

# L. RON HUBBARD



On  
**Blazing  
Wings**

**GALAXY**  
P R E S E N T S

## Preface

THIS is the story of David Duane, the man who learned his destiny, and, learning it, found his death. By that scattered and embattled legion, the pilots who practice their skill in war for the victory of the highest bidder, David Duane is remembered, a fact which, in itself, is tribute.

Ten years ago this winter, David Duane resigned his new commission in the US Air Service to the sorrow of the Rif and the glory of Spain. And then, from that time onward, it was heard from this nation and that, that David Duane had been awarded this medal and that for heroic service—medals which he never wore.

To his friends David Duane was an enigma and a paradox. On earth he was silent and still, his sensitive, even delicate face seeming to hide a secret shame. Some said it was for his battle lust, which he regretted as a drunkard regrets and deploras drink.

By his superiors he was ever regarded with some slight awe, as though he had come down among men by accident; for he knew more tactics than had been invented and spoke more languages than he ever would have need of. But on those rare occasions when he broke through his stillness on earth, it was to talk of music and literature and especially art, bewitching even the most academic of his listeners. Through all his

speech ran a thin, taut line of cynicism, as though in mocking the world he mocked himself.

No one ever counted his air victories and David Duane never said, seeming to hold their number as evidence of his own guilt. But it is certain that he broke the lances and heads of more than half a hundred sky warriors before his own, in turn, was broken.

There is a photograph of him upon the wall of a café situated on the Seine's Left Bank, a place frequented by men of the air. It shows him in mufti, a thin and graceful figure whose half-smiling, sardonic mouth is in contrast to his wondering, dreaming eyes.

There is an inscription written there in a careless hand, a note jotted down so that men who have been flying afar may know without asking. It reads:

DAVID DUANE

Born USA Sept. 10, 1908

Killed in service of Finland, February 20, 1940

Grave unknown. . . .

# On Blazing Wings

IN the black crystal of a Lapland night, men spoke in whispers while they awaited the coming of dawn and battle. Squadron Three of the Second Regiment of the *Ilmarvoimat*, *Lentorykmentti*, complained like sleepy eagles upon the line, their Mercury VIIs clanking and wheezing, dying out and revving up as though suddenly emerging from a nap into instant awareness of their responsibilities that day.

It was becoming barely possible at this hour of 9:00 AM to make out the Fokker D.XXI's which spread their wings close against the breast of earth, shadows against the weirdly beautiful luminescence of the snow.

Overhead the brilliance of the northern lights faded slowly before the coming of a briefly interested sun. In the north, the Wind Mother had already stilled her charges. Day was being ushered in—the most important day in the life of David Duane.

The pilots huddled about an oil fire in an odorous *choom*, pretending to find heat in it, but quite able to see one another's breath, and all continually flexing their ungloved hands to keep the frost from creeping in. By the smoky light of the oil lantern, hanging from a wooden hook on a pole which reached across the upper half of the skin tent, these men looked like Arctic bears with human masks; their *militzkas*

were huge and shaggy, and bulging because of the flying suits underneath; their legs, encased in stumplike *pimmies*, enhanced the impression. They were not dressed in accordance with Finn regulations, for each had his own idea on how to keep warm. Besides, could they not allow themselves a liberty in many things, considering their post here?

The Russians were less than thirty kilometers to the east, and the Russians were persistent in advancing to suicide upon the daggers and into the bullets of the stubbornly resisting handful of Finns. And supporting these valiant troops in white was Squadron Three.

If gas could be gotten, if bullets and bombs and engine parts came up, then Squadron Three could continue to carry on. But gas, so far north, was dear, and bullets and bombs were few. For not much weight can be carried by air transport, especially when nearly all available planes were battling bitterly in the south with an enemy of tremendous superiority in the air as well as on the ground; and on those days when planes could be had, then the weather was too bad and the transport pilots must brave the danger of missing this hastily organized port and flying far out into the Arctic Sea to be lost in the eerie flare of the northern lights.

It was a suicide post, just as it was a suicide war. Not one man in this group really expected to come out alive. Shot down behind Russian lines, a pilot became prey to furious troops—if he did not freeze.

“I do not think it is so,” said a young Finn lieutenant. “I think it is something which gets into a man’s head—a premonition which takes the form of a vision.”

