

Jerry came thundering down

Picture Pilots

College Rivalry is the Impetus to Swift and Bitter Settlement in Flame-torn Skies!

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

Author of "Silent Vickers," "Satan C.O.," etc.

SLUMPED back in the seat, the stabilizer of his S.E.5 set for level flight, Jerry Braddock, two-fisted Hun shooter-downer of the 10th Pursuits, stuck his free hand into the breast pocket of his Sidcot suit and pulled out a two-by-four snapshot of a girl.

She was a pretty little thing. Fluffy hair, wide, starry eyes, a pert little nose, and a little bow mouth that was smiling out at Jerry. Across one corner was written in ink, "With all my love, Betty."

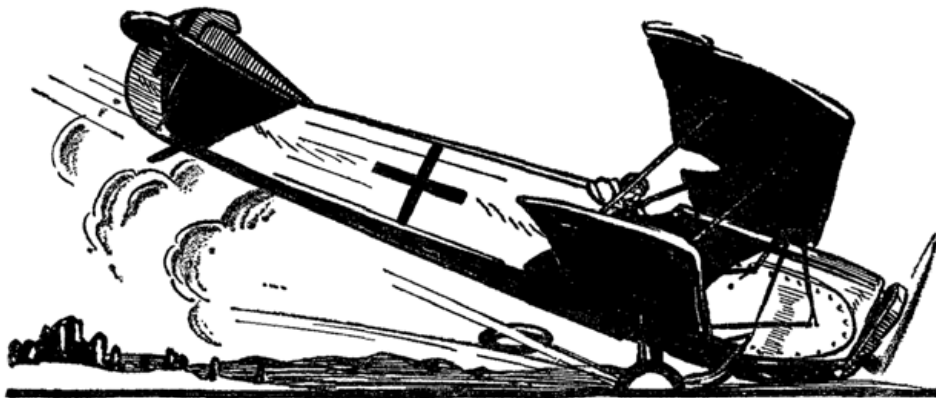
Just two hours before, Jerry had received it, along with a letter. He hadn't even begun to drink in the picture when Wing had been stupid enough to phone through that a lone Fokker was bothering Yank balloons over Contreau way. As luck would have it, Major Carter had sent him and Buzz Daniels out to stop the row. Well, they hadn't found any Fokker, and were now drifting back to the home. And what better way was there to take up the time than to feast his eyes on Betty's

picture?

And feast his eyes he did. So much so, in fact, that he was totally oblivious to the red-and-white striped Fokker that suddenly came streaking out of a cloud bank, until Buzz let go a warning burst. The yammer of the Vickers jerked him roughly back to the war. He twisted in the seat, glanced up, and let out a bellow of alarm.

It seemed as though he could almost reach out and touch the spinning Fokker's prop blade. As a matter of fact, at that very instant twin streams of jetting flame spewed out from between the whirling blades, and hissing messengers of death whipped past Jerry's head, so close they practically singed the leather of his helmet.

STICK over, right rudder on hard, in one combined berserk motion he flipped the S.E. up on wing, pivoted around and down into a vicious power spin. Three full turns later he hauled it out



The wheel bucked under the sliding ship

and came up in a wing-screaming zoom. Through eyes blazing with anger, he saw that the Fokker pilot had quit him cold and was now slicing around toward Buzz Daniels' plane.

"Thought you got me, eh? Well, here's—"

Jerry finished with a yelp of alarm. Buzz had flashed around into attack position, and was waiting for the Fokker to get within range. The German did, in almost nothing flat, but no smoking bursts ripped out from Daniels' guns. It wasn't necessary for Jerry to take a second look. Instinct told him that Lady Luck had played Buzz a dirty trick. Just when he needed them, Daniels' guns had up and jammed on him.

Slightly out of range, but closing in fast, Jerry let drive a long burst in the direction of the charging German. Perhaps a stray bullet struck his plane, or perhaps the very sound of Jerry's guns took his mind off his immediate objective. At any rate, the Fokker pilot whirled up and around in a vicious climbing turn, sparing Buzz Daniels' life for the moment.

The trouble was that the German tried the vertical climbing turn maneuver. Had he whipped into a roll or a power spin, he might have stood a chance. But against Jerry's zooming S.E., a vertical climbing turn from scratch was just plain suicide—it was asking for a shower of Vickers slugs.

