rage and grief inconsolable had torn at the veteran's heart when he woke at dawn. In his hand was the thing which the reckless Rockwood had launched from his fuselage when, after tricking Sub-Lieutenant Schneider into the belief that he had been fatally injured, the intrepid American drove headlong down at the very mouth of the antiaircraft gun.

It was the same object at glimpse of which the others of the pun-crew had hurled themselves into their bomb-proofs—the same object which had fallen at Colonel Imman's feet.

It was a wreath of laurel leaves, spotted with immortelles.

Attached to it was a card reading:

In reverent memory of my brother airman. Lieutenant Imman. from

KANE ROCKWOOD.

The veteran of two wars laid the wreath on the fresh-made mound, replaced his cap, and stepped back through the lanes of hangars which seemed to be swallowed up by the ground a few rods farther on.

He passed the covert where, in a cunningly contrived artificial copse of shrubs, his subordinate. Sub-Lieutenant Schneider, with true Teutonic thoroughness, was applying his eye to the lens of the powerful binocular mounted on the quadrant of the antiaircraft gun over which he was stooping.

A marvelous mechanism, that binocular, dragging distance into the foreground as relentlessly as gravitation dragged a disabled aeroplane earthward.

But something more marvelous blotted out the sight of the concealed weapon and its methodical watcher; something that, somehow, eased for a moment the frightful sense of desolation that had engulfed the colonel unchallenged since his son's demise until this flawless morning.