Another Old Wives' Tale

'Yes, he used to go on the razzle night after night, but since we started keeping Greys in the house nothing will induce him to stir out.'

H'm . . . . . would a Greys keep you in? Well, well, in a world of attractions, counter-attractions, and behind the counter attractions, cigarettes have their place, and Greys are merely very good cigarettes.

The Greys Cigarettes
Ten for sixpence

Footnote.—Twenty ordinary cigarettes a day, says a doctor, can do a smoker no harm. The trouble is that, judging by what one reads, there is hardly such a thing as an ordinary cigarette . . . except Greys.

ISSUED BY THE UNITED KINGDOM TOBACCO CO. LTD., ASSOCIATE OF GODFREY PHILLIPS LTD
LONG COMPLETE MYSTERY THRILLER  PAGE 474
THE FROG THAT FELL OUT OF THE SKY  Wilfrid Tremellen
Friend and Foe alike Loathed the Sign of the Leering Frog, Emblem of a Merciless Killer whose Blood-Lust was Appeased only by the Holocaust of that Strange Invention—the Giant Sprowder-Clap

GREAT MODERN AIR ADVENTURE  PAGE 506
HIMALAYAN HELL  J. H. Stafford
Four R.A.F. 'Planes Disappeared into the Blue before Flying Officer Vickers Unmasked the Treachery that was to set the Frontier aflame with Revolt

TWO DRAMATIC AIR WAR STORIES  PAGE 531
THE SKY CLOWN  J. Railton Holden
The Story of a Joke that Cost a Brave Man his Courage and made a Fighter out of a Fool
CALL ME JENNIE  Major L. S. Metford
Major Sharpness made Tigers out of Rabbits—but his first Creation won a most Untingerish Name

STIRRING REAL-LIFE AIR WAR STORY  PAGE 552
SCOUT SQUADRON  "Recording Officer"
The Epic Story of One of the Most Famous R.F.C. Units—No. 56 Squadron

SPECIAL AIR FEATURES
A STUNTING ACE  By A. H. Pritchard
BOMBERS OF OTHER NATIONS  By A. C. Leverington
AIR BOOKS  Book Reviews
WARPLANES OF THE LUFTWAFFE  New German Warbirds
MODEL SECTION (The Breguet 14)  By J. H. Stevens
HERE'S THE ANSWER  Replies to Readers
CONTACT  By the Editor

Cover Painting by S. R. DRIGIN (See page 565)

Most of the Original Drawings in this Magazine are For Sale. Terms may be had on application to the Cliché Dept. (AIR STORIES) George Newnes Ltd., Tower House, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.
THE FROG THAT FELL

Streaking down on the Hun formation like a scourge of the gods came an S.E. 5 . . .

Another Great Adventure of "The Three Squadrons" is Recorded in this Long Complete Mystery Thriller of the War in the Air.

474
OUT OF THE SKY

Friend and Foe alike Loathed the Sign of the Leering Frog, Emblem of a Merciless Killer whose Blood Lust Blazed a Trail of Horror across the Western Front to Appease itself in the Awful Holocaust of that Grim Invention, the Giant Sprowder-Clap

By WILFRID TREMELLEN
Lieut. R.A.F. (retired)

CHAPTER I
The Murder of the Running Man

DON'T say to me "probably this" or "probably that"; I tell you I know it; there can be no mistake; I saw the thing happen. Bledlow was squarely on the tail of that Fokker triplane with his propeller boss within fifteen yards of its tail-skid—and he deliberately withheld his fire. The Fokker pilot, oblivious of danger from behind, was thinking only of the S.E. 5 on whose tail he was riding; Bledlow could have finished him off at any time with a simple no-deflection shot. He didn't. He just waited. The three of them went racing across my front in single file, the German in the middle.

I had just finished off my own opponent, and was able to witness the whole affair. The foremost S.E. 5, after standing up for an incredible number of seconds to the hail of lead that burst from the Fokker's double Spandaus, suddenly whipped over in a

... and on the face of the man beside me there was one emotion—stark terror

475
vertical bank, flicked up its tail, and went hurling downwards in an uncontrolled spin. Clearly the poor kid inside had taken a burst of bullets in the back.

Then, I admit, Bledlow got into action—when it was too late. For a first-rate pilot like him that Hun was cold meat. He shot forward till his propeller was almost overlapping the other's tail-plane, and put in his burst at such point-blank range that the Hun could never have known anything about it; it was just butcher's work.

But the point I want to make is this: that just as clearly as Bledlow was responsible for the death of the German, so was he responsible for the death of the Englishman. He could have saved him, and didn't. And I thought I could guess why.

I strained my eyes downward. Five thousand feet below our whirling dogfight the little S.E. 5, still gyrating madly, was heading for its final crash in the mud of Hunland. That night our mess would be the sadder for the loss of one promising youngster. Thanks to Bledlow; thanks to our hunch-backed 'Flying Frog.'

I DON'T know how to describe Bledlow except to say that if you were waiting outside a box to telephone, and Bledlow glided up with the same object, you would instinctively move closer to the glass door—expecting from the very sinister squatness of the man and his silent tread that he would try and do you out of your turn. He was that kind. Then again, if you were in a restaurant and a waitress laden with a tray suddenly fell sprawling as she passed Bledlow's table, you might well expect that that gentleman had slyly put out a foot to trip her—and you would probably be right.

Bledlow's sense of humour was nothing like yours and mine; it was perfectly damnable, and all the more unhealthy because he shared his jokes with no one. He was the kind of person who sends anonymous letters, and writes nasty verses on the walls of wash-houses.

And the astonishing thing was that in all the Three Squadrons there was not a pilot to touch him. He had the courage of the fighting-cock, the guile of the serpent, and the ferocity of the whelping puma. The "Frog's" score in Huns had risen like a rocket.

Singularly hideous to look at, he was short and squat, and built like a battleship, with long gorilla arms strong enough to crush a bear. His thick black eyebrows joined over his squat nose, and his complexion was of that waxy-white colour that you often see in American sailors of Scandinavian stock. Generally his face wore an oafish grin—as though he had been about to say something maliciously humorous, but had decided to keep it to himself. He was what the French call malin. People in our squadron said he cheated at cards. I don't know about that—I play chess—but I wouldn't put it past him. It was the sort of thing that would be in keeping with his perverted sense of humour.

That sense of humour came out even in flying matters. There was a lad who came out to us from home with only ten hours on S.E. 5's to his credit. He was about as bad a pilot as he could be. "Tiggy Wiggy," the C.O., sent him up to put in a little more practice near the aerodrome. I was standing outside the door of the Intelligence Hut, watching his turns. So was the Frog. The turns were awful; either too little rudder for the bank, causing inward slip, or too little bank for the rudder, causing outward skid. I turned my head, and saw Bledlow simply hugging himself with delight. The Frog was standing as he always stood—with a forward stoop of his immense shoulders, so that he had to twist his head sideways to peer upwards. From time to time he clapped his cigarette hand over his mouth and voraciously sucked in smoke between the fingers. The flying display amused him with an amusement that was almost obscene; the man was silently shaking with odious laughter. I wondered how such a trivial thing could cause him such inner joy. Some days later I knew.

ON a car-trip up towards the line, "Woggy" Wane and I looked up
to see a venomous-looking Pfalz scout attacking one of our S.E.'s in a most masterly manner. Our man tried to run, making the most deplorable flat turn you ever saw. The result was, of course, that his machine continued in the same direction, only crabwise. Through his own panic he was making a gift of his life and his machine to the enemy.

The Hun drove in and fired a long burst which by some miracle failed to register. Then the S.E. pilot came out with the most dreadful exhibition of novice flying you ever saw, and I knew he must be the youngster I have just mentioned. We stood staring up at him, Woggy and I. It was a sight to make your blood run cold. The Hun flew rings round him, exposing himself in a way that would have been suicidal if it had been even a third-rate pilot that he had to deal with. Holding my breath I expected every moment to see the S.E. break up in the air or burst into flame. Woggy turned away; wouldn't even look.

And then the most extraordinary transformation suddenly took place. The S.E. pilot metaphorically threw away his crutches, rolled up his sleeves, and set to work. Never did any Hun look so silly. The S.E. man was here, there, and everywhere, overwhelming the other with matchless airmanship and brilliant fighting tactics. The German lost the initiative and never regained it. But the curious thing was that again and again the genius in the S.E. 5 got into a position of complete dominance, and yet he never fired a shot. He was just playing.

Woggy was looking again now. "D'you—d'you know who that is?" he gasped.

I nodded, and continued staring skywards, fascinated by one of the most skilful exhibitions I had ever seen. I realised then at what thoughts the Frog had been chuckling so odiously the other day, and why he had been studying so appreciatively the dreadful performance of the novice pilot. He had been learning to provide a suitable bait to attract the wily Hun. The man had the cunning of a serpent.

From far overhead the noise of the two engines came down to us, punctuated by futile bursts fired by that panic-stricken Hun. The Frog fired never a shot. I watched till the cigarette burnt down to my fingers. It was breath-taking.

"Why doesn't the Frog finish him off?" Woggy's voice was puzzled. I didn't know either.

Now he was hard on the tail of the fleeing Pfalz again. Would he fire this time? Yes; his gun stuttered out an abrupt hail of bullets. It lasted no more than six rounds, but it was put in with such exquisite skill that the propeller of the enemy machine leapt into splinters. The Hun, with the immediate fear of a burst of bullets in the back, shut off his juddering engine. And now what?

Continuing his dive, the Frog lowered his aim and sent a long burst of fire into his opponent's tail-unit, obviously with the intention of cutting through the wires that operated the rudder and tail elevators. I began to understand.

Climbing for height again, he descended once more on the slowly gliding German and put in another long burst that shot away the control-wires of the right-hand aileron. Another climb upwards, another descent, and the wires of the left-aileron were also shot away. The unfortunate German had now no control whatever over his craft.

I was amazed. The consummate skill of the Frog's gun-play was beyond all praise, but Lord! what a cruel devil the man was! I was reminded of that Chinese torture, the Death by a Thousand Cuts.

Woggy read my thoughts. "That's all right. Better'n putting a burst through his back, isn't it?"

I didn't answer. I knew the Frog better than that.

THE machine-guns were silent now. So were the engines. Both pilots were gliding down to earth, the German as helpless as a new-born babe.

A moment later Woggy tugged at my arm and drew me back to the car. "They're coming this way. They'll be
AIR STORIES

landing somewhere here. We'll take over the prisoner."

We got back into the car and bade the driver take the direction in which the machines were heading. We halted outside a gate just as the wheels of the Pfalz were clearing the hedge and dipping down to make a landing. The Frog was circling watchfully at a height of not more than two hundred feet.

Woggy drew off his British warm and tossed it into the back of the car. "Got a gun?"

"No."

"Nor me. Probably Jerry hasn't, either. Come on!" He climbed over the gate, and I followed him.

As soon as his wheels came to rest, the Hun pilot began wearily throwing off his safety-belt. That was not quick enough for the Frog. The Frog fired a burst. The German realised that his enemy desired to set his machine on fire. He dropped to the ground and began walking away. There was no hurry; if his enemy had wished to destroy him, he would have done so in the air. He didn't know the Frog.

As another burst of bullets came thumping into the grass behind his feet, the now alarmed German broke into a run. A hundred yards away he spotted Woggy and me, and headed for us.

Now the Frog was preparing to dive again. At the roar of the engine behind him the unfortunate German redoubled his speed, panting for breath in his heavy flying kit. The Frog liked moving targets; he came down on him like a thunderbolt; he dived until his propeller-boss was within five feet of the German's back; there was a harsh crackle as tracer streaked from his gun. The victim stumbled and fell dead not thirty yards away from us.

The Frog's sense of humour was like that.

As it turned out, the fair young man who lay so still upon the grass was Ulrich von Hochfels zu Feckenaar. His "von und zu" indicated a lofty lineage, but far more important was the fact that he was the younger brother of Rittmeister* the Graf † Wolfgang von Hochfels zu Feckenaar, who, after the great Baron Richthofen, was ace of the German aces. Even at the time I wondered vaguely what would happen if ever that blue-blooded Pomeranian Junker came to learn how his brother had been done to death. As later events will show, we had by no means heard the last of the proud house von Hochfels zu Feckenaar.

CHAPTER II

The Frog falls from the Sky

THE Frog never landed in the ordinary way. On returning from a show he would arrive over our aerodrome at a height of two thousand feet, and then "fall out of the sky." Our mechanics used to look out for his return and call to their mates working in the hangars to come out and watch. There was always a large audience when the Frog landed. Whether they really admired his daring, or argued that one of these days he must surely break his neck at it, which would be a sight not to miss, I could never make out.

On the morning of the murder of the running German, Woggy and I were back at the aerodrome in time to see him returning from his patrol. Beside me was standing young Peter Hughes, the "baby" of the squadron, his pink cheeks flushed, his blue eyes alight with expectancy. Two thousand feet above our heads the Frog banked his machine to place himself exactly over the leeward boundary of the aerodrome. The gathering crowd craned their necks upward to watch. Nobody who was about ever missed one of the Frog's landings.

"He's a marvellous pilot, isn't he?" exclaimed young Peter in his impulsive way.

"Yes," I answered shortly.

Then I said: "Young Peter, why do you let him twist your arms the way you do?"

"Who?"

"The Frog."

---

* Cavalry-Captain.
† Count.
At that moment there was a distant pop! as the Frog shut off his engine. The crowd drew in its breath with a simultaneous hiss. "Now!" breathed young Peter at my side.

We saw the Frog's S.E. put up its nose, drop one wing, go heeling over in a spin, and come streaking downwards gyrating like a sycamore seed. The air was filled with a crescendo of screaming wires. He was literally "falling out of the sky." This was the Frog's landing approach. The watchers waited with inheld breath. No Sunday-afternoon crowd at the Plaza de Toros watched the fortunes of their favourite matador with greater excitement than we watched our Frog making his landing. One of these days he would be just the fraction of a second late in his recovery, and when that happened the crash-gang would have an unpleasant task in clearing up the remains.

"Jove! I wish I could do that!" Peter exclaimed.

"You only have to try it once," I said dryly, "and the next entry in your log-book'll be a solo trip in a coffin."

"Just look at him, though, by George!"

In his wildly gyrating earthward plunge the Frog was making straight for the spot he had intended, a large bush growing out of the hedge that bordered the leeward side of the aerodrome. It was not until he was within twenty feet of it that with a sudden movement he flattened out his little S.E. Of course, the colossal speed he had accumulated during this perpendicular descent was far too great to allow of a landing, and at a height of two or three feet above the ground he went shooting across the aerodrome. It was a large field, chosen for the accommodation of three squadrons, but the Frog had streaked over to within a hundred yards of the other end before his speed was spent. Then he touched down in a perfect three-point landing, and trundled to a stop within a stone's throw of his own hangar.

It was a miracle of hair-breadth judgment and the crowd sighed in ecstasy. Not for an Air Marshal's job would anyone persuade me to land like that. Now don't mistake me; that L-shaped approach and landing, that vertical descent and horizontal shoot-across, are easy enough to do if you come down in a vertical sideslip. But to make the downward bar with a spin from two thousand feet, that, as the French say is quelquechose, especially if the angle of your L is anywhere near the ground. Bledlow always approached the suicidal limit, practically landing off the last turn of the spin. No wonder the ack-ommans downed tools when the Frog "fell out of the sky."

We watched his ungainly figure climb out of the machine and make for the hangar. He turned his head right and left as he passed into the entrance, and I could imagine the leer of satisfaction on his ugly face; he knew that everybody had turned out to see him come in. And yet if you spoke to him of his prowess, he would be cheerfully, but unapproachably, off-hand. "Got another Hun, Bledlow?" "Yup." Just "Yup"—without even turning his head. Since he had come to our squadron the Frog had made no contacts with anybody. Except young Peter.

The crowd thinned out as people went about their business again. Other pilots were coming in to land, but their stuff was not "front page." I lit a cigarette.

"And now, young Peter, tell me why you let that beggar twist——"

But Peter Hughes was no longer at my side. "Where's young Peter?"

"You won't find young Peter lazing about these days," someone answered. "'cept when the Frog's landing."

"Oh! Why?"

"He's joined the Ancient and Honourable Company of Gadget-Makers."

"Oh? What's it this time—a flame-throwing blunderbuss?"

A shrug. "Search me."

NOW the point about the Ancient and Honourable Company of Gadget-Makers was this: "Tiggy Wiggy," our C.O., who was progressive-minded, quite apart from being the most lovable
squadron commander on the Western Front, had been greatly struck by the capacity for ingenious invention of ordinary pilots and observers. The gentlemen who worked in white coats in the laboratories at home in England might be better equipped in the matter of scientific training, but it was the air fighters themselves who had the practical knowledge.

During the past few months there had been first the “Funk-Hole System” thought out by Delmar-Westrington and placed on a wholesale basis by the C.O. himself, and then the “Footle-board” an ingenious gadget invented by that skilled little worker in metals, Sergeant Haystead of the R.E. 8 Squadron. Impressed by the splendid results of these two devices, Tiggy Wiggy had promised a fortnight’s extra leave to the inventors of any gadgets of equal efficiency. In addition, there was the possibility of being nominated for one of the foreign decorations, small batches of which were allotted to squadrons and awarded at the discretion of the C.O. It was true that these “ragtime medals” were not thought very highly of, but as Teddy McFane pointed out: “Even an Eye-talian ribbon makes a spot of colour on the old tunic, and there’s no need to tell your girl it’s only an ice-cream decoration.”

Because of these allurements there was quite a rush of brains to the head in our squadron. Every available bench in the repair hangars was occupied by enthusiastic gadgeteers, some of them working between screens of three-ply for greater secrecy. They went about with that absorbed “gadget look” on their faces and were sometimes seen to stop chewing at meals, fish out Father’s last letter from home, and make a rough calculation on the back of the envelope. Cockpits began to take on the appearance of ironmonger’s shops, and some of the machines could not even be persuaded to leave the ground with a full war-load, because of the sheer weight of nonsense their owners had incorporated. There were three explosions and one fire. Everybody’s work was hindered; riggers cursed, fitters swore, flight-sergeants rolled their eyes to heaven.

Meanwhile the greatest secrecy was observed; people would cover over their cockpits as soon as they landed, lest anyone should pinch their cherished idea; while one gentleman, tortured by unworthy doubts, even went to the extent of sealing his cockpit cover at night time with a profusion of 5-centime postage stamps. Everyone was very “hush-hush.”

CHAPTER III

A Sort-of-a Kind-of-a Gadget

WOGGY WANE looked in at the door of the repair hangar as we passed, and stopped. “He’s got it, my dear—got it badly.”

“Who?”

“Young Peter.”

“Got what?”

“Gadgetitis. Look!” We strolled in.

At a bench in front of a window “glazed” with yellow aeroplane fabric a slimly-built youngster was bending over something clamped in a vice. There was a carpenter’s plane in his hands which he was using with great care. From time to time he stopped work to brush aside the shock of long fair hair that fell over his eyes. You could tell that he was completely absorbed because he put his tongue out as he worked, and held his breath over the tricky bits, so that his pink cheeks were flushed with exertion.

“Hallo, young Peter!” Woggy greeted him. “D’you find you plane better when you put your tongue out to it?”

Peter Hughes looked up and laughed shyly as he brushed the hair from his eyes. He looked no more than seventeen.

“I know. I’m always catching myself out at that. They used to tick me off for it when I was a kid.”

“A long time ago, that,” observed Woggy solemnly. “But tell me, young sir, why do you plane pieces of wood with such tireless energy? Might it be
in order to support an aged parent, or perhaps a bed-ridden aunt?"

Young Peter chuckled appreciatively. "No. Matter of fact I'm making something," he admitted with a pink blush. "It's a sort-of-a kind-of-a gadget."

"A sort-of-a kind-of-a gadget, eh? Is it a device for rendering more uncomfortable the lives of His Majesty's enemies, by any chance?"

Young Peter always did everything with enthusiasm. Now there was even enthusiasm in the way he excused himself. He looked appealingly at Woggy, his face a deep crimson. "I say!" he burst out, full of ingenuous frankness. "D'you mind if I don't tell you—yet, I mean. You see—"

"Don't mind us."

"You see, it's a—"

"A sort-of-a kind-of-a secret?" Woggy suggested.

"Ye-e-es," young Peter agreed, and added: "You see, it's a—an invention, but it may be so silly that—that—"

"—that every soldier in France will bust his braces with laughter, is that it?"

Peter Hughes laughed. I think that one of the secrets of that boy's charm was his obviously genuine appreciation of other people's bright remarks. He laughed in a way that warmed your heart to him. He was one of those kids of whom you say: "I bet his mother was a fine woman to have brought him up like that." Excuse my enthusiasm for Peter; he was one of the most likeable lads I ever met.

"Well," said Woggy, "it can't be much worse than the stuff some of the gadgeteers have turned out. Nearly blown the seats off their pants, some of 'em have."

"Oh, this is a rotten idea really, I expect, but—you know." He finished with a disarming chuckle and bent over his work.

"Have you got a name for it yet, Peter? Must have a name for it, you know."

Peter looked up, suddenly beaming. "Yes, I've done that. I'm calling it 'the Sprowder-Clap.' What do you think of it?"

"The 'Spowder-Clap'? Sounds dangerous. Anything like a thunder-clap?"

Peter grinned. "I'm hoping it'll be a bit more selective than that."

As we passed out through the door, Woggy turned to me. "He's got it badly, my dear. Only hope the kid doesn't blow himself to bits. They love playing with explosives, those young idiots."

"If it's that sort of thing," I said, "I don't see what he was doing with those bits of wood. He was cambering them, if you noticed—Hallo! What does the Frog think he's doing?"

WOGGY turned round to look back into the hangar. The Frog was gliding swiftly up to where Peter was working at his bench. For a man of his vast shoulders and ungainly build he could move extraordinarily silently. There was always something sinister about the Frog's movements. He suddenly clapped down two huge paws on the youngster's shoulders and peeped over.

"What you making, kid?"

Peter started, whipped round, and then grinned. "Shan't tell."

"What you making?"

"Go to hell, you lousy Frog. I shan't tell you." There were few people in the squadron who dared call him "Frog" to his face. Peter's voice was at once careless and familiar, betokening a degree of intimacy between the pair that I should never have thought possible.

"Call me a frog!" threatened the other with an oafish grin. (He knew perfectly well that everybody called him that, and a leering frog was the sign he himself had had painted on his machine.)

"Yes—Wow! Leggo!"

In his elephantine playfulness the Frog had gripped young Peter's wrist and was twisting it behind his back.

"Frog, am I? Frog?"

"Ow! No!"

"Sure?"

"Wow! Be a decent fellow an' stop twisting!"
AIR STORIES

"Say 'Please, nice Bledlow,'" prompted the Frog with a fiendish grin.
"Leggo, you rotten Frog!—Wow! Please nice Bledlow!"
The Frog released his hold, grinning hugely, and Peter, red in the face, brushed his untidy fair hair from over his eyes.
"And now, what's this rubbish you're making, eh?"
"Go to hell!"
The Frog made a movement to overpower his victim again, but just then a corporal and two ack-emas came into the hangar, and for the very look of the thing he was forced to desist. Woggy and I moved on.
I didn't like the look of things at all. Those two had been playing about like that a lot lately—like a rhinoceros and a gazelle—and young Peter seemed almost to like the Frog twisting his arms. I spoke my thoughts to Woggy.
"I don't know that it does any harm to young Peter," he said slowly, "and I'm sure it's good for the Frog to be on matey terms with someone, Peter's the only fellow he ever talks to. Always keeps that hard-boiled 'grim joker' mask for everyone else. Thinks that all mankind is his enemy, and is always trying to get his own back. Poor devil! Wonder what twisted his soul that way. 'Member how he killed that running German? You can't do a thing like that unless you're all tangled up inside."
"Dammit!" I said. "The man's nothing better than a murderer—rotten to the core!"
Woggy shook his head. "Nobody is."
We walked over to the anteroom in a silence that was almost hostile. Woggy broke it. "This has nothing to do with it," he said. "But don't forget that in a dog-fight the Frog's a braver man than you and I." It was a hint to be more charitable.

CHAPTER IV
Honeyball Sees "the Thing"

DURING the next few days young Peter went about as excited as a small boy on Christmas Eve. His pink face glowed, his blue eyes shone, and his shock of fair hair needed brushing back more and more frequently. The gadget of gadgets, the marvellous Sprowder-Clap, was nearing completion.

Generally speaking, it was only at meals and on duty that we saw him, because he had taken to hurrying over to the R.E. 8 Squadron in his spare time, partly for greater secrecy, and partly in order to get the invaluable help and advice of that most gentle little observer, Sergeant Haystead. Haystead himself was a gadgeteer, and his ingenuity and knowledge of aerial warfare were unique in the three squadrons. Moreover, he was known to be a clever worker in metals.

It was quite comic to see them together—the sober experienced little sergeant with the ribbon of the D.F.M. on his breast, and the eager-faced stripling, hardly able to stand still because of his excitement. Sergeant Haystead, having won his decoration by means of his famous "Foozele-board," was accounted an authority in all such matters. In these days the two were inseparable.

"Just look at 'em!" Woggy Wane murmured to me. "Just like uncle and nephew. How does the kid keep up all that enthusiasm? He'll bust one of these days!"

Peter and the Sergeant were in the closest conference at the farther end of the Intelligence Hut, which had come to be used as a sort of common-room for the junior officers and flying N.C.O.'s of all three squadrons. Young Peter had evidently sought advice on some matter of workmanship, and now the heads of the pair of them were bent over a sketch that the little N.C.O. was making on the back of a combat-report sheet. The excited whispers of the young officer were followed by the low murmur of the Sergeant's answers. From time to time Peter would brush his hair back and put down something in a note-book, writing carefully with a pink tongue showing at the corner of his mouth.

"Thanks most fearfully, Sergeant! It's awfully decent of you to take all
THE FROG THAT FELL OUT OF THE SKY

this trouble. May I keep that report-sheet? It'll help no end." He tossed his hair back once again and grinned gratefully into Haystead's face before hurrying back to his workshop.

"I say! Peter!" somebody called after him. "D'you want a tip for getting a little extra speed out of your S.E.?"

Peter paused with his fingers on the door-handle. "Jove, yes! How do I do it?"

"Get your hair cut. It's putting you back five miles an hour."

THAT evening I happened to be walking back from the épicerie of Veuve Maupin with Teddy McFane when we ran into Honeyball, a somewhat simple-minded youth who was an observer in the R.E. 8 Squadron, and a noted student of pond life. The road was still wet from the afternoon's rain.

"Hallo, Honeyball, old fellow!" Teddy greeted him. "Been playing mud-pies again?"

