

the guns drew steadily nearer. Too, the short, throaty, vicious bark of mortars with a wailing, high-pitched screech at the end, and the deep, fully rounded note of howitzers. Above the mist sobbed the engine of an airplane, doubtless painted with the black and white cross of Prussia. It was absolutely invisible. Yet, somehow, Tom could visualize it—like some evil spirit, infinitely brutal, infinitely subtle.

The mare gave a little, pitiful whinny. It was as if she meant to say to the rider:

"I can't. I can't. You have ridden the heart out of me, and the strength, the life!"

Her knees gave way, but Tom pulled her up with his soft, strong hands. The animal's labored, sibilant breathing sounded terribly distinct, terribly portentous.

"Steady!" he murmured, "steady, you beauty," as, nearly throwing him, the mare danced sideways, frightened at an enormous sheet of dazzling, whitish blue light that jumped up to the zenith, then dropped to the tortured earth with a million yellow, racing flames.

From a low, hog-back hill rose a curled plume of thick, inky smoke with a heart of sulphurous gold. The next second, an artillery salvo belched up, stopped abruptly, was followed by an immense burst of sound waves like a giant beating a huge drum. The western sky swallowed the mist in an intolerable, peacock blue, nicked with vivid purple.

Tom shaded his eyes with his hands. With his sharp eyes, far away, he could see a flag—very small it seemed, very foolish. But . . .

Yes! He could not make out the colors. But the stripes ran vertically, not horizontally. It was the flag of France!

"*Yip—yip—yip!*" his voice peaked to a quivering, long-drawn Indian yell.