“Saj saw no vision,” replied David Duane’s right wingman. “What he saw was a mirage—like the city Galahad saw when he parted from Sir Percivale and mounted up into the sky.”

“I think it was a vision,” said the lieutenant. “Three men have seen it now, and those three are gone. Saj saw it, and Saj is gone. Why haven’t the rest of us seen it? Why haven’t I seen it—I who led his flight?”

“Perhaps,” said David, “you are to be with us yet awhile, our machine-gun sweetheart.”

“And perhaps not,” said the lieutenant with a shrug. “But I still say—”

“It’s a mirage,” said the right wingman. “Though I can’t claim any such travels as our pet wolf David, still I have seen a thing or two. And once, in the Arctic, I saw a mirage of a town. It *must* have been a mirage, because everyone else saw it as well.”

“You defeat yourself,” said the lieutenant. “The rest of us do not see this mirage, and those who *have* seen it have not been with us more than a week or two thereafter. I’m not superstitious, but if I see it, I’m quite sure I shall make a will and pass out from sheer fright.”

“No doubt,” said David ironically. “And take half a dozen of the Red gentlemen along with you to ply you with bromides. There are too many things about this north which are strange to me for me to doubt anything.”

“Then don’t doubt that it’s just a mirage,” said the right wingman. “All this nonsense—”

“The Lapps believe in such a city,” said a captain. “Or at least they believe in such a land beyond this. Their word

for God is also their word for sky—*Jumala*—and they keep speaking of a heaven on top of the hills—*hiisi*. And their *Puhjola* isn't unlike the Norse *Valhalla*. Only those killed in battle can go to *Puhjola*, and our three brothers were very certainly warriors. If they saw *Puhjola*—”

“It's just a mirage,” said the right wingman. “Why, there's such a mirage in Alaska. In the winter it appears to be a city built on the clouds, perfect in every detail. Why, it's so real that a pilot in the United States Army flew right into it trying to find out what town it was. And you'll all admit that this country is crazy with mirages. Why, only yesterday I almost pulled my ship apart trying to get away from a flight of our Red friends, only to look back and discover that they hadn't existed, except as reflections on the air. Maybe what I saw was just a picture projected from a real Red flight, perhaps far to the south.”

“Saj didn't make any ordinary town of it,” said the captain. “He described to me a city which couldn't possibly exist in this day. Golden minarets and domes, parks and wide streets—”

The dull cough and sigh of a rocket shell, their takeoff signal, brought them lumbering from the *choom*. The air was so clear and sharp that their senses were quickened instantly into excitement. The rim of a pale sun was barely showing on the southern horizon, spreading a blue twilight over the limitless table of snow.

David had a feeling of unreality. His *pimmies* crunched on the snow crust—as hard and brittle as rock salt; his goggles

were like panes of ice. He mounted to his catwalk and thrust back the cockpit screen, feeling the Fokker rock sturdily under his weight.

“I fixed your motor cannon,” said an ordnance officer on the other side of the ship. “I hope it won’t jam today.”

“Thanks,” said David, and the puff of breath which came out with the word was so instantly frozen that it tinkle-tinkled as it dropped on the metal cowl.

David slid into the pit and adjusted the seat a trifle. The ordnance officer dropped the screen. David ran an eye over his instrument panel. The warm air from the engine was welcome upon his face and he went through contortions to remove his *pimmies* and *militzka*, for to sweat in here meant to freeze a little later outside.

As leader of the third flight, he waited for the first to get away. And then, pacing the second, with a wave to his two wingmen, he cracked the throttle. The ship jolted as the skis broke loose and then sped forward with a triumphant snarl.

David Duane had begun the most important day of his life.

Feodor Rossov, major commanding *Otriad* 178, Heavy Bombing Group, Red Air Force, thundered with his squadron into the eye of the sun. The great TB-3 (ANT-6) monoplanes looked gaunt and starved, despite the fact that each of the three ships in the three flights had its belly crammed with its long ton of bombs. Nine tons of demolition and incendiary, bound southwest, destined for the stubborn and unyielding city of Sampetso.



The bright red stars upon the wings and fuselages lent the only color to the otherwise gray warplanes.

The four 680 hp M-17s in each bomber drummed insolently against the even expanses of blue-white earth. Skis withdrawn into their bellies and low wings swiftly knifing the bitter air, they seemed to be nine vengeful demon-birds born out of the unknown beyond the Arctic Sea and come to put an end to Man.