The gibe was more or less justified. The wretched Honeyball was covered with mud from head to foot; there was a smudge of it on the end of his nose. His eyes were still wide from some recent astonishment.

"Are they all right, those two?" he asked in a dazed way.

"Right as a trivet!" Teddy answered promptly. "Mother and child both doing well." Teddy is the licensed funny-merchant of the three squadrons.

"Which two, Honeyball?" I asked.

"Why, Sergeant Haystead and—and the officer."

"What about 'em?"

Honeyball drew the back of his hand wearily across his face, enlarging the smudge on his nose to a streak. "Well, I was just walking back to the aerodrome with this specimen of dytiscus marginalis in my killing-bottle, when a motor-cycle combination came tearing towards me at a deuce of a lick. There was an officer driving—I couldn't see who, because he was bending low over the handlebars—and Sergeant Haystead of my squadron was in the sidecar. The Sergeant was looking back over his shoulder. The pace they were going was terrific; they looked as though the whole Boche Flying Corps were after them. They shot past, spattering me with mud, so, of course, I stopped and stared after them. It seemed most inconsiderate."

"Rotten shame!" agreed Teddy warmly. "Go on."

"Well, suddenly I heard a sort of whirring noise behind me, growing louder and louder. I looked round, and suddenly threw myself flat on my face—just in time to avoid the thing getting me. Fortunately for me it didn't stop, but continued pursuing the other two."

"But what was it?"

"It looked—it looked like a huge black hornet, really it did! And speed! Those two on the motor-cycle must have been doing seventy, but they were only just managing to keep their distance. I thought that at any second the thing would catch them up. If——"

"And you let it get past you! Oh, Honeyball!"

"But I——. It——. You don't understand."

Teddy shook his head sadly. "What a chance you missed. Now if you had been a really smart 'pond-opologist,' Honeyball, you would have snaffled the specimen, popped it into your killing-bottle, and come home with something worth having—'stead of that black beetle you've got there."

"It's not a black beetle; it's dytiscus marginalis," said Honeyball indignantly. "But—but do you know what this thing was?"

"Know! Of course I do! Call yourself a 'pond-opologist,' and you can't recognise that! My dear Honeyball!"

"Well, what was it, then?"

"We-e-e-ell," Teddy dragged out, "from your description I should say it was undoubtedly a specimen of jaberwoocuss giglanticuss."

"Eh?"

"The common or garden jabberwock," explained Teddy, taking my arm. "The——?
"Well, ta-ta, Honeyball!" grinned Teddy, as we moved away. "Have a nice wash. But keep your paws off the roller-towel, won't you?"

"Do you really know what this thing was, Teddy?" I asked as we continued on our way.

"No!" answered Teddy cheerfully. "But I've a good idea. It's a clue, my boy—another clue."

"Who was the officer on the motorbike, then?"

"Peter Hughes, of course."

"O-o-ooh!" I realised then that the phenomenon which had caused Honeyball such alarm must be something to do with the Sprower-Clap.

CHAPTER V

The Sign of the Leering Frog

Of late the Frog's score in Hun-s had been mounting with incredible rapidity—three, four, and even five a day sometimes. He was known up and down the line as a brilliant tactician and a merciless killer. As in the case of all the 'rover' pilots in the Wing—those pre-eminent air-fighters who were occasionally given roving commissions—he was allowed a personal emblem on the side of his fuselage. With cynical humour he had chosen, as I have mentioned, the head of a leering frog. Painted on in green by the hand of a real poster-genius, it was just the squat head of a frog, shaking with obscene laughter, as if in permanent derision of a victim's death throes. It was the most repulsive work of art I had ever seen.

Sometimes the Frog took his regular place in the "B" Flight formation, but whenever he could he went on his blood-thirsty expeditions alone. We would see, while out on patrol, a lone duel being carried on in the distance, and a little later the Frog could be observed streaking down in the wake of some unfortunate Hun he had disabled or set on fire. Usually he landed beside his victim, and what took place no man knew, though there were ugly rumours. He brought back no trophies. While many of us were ardent souvenir-hounds, and rejoiced in collecting shreds of black-crossed fabric, locks taken from the Spandau guns, and even dead men's flying helmets, the Frog came back with nothing, nothing except a leer of unholy satisfaction. You could almost see him licking the blood off his chops. Yet he shared this satisfaction with no one.

"'Nother Hun, Bledlow?" someone would ask as he came into the anteroom. "Yup"—just "Yup" without even turning his head.

The terror-striking value of that emblem was equivalent to a free burst in itself. German pilots, dashing and war-like in the preliminaries of battle, had been known suddenly to wilt at the first glimpse of the Sign of the Leering Frog. They raced back to Hunland; they went into voluntary spins; they did anything rather than accept battle with the blood-drinker. His comet blazed right across the Western Front. And wherever he passed flamers and break-ups trailed in his wake.

The great day had arrived. Whether young Peter had actually written to his mother explaining all about the Sprower-Clap and warning her that she might expect him home very shortly on a fortnight's leave with an ice-cream medal on his chest, I can't tell you. But he seemed very sure of it himself, and the very fact of Sergeant Haystead's collaboration led me to believe that he had certainly invented a gadget of some military importance. To-day it was to be tried out.

"I might get the French Légion d'Honneur!" he had confided to Teddy McFane. "And that's a decoration really worth having."

"So you might," agreed Teddy solemnly. "Or the Order of the Purple Hippopotamus—that's Siamese, I think."

"Oh, is it?"

"Yes, but it doesn't show up so well as most other medals."

"Why is that?"

"Because the right place to wear it is on the seat of your pants," Teddy told him.

We "B" Flight pilots were standing
outside the hangar ready for the morning patrol and waiting only for Haltrick, who was to lead it. There were Woggy Wane, the Frog, young Peter and myself. Peter could hardly stand still with excitement; waiting was a torture to him. Soon Haltrick appeared round the corner of the hangar methodically fastening the chin-strap of his flying helmet. There was a look of grave responsibility on his rather stern face; this was his first appearance as formation-leader. Young Peter went dancing up to him.

"I say, Haltrick, old boy!" he burst out, pink with enthusiasm. "If we meet a Hun patrol, you'll let them chase us, won't you? Do let them chase us! I want them to!"

The probable choice for the captaincy of "B" Flight stared at him.

"Oh, you do, do you?" he growled sarcastically. "So I'm to risk the lives of the whole flight of us just to give you the chance of trying out one of your blasted gimcrack ideas, eh? Not if I know it!—And not so much of the 'Haltrick, old boy!'; you're on duty now. Some of you confounded kids seem to think that every patrol is just another romp on the sands."

"Sorry," said Peter humbly. "Get into your machine."

Peter darted off. He couldn't remain crestfallen for long on this, of all days. This was the day that was going to make him famous! Yoop! A fortnight's leave and a ribbon for his tunic! Poor kid, how was he to know how that woeful day was going to end?

Haltrick turned impersonally to the Frog. "You remember our arrangement, Bledlow?"

The Frog grinned, licking his lips as though at the promise of some treat. "Yup! Trust me!"

"Right! Come on then, chaps!"

We moved over to where our machines were ticking over, and I remember hoping fervently that this patrol, which was to be Haltrick's first independent command, and also the first try-out for young Peter's Sprowder-Clap, might be attended with success.

Haltrick was a fellow for whose opinions and character I had the greatest respect. Without being in the slightest degree a Jingo, he took his war very seriously. His view was that the nation that had begun the whole filthy business should be subjugated as soon as possible, so that good men could turn again to the things worth doing—in his case the study of medicine.

As a matter of fact there had been a discussion on these matters on the previous evening when a crowd of us were sitting round the anteroom stove.

"There's only one good kind of armed German," Haltrick had claimed. "And that's a dead one."

"That's a bit steep!" Woggy protested.

The Frog, who had been sitting biting his nails and watching faces with a cynical grin, broke into the conversation at this point.

"Yup! Only one thing to do with any German!"—he made a brutal gesture—"Slit his gizzard!"

"My old uncle used to say—" began Honeyball.

"I didn't say any German," said Haltrick coldly. "I said an armed German. Different thing."

"But Germans can be quite decent fellows," Woggy objected. "Most of the ones I've met were, anyhow."

"My old uncle—" began Honeyball.

"I know they can be. But who began this blasted war?" Haltrick demanded of Woggy.

"Why, Kaiser Bill and the military bunch. The ordinary German—"

Haltrick pounced. This was his favourite hobby-horse. "That's just it! The ordinary German is content to knuckle under to an autocratic ruler, and if he happens to be a criminal, the whole nation becomes criminal. Now with us it's different; the genius of the British race happens to be the art of self-government. Anyone who sets himself up as dictator at once gets kicked in the pants. The commonsense of the ordinary—"
"But," complained Woggy, "the wretched Huns can’t help it if they’re bullied by——"

"They can!" retorted Haltrick sternly.

"You’ve got to hold a people responsible for its leaders. And so long as the German people tolerates leaders who insist on rocking the European boat, we’ve got to kill ’em off. We’ve no other course, except national suicide."

"My old uncle’s maxim——" began Honeyball.

"Well, what was your uncle’s confounded maxim?" asked Haltrick, turning on him irritably.

Honeyball fluttered over a few pages of his notebook and found it. "‘To children, lunatics, Germans and Dagoes,’" he read in his soft student’s voice, "‘never allow firearms, and only blunted knives.’" He looked round to find a grin on every face.

"If you’ll excuse my saying so, Honeyball," said Haltrick crossly, "your uncle was a far-sighted, but impractical old buffer." He flipped back the lid of the stove and tossed in his cigarette-stub.

"The point is, gentlemen, that the more Huns we kill off, the sooner this ruddy war will be over."

"Yup!" The Frog yawned and rose on his stocky legs. "Well," he said, looking down with a grin at the ribbon of the M.C. and bar on his tunic, "I do my best."

"So you do, you bloodthirsty old tower!" And cheeky young Peter gave him a playful kick in the pants, and ran.

Everyone caught his breath in amazement. The nerve of it! Kicking the Frog in the pants! The Frog! Clearly this Sprowder-Clap business had made that kid a bit above himself. Now he had gone too far!

The Frog caught him in ten paces and twisted his arm till he yelped. He twisted it good and hard, and there was a red glint of passionate anger in his eyes that I had never seen before. It is not well to kick a man in the seat of the trousers when he is glancing down at his decorations and boasting of his prowess. Not if that man is the Frog. The indignity of it was altogether out of keeping with his rôle of a cynical killer-man. He twisted savagely. Their usual relations of big dog and playful puppy had vanished for the moment. Peter yelped.

In view of subsequent events, this incident is worthy of note. It proved important.

CHAPTER VI
Death by Default

For the last half hour there had been hardly a sound in my ears except the monotonous thunder of our five Hispanos. Occasionally came the strident crackle of machine-gun fire, as one pilot after another loosed off a few rounds to keep the oil in his guns from congealing in the bitter cold. We had climbed up to eleven thousand feet, and were just emerging from a cloud-bank, when we spotted our first Hun. It was a Rumpler two-seater doing "art-obs" a long way below us and considerably to the right.

The watchful Haltrick saw it first. It was miles out of our way, and most leaders would have left it alone. Not so Haltrick. He twisted round in his seat, gestured for the attention of the Frog, and then made a sign. It was understood between them that if any "singles" were sighted off our line of flight, the Frog was to be despatched to mop up, and was then to return as soon as possible. The arrangement suited Haltrick’s ideas of efficiency and the Frog’s innate love of killing.

On receiving the signalled order, the bloodthirsty Bledlow grinned hugely, and, raising one gauntletted hand, drew the finger across his throat—the Dago gesture of assassination. I looked at the two-seater far below, and had a sneaking feeling of pity for the unfortunate wretches whose lives Haltrick had, with a gesture of the hand, delivered over to the tender ministrations of the homicidal Frog. It was like feeding live rabbits to a python.

Clapping on right bank and left rudder, the Frog went swirling out of our formation in a steep sideslip.

Haltrick wasn’t going to wait for the
Frog, so we continued on our way and it was when we were near the end of our beat that a thin layer of cloud on our right suddenly opened like an Easter egg, and produced the formidable-looking combination of four Fokkers and three Albatros.

Haltrick waggled his wings. They were nearly twice our number. Should we run from them, or should we shoot it out? He turned in his seat, and looked back with an expression of grave interrogation on his face. Were we willing to accept the odds?

Though he had been entrusted with the command of the formation, this was a decision of an importance that demanded something in the way of a consultation with Wogy and me, who were of equal seniority. He looked first at Wogy, and Wogy nodded cheerfully. He turned to me and I raised my hand in assent to whatever his judgment should decide. He also looked at Peter—but chiefly because of the exuberance of that young man's demonstration. Peter, thinking only of the Sprowder-Clap, had thrust the joystick between his knees, and was waving both arms in a positive fervour of enthusiasm for battle. But at Peter, Haltrick only scowled.

WE had a slight advantage of height. We gave a last look to our guns, settled in our seats, and went racing down. To the noise of our engines there was now added that of seven other machines. The whole air was filled with a growing thunder of sound, as the two formations tore towards each other at a united speed of over three hundred miles an hour.

*Tacca-tacca-tacca!* Fire broke first from the Germans. In the lens of my Aldis sight I could see the Fokker I had selected growing larger and larger. Tiny jets of flame were bubbling rhythmically from the muzzles of his guns. I opened fire myself then, and at the same second all the other guns in our formation gave tongue.

*Tacca - tacca - tacca!*  *Tacca - tacca - tacca - tacca!

At the moment of meeting the row was like the sound of a bursting sea—the united yammering of eleven high-powered engines flanked by death-spitting machine-guns. Then all guns suddenly ceased fire; the two formations had streaked through and past each other. By a miracle there had been no collisions.

The hull was short. Now every machine was whirling round in a tight circle, each intent on getting to grips with an enemy and shooting it out in single combat. Haltrick must take on two; I must take on two; Wogy must—No! Good! I saw as I came round and faced the enemy formation again that one of them was swirling aside, evidently disabled. It was a Fokker. Good again. Better a Fokker than an Albatros. Fokkers were good.

The two opponents who engaged me were a Fokker and an out-of-date Albatros. Keeping a watchful eye on the latter, I tangled with the newer machine, and together we went whirling round in a series of tail-chasing circuits. I soon found that as a pilot my opponent was not good; he lost height at every turn.

I waited till he had lost a fair amount of it, and then I zoomed sharply, whirled over in a loop, and came pelting down on him, putting in a long burst from what was practically an upside down position. I could see the tracer darting into his cockpit. His machine heeled over in a spin; there was a dead man at the controls.

The Albatros seemed none too anxious to engage, so I let him be for the moment. I was anxious about young Peter, fearing that he would be taking all sorts of risks to bring that confounded Sprowder-Clap of his into action. I had a strong feeling that whatever that weird contraption secured beneath his fuselage might be, it was going to be of no use at all in a dog-fight of this kind.

I looked round. Haltrick was fiercely attacking two Fokkers, fighting them burst for burst and drubbing them in fine style. As I watched, the wings of one of them folded suddenly upwards, the main spars shot through by his
concentrated fire. Good! We were winning all along the line.

To add to my elation, an S.E. 5 came diving down in front of me at right angles to my course, and as it passed I saw that painted on its fuselage was the hideous emblem I knew so well. The Frog had arrived! And already he was as happy as a terrier in a rat-pit. Below him an Albatros, streaming a long black plume of smoke and gyrating like a sycamore seed, was heading for its final crash in the mud of the trenches.

Following the direction of the Frog’s course with my eyes, I at last caught sight of Peter—and what I saw caused me to whirl round my machine in a hurry.

There was a Fokker hard on his tail, his guns streaming tracer. Peter went yowling over in a loop, and came racing back in my direction. But the Fokker looped also, and would not be shaken off; he was even gaining. Then I gave a gasp of relief, for I saw that the Frog had taken a hand. He hurled himself on the tail of the unsuspecting Fokker, and the three of them went streaking across my front, the German in the middle.

You already know what happened then. It has been described in the opening paragraphs of this narrative. The Frog, having the Fokker full on his sights, deliberately withheld his fire. And that poor kid, Peter Hughes, succumbing to the hail of lead that burst from the Fokker’s Spandaus, heeled over and shot down in an uncontrolled spin.

CHAPTER VII
Introducing the Sprowder-Clap

WOGGY WANE tried to hold me back, saying there was no proof, but I pushed him aside. I made straight for the Frog and let him have it with both barrels.

“Bledlow, you’re a swine!” I blazed at him. “You let young Peter get killed on purpose!”

He stopped and stared up at me with that peculiar stoop of the shoulders and twist of the neck. The expression that came over his face was mildly surprised; it was just as though the idea had never occurred to him. I was disconcerted; either this was incredibly good acting, or he was really innocent. To this day I do not know which. Hot anger made me continue.

“Just because the kid got above himself the other night and made you look a fool, you do this! It’s—it’s perfectly damnable!”

The Frog returned to his rôle of a cynical killer-man. He waved his hand airily. “Anything you like! Anything you like! Trot along to the C.O., tell him how I let your little friend get killed on purpose. But don’t forget to take your proof along with you, will you?”

He turned away.

Woggy prevented me from following by main force. “Don’t be a crazy idiot, man! You haven’t an atom of proof!”

The Frog must have heard this. He stopped and turned round with a leer. “Even my guns sometimes jamb, Trevelyan! Yup!”

I was beaten.

That night we packed up the kid’s kit for sending home. At the request of Flowers, the Adjutant, Woggy wrote a letter to his mother. Now there would be no fortnight’s leave for Peter—and no ice-cream medal on his chest. We should miss him, too.

THAT Sprowder-Clap business. It was something I wanted to know about very much, and in the Three Squadrons, if there is ever anything you want to know about very much, the best thing to do is to go straight to Teddy McFane of the Camel Squadron. Teddy knows everything about everything and everybody.

“Teddy,” I said, “I want to ask you about something.”

Teddy straightened his tie with the air of an expert receiving a client. “Certainly!” he answered briskly. “Tell you anything about anything!”

(This was a part of Teddy’s regular sales-patter, and I had heard it many times before.)
"It's about this Sprowder-Clap," I began.

"Oh, yes?" said Teddy encouragingly. I felt he would have offered me a chair, only we happened to be standing on the aerodrome. He cocked an eye towards an open door.

"Shall we stroll into your bar? It's most convenient."

I sighed. "Don't you ever give information without a drink, Teddy?"

"No!" answered Teddy promptly.

"The labourer is worthy of his hire."

"And the Nosey One is worthy of his nose-bag. All right. Come along, then."

I SAT him down and brought him a small whisky, which I thought was all his information was likely to be worth. I was wrong.

"Now, about this Sprowder-Clap, we shall never see it function now, of course."

"Eh?"

"I say that now we are never likely to know whether it was any good or not, seeing that it must have been destroyed with young Peter."

Teddy allowed one eyelid to droop, and smirked aggravatingly.

"What are you looking like that for?"

I demanded.

"Ne'mind me. Go on," he murmured, sipping his drink.

"Well, what I want to know is: What was the thing like? You know what Honeyball told us about—a black hornet thing chasing after a sidecar-combination? Well——"

Teddy stopped me with a raised hand.

"You must remember, my dear Trevelyen, that the intelligence of Honeyball is very much on a level with that of the tadpoles and water-beetles he's always fishing out of ponds. To begin with, the black hornet thing wasn't 'chasing after a sidecar'; it was being towed behind the sidecar."

"Oh! Yes, I might have guessed that."

"Haystead and young Peter were trying to produce a colourable imitation of the actual conditions of flight. They wanted to see if the wing area they had decided upon was sufficient to support the weight of their air mine."

"Their what?"

"Their air mine. That's the basis of the idea, fathead! To trail an air mine, a self-supporting air mine, so to speak, behind an aeroplane."

"Oh, I see!"

"When the old Hun noses up to it to have a real close-up view of the smallest aeroplane in the world, the fellow who is trailing it just presses the button to detonate it, and—Voilà! Allemand fini!, as the Frooglies say. The whole thing is based on deceit—like the bedroom scene in 'Little Red Riding-Hood.'"

"What do you mean by that?"

Teddy sighed at my obtuseness. "Well, fathead! What looks like a nice old grandma turns out to be a nasty old wolf; and what seems to be a pretty little aeroplane, turns out to be the World's Biggest Bang. Get me?"

"Yes, I'm beginning to see the idea."

Teddy played with his glass. Then he remarked with studied carelessness:

"It's going to work well, if you ask me."

I stared at him. "Going to! Going to, Teddy? What do you mean?"

Teddy gave an excellent impersonation of a gagged-and-bound oyster.

"Going to, Teddy?" I persisted.

Teddy allowed his eyes to stray to his glass, and started slightly, as though never in his life had he ever seen an empty one before.

"Yes, going to," he murmured abstractedly.

I fetched him another small whisky.

"Now tell me, Teddy!" I pleaded.

Teddy slowly drained the glass, took a cigarette out of my case, and lighted it with one of my matches. He leaned back and jingled money in his pocket. Then he raised his eyebrows as much as to say "These things will happen!" and answered:

"Somebody else has taken over the idea."

"Who?" I flashed at him.

"The Frog."
"The Frog! The Frog's got no right to!"

But Teddy is never greatly concerned with ethics. He rose, stifling a yawn, and sauntered to the door. "Well, ta-ta, Trevelyon! Don't let 'em slip you any dud half-crowns!"

It was a short time later that I went into our hangar for the purpose of fixing up a rubber-band device against the inside of my cockpit. I wanted something that would hold my map-board safe even when the 'bus was stunted. The sight that met my eyes when I entered the hangar was sufficiently astonishing to make me halt in my tracks.

Standing in front of the Frog's S.E. with a paint brush in one hand and a pot of yellow paint in the other was Private Stokes, busily engaged in painting out the sign of the leering frog. Behind him, Bledlow himself was standing. Then I understood. If the Frog really was going to take over the Sprowder-Clap, he would naturally want to fly incognito. To obliterate that wonderful piece of poster-genius seemed an act of vandalism, but it was nothing to do with me. I climbed into my cockpit, and put the matter out of my head.

I had been at work for perhaps five minutes, when Flowers, the Adjutant, came in. There was a paper in his hand and a message-bag under his arm.

"Here! I say, Bledlow!" He thrust the paper into the Frog's hand. "Take a look at that; it's just been dropped on to the aerodrome by a Hun scout. I haven't shown it to Tiggy-Wiggy; he doesn't approve of duels; also, there are some nasty remarks about you in it."

The Frog glanced carelessly at the German message and handed it back. "What's it all about? Me no savvy sausage language."

Flowers cleared his throat and began to translate:

"It has come to the ears of Cavalry-Captain the Count Wolfgang von Hochfels zu Feckenaar that his brother, Ulrich von Hochfels zu Feckenaar, having been forced to land in Allied territory, was brutally done to death by an English pilot in circumstances unwarrantable in international law and precedent. The aeroplane flown by the Englishman was an S.E. 5 distinguished by the head of a frog (or toad) painted in green.

"Cavalry-Captain Count Wolfgang von Hochfels zu Feckenaar has no other wish than to meet his brother's murderer in single combat. On the 17th, 18th, and 19th of this month at 11 a.m. he will arrange to be flying at a height of 6,000 metres above the salt-lakes of Carvilliers. His aeroplane, a Fokker D.7, may be identified by the emblem of the Death's Head Hussars painted in black and silver on both sides of the fuselage.

(Signed)

RITTMEISTER GRAF WOLFGANG V. HOCHFELS ZU FECKENAAR."

A broad grin was spread over the Frog's face when Flowers finished reading.

"I say, what's this about a brutal murder?" Flowers wanted to know. The Frog clapped his cigarette hand over his mouth, sucked in smoke through the fingers, and then, tilting his chin, expelled it in a long stream.

"Shot while attempting to escape," he murmured, unconsciously using the formula which, a decade or so later, was to be so overworked by the guards in Nazi concentration camps. He glanced at me with an odious smirk. "You don't know how I hated having to do that."

"Escaping, eh? Served him right then. But you're an uncompromising devil, aren't you?" Flowers said.

The Frog blew another stream of smoke roofwards. "You have to do your duty," he murmured regretfully. He took the German Graf's message from the Adjutant, and looked over it, shaking his head sadly. "The person I feel sorry for, y'know," he said, heaving a crocodile sigh, "is the old lady."

"For the love of Mike, what old lady?"

"Why, the old Countess von Hochfels zu Thingmejig. That'll be two of her kids I've done in this month. Bit steep, eh? I've got a heart, I have."

"First time I've noticed it," grinned
The wings of one of the Fokkers folded suddenly upwards, the spars shot through by the S.E.s' concentrated fire
AIR STORIES

Flowers. "You with a heart! What next! Why, I couldn't sleep if I had all those deaths on my hands. 'Thou art steeped in blood as a hog in slime,' as the poet says. What are you thinking about?"

The Frog was standing with his stocky legs astride, thoughtfully staring up at the roof, and sending out a long stream of smoke from his open mouth. "Wondering where I'll nail up that Death's Head Hussar emblem in silver and black."

"You're pretty sure of yourself. But don't forget that the Graf is the Elephant's Elbow in the air-fighting business," Flowers warned him.

"So'm I," the Frog retorted, still staring up at the roof.

"You're definitely going to take him on, then?"

"Yup. Trust me."

"Good! This ought to fetch in some gate-money." And Flowers departed.

For a few seconds the Frog continued staring up at the roof, then he suddenly whirled round and thumped a heavy hand down on the shoulder of the startled Stokes.

"You've daubed yellow paint all over my frogs' heads, haven't you? Well, now go and fetch some turps and wipe it all off again. I want those frogs' heads to stay."

CHAPTER VIII
Message of Mystery

I MET Teddy McFane outside the Repair Hangar.

"Hallo!" Teddy greeted me. "You've heard about the duel?" I nodded.

"And you know that a second message-bag was dropped at the same time as the one bearing the challenge?" he went on.

"I don't. Where is it?"

Teddy gripped me by the shoulders and switched me round until I was facing the tall poplar that grew on the farther side of the road that ran past our mess. A tall ladder had been propped against it, at the top of which a mechanic with a long pole was doing his best to disentangle something that fluttered in the branches some way above his head.

"That's where the second message-bag fell," Teddy told me. "And it looks as though it'll be hours before they fetch it down."

"What the deuce can be in it?"

"Dunno, and it's no good waiting."

He led me into the hangar. "Come and see the Giant Sprower-Clap. The Frog's stopped working on it."

"Why 'Giant'?"

"'Cos it's a jolly sight bigger than the one Peter had."

"How's he going to carry it, then?"

I wanted to know.