And that's just what Jerry gave him as he went thundering up. True, the German skidded outward, in a flash maneuver, so that none of Jerry's slugs hit vital parts of his plane. But, to save himself for a second or two, the German was forced to drop right smack into an even worse trap. His side-skid, nose up maneuver, ended in a stall. Like a bird batted in full flight, the Fokker fell over lazily and started down, its pilot steepening the dive in a desperate effort to regain flying speed.

The German might just as well have tried to loop a Zep. A tap on the rudder, a touch of the stick, and Jerry was sitting neat as you please on the German's tail. That was enough. In fact, it was too much for the Fokker pilot. With a grunt of disgust Jerry saw him fling both hands over his head in a wild gesture of complete surrender.

"Just like that, eh?" he growled aloud. Then with a shrug, "Ah, what the devil? What's the glory in dying when you know you're caught cold?"

Swinging down close to the other plane, Jerry signaled the direction of the 10th's field, and nodded to the German to lead the way. Then

making sure that Buzz Daniels was tagging along, he trailed the German back to the 10th's field, and herded him down to a landing.

A couple of minutes later he was confronting his prisoner. The German was not much older than himself, good-looking, and apparently much better mannered than most of the German pilots whom Jerry had met. He bowed and smiled as Jerry stared at him.

"Congratulations, *Herr Leutnant*," he said.

"Speak English, eh?" Jerry said.

"Oh, yes," was the instant reply. "I was in my third year at Harvard when the war called me home."

"That so?" Jerry grinned. "I was in my second at Yale when I quit for the war. Meet Buzz Daniels, a Cornell man, Lieutenant er—?"

"Von Muller," the German smiled, and shook Buzz' hand. Then, with a sad smile, "*Ach*, it took a Yale man to force me down, anyway."

"Just as it should be," Jerry chuckled. "Come on over to the mess and have a drink. You're our guest, you know, until you're sent off to a prison camp."

Von Muller frowned slightly, and looked dubious. Jerry caught on instantly, snorted.

"Hell, you can stop when you want to. I'm not after information. What does a Harvard man know that I don't? Come on. Maybe we have some mutual friends back at New Haven."

"Sure!" Buzz chimed in. "I once met some Harvard men myself—at a Vassar dance!"

WITH a polite bow, von Muller went with them over to the mess and accepted the drink they gave him. He sipped it in silence a moment, then smiled at Jerry.

"Your pardon, *Herr Leutnant*," he said, "but for poor marksmanship on my part you would now be dead. You were as a man asleep when I dived down on you. You can thank your friend, here, for shooting that warning burst. You were asleep perhaps, *hein*?"

Jerry went red to the ears. Buzz hooted gleefully, and spoke before Jerry could say a word.

"Sleep, hell, von Muller!" he cried. "He was in a love-fog! Sure! He got a letter from his sweetie today, and her picture, too. I could see the yap gawking at it even from where I was!"

The German sighed and shook his head.

"*Himmel*, it is best to forget the beautiful ladies

when we are up in the air," he said solemnly. "They take up too many of our thoughts, It is dangerous, *ja!* But, she is very pretty, *hein?*"

Jerry grinned like a schoolboy, pulled out Betty's picture.

"What do you think?" he grunted.

Von Muller took the picture, and stared at it long and silently. When he raised his head there was a very strange look in his eyes.

"She is beautiful!" he breathed. "I have always thought so—from a distance."

Jerry sat up straight.

"Huh?" he echoed challengingly. "What do you mean, from a distance?"

"Your pardon, *Herr Leutnant!* It is not what you think. I mean that I once saw her at a Harvard-Yale dance. *Ja*, it was in the fall of 1915. I am positive, yes! One could never forget such a lovely face."

Jerry gulped.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he gasped. "I remember that dance. I was with Betty! You probably saw me, too."

"Perhaps," the German smiled. "But it was the young lady's face I have always remembered.

Buzz Daniels almost fell off his chair laughing, and bellowed for another round of drinks. They were the only ones in the mess lounge, the rest of the squadron, and Major Carter having obviously taken off on the regular noonday patrol.

A moment later, however, a squadron orderly came in and saluted Jerry.

"Wing is on the wire, sir," he said. "The major is out on patrol, so will you take it, sir?"

Jerry nodded, stood up.

"Sure," he said. Then to Buzz and von Muller, "Be right back. Want to check some more on the Yale-Harvard dance. Boy, wait'll I write my next letter to Betty! Will she get a thrill!"

Dashing outside, Jerry raced over to the squadron office and grabbed up the phone.

"Major Carter's on patrol, sir," he said. "Lieutenant Braddock speaking."