Feodor Rossov flew without attention to panel or ship. The compasses did not work here where the source of compass direction had almost been reached, and the sun itself was his only guide. His eyes, however, were not for the sun, but the sky about it.

Three times now Rossov's *Otriad* had been forced to lay its eggs in the barren snow and turn about to lumber homeward, once again unsuccessful in its attempt to remove that unreasonable Sampetso from the path of the Russian advance; for three times the sky had apparently blackened and fallen in upon them.

Flying at a hundred and twenty-four top, their TB-3s were not quite a match for nine determined Fokker D.XXIs flown by nine pilots who had little regard for consequences to their persons. It seemed that these Fokker pilots died happy, so long as they had their teeth full of Russian bombers.

The Finn *Lentorykmentti* had already bitten off eight ships in three raids, and had lost but three themselves.

Rossov swore at his gunners, his bombers and his luck. At Murmansk, officers were beginning to ask questions and demur at the rate of replacement required by *Otriad* 178. Today,

growled Rossov to himself, Finns or no Finns, Sampetso would be wiped off like a picture on a slate. Only a few bombs would do it, for Sampetso was mainly of wood, even to its barracks and banks, and once a fire started there, nothing could check it. The water would freeze in the air, even if it got to the hoses.

Below there were rivers. Below there were troops. But they could not be seen, except for an occasional shadow stretching endlessly out in astonishing disproportion to its maker.

Rossov told himself that this day would bring success. From other squadrons he had begged the best gunners, the best pilots. His own brother, Dmitri, was heading *Zveno* Two. He had staked his entire reputation on this, and only his popularity with the soldiers' committees had let him carry on so long as he had in this attack.

For Rossov was popular. He was a veteran of Spain and, as such, was considered to know his business better than most. He had a restless, bombastic personality, of a kind to impress common soldiers without antagonizing them. He was thick of face and body but, despite that, very good to look upon, suggesting some kind of dynamo which neither bullets nor votes could stop.

Rossov looked back at his three flights and found them all in order. His wingmen, for a change, were staying close. In the after cockpits he could see gunners restively scanning the sky above and the horizon ahead. There was no slovenliness here. *Otriad* 178 had been hit so hard in the past three raids that the men knew only very soldierly conduct could pull them through. Even if a man escaped the bullets of the Finn

attackers, escaped the possible explosion of his own bombs hit by 20 mm motor cannon, and got safely out without getting his chute hung on the tail surfaces, all he could look forward to was speedy death by freezing in this endless monotony of snow.

Rossov's hands almost broke the control wheel.

Ahead and a mile above were nine dots!

Below, and almost invisible against the dark wall of the north, David Duane saw the TB-3s. The Finn signal system had worked well, for these lumbering monsters were within a mile or two of the position which had been estimated for this moment of time.

The gap was barely perceived before it closed. The Fokkers traveled at two hundred and fifty-five in this cold-solid air, nearly twice as fast as the TB-3s.

David glanced to his right and left to make certain of his wingmen and found them both in proper order, slightly above and nearly tip to tip. His squadron flew tighter than the other two, his reward for the many hours he had spent drilling into his men the importance of hanging close and maneuvering without the loss of a foot. Below and ahead was the first flight, to the left and on the same level was the other. David fastened his eyes upon the squadron leader's plane and waited for the signals.

Again he had that feeling of unreality, as though he himself was not really there, but was represented only by some form much like him yet only vaguely connected with his own thought processes. He could see himself in his own cockpit

as clearly as though he calmly regarded a photograph come to life. His lean, sensitive face was in repose, his gray eyes were pleasantly and politely interested, just as they would be if he listened to a friend telling a story he had already heard.

He saw the captain's wings rock and then saw the Fokker flip into a howling power dive. For one instant David Duane was acutely himself. What was he, an American, doing in this war which was not his at all? What had been his business in any of the four wars he had fought? He was going down there to kill men he had never seen before and, very likely, would never see again. For a moment he remembered his dreams as a kid—how he had wanted to loaf about the world, painting strange scenes and peoples. And his memory tricked him by blotting out his past ten years and making it seem that he was that same kid, wholly untutored in the art of murder, totally unschooled in the use of a plane.