"Slung underneath the fuselage. There's a quick-release device in the cockpit of his 'bus-hand operated."

We moved over to a bench in the corner of the hangar.

The Frog's Sprower-Clap was painted a brilliant vermillion. It was a kind of triplane glider with a deep keel weighted at the lower end. The "fuselage" in which a big charge of high explosive was to be contained, consisted of a cylinder of heavy metal cast in the manner of the casing of a Mill's bomb, and I could see that on detonation the thing would shatter itself into hundreds of death-dealing "toffees." A ring in the place where the propeller-boss would be provided attachment for the cable, which also carried the detonating wire.

"So that's an air mine, is it?" I murmured without enthusiasm.

"It is." Teddy approached a knuckle to the shining wet paint, and thoughtfully wiped it on the seat of his breeches. "As the Frog has knocked off work on it for the time being, it must mean that he's going to fight the Rittmeister without anything up his sleeve."

"I know that. I've just seen him cancel the order to paint out his emblem."

Teddy's eyes flickered. He hates anybody else to be first with the news.

"He'll win, anyhow. You see," he said after a pause.

"Not so sure. He's never fought anybody of the Graf's calibre before.
THE FROG THAT FELL OUT OF THE SKY

He's got the deuce of a reputation up the line, that Hun, and if he's taking three days' leave to come down and settle this score, he surely means business."

"Tcha! Bad luck aside, the Frog's unbeatable. I've never seen anybody to touch him, not even in the Camel Squadron."

There are times when Teddy's enthusiasm for his rotten Camel Squadron is a little trying.

"I'm quite sure of that!" I said drily.

"HAVE some tea, my dear?"

Woggly Wane is a confirmed tea-drinker, and takes alcohol with no enthusiasm at all; which probably accounts for the fact that his liver, and his temper, are in a great deal better condition than most. At the moment when I entered our hut he had his own private tea-making apparatus spread out all around him.

"I'd love some," I said, sitting down on my camp-bed.

"All right. Biff me a couple of holes in that, then."

I caught the tin of condensed milk he tossed to me, and obediently "biffed" a couple of holes in the top.

"Just heard from Peter's mother," Woggly told me, "in answer to my letter. Must be a grand woman, that. She took it like a heroine. I'll show you."

It was while I was unfolding the letter that there came a knock. The door was opened, and a mechanic asked leave to enter. He was holding a message-bag, to which a bright red streamer was attached. He was followed into the hut by half a dozen officers, all curious to know what was the purport of this strange missive from Hunland.

"Adjutant says this is for you, sir," the ack-emma said to Woggly. "We've just got it down from the top of a tree," he explained with a grin.

With a wondering expression on his face Woggly drew out the message, and smoothed it out on his knee. The eyes of everyone in the hut were on him.

Suddenly he was on his feet, his chubby face radiant with joy. "Hurray!"

"What is it?"

"It's—it's from young Peter! He's alive!"

"Wha-a-a-at? Impossible!"

Everybody moved over to look over his shoulder. But as they read the delighted looks on their faces gave place to disappointment. Woggly himself looked puzzled.

"It's a fake!"

"Never heard of any of those people!"

"Who's the girl, anyhow?"

Woggly looked up, frowning. "Does anybody know what young Peter's writing was like—his signature?"

Someone produced an autograph-book and began busily flipping over the pages.

"Here we are! That's it!"

"It's the kid's signature all right."

"Good! That's the main thing. He's alive then."

"Thank God. I can write to his mother, and let her know that much, anyway. But—but can anybody suggest anything to account for—for this rubbish?"

Several eyes turned to Haltrick, the acknowledged leader in the gathering. Haltrick was a medical student.

"There's a theory that has just come into my head that might explain it," he began slowly. "But it doesn't seem to me very likely. It's this: that when young Hughes crashed in Hunland, as he must have done, he suffered severe concussion and loss of memory. I don't mean complete loss of memory, but loss of memory of his recent life up to the date of the crash. I'm suggesting that all the people he mentions there, including the girl Dot Whatsaname, belong to a previous chapter of his life, which is the only one he happens to be able to remember."

"It's possible, of course."

"Tell you what, Woggly!" someone suggested. "You might write to his mother and ask her if she happens to know a Miss Dorothy Koad. She wouldn't know any of the men he mentions, perhaps, but she might know her. What about it?"
Looking very worried, Woggy shook his head. "No. If the kid’s gone barmy, I’d—I’d rather wait till we have more definite news."

I took the message from his hand and examined it. It read:

"Greetings to Jack Malting, Oswald Hines George Tipton, and Eddie Socks. And please give my love to Dot Koad.

PETER HUGHES."

Puzzling enough. Who in the name of fortune could "Eddie Socks" be? Not a single one of those names was known in the Three Squadrons. We gave it up.

CHAPTER IX
Return of a Victor

It was ten o’clock on the morning of the seventeenth day of the month—the day on which the Frog, of our S.E. 5 Squadron, and that redoubtable Rittmeister of the Death’s Head Hussars were to meet and shoot it out 700 metres above the salt lakes of Carvilliers. Everybody in the Three Squadrons who was not actually on duty had swarmed out on to the aerodrome to watch the Frog take-off.

"Think you’ll manage him all right, Bledlow?" someone asked.

The Frog was standing beside his machine waiting for the engine to warm up. He sucked in a mouthful of smoke through his fingers and, nonchalantly tilting his chin, expelled it in a stream.

"Yup. Trust me!" Then a twisted smile played round the corners of his wide mouth. "There’s one thing I’ve always been meaning to buy myself, and that’s a laundry-bag."

"A laundry-bag!"

"Yup. And now I’m going to get one free."

"How—how’s that?"

The grinning Frog explained. "Take any fair sized Boche with pretty emblems both sides of his fuselage. Flatten him out. Snip off emblems with pair of sharp scissors. Place edge to edge, and sew strongly with white thread. And there’s your laundry-bag! Useful little paper, ‘Home Snips!’ Well, goo’-bye, I gotter go!" He took one last draw from his cigarette, ground it under his heel, and cocked one stocky leg over the side of his fuselage. A hundred eyes failed to detect any trace of excitement in that cynical killer-man.

Br-rmp! Br-rmp! Br-rmp! Br-r-r-r-rmp! Now, with short bursts of engine-power, he was swinging round into the wind to take-off. At that moment Honeyball, sent out for a spot of "learning the country," was also taxying forth. But not a head was turned to look at Honeyball.

There was a sudden rising thunder as the Frog pushed open the throttle, and ripples chased one another over the wind-flattened grass. The little S.E. 5, dancing on her tailskid, went trundling forward with gathering speed. Now she was streaking tail-high across the big aerodrome, engine thundering all-out.

"Phew! Look at that, though!"

The Frog had decided that not only his return, but also his setting-out, should be spectacular. Before his wheels had left the ground he had dipped one wing-tip until it almost brushed the grass, and was now screaming upwards almost vertically in a hair-raising corkscrew climb. At three hundred feet—to give the spectators full measure—he performed a lightning loop, and then suddenly forgot about the crowd, and headed north-east.

The scattered groups broke up. Here and there someone casually turned his head and grinned to see Honeyball’s eminently safe departure from the ground. From the thoughtless there broke ironical cheers for the less gifted performance of the student of pond life.

Meanwhile the Frog was a tiny speck in the sky, still climbing steadily. At a height of twenty thousand feet above the white salt lakes of Carvilliers the proud Rittmeister would be waiting to do battle. Then the two high-powered scouts would be racing round in endless circuits of mortal combat, the silver Death’s Head matching the starkness of its grin against the odious merriment of
THE FROG THAT FELL OUT OF THE SKY

the Leering Frog. At the end of that epic contest only one of the two champions would be alive. We thought so at that time, anyhow. We were wrong.

"TEDDY'S the man!" Woggy exclaimed, dragging the Camel pilot towards me. "Allow me to introduce you to a friend of Miss Dorothy Koad."
"Does he know her?"
"Says he does."
"Shall we stroll across to your bar?" murmured Teddy. "And I'll explain." "No, we jolly well won't! I'm waiting to see the Frog come back."
Teddy's face took on a firm expression. "Oh, very well! Have it your own way, you red-headed guzzle-bird!"
"It's really very simple," Teddy explained. "And, as a matter of fact, it was me that told the kid how to work the stunt."
"What stunt?"
"Why, he wanted to let his mother know where he was stationed when he came out here. So I told him how to work it."
"Yes, but what about Dot Koad?"
"Dot Koad is 'dot code,' fathead! It's the system I told him about."
"O-o-h!"
"Now let's see your message." Teddy took the paper and began unfolding it. "Now, you see! There'll be small dots under some of the letters, and those are the ones that spell out the secret message." He smoothed out the paper on the table.
"D'you see?"

"Greetings to Jack Malting, Oswald Hines, George Tipton, and Eddie Socks. And please give my love to Dot Koad."

PETER HUGHES.

Woggy and I bent over the paper, examining it closely.
"No, we don't!" we said at last.
"Because there aren't any dots!"
Teddy grabbed at the message and scrutinised it. His face began to redder.
"Well I'll be jiggered! I told that young idiot——!"

I snatched away his glass. "Teddy, you're a twister!"
"But I thought——" began the dumbfounded Teddy.

Meanwhile Woggy Wane had taken the paper and turned it over. "Cheer up, Teddy!" he said calmly. "It's all right; the dots are on the other side. You have to hold it up to the light."
We all scrambled over to the window.
"That's not what I told him!" Teddy grumbled.
"No; it's a jolly sight smarter," I pointed out.
"Shut up, you two, and let's have a look!" Woggy held the paper up to the light.

"Greetings to Jack Malting, Oswald Hines, George Tipton, and Eddie Socks. And please give my love to Dot Koad."

PETER HUGHES.

"Take down the letters," ordered Woggy.
"i, a, m, g, o, i, n, g, t, o, e, s, c, a, p, e."
"Divide 'em up!"
"I/am going/to/escape."

WE looked at one another glumly.
"Pretty feeble, eh?"
"The silly young ass!" growled Teddy. "Even if he is going to escape, why take all that trouble to say so?"
"Don't forget he's only a kid," Woggy said. "I suppose he thought it was romantic to use your code. The thing that bucks me up is this proof that that gibberish does mean something. It shows that the kid's not gone barmy, which Haltrick thought possible."
"That's true," I agreed. "I wonder if there is anything in this talk of escape? Surely not!"
"Dunno," said Woggy thoughtfully. "With all the personal charm that kid's got, I should think nothing is impossible. He looks such a child that people don't take him seriously."
"Yes, I can quite imagine him getting away with it," said Teddy, brightening suddenly. "You know young Peter's style." He pushed back an imaginary
lock of hair, and thrust his face close up to Woggy's in an excellent imitation of Peter's enthusiastic "confidentialness." "'I say, Mister Hun! Can I sit inside your machine and twiddle the gadgets?' he chirps to a soaking big Bavarian. 'Ja gewiss!' grins the big stiff—probably he's got a kid-brother with the same untidy yellow hair. Young Peter hops into the cockpit, and before you can say—"

Teddy got no further. Suddenly the door crashed open with a noise like the bursting of a five-nine, and Naylor of the R.E. 8 Squadron shot in. His face was wild with excitement.

"Hi! Any of you fellows want to see a gen-u-ine Rittmeister of the Death's Head Hussars? Come on, then! The Frog's bringing him back on a dog-lead—'less than the dust beneath his chariot-wheels!' Come on out!"

TEDDY, who was first out, pointed excitedly. At a height of two thousand five hundred feet the Frog's S.E. 5 was slowly gliding towards us; the engine was throttled back to a tick-over; the propeller was flickering lazily; and he was not alone. Beside him, flying almost wing-tip to wing-tip, was a Fokker D. 7 painted entirely in black, except that on the side of its fuselage was the silver skull-and-crossbones emblem of the Death's Head Hussars. Its engine had been shut off completely, for the very good reason that its propeller had been shot away.

Delighted cheers broke from the crowd. The redoubtable Frog was conveying back a prisoner. No less a prisoner than the Rittmeister Graf Wolfgang von Hochfels zu Feckenaaar! Bringing him right back to the aerodrome! The idea! There was laughter and clapping. The Frog might be a queer devil, but, by gum, he could certainly shoot it out with the best of 'em!

This amazing feat implied that he had attained such tactical dominance over his enemy that he had been able to shoot away, not only his propeller, but all his important controls as well. What a man!

The pair of them were nearly over the leeward end of the aerodrome now, but still at a height of two thousand feet or so. This was puzzling. Why so high?

"Tell you what!" Teddy suddenly burst out. "The Frog's going to stage a sort of triumph, force the other fellow to make several circuits of the aerodrome with him as they glide down. It'll be like—like Achilles hitching the body of Hector to his chariot and parading him round the walls of Troy! By George! He's got circus-sense, the Frog has!"

But Teddy was wrong. The Frog's vainglory took quite another form.

Arrived over the boundary of the aerodrome, to the astonishment of us all, the Frog suddenly drooped a wing, flipped up his tail and, leaving his prisoner to land unattended, came whistling vertically downwards in his usual breath-taking spin.

Phew! So the crowd was not, after all, to be denied the spectacular "fall out of the sky!" We all gasped. There was something most insolently confident in leaving the prisoner up there. It was as good as proclaiming to the world that the proud Rittmeister was so completely subjugated that the possibility of his escape never entered the victor's head. The superb arrogance of it!

The all-black Fokker banked slowly to the right, and began gliding down in a wide circuit. But now all eyes were on the Frog. With a shrill scream of wires the S.E. came hurtling downwards out of the sky. It was spinning faster than it had ever been seen to spin before; probably the Frog was giving it a little engine to add to the effect. Its wild gyrations called to mind the frantic fluttering of some shot bird, dropping through the air like a stone.

Yow-oo-oohl! Suddenly the Frog jammed on opposite rudder, and the little S.E. flicked to an even keel, and went scooting forward only two or three feet above the ground. The dare-devil had practically landed off the last turn of a spin! We watched the slow-up of his wild dash across the aerodrome. He came to a halt not forty yards from the hangars.
THE FROG THAT FELL OUT OF THE SKY

"There's Honeyball coming in to land," Woggy said. But nobody wanted to see what Honeyball might be doing. All eyes were now on the dead-black Fokker decorated with the silver skull. We heard the soft whisper of its wires as it passed over our heads at the end of its final circuit, and turned in to land.

Its wheels touched down near the middle of the aerodrome, and a few seconds later it was stationary, the wreckage of a powerful scout that would never take the air again. Straining our eyes, we could see the Rittmeister wearily undoing the chin-strap of his flying-helmet. And that was that—so we thought.

"HERE ! Look !" The startled yelp of alarm came from Teddy McFane. He was pointing with quivering finger.

"That—that little idiot's going to land right beside him! Look at him! Oh, my God!"

The wretched Honeyball was nosing down to land. Unless he had the sense to open up again, his run would bring him within twenty feet of the German Graf.

Everybody saw the danger at exactly the same moment. Alarm spread like lightning over the whole crowd. Honeyball's glide was bringing him nearer and nearer to the stricken German craft. In a moment he would touch down—and make a free gift of his machine to the watchful Rittmeister.

There were frantic shouts of warning from the crowd. A hundred hands were cupped round half a hundred mouths, and half a hundred voices bellowed in unison:

"HONEYBALL ! You FOO-OOOOL !"

Meanwhile, quite unconscious of all this emotion, Honeyball brought his S.E. to a halt, and, leaving the engine ticking over, jumped down to have a look at the captured German craft.

"Hold me up!" groaned Teddy. "He—thinks it's a giant pond-skater or something!"

The Rittmeister was seen throwing off his safety-belt. He rose to his feet and slipped down from his cockpit.

He was a big man, but he moved like a panther.

The whole crowd howled in an agony of apprehension:

"HONEYBALL ! Get BACK !"

People stood on one leg and impotently shot their fists up to the sky. It was just as though a baby had been found playing with the bolts of a tiger cage.

"H O N E Y B A L L ! You FOO-OO-OOOL !"

At that moment Honeyball must have seen from the look on the German's face that all was not well. Grasping the situation at last, he flexed his knees and spread out his hands as though to shoo chickens or circumvent the escape of dytiscus marginalis from its pie-dish aquarium.

The big Pomeranian Junker came on at a run. One blow from him sent poor Honeyball to his knees. But Honeyball was not done yet. He flung both arms round the Rittmeister's legs, and hung on like a leech. There was a howl of execration from the crowd as the Graf drew back a huge fist and brought it down with stunning force on top of the youngster's head. And Honeyball, going suddenly limp, collapsed like a tired child.

In a matter of seconds the Graf was inside the cockpit of Honeyball's S.E. Its engine bellowed in answer to his hand on the throttle, and the little machine trundled forward, put up its tail, and came racing towards us.

Someone darted forward and began running like a hare. It was Haltrick, a big spanner in his hand. As the S.E. bore down on him with engine thundering all out, we saw him draw back his arm and throw it with all his might. A second later he had to hurl himself to the ground to avoid being smashed to pieces by the left wing. But the spanner went wide of the whirling arc of the propeller, and the Rittmeister pulled back on his stick and a second later was roaring up over the hangars—a free man, for the time being at least.

"THE Frog! Where's the Frog?" everyone howled. A man-hunt
roused the worst passions in any crowd.
"After him, Butcher-Bird!"
"Shoot the —— down!"
"Sock him, Towsier!"
"Set him on fire! Frizzle him brown, the dirty Sausage!"

But the Frog was standing up in his cockpit, waving his arms and raving like a lunatic. He had tried to turn his machine, but only succeeded in landing himself up against the hangar. Aeroplanes won't turn like taxi-cabs.
"Turn me round," he roared. "Turn me round, you sons of ——!" His face was distorted with fury. He beat his fists on the side of the cockpit. He was like a maniac.

A dozen men hurled themselves on his machine, lifted the tail-unit shoulder high, and staggered round with it until he was facing the aerodrome. It would be a down-wind take-off, but no matter. Almost before they had let his tail-skid down to the grass the Frog had slammed open his throttle. Br-r-r-r-rmp!
"Give him hell, Towsier!"

Getting up its tail in the first ten yards, the little S.E. went streaking back across the aerodrome. Watching, I gave a sudden exclamation. In the middle of the fairway, right in the track of the racing Frog, a dozen or more men were running to the help of the unfortunate Honeyball. It looked as though they would be cut to pieces by his propeller.
"Look out!" I yelled with all the strength of my lungs.

But, though the Frog cared nothing for men's lives, he knew that if he ran somebody down there would be damage to his craft. He kept her at full throttle, but felt with one hand for his Klaxon, and sounded it like one demented.

At the thunder of the engine and the strident blare of the Klaxon so close behind them, the runners jerked round their heads, and seeing death very near, flung themselves flat. The Frog never turned his head as the prone men flashed by beneath his wings. His take-off was like the progress of a fire-engine. With blue smoke streaking back from his exhaust and engine bellowing crescendo, he yanked back the stick and went up like a lift. But the Rittmeister had already put a mile and a half between his stolen S.E. and the aerodrome.

Beside me Teddy McFane was mopping his forehead. "Phew! What a man, eh? Taught the Frog not to swank, he has! Think the Frog'll catch him?"

I shook my head. "Not a chance."

HALF an hour later he was sighted returning. For the first time since I had known him, he made a normal landing. His face, when he climbed out of his machine, was grey with half-spent passion. His eyes had that look in them that made me fear for his reason.

Back at our living quarters, he went slouching round like a drunkard, putting his head in at the door of this hut and that. He visited the anteroom, the Intelligence Hut, and even the lats. I guessed he was searching for Honeyball, and looked at Woggy in alarm. But Woggy winked knowingly, and referred me to Haltrick.

"I tipped the wink to old McGregor," Haltrick said. "He's keeping him in hospital till to-morrow. This'll blow over as soon as the Frog's killed the Rittmeister. You see."

"Seems to me that the Graf won't want to risk another drubbing like that—not in single combat, any way."

"He most certainly will; I can promise you that. These Pomeranian* Junkers are as proud as turkey-cocks," Haltrick said. "All Germans, or rather all German gents, attach a deuce of a lot of importance to the duelling business. They've got minds like school kids."

"That's right," supported Teddy. "You see! Old Skull-and-Crossbones will turn up again to-morrow, even if he has to come in a 'plain van' and without any trimmings."

CHAPTER X
"Vae Victis!"

THAT night I found it difficult to sleep. On the other side of the hut there

* Pomerania: A Baltic Sea province of the old Kingdom of Prussia.
THE FROG THAT FELL OUT OF THE SKY

came sudden and violent creakings as the Frog on his rickety camp bed hurled himself first to one side, then to the other. Occasionally there would be a gritting of teeth and strange animal noises. I stared up into the darkness, more than a little afraid. It seemed that the man's soul was in torment. Was he going mad?

Soon I heard Woggy stirring. I heard him drawing on his sheepskin flying-boots. Woggy, as usual, was thinking not of himself, but the other fellow. Listening, I heard the splash of water in a glass, and the click of tablets against the side of a bottle. Now he was moving silently down the lane between the rows of beds towards the Frog.

"What about some aspirin?"
"Yup. That's good of you. Thanks."
"Tell you what," Woggy whispered.
"Give yourself a rest to-morrow, and fight him on the nineteenth; he gave you three days."

The teeth grated. The answer came almost in a snarl. "No!"

"Don't look so full of buck this mornin', do 'e?" remarked an ack-emma, shrewdly surveying the Frog from a distance.

The Frog was striding on his stocky legs up and down beside his machine, waiting for the engine to warm up. He made no cynical jests this morning. There were dark rings round his eyes. He gnawed at his nails as he strode. The wiseheads nodded sagely. "He knows it's coming to him this trip. You can't keep on at that pace—not for ever."

On climbing into his machine, Bledlow removed a revolver from his pocket and pressed it into clips he had had fitted in his cockpit. His take-off, though there was a larger crowd even than the day before to watch him, was without any frills whatever. We watched him leave the ground and climb steeply towards the north-east. Above the salt lakes of Carvilliers, the Rittmeister would be waiting for him.

"Well, I dunno!" exclaimed Teddy McFane. "But it seemed to me that the Leering Frog wasn't leering with quite so much gusto to-day. What do you think?"

"'P'haps the Silver Skull won't be, either," I answered.

Those of us who were not on duty stood about, just waiting. There was a definite sense of foreboding in the air. People smoked more cigarettes than usual, and threw them away with longer stubs. Anybody who possessed binoculars was wearing them round his neck. There was even a forbidden camera or two. Fellows who were usually quite unruffled discovered they had nothing to say in the group in which they found themselves, and moved on to join another. There was a certain restlessness abroad. "If he doesn't come back soon I'm going to make some tea," said Woggy.

There certainly seems to be an element of ghouliness in our human make-up. "Some day the Frog will break his neck," people said—and turned out as regularly as clockwork to watch his amazing "fall out of the sky." To-day they were looking to the Frog to provide them with red-hot drama. They were not disappointed.

An ack-emma saw him first, and pointed excitedly. "He's nabbed him again! Cor! Ain't he 'ot stuff!"

Woggy fumbled for his binoculars and handed them to me. At a height of two thousand feet the Frog was slowly gliding towards the aerodrome, and, strictly according to plan, another machine was gliding by his side. There was a thrill of excitement. There were cheers and clapping. "He's done it again! Good old Frog! Ruddy marvel!"

The Frog had changed his tactics to-day. There was going to be no spectacular "fall out of the sky." I could see that because in measure that the two machines approached, they progressively lost height. The Frog was going to take no chances this time. He would land beside his victim.

Gazing curiously through Woggy's binoculars, I noticed that the Rittmeister, just as Teddy had foreseen was possible, had turned out in the "plain van";
his machine was an ordinary-looking Fokker D. 7, on the fuselage of which the emblem of the Death's Head Hussars had been painted for identification. The two machines, the one with the propeller flickering lazily, and the one with the propeller in splinters, landed side by side.

The big Rittmeister had dropped to the ground, and was slowly undoing the chin-strap of his flying helmet. He raised his long arms and stretched them upwards—not because the advancing Frog had produced a revolver, but to ease his cramped limbs. It seemed to me that the Graf, looking past the Frog, was eyeing the S.E. 5, whose engine was ticking over so temptingly, with more than a little interest.

Now the squat Frog, moving with that curious gliding gait of his, was approaching his prisoner. The revolver was held carelessly in his left hand, pointing at nothing in particular. The two men began a formal conversation, which lasted perhaps a minute. The Frog was standing, as always, slightly bent forward, and peering upwards at the other with that curious sideways twist of the head. From a distance he appeared to be in high good humour over his victory. He had reassumed his rôle of a cynical killer-man. He was the same leering cut-throat as before.

From time to time the Graf stretched his big limbs for further easement. His eyes strayed frequently to the gently droning S.E. 5. I noticed that, and because I know that Bledlow must have noticed it also, I have no two opinions about what occurred next. It was just one more joke of the bloody-minded Frog.

**THIS IS HOW IT HAPPENED.**

While the two were talking in a formal, but not hostile manner, the Frog appeared to notice that the ankle-button of his Sidcot suit had come undone. He turned to one side, the left, and stooped down to adjust it. But, apparently, it was too much for the fingers of one hand, so he set down the revolver on the grass. I could imagine his oafish leer as he did so.

The big Rittmeister of the Death's Head Hussars acted precisely according to plan—the Frog's plan. Like a rugger man making a flying tackle, he flung himself full length to grasp the gun. That gun meant freedom, and not only freedom, but a second triumphant return to Hunland, with a second captured English machine—and a story that would go down in the annals of his Staffel.

He flung himself full length and grasped. But his clutching fingers grasped nothing. For, precisely at the right moment, the cunning Frog shot out his foot and sent the revolver flying. A gasp went up from the watchers. Here was red-hot drama indeed!

Gazing with inhaled breath through the binoculars, I saw the Frog hurl himself on the back of the prostrate German, and begin grisly work. I saw him grasp the wretched man's chin in his right hand, and the top of his head in his left. I saw those tremendous shoulders heave, the right one going up, the left one going down, as the prostrate man's neck was twisted. The Frog held his position for a moment, and then slowly rose to his feet and felt for a cigarette. The body lay still. The neck had been twisted further than necks will go.

The Frog's cigarette was well alight by the time we all came running up. He himself was walking up and down beside the corpse like a man waiting for a bus. From time to time he placed his knuckles to his mouth, sucked in smoke, and luxuriously expelled it with tilted chin. He had reversed the cigarette in his hand to avoid bringing in contact with his mouth the fingers that had just taken a man's life. There was a look of oafish pleasure on his face. Never had he been in better form. He had just staged the funniest joke of his life.

Panting from his run, Woggy Wane dropped on his knees beside the body of the Rittmeister, and felt for the heart.

