Rob Wagner's Script
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MY PAL, Tommy Bothwick, and I somehow got by the various examinations for the Royal Flying Corps and landed at Jessie Ketchum, the place where we were equipped with "army issue." We hadn't any more than climbed into our cadet outfits when the first of our glorious illusions collapsed with a bang! There wasn't the faintest resemblance between us and the shining heroes of the English propaganda booklet, "Knights of the Air, or How To Shoot Down Huns . . . in Two Parts." That showed pictures of dashing young officers in snappy uniforms and highly polished boots beside speedy looking planes or surrounded by pretty nurses.

Not that we cadets minded the "monkey suits"—they weren't especially uncomfortable—but the "boots," as the English called those big, heavy, ungainly clodhoppers, were next to criminal persecution. They weighed—well, never mind what they weighed, you wouldn't believe me anyway—but, suffice it to say, mine were at least four sizes too wide, and my feet sorta squashed around, with an occasional bumping at different sides. I always had had a yen for uniforms, but my boot complex actually bordered on a fetish.

Still, there was always July 15 to look forward to, the approximate day I would blossom out as Second Lieftenant Brown, pilot, in a new officer's tunic and hand-fitted boots.

July of that year finally arrived, and with it nearer came our "pips" and wings. Tommy and I had already visited "Follettes, Tailors," so our tunics, British warms, and breeks were but graduation day away. I felt I had a lucky break on the boots, for during the course I had become acquainted with a Captain LeBlanc, a Belgian who had been sent over as an instructor of navigation. And one evening while I was visiting at his quarters, my eyes lighted on a beautiful pair of handmade cordovan dress

boots, worth thirty-five dollars at any war-time bargain. I picked them up and fondled them and felt the quality of the leather and wiped an imaginary spot off one toe with my sleeve. Captain LeBlanc noticed my admiration and remarked,

"What size do you wear? I don't wear these often because they're a little tight for me."

"Ten A," I exclaimed, as I tried on the first one, "do you want to sell them?"

They were a superb fit, could have been made for me, and the captain offered them for twenty dollars. I would have paid for them on the spot and taken them to my bunk, and slept with them probably, except that I had only ten dollars. But I prevailed on the good captain to accept the ten and to hold the boots for me until I should receive my officer equipment allowance, and was I happy!

Four-thirty A. M. — early morning flying. Tommy and I had just finished our hot chocolate and crackers and were putting on our awkward but valuable "crash helmets," when the sergeant major came in with instructions for me to wait until five-thirty for my flight. I was burnt up a little, to say the least, for of all the ungodly hours for a fellow to get up and then be told to wait, that's the worst. But as I was up, I might just as well stick around until my turn.

"See you later, fellow!" Tommy called as he made off toward the line where several Jennies were warming up.

I wandered over to the canteen, thinking I would get caught up on some letter-writing, but the place was closed, so I sat down on a bench to smoke a "Players" and watch the flying. Several ships were already in the air, three more were taking off, and I tried to guess which was my pal.

For perhaps twenty minutes I casually watched the various flyers, until my attention was attracted to a particular ship which was diving preparatory to doing some stunt. A roll, or a loop, I thought, as I waited expectantly. He was pulling up now—when the plane, to my horror, became a broken wreck in the air! The wings buckled up suddenly . . . the whole mass of wreckage seemed to pause a

It was Tommy. The war ceased be-

ing fun from then on. Oh, there had been other, many other accidents, but I had only heard about most of them . . . I didn't *see* them. In Tommy's case, the center section cross-bracing wires had wrapped around his head and severed it from the body. They gave him a military funeral, but what the hell, all the killed cadets got that.

This was the third Jennie within two weeks that had folded its wings, and the authorities were questioning the structural ruggedness of the planes. G. H. issued an order grounding all pilots twenty-four hours.

The Intelligence Service had been on the job, however, and they knew that someone was tampering with the ships; had, in several cases, taken the bolts which attached the lower wings to the fuselage and filed them almost through. These cuts were then filled with lead, painted over, and the bolts replaced. They were not cut so deeply that ordinary flying would break them, but just try a dive. . . .

A court-martial was called that afternoon, and we were tense with excitement as we tried to break through the secrecy and learn who was responsible. I. S. had a pretty good suspicion of one air mechanic for a starter, but they had figured a trap which was definitely to brand the guilty man.

Under the guise of a military order for Ack Emmas, they had assigned the suspect to ride in a plane as observer to the regular pilot during a sham aerial dog-fight. And, of course, the plane to which he was assigned was one of those which had been "prepared"—"prepared" just as Tommy's had been and for the same kind of ride.

The suspect was on the spot, but he made one feeble effort to get off. "Air-sickness," he pleaded, of a violent and exhausting nature. He was stuck with his story, for Intelligence Service had expected some such excuse and presented evidence of many previous flights the Ack Emma had made without distressing effects.

After a trifle of third-degreeing, he confessed and gave the name of his superior and accomplice. Captain LeBlanc was the man.

All this we learned when the trial was over, and we gained some understanding of the detailed German preparation for war when it came out that Captain LeBlanc had joined the Belgian Army a year before the war be-

gan, so that he might have a trusted position from which to direct his sabotage.

Although the captain's uniform had been stripped of buttons and insignia, he made a good appearance before the firing squad, refusing the proffered blindfold. At his side the grave was already dug and filled with quicklime.

A queer thought came to me . . . this "innocence" or "guilt" was just a matter of opinion or belief. To the Germans this man was a highly respected hero giving his life for the fatherland; to us he became a rat of the lowest order. In the enemy's country the captain's widow and proxy would receive the *pour le mérite* pinned to her breast by a long green ribbon; we would present him a leaden medal in eleven sections pinned to his breast by dripping red ribbons.

Then all emotions ceased, and I seemed entirely detached from the scene. I felt no hate, no horror as the major barked his sharp commands. The volley—and the captain crumpled slowly.

Two men moved forward and lifted the body at the shoulders and feet to drop it into the grave. Now realization came to me suddenly, and with it a protesting anguish, for the sun shone down and reflected from my equity in the captain's highly polished cordovan boots.