"This is Colonel Steffon, Braddock," came the crisp voice over the wire. "I received an S.O.S. from balloons a couple of hours ago, and I was wondering—"

"All taken care of, Colonel," Jerry broke in. "It was a Fokker, right enough. Lieutenant Daniels and I took care of him. He won't bother us anymore. We forced—"

THE line went dead at that moment. Jerry hung up, waited a few moments for the colonel to call him back. However, it was evident that the Wing C.O. had learned all he wanted to learn, and had let it go at that. That suited Jerry, too.

Shoving up from the major's desk, he started toward the door, when suddenly a shot rang out. Immediately following it, there was a roar of rage that Jerry knew instantly had come from Buzz Daniels' lips.

In a flash he was outside, pounding dirt over to the mess lounge. Slamming through, he skidded to a halt. Buzz was picking himself up off the floor. One eye was fast turning a beautiful black-and-blue shade. Von Muller was nowhere to be seen.

"The louse slugged me, grabbed my gun before I could cover him!" Daniels shouted. "Bullet only missed me by a hair!"

Jerry hardly heard him. He looked at the table where they had been sitting, then whirled around on one heel as the mighty roar of an S.E.'s engine blasted the air outside. He virtually took the door off its hinges as he went through. An S.E. was streaking out across the field at the far end of the tarmac. Mechanics were piling out of all three hangars, shouting questions at each other.

There was no need for Jerry to shout any questions. One look at the S.E. sweeping up into the air was all that he needed. Von Muller was on his way back home.

"You dirty, lowdown bum!"

Jerry shouted the words, and practically leaped into the pit of the nearest ship. It wasn't his own. It was Daniels'. That didn't worry him, however.

Snapping the switch up and ramming the throttle half-open, he spun the booster magnet furiously. The engine caught on the first rev, roared up in full-throated song. A couple of mechanics dodged out of the way as Jerry rocked the S.E. over the chocks and went whirling across the field.

Pulling clear the first instant he could, he banked around toward the east. Half a mile ahead of him were the elevators of von Muller's stolen plane. Eyes agate, lips drawn back in a savage snarl, Jerry punched his free fist against the already wide-open throttle and cursed his plane on to faster speed.

It was really engine difference in the two planes. But it could be taken as though Lady Luck had decided to smile upon the angry eagle. At any rate, as von Muller reached the German side of the lines,

Jerry was right on top of him, slamming in with both guns blazing.

Through slitted eyes, Jerry saw the German twist around in the seat and glance back. Breathing a wild prayer that von Muller would swing around and give battle, Jerry kept both thumbs jabbed against the trigger trips. But von Muller wasn't having anymore of Jerry's shooting for that day. Instead of banking around, the German dipped his nose and went racing for a small field some distance behind the German reserve lines.

"The devil you do!" Jerry bellowed, and banged his throttle again.

Too late, though; the German had pulled the unexpected. Like a flash of light, von Muller streaked down, leveled off and tried to settle down quickly. He tried it too quickly, though. One of his wingtips raked a small mound of dirt. Like a top, the S.E. spun on one wheel of the undercarriage.

Then the wheel buckled and the whole ship went sliding across the field.

THUNDERING down, Jerry saw von Muller scramble out and go racing over toward the shelter of some bordering woods. Another few seconds and the German would be away and gone. For a second, Jerry was tempted to fire his guns. But with a curse he checked the desire, and tilted his wings instead and sliced downward.

Von Muller, glancing back over his shoulder, saw the plane slicing down his way. In a desperate effort he leaped to one side, but he was a split second too late. Jerry's left lower wing tip caught him in the small of his back. The blow lifted von Muller clean off his feet, spun him over twice and knocked him flat

Yanking up his wings, Jerry caught his throttle, cut around in a dime turn, and dropped down to a perfect windbreak landing. A rifle cracked as he leaped out and tore over to the prostrate von Muller. But he didn't even slacken his stride. Fifteen seconds later he was back at his own ship again, and vaulting into the pit. A shower of infantry rifle bullets followed him off the ground. At five hundred feet he met Buzz Daniels slamming down in a power dive. Signaling an "okay," he lead the way back home.

Buzz rushed over to him as soon as they had landed.

"What the devil, Jerry? Did you land to see if you'd killed him?"

"Hell I did!" Jerry snorted. "I can get *him* tomorrow. But it would take a month before I'd get another picture of Betty. The louse! He'd taken her picture along with him, the dirty crook! But I should have known better than to let him get his fingers on it. Sure! Didn't he say he was a Harvard man?"