"Dead!" the Frog told him cheerfully. "Trust me!"

Woggy raised his head slowly. "But, good God, man!" he burst out angrily. "You didn't have to kill him!"
THE FROG THAT FELL OUT OF THE SKY

The Frog shrugged his immense shoulders and grinned. Then he sucked in a mouthful of smoke, and nonchalantly expelled it in a great cloud. "'Memer what the Gaulish johnnie said after he'd put it across the Romans? *Vae victis!* Look it up in your little Latin book!"

"I'll report this to the C.O.! I'm damned if I don't!" It was the first and last time I ever saw Woggy angry. The Frog's grin broadened. A vast cloud of cigarette-smoke rose from his tilted chin. "'My dear Wane, this case is cast-iron. 'Overpowered while attempting to escape.' I saw to that. Yup! Trust me!"

CHAPTER XI

The Fall of the Frog

SERGEANT HAYSTEAD fastened the chin-strap of his helmet with the unhurried calm that never deserted that gallant little man.

"You'll let me have plenty of warning, won't you, sir? A Verey light lobbed over my way will do the trick."

"I'll look after you, Sergeant," I promised. It was a question of supplying protection "upstairs" while the little observer did his job of spotting for the gun-battery.

"I feel my eyes aren't what they used to be a few months back, sir," he confided. "It's the strain of having to keep looking up into the sun for Huns, and then down again to see where the salvoes burst. It kind of dazzles you."

"I'll keep sunwards of you," I assured him.

The little man smiled gratefully. "That's best for me, sir." He tucked his map-board under one arm, and under the other the green canvas hold-all that contained his Lewis gun spares. "The Huns have taken to moving round in packs more lately, I notice."

At that moment a shadow crossed Haystead, and jerking round my head, I saw that the squat Frog had just glided behind me with his usual silent step. The malicious leer that played round the corners of his wide mouth reflected the character of his thoughts, and with a shiver I wondered what devilish plans were being concocted in that witch's cauldron of a brain of his.

When he was gone the Sergeant leaned forward urgently and, placing his mouth close to my ear, said in a low voice: "Listen, sir. If you see Mr. Bledlow in the sky, don't go nowhere near him. And don't join in any fight if he's in it. Take my advice, sir." And with a meaning look the Sergeant moved away.

What did he mean? I stared after him in astonishment. Steer clear of the Frog! Was he trying to warn me that—? I thought of the fate of young Peter. Had I been selected as the Frog's next victim? If so, how did Haystead know? I made a mental resolve that if Bledlow and I were involved in the same dog-fight, I would keep well clear of the machine marked with the emblem of the leering frog. I didn't know at the time that on the previous night the frog heads had been painted out.

THAT morning, patrolling at nine thousand feet, I was keeping a particularly sharp look-out. People who have never flown seem to think that, because aircraft are so clearly visible from the ground, it must be just as easy for one aeroplane to see another, like goldfish in the same bowl. This is not true. When you are flying higher than another machine it is exceedingly difficult to spot it against the multi-coloured earth it has for background.

But, by a stroke of luck, the Aviatik that was making so bellicosely for Sergeant Haystead's R.E. 8 I spotted in good time, even though its top plane had been skilfully "jazzed" to shade into the patchwork of fields over which it was speeding.

It was three thousand feet below me, and it was my meat. I headed in a direction that I calculated would bring me right on its tail, slammed open the throttle, and went whistling down after it, with every taut wire shrilly protesting.
The shrieking wind matched itself to my exultation.
And then, out of the corner of my eye, I was horrified to see that beside me another S.E. 5 was also diving headlong to mop up the Aviatik. Horrified, because although I could see no special markings on the S.E., every instinct told me that it was being flown by the Frog.

What should I do? The warning of Sergeant Haystead leapt large in my consciousness: "If you meet him in the air, keep away!" But if I kept away the Sergeant's own life and that of his pilot, might be in danger. I kept on.

A red Verey light shot out from the R.E. 8 and lobbed down to my left. It was the Sergeant warning me, I supposed, to remember his words. It did not alter my decision. But the amazing thing was that it altered the Frog's. As soon as he saw it, he broke off his dive, zoomed upwards, and sheered off, I had no idea where. Astonishing! But I did not have time for anything but just the fleeting satisfaction that he had gone. There was the Aviatik.

I now saw that I was likely to overshoot it, and sharpened my dive.

Tacka-tacca-tacca!

At two hundred yards I opened fire, and saw my tracer passing into his fuselage. Nothing happened; as a guide tracer is quite unreliable except for close-up work.

My quarry flung himself into a steep bank to the left, and my dive carried me below him. Dammit! Zooming up underneath him, I put in another burst equally ineffectual, and a moment later was locked with him in the usual circuit of tail-chasing.

But I soon found that I was a better pilot than the man in the Aviatik; he lost height in his turns. I began to take risks, and with impunity. He seemed to be unable to bring his guns to bear, and instead was struggling with one hand to adjust his chin-strap. The fool! By slicker piloting I worked myself into a position astride his tail-plane.

A second red ball of fire from Sergeant Haystead swept down somewhere to my left. Bother Sergeant Haystead! I was doing my best for him, wasn't I? In less than two ticks — I applied my eye to the Aldis. My victim's unprotected back grew big in the lens. I crisped my fingers over the firing-lever, and then suddenly unloosed them. Because at that split second my man succeeded in his struggles with his chin-strap. The helmet was whipped off, and a wealth of long fair hair streamed back in the wind. There could only be one head of hair like that on the Western front. It was young Peter I had been trying to kill!

I waved joyously. So the little devil had charmed his way out of captivity after all! I manoeuvred my machine to fly alongside him.

But young Peter didn't seem a bit pleased to see me. I was right up to him now, and could see his face clearly. It showed one emotion only, stark terror. He flung out his arm, pointing wildly behind us. At the same moment a third red ball of fire went whizzing over our heads.

What the deuce! I wrenched myself round in my seat. At the same second I became aware that the whole air was filled with the thunder of engines. God! No wonder Haystead was shooting off salvos of Verey lights!

To describe the horror of that moment a more vivid pen than mine is needed. Behind us was a whole wall-paper pattern. But instead of being a pattern of flowers, fixed and immovable, it was a pattern of Hun scouts. And they were not fixed and immovable: each was shifting slightly within the pattern, manœuvring just sufficiently to bring his fire to bear on the one or the other of us. Flame jetted rhythmically from the muzzles of their guns. It was my last moment, and Peter's last, so I thought.

Bullets went slapping through my fabric, splintered my struts, filled my lap with glass from the instrument-board. Flying wires spanged loose. The controls went soggy to my touch.

And then, streaking down on the Hun formation from behind, I saw an S.E. 5. It fell upon them like the scourge of the
THE FROG THAT FELL OUT OF THE SKY

gods. It was the terrible Frog. Behind him swept a flash of brilliant red—the Spowder-Clap.

You-o-o-oo-ool! Tacca-tacca-tacca!

Putting a burst into the Hun leader, the Frog swept underneath him, and when the air mine was in the middle of the doomed formation, he exploded it.

There was a deafening roar. And then it seemed that every aeroplane in the sky was reduced to uncontrollable wreckage. I was going down in a spin, but Heaven knows so, it seemed, was everybody else. The whole sky was filled with bits and pieces of wings, and fuselages that dropped like stones.

I fought with joystick and rudder-bar as long as there seemed any hope at all, but neither seemed to have the slightest effect on my whirligig earthward journey, and when I saw the tree-tops of a forest rushing up to meet me, I just let go everything, kicked the stick where it wouldn't go through my stomach, curved my arms over my head, and prayed.

Cr-r-r-rash!

THE next thing I remember was hearing a voice I hadn't heard for a long time. It was saying: "He's waking, chaps!"

I opened my eyes and saw that young Peter was peering down at me, full of pink-faced solicitude.

"I say! Are you all right?"

"Hallo, Peter! Yes, I'm—all right."

I turned my aching head and took in the white walls and the rows of beds.

"Glad you got back, Peter. What—what happened to the Frog?"

"That giant Spowder-Clap was too much of a good thing," began Teddy McFane. "Sergeant Haystead warned him it was too big, and warned everybody else not to go near him. But the Frog insisted—"

"Pick up, Teddy!" interrupted Wogy Wane. "He can hear all about that later on when he's well."

"The Frog's—dead?" I asked. Wogy nodded. "Blew his machine to bits, poor devil. This time he really did 'fall out of the sky.'"

AIR BOMBING FROM FOUR MILES HIGH

Seven Special Ranges have recently been Allocated to the R.A.F. for Bombing Practice from Great Heights

ROYAL Air Force pilots now acquire the difficult art of bombing surface objectives from great heights at seven special ranges in the British Isles, established either in open country or at lonely points along the coast.

Within the past twelve months a more intensive system of bombing training has been introduced. Bombing aircraft nowadays operate at levels much higher than formerly, because high flying assists attainment of surprise in attack and reduces the efficacy of the defence organisation. Since the War, the science of anti-aircraft fire has made great strides. New sound locator devices and "predictor" apparatus to direct gunfire are extremely efficient. The advance of aircraft performance, while it makes the modern bomber extremely fast, has also increased the speed and rate of climb of defending fighters. All of these developments tend to force the bomber higher and higher, though the low-flying attack may still give excellent results in certain circumstances. Nevertheless, when a bombing raid means a long flight over hostile territory, the formation will probably fly as high as possible, perhaps descending a few thousand feet when near the objective in a glide with engines throttled right down to defeat the sound-locators.

One of the latest of the high-bombing ranges to be put into service is in open country at Icklingham, Suffolk. The target, consisting of a circle with a radius of 1,000 yards, is located on heathland. Around the circle is a large "danger" area, at the boundaries of which warning boards are erected. The margin of error allowed inside the circle is not great for practice from high-speed bombers flying at heights of more than 20,000 feet, but there is a lot of room around the target and only small practice bombs are used.

Squadron bombing practice from heights of 6,000 feet or less is done on targets marked out on the aerodrome, and the new ranges are intended to serve for greater heights.

Accurate bombing from great heights involves immense skill in the aiming, and in pilotage of the bombing aeroplane. One of the new high-performance British bombers engaged in target practice must be steadied on its course for the target when it is still several miles away. The practice bombs fall at approximately 500 feet a second. As they fall, they travel forward at roughly the same speed as the aeroplane from which they are released. Assuming that the bomber is cruising at 200 m.p.h. at a height of 25,000 feet, the bomb will take fifty seconds to reach the ground and travel forward about three miles during its fall. This means that the bomb-aimer and pilot must discern the target clearly at a distance of at least six miles in order to adjust course and to set the aeroplane on a perfectly level keel for steady bomb-launching. Influences likely to affect the bomb in its fall—ground speed, wind strength and direction, the bomb's velocity of fall, and its line of flight—are compensated by the setting of the bomb-sight, a piece of mechanism which has been brought near perfection in the past few years.
BOMBING 'PLANES

Modern Monoplane Bombers of France, Germany & America

THE AMIOT MILITARY MONOPLANE

A STRIKING example of a modern French bomber and multi-seater fighter, the Amiot 143.M is a cantilever monoplane fitted with two 780 b.h.p. Gnôme-Rhône geared and supercharged engines. The fuel tanks, which are armoured-plated and can quickly be jettisoned in an emergency, are carried in the wings. An enclosed turret in the nose houses the front gunner, the pilot's cockpit is in front of the leading edge of the wing, and there is a second gunner's cockpit, or tunnel, aft of the wing. Below the fuselage and forward of the wing there is a long glass-enclosed compartment which contains the bomber's and navigator's posts and the photographic and wireless equipment. To the rear of this compartment is a third gunner's post with a field of fire below the tail. Bombs, to a total weight of nearly 4,000 lb., are carried in the lower compartment and under the wings. Provision is also made for mounting a 25-mm. cannon.

Top speed is 196.2 m.p.h., ceiling is 32,000 ft. and range 1,250 miles. A later version, the 144.M, with retractable undercarriage and more powerful engines, does 242 m.p.h.

THE BOEING FOUR-ENGINED BOMBER

BUILT to a U.S. Army Air Corps specification which called for a top speed of from 200 to 250 m.p.h., a cruising speed of 170 to 220 m.p.h. at 10,000 ft., a ceiling of 20,000 to 25,000 ft. and a range of from 1,200 to 1,500 miles, the Boeing YB.17 Bomber is a middle-wing monoplane, powered with four 1,000 h.p. Wright "Cyclone" engines driving three-bladed controllable pitch airscrews.

Formidably armed, this bomber has five gun positions, one in the nose, one above and one below the fuselage, and one on each side of the fuselage, about halfway between wings and tail. The four latter guns are housed in streamlined "blisters," resembling giant sidelights, designed to offer the least possible resistance to the air and so placed as to provide overlapping zones of fire. The undercarriage is retractable and standard equipment includes an automatic pilot and a radio "homing" apparatus. Thirteen machines of this type have been ordered by the U.S. Air Corps. Chief dimensions are: span, 100 ft.; length, 70 ft.; height, 15 ft.
OF OTHER NATIONS
Described and Illustrated by A. C. LEVERINGTON

THE DORNIER BOMBER-TRANSPORT

A TWIN-ENGINED bomber-transport type extensively used in the new German Air Service, the Dornier DO.23 is a semi-cantilever high-wing monoplane driven by two 750 h.p. B.M.W. twelve-cylinder liquid-cooled engines. No details have been disclosed as to the accommodation available, crew carried or armament mounted, but three gun positions, one in the nose, one aft of the trailing edge and another in a tunnel below the fuselage, are apparent in the sketch reproduced above. The circular framework abaft the rear gun position is the radio aerial for the direction-finding and "beam" landing apparatus.

Principal dimensions of the Dornier DO.23 are: span, 84 ft.; length, 61 ft. 7 in.; height, 17 ft. 8 in.; wing area, 1,163 sq. ft. Maximum loaded weight is 20,240 lb. and top speed is 161.5 m.p.h. with a range of 745 miles at 136.6 m.p.h. cruising speed.

THE VULTEE ATTACK BOMBER

A MILITARY development of the American Vultee V.1A eight-passenger air-liner, the Vultee Attack Bomber is a two-seater low-wing cantilever monoplane driven by a 775 h.p. Wright "Cyclone" engine.

Pilot and gunner are seated in tandem inside the cockpit enclosure, which has sliding sections over the two seats. The gunner, to the rear, has a revolving tip-up seat and a duplicate set of flying controls. Armament comprises four fixed .30 calibre electrically-fired guns, two in the leading edge of each outer wing-section and each provided with 600 rounds of ammunition. These guns are controlled by the pilot, who also releases the twenty 30-lb. bombs carried inside the centre-section. The rear-gunner is provided with a .30 calibre gun on a flexible mounting for repulsing attacks from the rear. Standard equipment includes two-way radio set, self-starter and apparatus for the electrical retraction of the under-carriage.

Chief dimensions are: span, 50 ft.; length, 36 ft. 11 in., and height, 10 ft. Maximum speed is 237 m.p.h. at 11,000 ft. Cruising range is 1,550 miles and absolute ceiling 28,000 ft.
HIMALAYAN HELL

Four R.A.F. 'Planes Disappeared into the Blue and a Frontier Fort became a Place of the Dead before Flying Officer Vickers Unmasked the Treachery that was to Set the North-West Frontier Aflame with Revolt

By J. H. STAFFORD

CHAPTER I
Secret Service

DURING that dreamy vacancy between tiffin and dinner that the Near East calls a siesta and the Far East calls the sacred silence, when even the flies are too sleepy to escape the lightning dart of the green lizards and the faint breeze drifts wearily in the oppressive afternoon heat, two men sat on the verandah of the Gymkhana Club, Quetta.

Both wore the narrow band of an R.A.F. flying officer on the epaulettes of their shirts, both were burnt nut-brown by the Indian sun, both had the wrinkled eyes that told of the glass-clear air of the hills of the North-West.

"There are some people one instinctively dislikes," said the younger man as he swatted a lazy fly with a camel-tail whisk. "And there are other people one just can't help liking."

"Mae West, for instance," suggested the other. "One can't help liking her. Something about her, the figure, the face, the 'It,' you know—sex-appeal stuff. Only thing I don't like about her—she's too distant, much too distant."

"I wasn't thinking about her," Vickers said shortly.

"I was, so don't disturb me for a bit," replied Winter.

"Oh, give females a rest for a change," Vickers said. "I want to talk seriously."

"It's too confoundedly hot for serious talk, man," objected Winter languidly. Then, as Vickers' first remark recurred to him, "Who's this you can't help liking, anyway? Not lost your heart to some soldier's wife down in Karachi, have you?"

"It's not somebody I like, it's somebody I dislike. That fellow, Drew. Who is he?" asked Vickers.

"Why, Captain Drew? He's up from Delhi; been calling on some of the hill chiefs to see what the rumours are about."

"Are there some more rumours, then?"

"Sure, haven't you heard? It's in all the bazaars and bug-shops from Bengal to Bombay. Somebody up there is gathering the tribes together and is going to bang us on the nut with the Himalayas. It's all very secret, of course. You may not have heard about it down in Karachi, but all the rest of India knows. Bit more Russian propaganda. 'The Master comes' stuff," Winter added, referring to the occasional religious flares without which the North-West would not be the Devil's playground that it is.

"They ought to collect all those blokes and stick 'em on the top of Everest," he continued, "and then take Everest away and leave 'em there. That'd cool them down a bit."

"It will come to something one day, I think, something pretty nasty," Vickers said meditatively.

"Not while there's so much talk about it," his companion assured him. "If anything serious was on the move it would be kept really dark."

"So Drew is Secret Service from Delhi, eh?"

"Yes."

"There's something queer about him," Vickers said quietly. "He reminds me in a vague way of fakirs and mahatmas and all those gents who dress in wood-ash and meditation, and dish out spoonfuls of politics and passion to the ignorant."

506
"Yes, there is something like that about him. You know, 'Tell your fortune for five rupees, Sahib,' sort of thing. One like that once drifted into Simla, an Afghan or Persian or Afridi or Pathan, or perhaps a bit of each. He told old Tiger Morgan to beware of a dark woman. Tiger said he'd married her fifteen years ago, and threw a perfectly good gin-and-it at the fortune wallah, who put a curse on him, and blow me if Tiger didn't lose twenty rupees the same night."

"I wasn't thinking of a do-anna fortune teller, but the big ones at the back of beyond, who sit and think how nice it would be if they were king of India."

"Those are the sort of people Drew's looking for. But what, in particular, have you noticed about him?"

"Well, first thing, I don't like him.
Secondly, last night when he told you he was speaking to his bearer in Urdu, it was Russian and fluent Russian, too. You remember? You asked him what lingo it was, and he said Urdu. I speak Urdu and Russian, though I didn’t say so because I wanted to hear what he said. He didn’t speak as if the man were a servant, though there was nothing suspicious in what he said, but when he told you it was Urdu, I nearly fell over.”

“Umm, that’s strange. Still, I expect the fellow has credentials from Delhi, and perhaps the bearer is Secret Police, too. He’s been up with 5 Squadron at Rawalpindi, and to-morrow he’s going up to Kohat. They’re carting him round from there, so I expect 20 Squadron will be doing mail to the forts.”

“Yes, I shall be just in time to get my share in and maybe have another look at friend Drew.”

CHAPTER II
Lost in the Blue

A FAINT, smoky-blue mist hung about the hills as Frank Vickers took-off from the little horseshoe ‘drome at Quetta the following morning for his squadron at Peshawar. It was two months since he had left 20 (A.C.) Squadron for temporary duty at the Aircraft Depot, Karachi.

The biting, crisp air of the early morning was welcome after the heat and dust of the Sind; clean air that gave one a vision of a hundred miles when the mists had cleared.

Bleak and barren and naked, the stupendous, tortured rocks flung their virgin white peaks to the heavens. Braving their grim, forbidding silence, the infinitely small craft buzzed its way between those timeless walls, following the dried river beds, slipping through dangerously narrow gorges, hovering like an immense dragon-fly in a vast gash in the hills, swooping joyously down to the very depths where the remnants of a spring torrent glittered like a silver ribbon.

In the exhilaration of the trip where a crash would inevitably follow a forced landing, Vickers forgot his conversation with his friend at Quetta and only remembered it later in the day when the name of Captain Drew was mentioned in the mess at Peshawar.

“DID you hear about 5 Squadron losing three machines, Frank?”

It was Jackson who spoke. A lean, hard figure of a man, as tall as Vickers himself, and with something of the other’s quiet confidence.

“No, what have they been doing?” Vickers asked.

“The first one was a Sergeant Lehan, went off with the mail for the Carlton,” Jackson said, using the name by which the mud fort of Khalan was known to the Services. “Never got there, and was never seen again,” he continued. “No kite, no sergeant and no fitter, just disappeared, the whole damn packet. We searched the hills with candles and combs, but there wasn’t a smell of ’em. Funny business.”

“That’s queer,” Vickers said. “Not a sign of the kite?”

“Nothing whatever. The other two were even more mysterious. Gooding—you remember him, played outside left for them—well, he went off one morning with a fellow from the Delhi residency, a Captain Drew. They were fired on by tribesmen and had to land. Both were taken prisoner and bunged in a mud hut over the other side, but this fellow Drew managed to escape, and, being able to speak the lingo, got clean away in the night. We took him over to find Gooding, but the place was as clean as a new pin. Gooding was gone, the kite was gone, the bunch of wogs was gone. Drew couldn’t explain it. He wanted to land and investigate, but it was too risky.

“Then, two days later, exactly the same thing happened to Price. They had flares out all night, and a patrol left early in the morning and came back with—Drew. A party of wogs had picked him up in the hills and were bringing him back. He was torn about a bit, but he was able to mark the spot on a map where Price came down.
HIMALAYAN HELL

"I didn’t go out, but Sutton did. He said they found the spot all right, but as that was all there was, they couldn’t bring it back as evidence. There were skid marks and signs of gathering down on the floor of the nullah, but nothing else, not even a dead body.

"Burton is screaming mad about it. Three machines out of his squadron in a week, to say nothing of three pilots and a fitter. He says he’s going to turn those damned hills upside down and shake them. Well, he couldn’t make them more untidy than they are, could he?"

Vickers stared long and hard at those cold, merciless hills that guarded their mysteries as closely as the ocean.

"You say Drew was knocked about a bit?" he asked at length.

"Yes. Not serious, you know, but he’d had a pretty tough trip. He’s a bit of a hard nut, I think, not easily bowled over."

"No," Vickers murmured to himself, "I should think he’d take quite a lot of—er—bowling over."

"Do you know him, then?" Jackson asked, surprised.

"Not yet," Vickers answered vaguely.

"I met him down at Quetta."

"Yes, he’s been down there getting himself straight. I expect it has shaken his nerves a bit."

"How about my getting attached to 60 Squadron at Kohat?" Vickers said suddenly. "Do you think the Old Man would stand for it?"

"I dare say. Why? What’s the idea?"

"Oh, just that I’m interested in things, and I’d like to be there." Beyond that Vickers would not commit himself, despite the other’s persuasion.

As the veil of mist that cloaked the hills like a night-gown thinned and vanished with the light of day, Vickers changed the metallic rattling of the Bristol Fighter’s engine to a full-throated roar that split the silence and rolled back and forth between the walls of rock in an unending echo. The chocks slipped from under his wheels as he lifted his hand, and a moment later he was soaring up into the sunshine that had not yet reached the ‘drome.

Following the scanty green shrubs that marked the bed of the nullah, he turned over in his mind the facts that Jackson had given him the previous day. That there was something distinctly sinister about Captain Drew he felt convinced, but it was a conviction he could not explain. That the man possessed credentials signed by the highest authority, that he had, as he said, come from the secretariat at New Delhi could easily be verified. But the doubt remained.

Sweeping through the wide valley, where small patches of cultivation offered a thin existence for a few hearty hillmen, he was surprised to find the place as lifeless as a cemetery. Normally, a few Pathans would turn from watching their goats to stare up at the big snarling birds of the white men. To-day, the valley lay silent and dead, devoid of any living thing. Desolate and deserted.

Deserted?

Vickers peered over the cockpit at the huge boulders that strewed the bed of the nullah. Were his eyes deceiving him or had they moved? He knew the hills well enough to know that boulders had ears and eyes, and sometimes spat hot lead that flattened against a man’s flesh like a huge saucer and tore ghastly, jagged holes.

Imagination, of course, and then he pulled up sharply into a stiff climb. The rattle of a ground gun and the fluttering ribbons of canvas in his wings were far from imaginary.

"Machine-guns!" Vickers gasped.

The nullah was sufficiently wide here for him to sweep round in a sharp bank. His wings almost scraped the granite walls as he forced the Biff. back on her tracks. He could see them now, hundreds of them; bearded Pathans rushing for cover.

His eye searched for the gun nest among the shadows and rocks. As a sharp, short burst crashed and echoed through the valley, he saw it—high up
the wall almost level with him, perched on a narrow ledge. He caught a glimpse of the little group around their chattering weapon. If only he had an observer, he thought, how easy it would be for an aerial gunner to wipe a line across that narrow shelf. As it was, he could not use his gun upon it. He contented himself with diving at the squirming boulders beneath. Futile as he knew it to be, it gave him a measure of satisfaction.

Half a mile down the nullah, he risked another turn. The walls here were perilously near, closing in on him it seemed. Shooting up almost vertically, he managed to pull over into a neat Immelmann. The walls of rock opened for him like huge jaws, and he dived cleanly into them towards the nest on the ledge.

With his port wing barely missing the jagged cliffs on his left, he waited until he neared the ledge on the opposite face.

As it came into view, a sudden pressure on the starboard rudder sent the nose of the Biff. charging straight for the side of the mountain, and Vickers' front gun swept a clean line of fire along the jutting lip of rock. In the fraction of a second allowed him, he saw that the gun was mounted on a tripod, that the figures round it scattered and dropped, that it was silent, and the next moment he banked fiercely with his undercarriage a mere foot from the mountain face.

It entered his mind to turn and make another dive on the tribe, but his obvious duty was to report as soon as possible that the natives were in possession of weapons even more dangerous than their gas-pipe blunderbusses, those unwieldy weapons so much more dangerous to themselves than to their enemies.

Probably, most of the fellows would smile when he suggested a genuine machine-gun nest, until he reminded them of the three lost machines from 5 Squadron.

The incident strengthened his suspicion that trouble of an unusual order was brewing in the hills. Trouble always was brewing there, of course, but things had taken a much more sinister turn now.

Would they believe him and take precautions? He doubted it. It was just another rumour, the whole Himalayan Range was built on rumours. Suppose he could get that gun, discover its origin?