But he was over on his side now and the world tipped violently and became a target for his guns. His tach was revving up and his altimeter going down, and a wall of air was screaming by, air suddenly laced by dark streams, as though someone sprayed black water at him. He dodged the tracers and his wingmen dodged with him. Delicate pressure of toe to rudder placed the Red Squadron's second flight of TB-3s in his sights.

The Fokkers were a third of a mile above their prey now. It was time to open fire, for in the blink of an eye they would be past.

David picked the plane heading *Zveno* Two as the target for his flight. The bomber was sliding upwards at them. The

gunners' pits each held a white face and a flaming machine gun. The glassed-in noses of the bombers gave out a hazy impression of a pilot and copilot, also staring up.

David's guns were hammering, one in each wing. And through their racket came the even, wide-spaced barking of the motor cannon.

Ring sights were full of bomber. Wings flashed by. Above, the Russian red stars showed. David knew where the other flights were. He eased back his stick, and the engine bit deeper and the tach began to slide down. As one plane, his flight zoomed upwards.

Gunners in the bombers' bellies were having their inning in this instant. Once again David fired, and once again motor cannon and machine guns raked the enemy.

Abruptly the red-starred target was a cloud of smoke and a mass of flying debris. A 20 mm shell had probably gotten the nose of a bomb. On his left, David had a swift impression of a body, its clothing ablaze, tumbling off at right angles. Smoke swallowed his flight, and then David and his men were high above the battle.

Over on their backs, both wingmen still hanging tight, the flight again started down. Numbers One and Two of the fighter squadron had each completed the same maneuver. But the multiple fire from the Russian bombers had not been without toll.

A mile below, with still a mile to go, a Finn Fokker was sloppily carving black arcs against a white earth, and there was no sign of an open chute anywhere.

As Flight Three again drew the Russians' fire, the air was

once more a throb with an explosion. Flight One had gotten a second bomber. Yet another TB-3 was spiraling down, barely under control.

David pressed his trips. The right wing of *Zveno* Two was the target now, and again white faces stared upwards and machine guns sprayed wildly at the ships which lashed downward with such speed that they were no sooner sighted than they were gone.

The 20 mm cannon gouged great holes in the bomber's back. The glassed-in nose was blown half away. A Russian gunner threw up his arms as though in prayer to the attacking planes. Then, once more, the red-starred planes were above.

Again David zoomed, and clawed for sky. He looked right and left. But the left wingman was not there. The Fokker was streaking toward the earth, motor full on, locked in a power dive. The Finn pilot's screen was blasted away and the Finn was striving to haul himself from the pit. Suddenly the whole ship became a ball of fire, such a brilliant flash that eyes were blinded by it for a moment and then, when turned away, still held the light as a spot of black.

David discovered with a start that he had been yelling for an endless time. He made a fleeting attempt to quiet himself. And then he was going back to the remaining plane in *Zveno* Two. He knew that he was battle-mad. He knew that he should be ashamed of it. But he was yelling again into the crash of his guns and the high, hoarse scream of his engine, and the third bomber was in his right sight, then gone.

His clock on the dash said that the engagement had lasted a minute and a half. Long ago he had found that he had to

believe his clock for, at times, he had thought an hour's battle had been but three minutes long.

He did not know what had happened to the third Russian bomber, unless it had suddenly slipped sideways. He pulled up and stared around for it, like a hunter on the alert for flushed game.

Instead of a bomber, he found a sky full of I-15 single-seat biplane fighters. What had detained this escort from joining the bombers sooner he did not have time to speculate. He knew only that these ships could outmaneuver the Fokkers, and that the Russian pattern of the Wright Cyclone engines was strong enough to outclimb the Mercury VIIIs. The only edge the Finnish had was speed, and so speed it had to be.

He caught sight of his own squadron leader, his three ships intact, below and beyond, circling madly and signaling his squadron to close in upon him. Flight Two wasn't there and then swiftly *was* there, but with one plane gone. David lashed across the gap and took position just as the first flight of I-15s came bucketing down from heaven to lash their vengeance upon the unreasonably suicidal Finns. There were twenty-seven I-15s, stacked up toward the zenith like steps on stairs.

David's squadron leader signaled for the Lufbery circle and, like cogs in a perfectly running machine, his six remaining ships fell into line.

The I-15s went through them and down, trying to lure them out of their formation. The formation held. A flight of I-15s recklessly stabbed at the spinning wheel of ships—and promptly lost a plane.