He laughed at the crazy idea. An eagle would find it difficult to land in that tortuous valley.

CHAPTER III

The Mysterious Captain Drew

His report to Squadron Leader Carrington—"Cautious Carrie," as he was more affectionately known in his absence—was accepted in the quiet, unruffled manner of one who measured all evidence and weighed his facts carefully before acting.

"A report will be sent through to Air Headquarters, but beyond that we can do very little," he said. "Pilots must be warned to keep a sharp lookout and avoid narrow or dangerous watercourses. We already have a Captain Drew, from the residency, up here inquiring into matters, and the Frontier Guides are scouring the hills for suspicious movements."

"Oh, it's about Captain Drew that I've been posted to you, sir," Vickers said.

"You were sent here for escort duty," the squadron leader corrected him. "Flight Officer Owens is conveying Captain Drew to a point on the Kurram Pass to-morrow morning. You will accompany them. You know these hills, don't you?"

"Like the back of my hand, sir," Vickers answered truthfully.

He did not add that he had first seen them soon after he could walk. That his father, Lieutenant-Colonel Vickers, had given his life for India in those hills and been buried in the little English cemetery on the eastern side of Back Bay, Bombay, opposite Malabar Hill. Squadron Leader Carrington would not be interested. But to ask him if he
knew those hills! Was he not an Anglo-Indian, born in the country, speaking more dialects than the average Englishman knew to exist?

THE news of an escorting machine was received by Captain Drew with apparent pleasure.

"That's very comforting," he said, as the two men watched the Biffs. run out from the hangars on a tail truck. "After the picnics we had at Rawalpindi, I naturally view aircraft with a doubtful eye. It's all right for me in the hills, but your chaps are out of their element on the ground."

"Yes," Vickers agreed, "without our wings we are like clipped eagles. Few of our fellows know the hills except from the air."

"You'll stick close behind us, of course," Drew said, as though he feared to be left alone with only one white man. "Not that there's likely to be trouble out here. They're only a small bunch of Afridis. And friendly—at least as friendly as the hillmen ever are. Besides which, they're practically unarmed."

As Vickers adjusted his 'chute harness, that last sentence ran through his mind—"They're practically unarmed." He saw again that machine-gun nest perched on the lip of bare rock, and a slow, grim smile crept about the corners of his pleasant mouth.

"Switch is off, petrol on, sucking in." Mechanically he repeated the well-worn cry as two fitters turned the prop. by hand.

Ten minutes later he was trailing Owens through the twisting gorges, half hoping that something would happen.

Something would happen; he felt it, knew it. But what?

Suddenly the machine ahead dropped in a long dive, and instantly Vickers became alert. Opening his throttle he soared above the diving Biff.

Was Drew up to some cunning trick? Just how much he distrusted the man was shown in that first thought.

No. Drew was leaning out of his cockpit peering down at a figure stretched full length on the empty floor of the river bed.

The khaki tunic and black shoes could be picked out in detail. No movement came from the figure as Owens roared over it at ten feet.

Gooding, Price, Sergeant Lehan, the fitter— the names flashed through Vickers' mind as he lifted his nose to where the greater width would allow him to turn. No, they were miles from this spot. Then who could it be?

Casually, he glanced up at the blue gap of sky between the hilltops and a sudden suspicion came to him. Where were the vultures? If that man was alone, those gruesome creatures would be circling above him like the shadow of death.

Owens had landed and was walking towards the figure with Drew close behind him, when Vickers at last turned his nose down the nullah. Even as he watched, the still form rolled over and sat up to face the two men, and from every nook and cranny rushed a yelling horde of natives.

VICKERS stared, horrified. The utter simplicity of it stunned him. Then his hand tightened on the stick, and his thumbs caressed the gun trip. Should he land? No. Definitely no.

The two white men were racing like mad for the Biff, as the screaming fiends closed in around them. If Vickers wanted evidence of Captain Drew's integrity, it was here before his eyes. The man had reached the machine with Owens close behind. His hands clawed at the cockpit as a swarm of white-clad figures swirled round the machine like a torrent of foam.

And then Vickers was diving on the sea of upturned black faces. Some scattered for the protection of the boulders, others crowded round the white prisoners, knowing well that Vickers would not risk firing into that thick knot of swaying, struggling humanity for fear of injuring his countrymen.

From behind the rocks the evil faces leered up at him, spat their deadly, soft leath and crouched back into safety.
AIR STORIES

Four times he dived and turned and dived again, but the damage he could inflict was insignificant. Every time he passed over the stranded machine he was subjected to a withering fire from the shelter of the nooks and crannies. He watched the two helpless victims being dragged to the foot of the hills, unable to lift a hand to aid them.

Still the valley roared and rattled and shook with the concentrated fire of a hundred rifles. He thought he heard the chatter of a machine-gun among the confused and tortured sounds, but he could not be certain.

His lips thinned as he gazed at a perfectly sound Bristol Fighter standing serene and indifferent to the grim battle around it. The amazing ease with which the whole trick had been carried out stung him to a savage rage. Once again he dived on the scattering forms beneath, and was met with a volley of fire that startled him to sanity. The sheer hopelessness of his position, his inability to cope with the situation, drove him frantic. Two white men held captive not fifty feet away, a machine standing ready to take-off, and he above it all, alone and powerless to help.

Abruptly, he came to a decision. Kyoti Fort! A matter of fifteen minutes flying and he could drop a message to the Indian Major commanding the half company of Sikhs there. Those silent, formidable fighters would make short work of a handful of Pathans or Afridis, or whatever the devils were. True, they would take a full day to cover the ground that it took him a mere fifteen minutes to fly, but they would get there, and then—well, he could only trust to Providence that those two poor wretches would be alive.

Sighting the fort, he swooped down with his engine open to warn the sentry that a plane was overhead. No bearded giant waved a cheery welcome, no surge of half-dressed native troops rushed out into the compound.

Silence! Stillness! Utter and complete.

No cry, no shot, no movement answered his sharp engine bursts, for there was nobody who could cry, nobody who could shoot, nobody who could move.

They were all dead!

WITH unbelieving eyes, Vickers stared at the blackened walls above the windows in the barrack block. There was a deathly coldness at the pit of his stomach.

"My God," he muttered through dry lips, and high overhead a dark shape hovered impatiently in confirmation of the tragedy.

In Vickers' short life there had been many attacks on the frontier forts and block-houses, and many more that he had heard about from the lips of his father, but never before had he been brought face to face with the sudden, fanatical savagery of the hillmen.

At last, rumour had lifted its ugly head to show its fangs. It was all so plain now. The lost machines, that machine-gun nest, the sullen, watching atmosphere of the border ought to have warned him. Everything pointed to a carefully organised upheaval, a fiery torrent of hatred that had brewed for years in the more inaccessible regions of the mountains, and which probably had its roots far back in Afghanistan and Kashmir, perhaps even in Russia.

A tiny spark from the bowels of Hell had caught, and soon its flaming tongues would lick through the passes and down into the peaceful provinces, scorching to bloody dust everything that stood for law and order and prosperity. And the masses would not understand; they would follow like sheep, flinging themselves into the grisly cauldron in the hope of sudden gain and the fulfilment of deceiving promises.

So ran Vickers' thoughts as he raced back to Kohat, roaring through gorges that left little room for chance, straining over towering peaks, ignoring the danger to himself in his desperate endeavour to save time.
CHAPTER IV
Active Service Orders

.servers of formality, Vickers dashed straight into the office of Squadron Leader Carrington. In jerky sentences he gasped out the story of the capture of Owens and Drew.

"As neat a job as you ever saw, sir. Why I hadn't landed I don't know. Another two minutes and they would have had the lot of us. Owens did just what I, or anybody else, would do. He went down to investigate, and before he could look round they'd got him. No, I couldn't see if they were injured or not. As for the fort—well, it made me feel sick. It was ghastly, as cold and dead as the hills themselves."

"The machine, you say, is standing there intact?" the C.O. asked.

"It was, sir. They made no attempt to fire her while I was there. She was ready to take-off."

For a moment the Squadron Leader drummed the table. He liked at all times to live and act by the book. Slow to draw conclusions, he was yet very sure in his opinions, very definite in his decisions.

"Get Mr. Moore," he suddenly snapped at the sergeant major who stood by Vickers' side. "'A' and 'B' Flights to be ready to take-off in ten minutes. Active service order. 'C' Flight to stand by for orders. Double the guards. Send me Corporal Tomkins of the wireless section."

The words were not orders, they were commands: crisp, curt and confident. They sent a wave of admiration through Vickers. This was the sort of talk. No dilly-dallying, no "maybe we should and maybe we shouldn't," but cold, icy cold determination that won Vickers' lasting respect.

"The next wog who goes to sleep in a nullah in somebody else's tunic won't get up any more," one of the pilots said to Vickers as he made his way to the 'drome, where a swift, silent activity told of the rigid efficiency with which this station was run.

In less than half an hour from the time he had landed, Vickers was in the air again, flying slightly ahead of the squadron leader's machine, with six others spread out in a long line like an aerial train.

Rounding a head of solid granite that jutted out far into the nullah like some grotesque giant's head, torn and ravaged by time and the elements, Vickers swooped down into the valley where Owens had landed.

Then his eyes opened. He strained forward against the safety belt, his mouth dropping open. The floor of the watercourse was bare. Huge boulders strewed the ground as though thrown carelessly by some colossal hand, but the level, clear stretch where the Biff had been stared back at him empty and deserted.

The Biff. was gone, and with it all trace of the tribe and the two white men. The thought flashed through Vickers' mind that he had perhaps mistaken the gorge. No. There were the tell-tale skid marks. As he dived and flashed along close above the earth, he pointed these out to the others.

It occurred to him to land and inspect the spot thoroughly, but the events of the morning warned him against it. Had Owens escaped and made off with his machine? Had the wogs taken it by road to some place of concealment? Or—he hesitated even to contemplate the possibility of a native flying it away. Well, it had gone, disappeared, vanished as cleanly as though the earth had swallowed it.

A long and fruitless search was made in every likely corner of the pass. It was of no avail, and at last, after the line had dived in a last salute on the desolation that was now Kyoti Fort, they turned their baffled eyes towards Kohat.

If there had been any glimmering of hope that Owens had returned, it was shattered when the machines slipped in to land on the 'drome. There was no word of the missing men, and it was a solemn group of pilots and fitters who made their way to the mess and
canteen for late tiffin. An uncanny air of expectancy hung over the camp, sending men about their business in a strained silence.

A movement outside on the road sent the blood pounding through the veins of the sentries just before dawn broke. In contrast to the usual procedure of challenging with the bayonet, they dropped into cover behind the solid masonry of the gate-posts.

"'Alt, oo goes there?" The sudden challenge was followed by a deathly silence.

"Captain Drew with native escort," at last came the surprising reply.

"Oo?"

"Captain Drew. Come on, let me in." There was an aggressive demand in the tone, but the sentries were taking no risks, particularly when the ears and eyes of authority were listening and watching.

"Advance, Captain Drew. Under that light, please," commanded the voice from the shadows. "'Alt escort!" the voice added as several dark figures made towards the circle of light.

With a half-smothered curse, Captain Drew moved into the light and turned round for the benefit of the watching sentries, while two pointing rifles followed his movements.

The following day Captain Drew remained in camp. His description, given in vivid detail, of his escape from the tribe was a topic of conversation whenever two or more of the squadron met.

Late that night a different sort of conversation took place in the C.O.'s office, although the central figure remained the same.

"Captain Drew's papers are in the safe here," Squadron Leader Carrington was saying; "they are perfectly in order, and furthermore, Delhi confirms every detail of them. We have no reason whatever to suspect him, and I hesitate to take any action, Vickers."

"But," protested Frank Vickers, "we don't have to take any action that would not be normal routine, sir. The man may be genuine. Judging by his action when they were captured, I should say he is. But how is it one man can dig a hole through a 'mutti' wall with a broken 'charpoy' and get away, without doing something for the other while he's about it? It isn't as if it's the first time he's come back alone."

"He was unarmed, remember, and in a hostile camp," Carrington pointed out. "Probably there were difficulties which we cannot realise."

"He wasn't unarmed, sir. He had an automatic on him when he got back here." Vickers spoke slowly and quietly, smiling a little at the sudden light of interest in the C.O.'s eyes.

"Are you sure of that, Vickers?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I—er—I had a look at it. That gun hadn't been fired. Why?"

"Curious," mused the C.O., "but perhaps there's a good reason. Most probably Captain Drew could explain."

"If you'll pardon the suggestion, sir," said Vickers, "I don't think it would be advisable to mention the matter to Captain Drew. He'll be on his guard—I mean, sir, it would look suspicious," Vickers added hurriedly. "If you could let me fly him next time, without escort, I'm confident I could take care of myself even better than he could."

"Mm, yes, you're Anglo-Indian, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir. All my people have served out here. I know the place and the people, and I can feel when things are running wild in the hills."

"Well, what do you expect to happen?"

"I don't quite know, sir," Vickers lied. "But I have an idea the whole border is seething and getting ready to flare up. There have been so many things happening lately, little things in themselves, but they add up. It can only mean one thing."

"If it's Kyoti Fort that's on your mind," said the C.O., "you may rest assured that something is being done about that. The Sikhs and Punjabis and several companies of British troops
A terrific, rending crash behind told of the failure of one of the pursuers to negotiate the rocky bottle-neck.
are closing in on the passes. Every station in the North-West from Quetta to Rawalpindi is standing by, and an armoured train is on its way from Lahore. No,” he added, as if to himself, “there’s little possibility of this trouble spreading.”

CHAPTER V

Vickers has a Hunch

“Oh, you’re coming with me this time?” Captain Drew nodded cheerily to Vickers as he approached the tarmac where the fitters were already warming up the Biff.

“Yes, I’ve got to get some experience of the hills. That’s why I’m here,” Vickers answered, eyeing the other closely.

“We’ll have no trouble to-day—wrong direction; these people are all right.” Drew spoke with a confidence that was not lost on the other.

“These people are all right.” Somewhere Vickers had heard that phrase before, and he felt a great deal more comfort in the knowledge that his front gun had been specially cleaned and adjusted.

“Next man in for the high jump. Professor Drew’s famous disappearing trick,” came the laughing remark from a group of Vickers’ brother officers near the hangar.

Vickers laughed at the jest and marvelled at the easy casualness with which even Britishers viewed life up here. They soon forgot their tragedies.

“No disappearing tricks for me,” he said, glancing across to where Drew stood chatting with the fitter. “We’re coming back together this time.”

And the little gods that dwell deep in the hills smiled grimly.

“Good-bye, Vickers, it was a pleasure to have you here,” another voice called from the group by the hangar.

“Go to hell!” Vickers retorted genially as he strode out to the machine.

A few minutes later the Bristol Fighter was in the air, and the soft rose and velvety pink on the mountain faces shone vividly as they threaded their way through the towering peaks and tortured valleys. Vickers noted they were picking a way towards a spot that he knew only by the map, a place where few white people had ever trod. Very carefully he tried to memorise each landmark, measure the depth and width of every gorge they passed, and check what he considered suitable landing-grounds. The latter was the most difficult task of all, for the rocky nature of the earth seemed to offer little hope of a soft landing.

A light touch on his shoulder stirred him to instant caution. He followed the pointing finger, and, to his unutterable amazement, saw what was undoubtedly a well-used landing-ground laid out on the floor of the nullah. Figures were emerging from the numerous caves that lined the foot of the hills on either side, and for a moment Vickers hesitated. Was this a trap? Hardly. Drew was standing up as if ready and anxious to get to business.

Judging his approach to a nicety, he put the Biff down on the cleared landing-ground and, with a swirl of dust in his wake, taxied along the smooth even ground until Drew’s hand gripped his shoulder. Disregarding it, he carried on to the extreme end of the runway and turned before finally stopping. He had now the whole sweep before him to take-off at a moment’s notice. He did not know why he had deliberately placed the machine like this. Just a hunch, he told himself, but it was to prove the luckiest hunch Vickers had ever had.

“I WON’T be long, just a bit of questioning to do,” Drew said as he stepped down from the machine. “Come along in, if you like. This crowd’s all right. I know ’em well.”

Vickers glanced round at the black, watching eyes. The significant fact that most of the natives were armed with modern rifles did not escape his notice.

“All right, thanks, I’ll drift in presently,” he answered.

Curious eyes. Watching eyes. Evil
eyes. Sneering quietly and contumaciously. Vickers could feel them all round him as he studied the skid marks on the soft earth. Engrossed in his search, he began to follow the marks towards the face of rock, when a burly native suddenly confronted him, effectively barring his path.

There was a guttural flow of rapid Urdu, which caused Vickers to step back hurriedly. It was not what was said, although he understood that perfectly, but the tone in which it was spoken. There was a definite threat in the voice.

"I don't understand," he began, then, shaking his head uncomprehendingly, he added, "no 'mallum.'"

Gently but firmly he was grabbed and led, unresisting, towards the cave into which Drew had disappeared.

"I say, what's the matter with these blokes?" Vickers began, before his escort could get a word in. "I was having a 'decko' at those skid marks when they grabbed me and brought me along here."

"Keep the dog in here out of the way. If his eyes get any bigger we'll sew them up," said a gruff voice in Urdu behind him, and Vickers just restrained the impulse to turn round.

"What's he say?" demanded Vickers.

"They are afraid of your shadow falling on the sacred ground where the shrine stands during religious festivals," Drew explained casually.

Almost Vickers gasped.

"Oh, is that all?" he muttered, and they both smiled at the stupid simplicity of these natives.

Through Vickers' mind flashed a stream of questions. Why should Drew lie? What lay behind the aggressive attitude of the natives? What did it all mean?

Before he could answer the questions himself, they were answered by Drew in Russian.

"Four aircraft you've got without our own, that's six altogether. And the cases, are they safe?"

A voice which Vickers had not previously heard now spoke.

"Yes, everything is in order, but the tribes are getting impatient. They won't wait. We must act soon."

"We are going to act very soon now," Drew replied. "This puppy can stay here with the others."

Cautiously, Vickers glanced out of the corner of his eye in the direction of the speakers, neither of whom had turned their head towards him as they spoke.

"With the others?" Good God! Were his comrades here, perhaps not ten yards away from him? A blazing hatred surged through Vickers, but his face betrayed nothing of his mental conflict. What was his duty? To attempt a rescue single-handed? He thought of the hundreds of watching eyes outside. No, he must get back immediately. Get the squadron. Get several squadrons.

As unobtrusively as he dared, he drifted idly out into the sunshine, stuck his hands in his pockets and began whistling quietly. He had heard enough to convince him that this place was a hot-bed of revolt, and decidedly unhealthy for a young flying officer with ambitions.

The same curious eyes watched him as he leaned a moment against the Biff. counting the seconds. Casually, he reached over into the cockpit and switched on the engine. Still with one hand in his pocket he began rocking the prop, as if it were the most natural thing for an idle pilot to do to while away the moments. Suddenly he gave an extra heavy heave on the metal blade, and to his eternal surprise the thing swept round dangerously near his head.

A moment passed while the gathering natives stood and stared, and in that moment Vickers acted.

CHAPTER VI

The Battle of the Nullah

At the first savage snarl of the Falcon, the crowd awoke to feverish activity. There was a rush towards the already moving Biff. Black, talon-like hands clawed at the wings of the machine, missed, and fell back into the
path of those behind. With its tail well up the Bristol shot along the sandy bed, scattering the screaming horde before it as chaff before a wind.

Shots were now spattering and smashing all over the fuselage, but Vickers dared not look round. He thanked all the gods of luck that none of the natives thought of aiming at his radiator, that their fire was concentrated on himself.

He was ten feet in the air now and climbing rapidly, heading for the bend in the nullah; in a moment he would be out of range of that murderous fire.

Then something hot struck the side of his head, and the earth exploded in a blinding sheet of flame. The walls of the mountains dissolved into a shimmering mist, and he felt himself falling — falling through space, through time, through eternity.

Vickers was perfectly convinced that in those few awful minutes he was completely unconscious, that he righted the heaving Biff, and held on to his climb instinctively, as a drunken man will walk and talk without being aware of himself. Dazed and numbed, he raised his hand to the sticky mess on the side of his head. Strange that it did not pain him. Was his head blown completely off? Was he already dead? Was it merely his spirit that was floating about in space, zig-zagging from side to side of the nullah?

Pulling off his helmet, he was surprised to see that the left side of it level with the ear-guard was missing. A brilliant crimson that stained the lining held his horrified gaze for a moment. Then the cold upper air cleared his head and the throbbing began, racking and tearing and beating with the cycles of the engine. But he could still think, and his mind was clear enough to tell him he must warn the forts, and get back before the trouble began; for trouble there would certainly be now that he had escaped to warn the authorities.

Happening to glance into a gash in the mountains as he passed it, his attention was suddenly caught by a group of machines bearing down upon him. That there was a short cut somewhere from the encampment he had just left was obvious. Taking his eyes from the twisting, writhing valley ahead he snatched a glance behind. Trailing him with the grim tenacity of bloodhounds were two Bristol Fighters, accompanied by two vicious-looking monoplanes.

Without pausing to consider how the strange craft came to be in the hills, and who were the pilots, Vickers slammed his throttle full open.

TEARING round precipices, squeezing through narrow slits in the mountains that normally would have scared him, Vickers led the flight through the hills, heading always towards where he knew the line of forts to be situated.

Ahead, like sentinels of the pass, stood two colossal pillars of rock closing in almost in the shape of a bottle-neck.

With his heart thumping madly in his throat, Vickers charged straight for the narrow gap, gritted his teeth as the wicked, jagged columns rushed at him, and prepared for the inevitable crash that would occur if the wings failed to squeeze through.

There was a deafening roar as the naked rock opened before his eyes, flashed past his wing-tips, and closed in again behind him. A terrific rending crash behind told of the failure of one of his followers, and a grim smile showed on Vickers' face. Unconsciously he had led his enemies into a natural trap, a neck of valley in which it was impossible to turn, and which it was equally impossible to climb over in the short distance.

He chanced a glance round, and was amazed to see that the two monoplanes and one of the Bristols had got through. Obviously, he thought, the monos, short-winged and with exceptional climbing power, had been specially chosen for such work. The valley here opened out as the walls of rock fell back. Slowly, he eased back his throttle and felt rather than saw the two monoplanes creeping up behind him.
HIMALAYAN HELL

With the unexpected swiftness of a hooked fish, the Bristol shot up in an almost vertical climb, rolled over and dived with screaming fury and blazing gun on the foremost monoplane. Had the manœuvre been rehearsed for twelve months it could not have been more accurately timed. The shark-like outline of the monoplane hovered for a fatal moment in Vickers’ sights, seemed to pause and shiver as a charging animal will pause and shiver with the stunning impact of lead, and shot down in an ever-increasing dive to dissolve in a cloud of dust and smoke far below.

Without waiting to witness the result, Vickers pushed on. Screaming and roaring through gorges, slipping over hill-tops, squeezing between razor-like jaws of barren mountain rock, the chase continued.

Hastily Vickers scribbled a note as he flew, and stuffed it in a streamer ready to drop on the first fort he reached.

Now he was in the pass. If only he could lure his pursuers out into the open he was confident he could deal with them. He stole a glance to his rear. The wide valley lay empty and peaceful behind him. He was alone.

At that moment he sighted the flagstaff and square rock block-house, against which stood a board declaring that “He who passes this sign does so at his own risk,” informing the adventurous that British authority ended at that spot.

He was a little surprised to see a machine-gun nest mounted on the roof and already trained on him. So the forts were prepared!

Swooping low, he waved his hand to the bearded figures below, dropped his message neatly into the compound and headed down the pass.

OVER Fannah Fort, five miles away, a Bristol Fighter and a strange dark monoplane dived with blazing guns, and were met with the deadly, concentrated fire of mounted ground guns.

Three times they dived before they were joined by another Bristol Fighter. But this new machine employed different tactics. Watching for an opportunity, it dived straight up on the circling monoplane, its front gun pouring a stream of biting lead into the other, hanging on to its fire until it seemed that the two machines must collide. The monoplane, taken completely unawares, rolled slowly on to its back, dropped its nose lazily to the earth, and went down with its tail spinning round in a wide circle.

Long before it had crashed into the boulders, the two Biffs, had parted and disappeared in different directions. The occupants of the fort stared at one another in mystified surprise, shrugged their shoulders and went to inspect the remains of the monoplane.

CHAPTER VII
The Secret ‘Drome

HALF an hour later Vickers landed on the ‘drome at Kohat, tore across to the hangars with his tail in the air, like, as one spectator put it, “A dog that has beaten the dog in the next street and come home to collect the glory.”

“Where’s that fellow who calls himself Drew?” asked one of the pilots who had run to meet him. “Gosh! Here, I say, what the hell has happened?”

There was genuine concern in the voice as the speaker’s eyes fell on the crimson mess on Vickers’ face, where blood had trickled and been hurriedly wiped away.

“Got hit,” Vickers answered. “Where’s Cautious? I’ll have to see him right away. They’re on the move. Got our kites—flying them, too. Our fellows are out there, prisoners,” he panted as he ran to the C.O.’s office.

“You carry on,” shouted the other, impressed by the urgency of Vickers’ words. “I’ll get the M.O.”

Two minutes later Vickers was gasping out his story to the crowd of pilots who had squeezed into the office.

“That rat Drew has got our chaps out there in a hide-out. He’s a spy working up the hill tribes to overthrow the British. They’ve got our ‘planes intact, and they’re flying them. I’ve

519
warned the forts coming in, but the devils are pouring through the passes.

While he had been talking the M.O. had inspected his wound.

"Skin's gone a bit, but nothing serious, looks worse than it is. You were mighty lucky, young man."

At that moment a tall, grey-haired man in white drill stepped forward. "I'm Captain Drew," he said to Vickers. "We have been waiting for you to bring this fellow back. We know all about him."

"You're Captain Drew?" Vickers said slowly. "I knew that fellow was queer the moment he spoke Russian. He spoke it too well. But how did he come to get papers from Delhi?"

"I've already explained to Squadron Leader Carrington. I was held captive at Wazirabad. All my belongings were stolen, my bearer killed, and I was locked up in a filthy mud hut. Fortunately, I managed to bribe my way out, and I'd hoped to get here before that murdering rat could do any harm. Now it seems that I'm too late."

"Not too late, sir," Vickers answered. "I know where to find him, that's if—if he wasn't flying one of those monos."

"Will you kindly keep still just a moment," said the M.O.

"Sorry, sir," Vickers mumbled, "I'd almost forgotten that."

THE wide pass of Gommal trembled and shook as six aircraft thundered their way through, heading for the valley where Vickers had so narrowly escaped death.

Flashing along the watercourses in the Khyber and Kurram passes 27 and 28 Squadrons wended their way, each hoping that they would be the lucky ones first to encounter the enemy.

Like a long, dark snake crawling along the river bed, a strong force of mixed Pathans, Persians, Afridis and Mussulmans of every type marched and chanted, ignorant of the fact that their path led them straight into the jaws of death.

At every favourable position an ambush was placed, so cunningly hidden that the aircraft passed them without being aware of the nearness of British machine-gun posts. Gurkhas, Punjabis and Sikhs watched the aircraft and prayed that the scrap would not be over before they reached it.

Their fears were unfounded, for as Vickers, with the C.O. close behind him, sighted the marching tribesmen they lifted and avoided combat. Their mission was to reach that secret 'drome before the insensate fury of the hillmen expressed itself by impaling and burning alive the prisoners.

Vickers easily recognised the narrow bottle-necked pass and turned off into a wider nullah. They were nearing the encampment now, coming in from the opposite side. Then quite suddenly the mountains opened, and before him lay the wide basin.

Three machines were standing on the runway, and even as the Bristsols tailed up to dive in, two skimmed along the floor. With screaming engines that flung out a challenge more savage than the cry that met them, the squadron tore into the attack. Like a shot from a catapult, the C.O.'s machine skimmed away ahead after the two escaping aircraft, and, close on his tail, Vickers followed.

The suspense and excitement of a lifetime was crammed into the next two minutes. Obviously the C.O. had recognised Drew in the foremost machine, for he rushed straight at it like a released bull-terrier.

If Vickers had admired Squadron Leader Carrington for his sudden decisions, he now loved him for his swift and deadly methods in the air. Man and machine were one, diving, soaring, rolling and twisting with the concentrated savagery of a tiger, master of himself, master of his machine.

Vickers, hovering above, waiting for a chance to get into the scrap, caught a glimpse of the C.O.'s face which raised the hair at the nape of his neck. Never in all his life had he seen such an expression of ice cold fury, hard and merciless as the very rocks.

In a few minutes it was all over.
The pilot of the second aeroplane could never have known what happened, it was too sudden. The machine was staggering down helplessly before the dust had settled from its companion’s crash.

Banking to rejoin the squadron, Vickers decided that if there was one man living whom he would fear in the air, that man was Squadron Leader Carrington, “Cautious Carrie,” V.C.

UNABLE to avoid the combined diving of the Biffs, the natives were driven along the nullah. The boulders which had always stood them in good stead, now splintered into fragments that cut like shrapnel when the bombs fell among them. While shots were still spurting from the crevices in the face of the hills, Vickers and the C.O. landed, covered by the diving Biffs. Dust filled the gorge and offered a scanty cover both to the escaping natives and the two men who cautiously peered into a giant cave.

“Hullo, there,” Vickers cried, and dropped behind a boulder. His action was unnecessary, however, for his shout was answered a second later by several voices.

“Hullo. All clear in here. We’re lashed up. Hurry up, there’s a timed bomb somewhere. Drew, nice lad, set it for us.”

“For God’s sake, hurry,” shouted a voice that Vickers recognised as Owens.

The prisoners were no sooner released and in the air than a terrific explosion, that shook the mountains and rolled away over the peaks, brought the whole side of the hill crashing down to fill the valley.

IN the mess of 60 Squadron, at Kohat, a young flying officer approached Vickers.

“The next time you don’t like anyone, Frank,” he said, “just tell the lads, and we’ll pull him to bits and see what it is you don’t like.”

“Hullo, Winter,” Vickers said, grasping the other’s hand. “Have you come up to stop the war, too?”

“Yes, we’ve all come, so they can start as soon as they like now. Oh, and by the way, I heard that Captain Drew—I mean the real one, you know—has been inquiring into your past. Seems he wants somebody like you at Delhi, somebody with the gift for not liking the wrong kind of people.”

same time forwarding your own letter to this particular reader. If there is no suitable correspondent waiting at the time of receiving your letter, we will retain it until one is available.

READERS living abroad must enclose a postal reply coupon instead of a stamped self-addressed envelope.

All letters should be addressed to “Correspondent,” AIR STORIES, Tower House, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2. If, at any time, an additional correspondent is required, it is only necessary to write us another letter, on the same lines as before, when a further exchange will be made.

Do Not Miss

“FIGHTER PILOT”

A Vivid Account of Personal Experiences as a Member of One of the Most Famous R.F.C. Scout Squadrons of the Great War

By “McSCOTCH”

Starting in AIR STORIES Next Month
The Stirring War Story of One of the Most Famous R.F.C. Units, No. 56 Squadron, which, in Nineteen Months' Active Service, scored 400 Decisive Victories and gained 33 Decorations, including Two V.C.'s.

By "RECORDING OFFICER"

"THAT evening I was invited to dine with No. 56 Squadron. At 8 p.m., after preliminary cocktails, we sat down to dinner... and by the time we had finished I had decided to get to 56 Squadron under any pretence whatever.... There was a wonderful spirit in this squadron, entirely different from any squadron with which I had come in contact...."

So does McCudden, in his autobiography, "Flying Fury," describe his first impressions of the fighter squadron that was destined to become one of the greatest on the Western Front, bearing on its roll of honour such immortal names as those of Albert Ball, Rhys-Davids, Hoidge and Mayberry.

McCudden, however, made his decision to join the squadron in June, 1917, when "56" had been in France for less than three months, and it says much for the spirit of the squadron, as well as for McCudden's judgment of men, that a fighter pilot as famous as he then was should wish for nothing more than membership of this young and virtually untried squadron. In the days that followed, the gallant company that was 56 Squadron was abundantly to justify McCudden's high opinion of them, while he himself, as one of its flight-commanders, was to win that most coveted of all decorations, the Victoria Cross.

To revert to the beginnings of the squadron, No. 56 was formed at Gosport in June, 1916. It was created out of a nucleus taken from No. 28 Squadron and, in the month following its formation, was moved to London Colney, where it was to be brought up to strength and its personnel trained in the duties of a fighter squadron. This formative period is an all-important one in the life of a new squadron, and "56" was fortunate in having as one of its early C.O.'s Major H. D. Harvey-Kelley, who, as a member of No. 2 Squadron, had been the first Flying Corps pilot to land on French soil in August, 1914. To Harvey-
Kelley, 56 Squadron no doubt owed much of the fine spirit which was later to stand it in such good stead, and to his careful selection it also owed the fine pilots that made up the original squadron.

Among the first to be attached was Cecil Lewis, who though only nineteen years of age had already won the Military Cross as a member of No. 3 Squadron in the Somme battle. Lewis, who later became one of 56 Squadron’s crack pilots and is now a member of the B.B.C. staff, has recently paid tribute to his old squadron in an autobiography, “Sagittarius Rising,” one of the finest accounts of air fighting in the Great War that has ever been written. Incidentally, it is fortunate indeed that a squadron with such a distinguished record as No. 56 should have had among its members fighting men who had also the literary ability to give to the world first-hand accounts of its stirring deeds. McCudden, in “Flying Fury,” Cecil Lewis in “Sagittarius Rising,” and Grinnell-Milne in “Wind in the Wires” have all immortalised the achievements of 56 Squadron, and aeronautical literature, as well as the annals of man’s heroism, are the richer because of their writing.

The Squadron Forms an Orchestra

In February, 1917, Major Harvey-Kelley was succeeded in command by Major R. G. Blomfield, and here again the squadron was lucky in having as its new C.O. an experienced and understanding officer whom the Hon. Maurice Baring, A.D.C., to General Trenchard during the War, has described as “that prince of organisers.” Major Blomfield was no barrack-square martinet, and quickly realising that his new squadron was just as keen on its job as he was, he took care not to let them get stale by over-insistence upon irksome regulations. Every morning before breakfast he had all his pilots out for a run, kept them busy in the air or in the workshops during the day, and turned them loose in the town at night. All he asked of them was that they should know their jobs as fighting pilots. Apart from that little else mattered.

One of the first things that Major Blomfield did on assuming command was to set about forming the orchestra that was later to become famous throughout the Western Front. McCudden, in his book, gives the following account of Major Blomfield’s irregular but highly effective method of recruiting.

“It was at the time that the ‘Derby’ scheme was operating,” he wrote, “and so Major Blomfield went to all the principal London orchestras and inquired the name of any of the men who were being called up. In this way several of them not only came to the R.F.C., but were posted to 56 Squadron afterwards. Among them was the first violinist of the Palace Theatre.

“Another method of Major Blomfield’s was to take half a dozen spare men of various trades round to different squadrons in a tender, and if a squadron which they visited had, say, a coppersmith who played the violin, Major Blomfield at once produced a coppersmith from the tender who immediately replaced the coppersmith violinist, who came away in the tender at once.”

Soon after this enterprising C.O. had taken over, the squadron gained a welcome newcomer in the person of Captain Albert Ball, already famous for his gallant achievements as a member of 60 Squadron, and the holder of the D.S.O. and M.C. He had been in France from February, 1916, until October of that year, when he had been recalled to England to give him a much-needed rest, and also to enable him to supervise the construction of the special Austin-Ball Scout whose design he had conceived while in France. His record at the time of joining 56 Squadron was ten E.A. crashed and twenty forced to land, and his appointment to “56” was the result of his repeated applications to the authorities to be allowed to return to France and “get on with my job.” Ball’s verdict on his new unit was given in a letter to his parents in which he wrote that all the pilots were young boys, “so they should do well.” Ball
himself was then only twenty-one—but in ten months of active service on the Western Front a man could live a lifetime in experience.

Orders for Overseas

Early in April, 1917, 56 Squadron received its sailing orders, and on the 5th, an advance party, comprising Captain H. M. T. Meintjes, Lieutenant M. A. Kay and Second Lieutenant T. B. Marson, crossed to France. Two days later the rest of the squadron followed, and, after stopping for lunch at St. Omer, created something of a sensation by arriving all complete at Vert Galand aerodrome, some six miles from Doullens, on the main Amiens road.

Led by the C.O., Major R. G. Blomfield, this main party consisted of the following officers: Captain A. Ball, Lieutenants L. M. Barlow, R. M. Chatworth-Musters, R. T. C. Hodge, C. R. W. Knight, K. J. Knaggs, C. A. Lewis, H. M. T. Lehmann, J. O. Leach, G. C. Maxwell, W. B. Melville and A. F. P. Rhys-Davids. Captain C. M. Crowe arrived a few days later, thus bringing the squadron up to strength.

Their flying equipment was the S.E.5, a single-seater tractor biplane with a 150 h.p. Hispano-Suiza engine and a bulky celluloid windscreen of such proportions that it seriously obstructed the pilot's forward view. As an experienced fighter himself, Major Blomfield was not the man to allow his pilots to suffer this handicap for long, and no sooner had he got his squadron in France and well out of the way of the Farnborough experts who had designed the machine, than he "grounded" the entire squadron for a week while an improved form of windscreen was designed and fitted to each machine.

Even then, however, Ball cordially disliked the S.E.5, which he found much heavier and less manœuvrable than the Nieuport to which he had been accustomed in 60 Squadron. Writing to his father about this time he said: "They have put me on an S.E.5, and simply won't let me get back to a Nieuport. Now I must get back, and as soon as possible, or I shall never be able to do my job. I must either fly a Nieuport or a Spad, and then I can get along with the job."

Finally, after much agitation and a personal appeal to General Trenchard, Ball got his wish, and was given a Nieuport to use in addition to his S.E. Whereupon he wrote to his mother: "Cheer oh! Am about to start the old game again! Oh, how nice it will be, and I will try so hard to be a credit to you."

No. 56 Squadron's arrival in France coincided with the start of the Battle of Arras, a time when the Germans were reaching the pinnacle of their effort to win and maintain supremacy of the air. No longer, as in 1916, was all the air fighting being done over the German back areas, but, for the most part, directly over the trenches, or even well on the British side of the lines. The German aircraft had proved themselves superior in performance to those of the Allies, Richthofen and his "circus" were at the height of their success, British casualties were mounting with alarming rapidity—it was "Bloody April" at its worst.

Much was expected of the new S.E.5's, of whose advent the R.F.C. had been hearing for so long, and, as the first S.E.5 Squadron to reach France, "56" was very welcome. Its pilots, naturally, were anxious to get down to business without delay, but, save for notable exceptions like Ball, Crowe, Meintjes and Lewis, they were inexperienced men, and it was essential that they should be given time to get to know the lie of the country before facing opponents of the calibre of Richthofen and his veterans.

Accordingly, 56 Squadron was at first kept strictly to its own side of the lines in obedience to orders, which stated: "On no account will an S.E.5 cross the lines under any circumstances." The doubly emphatic nature of this order would seem to indicate that H.Q. were not only anxious for the safety of their fledglings, but even more apprehensive lest one of their latest types of fighters should fall into enemy hands.
Ball Draws First Blood

BY April 23rd the squadron was considered ready to take the offensive, and on that day Ball’s flight received orders for its first O.P. It got promptly to work.

First blood was drawn by Ball who, at 6.45 that morning, caught an Albatros two-seater well inside German territory. Maneuvering his Nieuport beneath it he loosed off half a drum from his top Lewis and sent the two-seater hurling down to crash, upside down, on the Tilloy-Abancourt road. Quarter of an hour later he engaged another Albatros two-seater, overshot his man, and had both spars of his Nieuport damaged by Spandau bullets.

After breakfast he took-off again, and another fight just before noon had to be broken off when his gun jammed. He landed to repair the stoppage, took-off again, and within a few minutes had singled out an Albatros scout from a formation of five and sent it down to crash in flames. On the way home he met a white two-seater Albatros, held his fire until within one hundred feet of the machine, and then sent it diving steeply to earth, where it was seen to make a good landing. When Ball returned to his aerodrome it was only half an hour after noon. 56 Squadron had begun its fighting career, and was wasting no time about it.

Three days later Ball scored a “double,” bringing down an Albatros two-seater and a new type of scout in the course of a single patrol. On this occasion he was flying his S.E.5, and the way in which it stood up to the damage it suffered in the combat with the scout, together with its higher speed and greater volume of fire, so impressed Ball that he withdrew all his former complaints about the type, and thereafter used his Nieuport only once again over the lines.

April 29th was a busy day for the squadron, and began with a combat between six Albatros machines and three S.E.’s, the latter piloted respectively by Captain Meintjes and Lieutenants Hodge and Melville. Despite the superior odds, the S.E.’s had the best of the encounter, destroying one Albatros and driving off the others. On the same day “A” Flight, led by Ball, had two combats, driving down two machines in each, while “C” Flight, under Captain Crowe, not to be outdone, succeeded in shooting two more down out of control. The squadron was beginning to get into its stride.

But victory demands its price, and next day the squadron paid with its first casualty, when Second Lieutenant Kay was killed in a dog-fight behind the German lines while he and his flight were attempting to rescue several obsolete F.E.’s that were being attacked by eight Albatros scouts. His companions, Captain Crowe and Lieutenant Leach, each accounted for one of the enemy, but Kay was shot down, the first of a gallant company of forty who were destined to make the supreme sacrifice in action with 56 Squadron.

The Last Fight of Albert Ball

A WEEK later tragedy again overshadowed the squadron, when the brilliant career of Albert Ball was brought to its heroic end. To this day the full story of his passing is not known. The German records attribute his defeat to Lothar von Richthofen, but Richthofen’s combat report speaks of a triplane, whereas Ball was flying an S.E. biplane. The official historian of the R.F.C., after careful examination of the German records, comes to the conclusion that it is possible that Ball was hit by gunfire from the ground.

Which, if either, of these versions is correct will never now be determined. All that has been established beyond doubt is that in the course of a great air battle near Douai on the evening of May 7th, involving all three flights of 56 Squadron and a number of Spads from 19 Squadron, the S.E.’s became separated, and the fight broke up into a series of individual combats spread over a wide area. The fighting was
fierce and protracted, with losses on both sides, until at last the gathering darkness and heavy rain caused the engagement to be broken off. Just before its end, at about 8 p.m., Captain Crowe saw Ball's S.E. and turned to join him. Suddenly two red Verey lights sped from Ball's machine, and he dived away in the direction of Lens. Crowe and a Spad pilot from 19 Squadron at once followed him, though it was not until several moments later that they saw what Ball was after—a German scout far below them.

Ball opened fire with his Vickers, but apparently without effect, and as he turned away Crowe followed up with an attack at close range. Then, before the Spad pilot could get within range, Ball had returned to the attack, and still pursuing the Albatros, disappeared into a heavy bank of cloud. Crowe followed close on his tail, but when he came through the cloudbank there was no sign of Ball or his opponent. After patrolling the area for some time Crowe was forced to give up the search and return to his own side of the lines.

Nothing more was ever seen of Ball on the British side of the lines, and of that night Cecil Lewis writes: "Only five of us returned to the aerodrome. The mess was very quiet that night. The Adjutant remained in his office, hoping against hope to have news of the six missing pilots, and later, news did come through that two had been forced down, shot in the engine, and that two others had been wounded. But Ball never returned."

For many days, however, Ball's companions at Vert Galand would not give up hope that he was still alive, even as a prisoner, and it was not until the end of the month that his death was established beyond all doubt when a note was dropped by a German pilot. It read:

"R.F.C. Captain Ball was brought down in an air fight on May 7 by a pilot who was of the same order as himself. He was buried at Anneoulin."

This note also stated that Second Lieutenant Chatworth-Musters, another member of the squadron who had been missing with Ball, had been killed on the same day.

So passed the gallant Ball, but his spirit lived on in 56 Squadron, and soon there were other pilots, notably Lieutenant A. F. F. Rhys-Davids, showing promise of almost equal brilliance.

Recalled for Home Defence

At the end of May, the squadron was moved to Liétteres to take part in the Battle of Messines, and found themselves detailed for the highly dangerous game of "ground strafing." But it was all part of the job to 56 Squadron, and soon one particular specialist, Second Lieutenant L. M. Barlow, became so expert at it that in the course of one patrol he visited two German aerodromes, flew up and down the sheds firing into them from a height of a few feet, and finished the trip by shooting the windows out of each side of a moving troop-train.

In mid-June the squadron was both surprised and elated to receive orders to return post-haste to England. The Gotha raids at home had got the authorities rattled, with the result that three crack fighter squadrons, Nos. 46, 56 and 66, were being recalled from France to strengthen the air defences of London.

Perhaps the news of the warm reception awaiting their Gothas reached the German High Command, or possibly it was merely coincidence, but, whatever the reason, the raids suddenly ceased with the arrival of the fighter squadrons in England. After ten days of this welcome quietness the authorities recovered their nerve, and 56 Squadron, highly appreciative of a delightful holiday, flew back to France in time for the third battle of Ypres.

Always on the aggressive, the squadron steadily piled up its victory score, and gradually the threatened German supremacy in the air receded before the fierce and relentless pressure of the British fighters.

Mayberry's Daring Lone Raid

The Battle of Passchendaele opened on July 31st, 1917, and on that day
Lieutenant R. A. Mayberry left 56 Squadron's aerodrome at Estrée Blanche on one of the most daring lone raids of the War. Crossing the lines at five hundred feet, beneath heavy clouds, he was soon forced down to about thirty feet by the smoke from an artillery barrage raging near Ypres. Miraculously escaping heavy rifle fire from the ground and the persistent attentions of two enemy scouts that tried to intercept him, he finally reached his objective, Heule aerodrome. Then he set seriously to work.

"After circling round the aerodrome," he later reported, "I turned east and then came back along the line of the southernmost sheds and dropped my first bomb, which hit the third shed from the east and exploded. This caused immense excitement and I could see people running about all round the sheds."

More sheds were demolished by his second and third bombs. A fourth bomb stuck in the guides, and as the aerodrome's machine-guns were now becoming rather too accurate for loitering, Mayberry sheered off for a moment while he struggled with the bomb release gear. Clearing the trouble at last, he found himself over Courtrai railway station and promptly planted his last bomb between a goods train and a shed. He then returned to Heule aerodrome, silenced the machine-guns with his own Vickers and proceeded to shoot up the hangars at such close range that on one occasion his wheels were actually running along the ground.

The rest of the story of this amazing raid is best told in the words of Mayberry's own report:

"I then zoomed over the sheds," he stated, "and flew straight on to Cuerno Aerodrome, again attacking the sheds with both guns, driving back a machine that was just being got out. Leaving the aerodrome, saw two horsemen who looked like officers. Attacked them, and their horses bolted. Turned west and attacked a goods train going from Courtrai to Menin, via Bisseghem. Saw a column of infantry about two hundred strong on the road just west of Wevelghem marching towards Menin, and attacked them with both guns. They scattered to both sides of the road. Changed drums.

"Turned back east and attacked infantry again. Looking up, saw one E.A. two-seater at about five hundred feet just below the clouds, making east. Zoomed up and got very close under E.A.'s tail without being observed. Pulled down Lewis gun and fired half a drum into E.A., which started to go down in a steep left-handed turn. E.A. straightened out again and I followed, firing Vickers gun. E.A. crashed just north of the railway south of the "G" in Wevelghem. Only one man got out. A small crowd started to collect, and I dived, firing both guns. The crowd either ran or lay down flat. Saw a passenger train coming, towards Courtrai, and attacked, but Lewis gun ran out of ammunition, and Vickers stopped. Flew west, recrossed the line south of Messines, and returned."

Less than five months later, on December 19th, 1917, this gallant officer, then a Captain and holder of the Military Cross, failed to return from action.

McCudden Joins the Squadron

On August 15th, Captain J. B. McCudden at last succeeded in realising his ambition to join 56 Squadron, on appointment as Commander of "B" Flight in succession to Captain Crowe.

"I at once reported to Major Blomfield," he wrote in his diary, "and I don't think I have often experienced such pleasure as when I was able to call myself a flight-commander in No. 56 Squadron. When I arrived at the squadron I was just in time to meet the pilots landing after the evening patrol, during which they had got four Huns. We adjourned to the mess and had dinner, which was enjoyed to the accompaniment of the squadron's orchestra. I sat on the C.O.'s left. Bowman was on his right and Maxwell, the other flight-commander, on the right of Bowman. I was to command "B" Flight, and my brother pilots were Lieutenants Barlow, Rhys-Davids, Muspratt, Coote and Cronyn, as splendid a lot of fellows as ever set foot in France."
Within three days of joining, McCudden had added to his already substantial score by out-firing an Albatros in a head-on attack. In the same fight Barlow accounted for two more sent down out of control, after which the flight returned rather hurriedly for breakfast on finding themselves beneath about eight V-strutters obviously bent on exacting vengeance for their falling comrades.

In the following month McCudden and his flight took part in what must surely rank as one of the greatest and most gallant air fights of the whole War—that in which the German airman Werner Voss, fell to his death before the guns of Rhys-Davids. Voss was an “ace” with forty-eight victories to his credit, and when trapped by two flights from No. 56 Squadron on the evening of September 23rd, 1917, he courageously accepted combat by launching an immediate attack on McCudden, who was leading Rhys-Davids and Hoidge of “B” Flight. For ten minutes this brave man fought single-handed against six of 56 Squadron’s best pilots, and once he even flew head-on against McCudden, determined to take at least one of his opponents with him to his last landing. But Hoidge, seeing his intention, dived in and drove him off at the last moment, when a collision seemed unavoidable. Still Voss attacked again and again with undiminished courage, until at last Rhys-Davids, closing to within thirty yards of the chequerboard triplane, emptied his Lewis drum into it to send it hurtling to earth on the British side of the lines.

When the British machines landed, each was found to carry the scars of Voss’s bullets, convincing evidence of the skill with which he had waged his last heroic fight. Bravery of this quality was not likely to be unappreciated by such kindred spirits as his conquerors, and in the mess that night Rhys-Davids voiced the feeling of them all when he exclaimed: “Oh! If only I could have brought him down alive!”

McCudden, too, paid his tribute to Voss when he wrote: “His flying was wonderful, his courage magnificent, and

Major J. B. McCudden, who won his Victoria Cross as a flight-commander in 56 Squadron in my opinion he was the bravest German airman whom it has ever been my privilege to see fight.”

A month later Voss’s victor, Lieutenant A. P. F. Rhys-Davids, D.S.O., M.C., had also fought his last fight, falling in action on October 27th, 1917.

Thus did McCudden begin his association with the squadron to whose record he was to add such lustre and to which his gallant example was to prove so high an inspiration. He remained with it until early in March, 1918, when he was posted to Home Establishment, and the quality of his leadership is shown by the fact that whilst he was with them his flight accounted for seventy-seven E.A., and its own casualties were only four.

Before he left, the squadron gave him a farewell dinner in Amiens, at which the famous squadron orchestra excelled itself. The dinner was followed by a concert, and the presentation to McCudden of a silver model of his S.E.5.

Back in England, on April 2nd, McCudden was gazetted with the Victoria Cross “for conspicuous bravery, excep-
tional perseverance, and a very high devotion to duty. Captain McCudden,” the citation continued, “has at the present time accounted for fifty-four enemy aeroplanes. . . .”

Three months later this great and gallant fighter was dead, killed in a trivial flying accident while on his way back to France to assume command of No. 60 Squadron.

A Change of Front

In October, 1917, Major R. Balcombe-Brown succeeded Major Blomfield as C.O., and in the following month the squadron was transferred to Lavieville, near Amiens, and attached to the 13th Wing of the Third Brigade. A large-scale attack was being planned on the Cambrai front, and when this was launched in November, 56 Squadron kept up for several days an intensive “strafe” on the German support lines, harassing the troops and supply lines on every possible occasion.

On December 19th, the squadron sustained another grievous loss, when Captain R. A. Mayberry, one of its original members and the hero of the daring lone raid on Heule aerodrome, was seen to spin down on the German side of the lines, just after he had shot down an enemy machine in flames.

Throughout the winter the squadron’s list of victories continued to soar, and on January 21st they were moved to an aerodrome south of Baisieux, where they played a great part in stemming the tide of the German advance on Amiens. All through that arduous Spring campaign the squadron kept up its morale and its patrols, but it suffered a great loss when, on May 2nd, its popular C.O., Major Balcombe-Brown, was killed in the course of a lone offensive patrol over the Somme area. There was an order in being that squadron C.O.’s should on no account make offensive patrols, but the C.O.’s of 56 Squadron were the type of men who thought more of the spirit of their squadron than the letter of official regulations.

Major Balcombe-Brown was succeeded by Major E. J. L. W. Gilchrist, and again the squadron’s luck in its C.O.’s held good. Overwork and the nervous strain of a serious crash had seriously undermined Major Gilchrist’s health, but he was determined to see the War out before he took a much-needed rest. Like his predecessors, he took an active part in the fighting, and on one occasion, after leading the squadron on a particularly daring “ground strafe,” he returned to the aerodrome, landed, taxied up to the sheds, and then fainted in his seat through sheer overstrain.

Even then he would not give up, and both during the German advance and throughout the magnificent rally of the Allies in the autumn of 1918, the squadron, under his leadership, did valiant work.

On August 1st, our main offensive started, and “56” took part in a memorable low-flying raid in conjunction with No. 3 Squadron. More than one hundred 25-lb. bombs were dropped on enemy aerodromes and railheads, and over ten thousand rounds of ammunition were fired at various ground targets in the course of this one raid, which also saw the destruction of six enemy hangars and some seventeen aircraft.

In the closing stages of the War the squadron spent most of its time carrying out offensive patrols against the retreating and disorganised enemy. It had constantly to change its aerodrome to keep up with the advancing armies and ended up on Armistice Day with its headquarters at La Targette.

The Record of a Great Squadron

With such C.O.’s as this squadron had, and with the deeds of such fighters as Ball, McCudden, Mayberry and Rhys-Davids to inspire it, 56 Squadron’s brilliant war record is not difficult to understand. In the nineteen months of its active service, from April 7th, 1917, to November 11th, 1918, the squadron accounted in all for four hundred German aircraft, with a loss to itself of forty pilots killed, twenty wounded and thirty-one taken prisoners. Among the honours won by its members
were two Victoria Crosses, five Distinguished Service Orders and one Bar, fourteen Military Crosses, seven Bars and one second Bar, twelve Distinguished Flying Crosses and one Bar, and numerous foreign decorations—a worthy roll of honours for a gallant company of great fighting men.

After the Armistice, command of the squadron devolved upon one of its flight-commanders, Duncan Grinnell-Milne, until it was reduced to cadre and eventually disbanded in England in January, 1920. But its traditions were too fine to be lost to the Royal Air Force for long, and a month later it was re-born by the re-numbering of No. 80 Squadron.

Disbandment overtook it again in the economy wave of 1922, but the Chanak crisis arose soon afterwards, and in November of the same year No. 56 Squadron was re-formed at Hawkinge with Sopwith Snipes.

To-day, equipped with Gloster Gauntlets, 56 Squadron is stationed at North Weald, in Essex, still one of the crack fighter squadrons of the Royal Air Force, and still imbued with the same fine spirit that so impressed and attracted McCudden nearly twenty years ago.

**HERE'S THE ANSWER**

Readers' Questions are invited and should be addressed to AIR STORIES, Tower House, Southampton Street, London, W.C.2. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany ALL enquiries.

**MANNOCK'S MARKINGS** (G. A. Doyle, Stoke Newington). (1) The Nieuport used by Mannock in 40 Squadron carried his initial letter "M" and three white lines encircling the fuselage. His actual machine is shown in the sketch at the head of the article on 40 Squadron on p. 235 of our September, 1936, issue. (2) Mannock was born at Preston, Ball at Nottingham, Guynemer at Compiègne, Richthofen at Schweindtitz and Boeleke at Giebickestein, Halle.

**B.A.T. BASILISK** (L/Cpl. T. Morgan, Singapore). (1) The engine of the 162 m.p.h. B.A.T. Basilisk, the fastest Allied 'plane of the Great War, was a 320-h.p. A.B.C. Dragonfly. (2) Yes, the German Aviatik G.1 was the twin-engined bomber. It was produced in July, 1918, and about a dozen saw service on the French front.

**SNIPE No. 1** (H. H. Russell, Masterton, New Zealand). An ex-Sopwith test-pilot confirms that the photo you sent us for identification is of the original Snipe Model 1. Dive tests with this model showed that the single bay struts would not stand up to the strains involved, with the result that the design was modified and all subsequent Snipes given the double bay. Your other photo is of the Eastchurch Kitten, a small single-seatener designed and built at the Isle of Grain R.N.A.S. station, and often erroneously attributed to the Sopwith concern.

**ARMOURCED 'PLANES** (E. R.cottier, Liverpool, 7). The first armoured aeroplane was probably a Breguet type produced in France in 1912. France also produced the first armoured 'plane of the War, a Weymann type which appeared early in 1916, first as a scout and later as a two-seater. Germany was a close second in February, 1916, with an armoured-plated Junkers monoplane.

**HELIICOPTERS** (R. Y. Turner, Leeds 8). (1) Essential difference between a helicopter and an autogiro is that the horizontal rotors of a helicopter are power driven in flight, whereas those of an autogiro are wind driven. (2) Strictly speaking, the term “airport” should be applied only to those aerodromes providing Customs facilities, though, in practice, “airport” and “aerodrome” are generally used without distinction. (3) For complete list of all R.A.F. commands, stations, squadrons, their location and address, together with an alphabetical list of all serving officers and the units to which they are attached, see “The R.A.F. List” published monthly, price 3s., by the Air Ministry and obtainable from H.M. Stationery Office or any bookseller.

**MONOCOQUE** (Hon. J. Cokayne, Bircningham, Kent). (1) Monocoque is the name of a form of fuselage construction in which the main loads and stresses on the structure are taken by the skin or covering. (2) Aero-engine carburettors are usually tuned to give a rich mixture for full power, a leaner mixture for cruising, and a rich mixture at low throttles for acceleration on opening up. They are also provided with a mixture control operated by the pilot.

**BLACKBURN ’PLANES** (F. Royston-Mather, Leeds 9). Top speeds of the Blackburn craft you list are: Perth, 115 knots; Iris, 103 knots; Sidney, 110 knots; Lincock, 164 m.p.h.; Ripon, 124 m.p.h.; Beagle, none issued.

**THE A.W.19** (H. Davison, Bridlington, Yorks). (1) The Armstrong-Whitworth Type 19 was an experimental general purpose, bombing and torpedo-carrying biplane with a Tiger engine. We cannot trace that it was ever christened. (2) Dimensions of the Fairey Firefly are span, 32 ft.; length, 24 ft. 6 in.; height, 8 ft. 8 in.; chord (top), 5 ft. 1/4 in.; chord (bottom), 4 ft. 1 in.

**WARTIME UNIFORMS** (W. E. Smith, London, E.13). The R.F.C. and R.N.A.S. were combined into one Service, the R.A.F., on April 1st, 1918. In the stress of the war there was a need to ensure uniformity in dress or titles of rank, and for some time afterwards R.F.C. and R.N.A.S. officers continued to wear their distinctive uniforms.

(Replies to Readers on page 539.)
THE SKY CLOWN

Behind the Strange Metamorphosis of Second Lieutenant Dunne lay a Joke that Cost a Brave Man his Courage and made a Fighter out of a Fool

By J. RAILTON HOLDEN

It was not a coincidence. I wanted to buy an aeroplane, so I motored over to the works whose craft had been doing exceptionally well of late on endurance flights.

When I made my requirements known, the typist who came to the reception room asked me to take a seat. She passed through to an office on my right and deposited her handful of letters on the resplendent mahogany table.

When the girl told him of my presence I heard the man who was sitting there say: "I'll sign these first."

I also caught sight of his profile as he looked up at her, and that bullet-scarred chin of his brought back a rush of memories.

OFFICIALLY, of course, no flight-commander ever did get the pilots

"I saw his hand go up in farewell as he plunged down, out of control."
he wanted during the War. Usually Mason's Yard received an order from France for a packet of "all sorts"; the information was passed to the various training squadrons in England in the form of an order for a draft, and a mixed batch of pilots, often with barely twenty hours' flying to the credit of each, was pitchforked into the arena.

A flight-commander had no option but to accept what was coming to him, unless, of course, he happened to know the string to pull. An old side-stepper of mine—who had stopped a "blighty" one, and was then an instructor at a training squadron—gave me the tip.

"The O.C. Pool* over there is an Irishman," he told me with a sly wink. "And he doesn't like Scotch whisky."

I was also indebted to the same friend for frequent budgets of home news, including some illuminating remarks about the various pilots who had been through his hands. And the good Lord alone knew how I had prayed for two with sufficient sense to do as they were told until they had developed that seventh sense which made cæs out of rabbits.

Frencham, the Canadian, was the only pilot left to me after Arras. The remainder had gone down over Arleux, after breaking formation to bag an inoffensive-looking German two-seater artillery-observation machine.

It cost me two bottles of Irish whisky to get Dunne in my flight. I had paid this premium at the Pool on my last leave. I knew of him through my instructor friend.

"... a sound pilot, no bad habits, seems officious on first acquaintance, but this is only a mannerism. Can shoot the hair-line off a compass..." he had written.

I took his word for it and managed to get Dunne from the Pool. With him came a tow-haired, wide-mouthed individual, who went by the name of Lane. As soon as I welcomed him to the squadron I knew I had heard the name before. I searched the only possible source of information I had—my instructor pal's letters, which I had kept for my war diary. Sure enough, I found him mentioned in one of them:

"Lieutenant Reginald Lane has just come down from the aerial fighting school at Ayr," he had written. "You will remember him better as Jerry Lane of the music-halls. Can't be beaten at crazy flying, but that's all it is—crazy flying. Full of his old tricks, and will be popular with any concert party you have out there. Won't last long in the air, I'm afraid."

And so my dip in the lucky-bag had produced mixed results. I had great hopes of Dunne, however. With him and Frencham behind me I hoped to regain a little of the confidence I had felt slipping away from me after the losses of Bloody April.

"Loopy" Lane and Dunne had come from the same training squadron, and so I put them in the same Nissen hut in the belief that they would prefer to be together.

I received my first shock when passing their sleeping quarters on the way to the mess that night. Outside, in the yellow light that streamed from the window, a group of the chaps were snowballing one another. As Frencham seemed to be receiver-in-chief, I went to his rescue.

As I passed the open door of the hut, I caught the sound of high voices within, evidently the tail-end of a quarrel.

A deep husky voice boomed out, "Hang it, man! Can't you take a joke? Shake, and get it out of your system!"

There could be no mistaking Lane's confident appeal. His voice held that touch of personality that marks a top-of-the-bill turn in variety. Dunne's surly, muttering retort was lost to me as a snowball between the eyes urged me into the combat.

I guessed what had happened. All the lads were scuffling in the snow with the exception of Lane and Dunne. "Loopy" had evidently been up to his tricks again at his friend Dunne's expense.

I called a halt to the snowfight.

"Hey, boys!" I said. "There's
THE SKY CLOWN

someone inside there who can’t take it. Let’s give him his baptism!”
They did. They let the pair of them have it with accurate aim as they came out. The big, tow-haired comedian took up the challenge at once, charging forward with a handful of snow and collaring a member of “B” Flight. They were rolling over on the ground the next minute, trying to cram as much snow down each other’s neck as they could.

But Dunne retired into the hut, his new uniform plastered with white, and that officious look on his face which my instructor friend had described. For myself, I should have called it a supercilious, aloof, and slightly sneering expression, as if it were beneath his dignity to show any emotion whatsoever.

He showed his antipathy to Lane in various ways during the next day or two. He refused to sit anywhere near him in the mess, was never seen in a group which contained the comedian, and had his bed removed to the other end of the hut.

“Loopy” Lane, like any fellow who has acquired a nickname, was popular. A happy, easy-going soul, he mixed well right from the start.

When I told him that I would not be taking him along until the afternoon patrol, he just grinned cheerily, and exclaimed:

“That suits me, Dale. I’ll be beetling around. Just whistle for me when the Huns are getting too much for you.”

THE Huns were not getting too much for us. The capture of Arras and Vimy the previous week would never have been accomplished had we not carried out to the letter our order to “Clear the sky!”

The cost in pilots had been enormous for that small sector of the line; forty-six enemy machines had been shot down at a cost of forty-eight good men from our side. But no Hun observation machine had been able to catch a glimpse of that area of shell-holes, shattered wire, burnt-out tanks, and unburied corpses. Their batteries could give no protection to their retreating and demoralised troops.

Now the offensive was held up until the guns could be manhandled forward through the slush and snow and shell craters. A cavalry detachment was waiting at Arras for that break in the enemy’s line which would give them scope for action.

Four, five, six patrols a day; far over the line to Douai, back down the Scarpe, chivvying the heavy batteries in Bois Bernard, the reinforcement concentrations in the streets of Oppy, Gavrelle, and Roeux. Out at dawn; glad to get a full meal as night brought us rest; weary—utterably weary, spineless, cold. An empty bed next to us where a pal had lain the night before. Their memory was buried but not forgotten in a long drink, a joke, a supreme effort to laugh and pretend we were tough—tough at the age of eighteen, nineteen, twenty!

Dunne neither laughed nor joked. He was a teetotaller until after that first flight over the lines, and then—

We had reached Roeux cemetery on the outward trip without spotting a single Hun. It was still early. “Archie” followed us with black puff-balls all the way along the river. Dunne was keeping formation splendidly, flying close to my right wing-tip, apparently quite unperturbed by his baptism of fire.

I turned north-east to Fresnes, hoping to catch an observation two-seater on the hop on my return. It was bitterly cold.

With the sun behind my tail now, I was able to see better. If I could only give Dunne one victim it would satisfy me for that patrol. I remembered only too well my own sense of inferiority during my first flight, that nervous, twittering fear that something would go wrong—the gun jam, the engine fail, or my opponent prove to be an ace with a bloody record. If I could nurse Dunne over that stage of prostration and lead him to the exultant state in his second scrap, I would be ready to tackle anything again.

Then the opportunity came. I couldn’t believe the luck that gave me the choice of a couple of lone two-seaters.

A quick glance round convinced me
that there was no trap waiting to be sprung. Frencham grinned back at me, his hand above the cockpit with thumb confidently vertical. I nodded. I jerked my head in Dunne's direction, though we had arranged all that between us before taking-off.

I swooped down, giving my new pilot a clear way to his target. Frencham pulled slightly away to be ready for the second machine.

A hundred yards away! Both pilot and observer of the Hun 'plane were watching our lines—the latter busy signalling ranges. Dead meat!

It was a "sitter" if ever there was one, flying across our front. I dived past his tail and pulled out. No stuttering of guns came to my ears. I looked for Dunne, and saw him far below, still diving and glancing nervously rearward. I cursed and came back at the two-seater in a stalled turn, firing obliquely as he banked for home, and met with a reception that left me with an elevator wire threatening to foul my controls.

I had no need to attack again: Frencham saved me the trouble. I waited to see the two-seater hit the dyke running alongside the Gavrelle road and send up a fan of water, and then I collected Frencham and returned.

DUNNE'S machine was in front of the hangars with the flight sergeant in the cockpit and a couple of mechanics hanging on to the tail. A third was swinging the propeller.

"Just a minute, Sergeant!" I shouted.

"What's wrong?"

"Pressure, Mr. Dunne says, sir."

"Right! Let me get up there. Give her a swing!"

I revved it up on the chocks and listened to the full-throated roar. Nothing wrong there, I decided. But it would not do to let the mechanics think so. I eased the throttle slowly back and looked significantly over the side of the cockpit at the sergeant.

"Give the automatic pump a once-over!" I ordered, and switched off.

"All right, wheel it in!"

I doubt whether this subterfuge deceived anyone. Frencham made no comment as we trudged messward through the snow. We heard another machine coming in, and waited for it to land. It was from the S.E. squadron.

The pilot taxied right up to us and called out without stopping his engine. I told Frencham to see what he wanted.

He did so and then, without getting out of his machine, the pilot swung her round and made off. Frencham came back, frowning in a puzzled manner.

"Says he just came in to confirm the Clown's two victories," he muttered.

"His patrol saw the whole fight."

"What the devil does he mean?" I asked.

Frencham hunched his shoulders and went on to the mess hut.

I swung on my heel and entered the hangars. The visiting pilot's reference to "The Clown" could only mean one thing—he had seen the insignia painted on the side of the fuselage. I do not know who first started this artistic conceit, but it had spread so rapidly that every pilot now had his own coat of arms.

If the pilot had wished to confirm a victory of Frencham's, he would have alluded to him as "The Maple Leaf," or to myself as "The Owl."

I knew that we had no clown in our circus, unless—my mind went back to "Loopy" Lane, the comedian. I found his machine, and at once the mystery was solved. He had been hard at work with brush and paint on his own particular emblem—a clown, rampant, with high-domed head, wide mouth like his own, and thumb to nose, facing rearward.

From where I stood at the tail of his machine it looked as if that clown were cocking a snook at me. I had to laugh.

I got in touch with the S.E. squadron at the next aerodrome for further particulars of Lane's two victories. They sounded like the actions of a village idiot to me.

He had seen three Fokker scouts harrying one of our machines which was limping back across the line. Knowing that if he tackled one of them the other two would get the lame bird, he deli-
berately avoided action in order to protect its tail.

His tactics were those of the fool he was, flying contemptuously across the sights of each Fokker, and cocking a snook at the pilot.

I chuckled quietly to myself as I visualised the scene: "Loopy" Lane who, I had been told, would "go west" in his first fight, beating three Fokkers off their prey with the schoolboy's favourite insult. He had probably so enraged them that they had lost their heads in their attempt to get at him. Then, when they turned for home from far over our line, he had finished two of them off.

And the man he had saved was Dunne! Dunne, of whom I had expected so much. Dunne, who could shoot the hair-line off a compass!

Dunne had "ratted" in that first fight. I felt as though I had shaken a rabbit out of the bag in front of a dog's nose, and seen the rabbit chase the dog.

Frencham was talking to Lane at the mess table when I entered. Dunne was at the far end of the hut with a glass of neat whisky in front of him—Dunne, the teetotaller!

I knew that it was neat because of the coughing bout that shook him as he attempted to put it away when he caught sight of me.

I stopped behind Lane. He had a broad strip of plaster on his cheek. He covered it with his hand as though half ashamed of it. Before I could voice a question he looked up at me with a grin and muttered:

"Dud razor, Dale."

I thumped him on the back in congratulation.

"I can't think what you were doing to let that third Fokker get away, 'Loopy,'" I exclaimed.

"Bad shooting!" he grunted.

"Ye-es," I drawled. "Rank bad shooting! Well, you can give us some more of the same brand on the next patrol. Take the right wing position. And don't be too long over breakfast. We're up again in an hour."

I saw the back of his neck turn a fiery red with pleasure and embarrassment. None of the other fellows knew of his two lone victories. But his feat was soon on many tongues.

I crossed over to Dunne, and planked myself down beside him.

"Tough luck——" I began, when he turned and faced me with a kind of defensive glare in his eyes.

"I never did like Camels," he exclaimed. "And that one you've given me, Dale, is the duddest in the hangars."

"But surely you're a Camel pilot, Dunne?" I expostulated.

"I am, but I prefer S.E.'s."

"They'll have to improve a lot on that first S.E. before it beats a Camel, old chap," I declared with a tolerant smile. "Give me a B.R. Camel any day. It's the difference between an Irish 'jepper' and a London cab-horse."

He concentrated on his meal without replying.

"What happened?" I asked him.

"Pressure," he said curtly from a full mouth.

"I've tested that," I told him, and his head jerked round again.

The look he gave me was challenging, officious, hard, and surly. It was more than that; it was guilty. If he had just apologised with a "Sorry I let you down, Dale," I should have accepted it without doubting him. A tyro could easily have mistaken a slipped timing for pressure failure. But Lane's truculent, dogmatic pronouncement of the trouble rubbed me on the raw.

"Well, it was pressure," he repeated insolently.

"Have I said it wasn't?" I asked him.

He mumbled something and went on eating. I clapped a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"Let me give you a tip about drinking, too, youngster," I offered with the paternal wisdom of my two years' advantage in age.

I thought he was about to tell me to mind my own business but, if he had been, he stifled the impulse and allowed me to continue.
“The Irish like their whisky neat; that way they get the true bouquet. But they put it to sleep with a glass of water afterwards. From Edinburgh to Inverness you’ll see a glass of beer pairing off with each tot of whisky for the same reason. It gives it a spreadover. Hot cocoa is equally effective, young Dunne, if you must drink. Try it! But give whisky a miss until you’ve finished your patrols for the day and then lace a well-filled belly with it, not an empty inside before breakfast.”

Dunne, I could see, was not the man my instructor friend had made him out to be. Either a mistake in the name had been made, or something had changed him completely. The officiousness was correct; the remainder of his character study was well off the mark—like his shooting.

To add to the mystery Lane began to change. After a dozen patrols over the line, in which he bagged another two Huns, that clown insignia no longer represented his outlook on life. He dropped the garb of Punchinello and became a serious student of aerial fighting. He was constantly pesterling Frencham and myself with tricky problems.

“What would you do if——? ”

He also filled the ground target with lead at every opportunity; got Frencham into the air after nearly every patrol to practise another method he had thought out of throwing Jerry off his tail in a scrap.

On three separate days he had been seen to save Dunne from a sticky death. In the air they were inseparable; on the ground they never spoke.

Meanwhile, Dunne had become a menace to the flight; he had gone completely to pieces. I determined to give him one more chance and then ground him, or, better still, send him back to the Pool and accept the worst pilot they had in exchange. It would be a good bargain for me.

We had been given instructions to concentrate our offensive patrols on the Monchy-le-Preux front. Our cavalry had made an attempt to break through on this sector the day before, but had been held up, with heavy losses, by the unbroken wire south of Feuchy, and by scores of machine-gun nests behind the rising ground on which the town of Monchy stood.

The wind had changed from north-east to west, and a driving snowstorm had blotted out all signs of our recent magnificent victory all along the line from Vimy to St. Martin. The scars, blasted in the earth by a tornado of shrieking death, had been mercifully covered. The new barrage pock-marked the white face of the snow as the attack was launched under its protection.

I was out with the flight during a break in the storm, doubting the wisdom of the patrol, cursing the cold, thrusting the fingers of each hand alternately into my mouth.

The storm was sweeping over the flat country towards Douai, revealing roads crammed with support troops, ammunition trains and field guns. They were tempting targets, but not for us. We were there to poke out the enemy’s eyes if any should appear in the sky.

I could not keep my own eyes from that attack on Monchy. The sight of cavalry in action was fascinating. Time after time I turned back to watch. It seemed to me utter recklessness to launch them north and south of the town, knowing, as I did, the position of the majority of the machine-gun traps.

The southern detachment had fought their way in open formation across the by-road from the Cambrai highway. The formation became more and more open as man and horse went down under that murderous fire. Now they were in the debris-strewn streets of Monchy! A broken wave of infantry overran it from the west. The barrage moved forward, leaving a smoking desolation swarming with human ants, firing, bayonetting, clubbing, winning.

I nearly lost the whole flight on that patrol. A Hun staffel had been sitting up above the storm waiting for it to pass. They came down now, all seven of them. I lured them north, away from the
THE SKY CLOWN

Monchy area. They meant business. So did I.

Their formation flying went to pieces in the dive, especially after I had begun another turn east instead of west, as their leader had evidently expected. He overshot us, and we were among them before they could recover height.

It is impossible to mark individual points in a dogfight; one’s attention is concentrated on one’s own kill. Only when that has been accomplished is there a flash-second’s glimpse of the arena in general.

The odds were now six to four. I zoomed away from the avenger who had wasted a quarter of a belt of ammunition on my tail. I saw him break off the fight as he caught sight of Frencham on his port side engaged in a game of ring-o’-roses with the Hun leader. The Camel excelled in these tight circle tactics. Frencham got in a winning burst when almost on his back. The pilot whom I had shaken off my tail immediately took him on.

Five to four now! No, five to three! They had got the Clown!

He had been nursing Dunne, as usual. I saw his hand go up in pathetic farewell as he fell out of control, or was he cocking a snook at the victor? I flew to Dunne’s rescue with a Hun perilously near my own tail.

And then, as if stung into some semblance of the high-class pilot he was supposed to be, Dunne’s yellow streak disappeared. He was fighting three of them when I reached him, twisting, banking, split-airyng all over the place with a finer touch on the controls than I had ever seen him use before.

Not avoiding combat this time—no thought of his own skin. He was mad, but it was a frigid madness, nerved and calculating.

Four to two!

He got his man on a vertical zoom, drilled him from tail to prop., and then fell away in a stall and followed Lane down. He took not the slightest notice of the two Huns on his tail beyond kicking an alternate rudder to throw off their aim.

I was left with a solitary opponent who clipped my left wing with a burst before I got his measure. I hung on to him until my last shot had sizzled its inflammable way into his petrol tank. I did not wait to follow his path to earth. There was another flaming machine half in the waters of the Scarpe.

And on the snow within twenty yards of it was Dunne’s machine—undamaged. Dunne was running across to the burning wreckage.

That was the last I ever saw of either “Loopy” Lane or Dunne until—

NEARLY twenty years later, and the memory of it all had remained like a woodcut in my brain.

Nobody could have forgotten Lane’s unlovely features—that wide grin and tow-coloured hair. As he came from the inner office and caught sight of me, his mouth almost split his face with delight.

“By gosh! It’s Dale!” he shouted so loudly that the typist overbalanced and sat down suddenly in a chair.

Well, you know how it is when Flying Corps pals meet after nearly twenty years, especially when one of them ought to be dead. After we had finished wrestling and thumping and crying: “You old dodger!” “Loopy, by the holy smoke!” Lane dragged me into his office.

I asked him point blank about the whole episode.

“It all started at the training squadron,” he began with that infectious grin of his. “I was acting as a ‘buck-shoo’ flight-commander until the draft went. The T.D.S. was short of instructors. But the job didn’t amount to much, because the pupils were only there to put in time. They had all passed out for their wings.

“You know how we used to put on our oldest maternity jackets for flying, smudged with oil, epaulettes torn or missing, and, in my case, no wings up and not even the extra pip on my shoulder.

“Young Dunne was drafted to the same flight—a temporary instructor under me before going overseas. Really
nothing to do; but he didn't know it.'

I laughed outright as Lane drew a picture of that particular training squadron with himself lounging negligently against the yellow brick flight hut, bored with inaction, enjoying a cigarette, and looking like a pupil waiting for a flight. "That young whipper-snapper breezed on to the aerodrome all posh and importance," he continued. "He came straight up to me and snapped: 'Have you been up this morning, Cadet?'—Cadet, mind you; me, a cadet!

"I caught the flight sergeant's eye, winked, and said: 'No, sir.'

"'All right; get into that machine, and I'll take you up now,' said Dunne.

"I got in. The sergeant swung the propeller. Dunne fiddled about with his rudder straps, his head below the cowling. It was at that moment that the great joke occurred to me. I climbed carefully out and allowed him to take-off alone.

"Of course, the news went round the mess like lightning. We were having tea when Dunne came down. A few minutes later the Adjutant came into the mess and held an informal roll call. He looked very worried, and someone asked him what the trouble was.

"'That new fellow, Dunne, has just come into the squadron office and reported that he dropped a pupil out of his machine at two thousand feet while looping the loop,' the Adjutant explained."

"THERE was a roar of laughter at that. Even the Adjutant smiled when we let him into the joke. He went in search of Dunne, but must have missed him, for Dunne came in a few minutes later looking very white about the gills.

"As he passed in front of me he looked hard at me, and then sat down at the end of the table. No one said anything; every man was keeping the conversation going as if nothing had happened.

"Presently Dunne came across to me and almost whispered: 'Aren't you the chap I took up with me this afternoon?'

"Quite truthfully I said: 'No,' and went on with my bread and marmalade and badly-brewed tea. I thought I'd teach him not to be so uppish.

"He sat down again, and glanced across at me time and again from under his eyebrows. As we left the mess he came up behind me and asked again: 'Are you sure you're not the pupil I told to go up with me?' He was fairly pleading this time.

"I said: 'Look here, cully, I'd like you to know that I'm the temporary commander of "B" Flight of this outfit, to which you've been attached as "buckshee" instructor. You did tell me to go up with you, but don't do it again!'

"If looks could have killed, then I shouldn't be here now.'

"'I'm not surprised," I told the Clown. "It was a damned silly trick to pull off. Just imagine how you would have felt thinking you had dropped a pupil out of the machine. He might have crashed and killed himself.'

"'They told me that he nearly did,' said Lane, more soberly. "I tried to apologise, but it was no use. And it was not until we reached France that I discovered that Dunne had lost his nerve. I knew that I was responsible for it, and that if he were ever shot down, morally I should be his murderer.'

In that one revealing sentence I saw the whole unhappy episode in its true perspective. "Loopy" Lane had not been alluding about the aerodrome as he had said that first day. He must have been up at the ceiling, watching over Dunne like a parent vulture over its offspring on its first foray. He had saved Dunne's life on many occasions.

I savoured the expensive cigar he had given me, and added another half dozen smoke rings to the already blue atmosphere. I occupied the hiatus in the conversation in conjuring up with half-closed eyes that last picture of a blazing machine half in the snow-covered banks of the Scarpe River.

"He saved your life that day," I muttered, more to myself than to Lane.

"He surely did," agreed Lane fervently. "I'd crashed in the mud, luckily, and was flung out into the stream, unconscious, with a bullet through the
jaw. Look! The Boche patched that up at the concentration camp hospital.” There was no need for me to look. I had already seen that scar.

“And now we’ll see if Dunne is free,” he said, picking up the ’phone. “He’ll be glad to see your ugly mug again, Dale; especially if you’re a customer.”

“Then he’s here, too?” I asked in surprise.

Lane slammed the receiver back.

“Come and see for yourself,” he suggested.

“So you are still wet-nursing him?” I commented, as we threaded our way through many corridors.

Lance stopped in his stride and burst out laughing.

“Who—me?” he asked. “My dear chap, d’you think I could run a show like this?” His outflung hand swept comprehensively across the busy workshop, whose clatter barely penetrated the glass partition. “Not on your life. Dunne had the brains. He had the guts, too, until I scattered ’em with that silly joke. No, Dale, you’ve got hold of the wrong end of the stick. If old Dunne hadn’t given me a job here after the war I should have been in the same boat as hundreds of other pilots——on the outer, as our Australian pals used to say.”

THE SKY CLOWN

HERES THE ANSWER

More Replies to Readers’ Enquiries

ERNST UDET (D. Griffiths, Chede. Cheshire). The present address of Colonel Ernst Udet is the Reichsluftfahrtministerium, Berlin, W.8, Germany.

MODEL PLANS (M. M. Quinn, Birmingham). Model aeroplane articles first became a regular feature of “AIR STORIES” in the October, 1935, issue and the following types of aircraft have been featured to date: 1935—Sopwith Triplane (October), Albatros D.I (November), Nieuport 28 (December), 1936—Sopwith 1½ Strutter (January), Halberstadt C.L.2 (February), Fairey Fantome (March), F.E.8 (April), Bristol Bulldog (May), Fokker D.3 (June), A. W. Scimitar (July), D.H.9 (August), Avro Anson (September), D.H.5 (October), Fairey Fox (November), Pfalz D.12 (December). 1937—Rota Autogiro (January), Short N.26 (February), Bristol Blenheim (March), Vickers Bullet (April), Westland Lysander (May). Back numbers of most issues are still obtainable, price 9d. each, post free.

AEROPLANE CONTROLS (W. H. Brown, Angus, N.B.). Illustrated descriptions of the controls of an aeroplane, how they are used by the pilot, and how they act, are among the numerous interesting articles on modern and Great War aircraft which appear in “Marvels of the Air,” published by George Newnes Ltd., price 3s. 6d.

THE JASTA (J. Berny, Ascomb, York). (1) The German terms, “Jagdstaffel,” “Jasta” and “Staffel” were synonymous, the two latter being merely abbreviations of the former. There was no exact R.F.C. equivalent to the Jagdstaffel, the nearest probably being our squadron formation. Similarly, the German Jagdgeschwader approximated in size to an R.F.C. Wing. (2) The term “bay,” applied to an aircraft, refers to the gaps between the interplane struts of a biplane. Where there is only one set of interplane struts on each side, as in the Hawker Fury, the machine is known as a single-bay type. The Gloster Gauntlet is an example of the two-bay type.

FIRST CAPE FLIGHT (J. G. Arlen, Durban, S. Africa). Three different aircraft were used for the first flight from England to the Cape made in 1920 by Helperus van Rynveld and C. Quentin Brand, with Sergeant E. F. Newman and F. W. Sheratt as mechanics. They started from England on February 4th in a Vickers Vimy, wrecked it on landing in the dark at Kosorsky, Egypt, continued the flight in a new Vimy on February 22nd, crashed in taking-off from Bulawayo and finally completed the flight on March 20th, in a D.H.9. Their total flying time from Brooklands to Cape-town was 4 days 13 hours and 30 minutes. The present record for the same journey is held by Amy Mollison with a total elapsed time of 3 days 6 hours.

AIRMAN PILOTS (Richard Heygate, Hunstanton, Norfolk). (1) Civilians joining the R.A.F. Reserve for flying duties are usually enlisted as airman-pilots in Class F. Those who are already qualified pilots are at once promoted to the rank of Sergeant-Pilot. (2) Sergeant-Pilots of the Reserve receive reserve pay, flying pay and allowances totalling approximately £35 in a full year. (3) Candidates for enlistment as airman-pilots must be between 18 and 25 years of age (up to 28 years of age in the case of certificated pilots). Full details of training and method of entry may be obtained from The Secretary, Air Ministry, London, W.C.2.

BOELCKE’S ALBATROS (J. E. Langbourne, London, N.6). (1) Oswald Boelcke’s Albatros was painted all black, the only markings it carried being the type and factory numbers, and black Maltese crosses heavily outlined in white. (2) Opinions differ as to the relative merits of the D.H.4 and the Bristol Fighter. Our own view is that the “Bristif” was the superior machine, and in support of this is the fact that it continued to be used by the R.A.F. for many years after the War, whereas the D.H.4 design was discontinued.
"—shadows before them." Two new German hush-hush fighters. The Heinkel mid-wing two-seat fighter and, below right, the very new B.F.W. "Pursuer" which bears a striking likeness to the fast light planes produced by the same firm.

On the left is the Menšchel "Diver," a new single-seat cantilever dive bomber fitted with a 650 h.p. B.M.W. radial motor. It has a span of 34' 5" and a length of 28' 2".

Upon its formation the Luftwaffe was hurriedly equipped with several types of rather old-fashioned design, one of which is shown on the right. This Heinkel H.E.51 was one of the best aeroplanes adopted for the new-formed "Air Weapon" and is still in service. It is a type comparable with our own "Furies". The H.E.51 is powered by a 750 h.p. B.M.W. VI which gives it a speed of 217 m.p.h.
AIR WAR IN THE EAST

"Aces and Kings": By L. W. Sutherland: John Hamilton: 7s. 6d.

HISTORIANS have recorded with their accustomed accuracy the story of the Eastern campaigns of the British air services during the Great War, but no history book, we venture to assert, will ever afford so clear an insight into the characters of the men concerned and the spirit in which they fought as do these intimate reminiscences of a former comrade-in-arms.

The author was a pilot in No. 1 Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps, which operated in an R.F.C. Wing in support of General Allenby’s campaign in Palestine. His book does not purport to be aeronautic or geographical, but aims rather at revealing by stories, some light and some grave, the vital human side of the air war in the East. And in their reading one realises anew that the airmen of the Western Front had no monopoly of gallantry, and that courage and camaraderie of a high order were needed to endure the dangers and privations of the Palestine campaign and to bring it to so triumphant a conclusion.

In that same squadron as the author was that great Australian, Ross Smith, known to his comrades as “Hadji,” and so admired by the troops that Australian Light Horsemen frequently consoled themselves by remarking that “Jacko” (the Turks) bombed hell out of us to-day, but Ross Smith’ll fix the—!” (description according to the heaviness of the bombarding).

Of that almost legendary figure, T. E. Lawrence, the author also writes from personal knowledge, for it was No. 1 Squadron A.F.C. that was detailed to provide the aerial reconnaissance needed by Lawrence in his operations against the Turks. This chapter is one of exceptional interest, both as a record of little-known incidents in Lawrence’s eventful career and for its intimate picture of “Sherif Aurens” (the nearest the Arab tongue could get to a name), described by the author as “a bantam of 5 ft. 3 who could not have joined the A.I.F. as a batman to a padre,” yet who could, and did, throw and pin big Arabs almost twice his weight.

No passage in war literature could be more tragic than the author’s chapter, “Nine Miles of Dead,” describing the slaughter of two Turkish armies by the R.F.C. and A.F.C.—and none more amusing than his description of “Cam,” the horsebreaker turned pilot, who, unable to master the art of landing, would finally whip off his muffler and flailing it, whip-like, along the fuselage of his B.E. 2e, “ride” it in to a landing by sheer brute strength.

Outstanding among many stories of daring adventure is one describing how two pilots in a Bristol Fighter made a lone raid on a new German aerodrome, landed on it in broad daylight, destroyed all the machines in sight and escaped unscathed. A less happy sequel might well have attended another raid when a Bristol was forced down by engine trouble almost alongside a German aerodrome. An escorting D.H. 9 promptly landed beside it, picked up its crew and, to their great amazement, were allowed to get clear away, despite the fact that the Germans had five scouts ready on the tarmac and machine-guns at their posts on the aerodrome. Later, one of the German officers of the squadron was taken prisoner, and was asked the reason for their forbearance. “Sir,” was his curt retort, “sportsmanship is not confined to the English.”

The temptation to continue quoting extracts from the many other fine stories in this book—particularly the description of that Suez Canal sport known to the R.F.C. as “felicissequi”—has to be firmly resisted, for only the book itself can do justice to the author and to those aces and kings of the Eastern Front who were his comrades.

FLying TEN MILES HIGH

"The Conquest of the Stratosphere": By Chas. G. Philp: Pitmans: 7s. 6d.

In the opinion of many experts, the future of flying lies in the stratosphere, that mysterious region of the upper air where there is no “weather,” where rain or clouds are never seen and where the atmosphere is so “thin” and unresistant that aeroplanes can attain far higher speeds than are possible in the denser atmosphere at lower levels. Air speeds up to 1,000 miles an hour are spoken of as likely to be attained by stratosphere aircraft—or “overweather” planes, as the Americans have aptly christened them—and for some time past every great Air Power, appreciating the vital military importance as well as the great commercial possibilities of such aircraft, has been carrying out research and practical experiments in high altitude flying. In Great Britain our recent capture of the world’s altitude record, and our present plans for a yet higher ascent this year, are evidence of the importance we attach to the subject.

No more opportune time could, therefore, have been chosen for the appearance of this book by Mr. Charles Philp in which the whole story of stratosphere flight is told for the first time, and in such a way that it appeals as much to the inquiring layman as to the scientist. The author has made a close study of the subject, and his book contains an accurate and detailed record of all the important stratosphere balloon ascents yet made. The preparations and the results achieved are carefully described, and the reader is given a vivid impression of the sensations and experiences of the men who made these hazardous journeys of exploration.

Looking towards the future, the author records that, in American opinion, a height of 70,000 to 75,000 feet marks the limit to which man can ever expect to attain. Professor Piccard, however, sets the human limit at 25 miles, and is already planning an ascent to a height of some 19 miles
above the earth. "It is my strong conviction," he is here quoted, "that at this height we can study not only the effect of the cosmic rays, but a number of other things which are absolutely unknown to human beings. . . It is almost certain that at a height of 19 miles we shall find some infinitely surprising things . . . the firmament will be under our feet and the stars will not twinkle . . . the sun will be above our heads without illuminating the surface of the earth, without dispersing the darkness of the night. . . ."

A fascinating book this, and an enthralling one to anyone with imagination and an interest in science.

FLYING AS A CAREER

"Let's Learn to Fly": By C. St. John Sprigg; Nelson: 3s. 6d.

In this excellent book, the would-be pilot is taken through a complete course of flying instruction, starting with an introduction to the machine prior to his first lesson in the air and ending with the pupil in sight of his ambition—the command of a great air-liner.

Its great merit over most previous books on learning to fly is that it does not stop short at the "A" Licence, or private pilot's stage, but goes on to deal with the far wider experience and more intensive training that are necessary before a pilot may qualify for his commercial licence and make aviation his career. Thus, having "learned to fly" in the first three chapters of the book, the reader proceeds to "advanced dual", is shown how to stunt, and is initiated into the not-so-very-deep mysteries of how to find his way across country with the aid of maps and compass and how to read the weather. He is given a good working knowledge of parachutes, aircraft wireless and the "rule of the road" in the air, does a short course in night flying and bad weather navigation, and is made acquainted with the requirements of the various Air Ministry licences for Commercial Pilots, Navigators and Ground Engineers that he may need to obtain.

The final chapters explain the general constructional features of modern civil aircraft and the organisation of a modern air line as it affects the pilot and his duties.

The book is packed with information, all presented in so clear and interesting a style that it will be understood by anyone. Well illustrated by diagrams and photographs, it is truly remarkable value for its modest price, and though there will always be only one way to learn to fly—in the air—no pupil could fail to benefit in his training from having read this book.

RECORD FLYING FROM THE INSIDE

"Airman Friday": By William Courtenay; With a Foreword by Lord Londonderry: Hutchinson: 12s. 6d.

WILLIAM COURTENAY is an aeronautical journalist who has acted as "man Friday" to a number of famous British long-distance pilots including Sir Alan Cobham, the Mollisons, Neville Stack and the late Tom Campbell Black. In this book he sets out to tell the "inside story" of the notable flights which he has helped to organise in the course of his eight years' association with British civil flying.

His first job was to act as advance publicity agent for Sir Alan Cobham's 1929 air tour of Great Britain, which did so much to spread "air mindedness" among the public and to foster municipal interest in the provision of civil aerodromes. The vast amount of work that the organisation of a successful air tour will come as a surprise to many, but, as Courtenay shows, Cobham's genius for organisation, allied to his unquenchable energy, have ever been the two greatest attributes of his success.

In the following year, an unknown Yorkshire girl, Amy Johnson, with less than eighty hours' solo flying experience to her credit, startled the world by her record-breaking flight to Australia in nineteen days. Courtenay was appointed to organise a national air tour for her on her return to England, and so began a business association with her that has covered all the great flights which she, and later her husband, Jim Mollison, have since made, either singly or together. He has much of interest to tell of the preparations that lie behind such famous flights as theirs, and his accounts of the numerous problems of finance and organisation that have to be overcome, and of the hundred-and-one vital details that must be attended to before the start, explain why, in the opinion of most pilots, the actual flight is the least difficult part of a record-breaking venture.

As regards the financial rewards of long distance flights, Mr. Courtenay holds out small encouragement to our budding Amys and Jims. True, one London newspaper, having refused to offer £50 in advance for the exclusive story of Amy Johnson's first Australian flight, was later glad to pay £10,000 for it, but those days, it seems, are gone for ever, and now, says Mr. Courtenay, a record-breaker will be fortunate if he receives £250 for his story. Similarly, the handsome bonuses that once came from the various firms whose products were used, or allegedly used, have dwindled sadly and, as a machine to beat the present England-Melbourne record of two days three hours would cost about £10,000 to build, and the total financial return would be unlikely to exceed £2,000, it seems that record-breaking is no longer a short cut from "take-off" to "rake-off."

An owner-pilot himself, Mr. Courtenay writes authoritatively and interestingly of the air history he has seen in the making, and gives a vivid description of his fast flight to India and back with Neville Stack. He tells, too, in his capacity of Air Correspondent to the London "Evening Standard," of the thrills and dramas of gathering air news, and it is only when, from time to time, he abandons his role of air reporter for those of historian, prophet and, occasionally, poet, that the reader's interest is apt to flag. The devastating blue-pencil of the sub-editor is the proverbial enemy of the reporter, but one could, none the less, have been used to good effect on much that, by its unimportance, irrelevance or just plain dullness, makes heavy reading, in parts, of an otherwise interesting and important book.

BOOKS RECEIVED

"The Three Squadrons": By Wilfrid Tremellen: George Newnes: 3s. 6d.

"Masked Judgement": By David Lindsay: John Hamilton: 3s. 6d.
A Description of the Most Famous French Wartime Bomber, the Breguet 14, with Full Instructions for Building a Solid Scale Model

The Breguet 14 of the French Air Service had much in common with our own Bristol Fighter. Somewhat heavier than the "Brisfit," it was used for similar duties—bombing, reconnaissance and fighting, and, like the Bristol, it had an extraordinarily long life. Produced during the war years, it was in regular use with the Aviation Militaire until about 1930, when it was finally withdrawn. Another curious coincidence lies in the fact that the two concerns, the Brégut company in France and the Bristol company in England, producers of the longest-lived two-seaters, were collaborators in the years before the War.

A notable feature of the Breguet 14 was that, at a time when wooden construction was practically universal, it was built mostly of metal. The Breguet company had been one of the first to experiment successfully with metal construction, and had produced an all-steel biplane in 1913.

The backward-staggered wings of unequal span and chord were a common arrangement on French biplanes of that time, and ailerons were fitted to the upper planes only. The flaps along the trailing-edges of the lower planes were a form of variable camber gear, and hinged to allow a downward movement only. Rubber cords were fitted which
tended to pull the flaps down, so that when the machine was at rest on the ground they drooped noticeably—as much as ten or fifteen degrees. In the air, the flaps took up a position to suit the loads on the aeroplane, somewhat after the manner of the flaps on the Westland Lysander described last month. The spars and compression members were made of aluminium. Ribs were of wood and the covering was of fabric. The little platform sticking out from the lower plane was part of the bomb-rack equipment. Interplane bracing wires were duplicated, and the gap between the two wires was filled by light wooden laths. Interplane struts were of aluminium.

**Machine-guns and Bombs**

The fuselage of the Breguet 14 was built almost entirely of aluminium tubing. Light wooden formers and stringers served to give the fabric covering its correct contour. The engine was completely enclosed in an ugly aluminium cowling, which was plentifully slotted to allow the escape of the cooling air from the radiator. The pilot’s cockpit had a well-raised seat and the occupant had to be protected from the slipstream by the massive deflector and windscreen shown in the drawings.

The observer had a trap in the bottom of his cockpit for bombing or photography, and celluloid panels, usually on each side of the fuselage, allowed a certain amount of light to enter his “office.” He also had a full set of dual controls. The pilot was armed with a fixed machine-gun mounted externally on the port side of the fuselage, while his companion had either one or two machine-guns on a gun-ring mounted over his cockpit. Bombs were carried in racks beneath the lower planes, eight on each side in double rows of four if they were small bombs, or four abreast on each side if they were larger ones.

The engine was a 300 h.p. twelve-cylinder “vee” water-cooled Renault 12F. With this power-plant, the Breguet 14 had the following weights and performance. (The two sets of figures for the A.2 and the B.2 denote the reconnaissance and bomber versions respectively):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A.2</th>
<th>B.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speed, sea level</td>
<td>118 m.p.h.</td>
<td>115 m.p.h.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climb to 16,400 ft.</td>
<td>21 min. 45 sec.</td>
<td>47 min. 30 sec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceiling</td>
<td>20,000 ft.</td>
<td>18,900 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight, empty</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,480 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb load</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>660 lbs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Breguet 14’s undercarriage was very robust. The struts were heavy gauge aluminium streamlined tubes, and the axle was sprung by rubber cords which tied it to the cross-bar at the bottom of the fixed struts. The axle was faired by a broad aerofoil section fairing. Noteworthy, too, were the unusually fat tyres on the wheels, at a time when aeroplanes usually had very thin tyres. The tail unit was made from welded steel tubes with a fabric covering.

Altogether, the Breguet 14 was an interesting, if unlovely, aeroplane, and the fact that it was so long used in France as a jack-of-all-trades speaks well for the soundness of its design and the strength of its construction.

**HOW TO BUILD THE SCALE MODEL**

**Materials, Tools and Methods**

Reproduced to a scale of \( \frac{3}{8} \) on page 545 are three-view general arrangement drawings of the Breguet 14. By scaling these drawings, the modeller can make his own drawings for a model to any other scale he may prefer. A great advantage of the \( \frac{3}{8} \) scale, apart from its uniformity with the other twenty models in this series, is that there is a complete range of accessories—guns, wheels, airscrews, etc.—available for use with it.

**Materials and Tools**

Approximate over-all dimensions of the materials for a \( \frac{3}{8} \) scale model are as follows:
THE BREGUET TWO-SEATER BOMBER

Scale of Feet

PRINCIPAL DIMENSIONS

Span (top) ........ 47'3"
Span (bottom) .... 45'2"
Length ........... 29'7"
Chord (top) ....... 6'8"

A Three-view General Arrangement Drawing of the French Breguet Type 14 Day-Bomber
AIR STORIES

A block of whitewood 4\(\frac{1}{2}\) x 6 x 2\(\frac{1}{2}\) in. for the fuselage; for the main planes, a sheet of wood 8 x 3 x \(\frac{7}{10}\) in.; the tail unit and axle fairing require a piece of fibre 4 x 2 x \(\frac{1}{10}\) in., and the interplane and undercarriage struts will need some 2 ft. of 20-gauge brass wire. If it is intended to fit bracing wires, a coil of fine florist’s wire will also be needed. Certain shop-bought accessories such as wheels, guns and airscrew will be found very useful.

As a guide to the most essential tools, the following list should prove useful: a 4-in. chisel; small plane; penknife; oilstone; fretsaw; small half-round file; \(\frac{1}{16}\)-in. bradawl; archimedean drill; small long-nosed pliers; tube of cellulose glue; a penny ruler measuring in \(\frac{1}{10}\)ths, \(\frac{1}{12}\)ths and \(\frac{1}{16}\)ths of an inch; and also a soldering iron, flux and solder.

**Method of Construction**

READ these instructions, thoroughly understand them, collect tools and materials and then set to work as follows:—

If the \(\frac{1}{3}\)rd scale is to be used, start by tracing the side elevation from the G.A. Drawing. Then lay the tracing upon the size of the fuselage block, pin-prick the outline, remove the tracing and line-in the outline with a pencil. Cut away the surplus wood with saw and chisel. Draw centre-lines down the top and bottom surfaces of the block and then draw the plan of the fuselage. Again remove the surplus wood. Make a cut-out in the bottom of the fuselage to take the lower plane—the dimensions for this are given in Fig. 1. The fuselage is now ready for final shaping; the top is quite well radiused, while there is slight rounding of the bottom, aft of the wings. The surface of the wood should be made dead smooth with fine glass-paper. The cooling slots in the cowling are made very carefully with a penknife. At this stage, it is as well to make the holes for the undercarriage and centre-section struts. The nose of the cowling, where it projects round the radiator, is made from a piece of thin paper, as is shown in Fig. 1.

The outlines of the upper and lower planes are next drawn on the piece of thin wood. Cut-outs are made in the centre-section of the lower plane to correspond with those in the fuselage—the dimensions are given in Fig. 1. Cut the two planes out and camber them. Fig. 2 shows the section of the wings with their concave undersurfaces. When cambering, first of all shape the convex lower surface of the leading-edge, then make the hollow part with a penknife as shown in the figure. Camber the top surface of the wing with a file and glasspaper. Make the holes for the wing struts.

Trace the outlines of the tail unit sections, and pin-prick them on to the fibre sheet. Cut them out and camber them to the respective sections shown in the G.A. Drawing. The outlines of all controls, rudder, elevator, ailerons, and of the camber flaps on the lower planes, are made by scoring a line with a bradawl and ruler.

The tail-skid, interplane struts and centre-section struts are all made from appropriate lengths of 20 s.w.g. wire.
The exhaust pipe should be made from an odd piece of wood left over from the wings. These parts are simple to make, and the methods are obvious.

The undercarriage is rather more complicated in the manner of its construction. The first stage is to make a soldering jig for the undercarriage struts. This jig is a block of wood with pins in it, and is shown in Fig. 3. The sizes of the struts are given in this sketch, and their positions are indicated by dotted lines. The front leg and the cross-shaft at the bottom of each unit are made from single wires, while the vee-strut at the rear is made from a "vee" of wire. The wires are cut to length, assembled in the jig, and neatly soldered to joints A and B. The axle is made from a straight piece of wire. The axle fairing is also shown in Fig. 3. and is cut from fibre—note the 3/8 in. groove in which the axle has to rest.

Guns, airscrew and wheels may be purchased from most model- or toy-stores. The gun-ring can be made from a piece of 20 s.w.g. wire bent in a circle and the ends soldered, or, if one can be procured, the internal copper washer from an old sparking plug. The latter will be found to be very close to size and, being of copper, it is easy to solder the movable wire arm to it.

**Method of Assembly**

GLUE the lower plane in place beneath the fuselage, taking great care that it is set squarely both in plan and elevation. Glue a small piece of wood across the gap in the fuselage line beneath the plane and, when the glue has set hard, cut it neatly down to size and then glass-paper it. Fit the interplane and centre-section struts to the holes in the lower plane and fuselage respectively. Give the top plane its dihedral by bending between finger and thumb after heating in the steam from a kettle. Assemble the top plane on to its struts and adjust it for gap, alignment and the correct back stagger of 1/8 in. Having adjusted the strut lengths as required, remove the plane and struts; re-assemble with glue and put the job aside to set.

Adjust the undercarriage struts for track, height and alignment, and glue them firmly into their holes in the fuselage. The axle is tied to the cross-bars of the undercarriage with two short lengths of florist's wire. The fairing is then put in place beneath the axle, with the latter resting in the groove in the fairing. The ends of the fairing are then glued to the cross-bars of the undercarriage and the attachment of the wheels, which are kept in place by burring the ends of the axle with pliers, completes this unit.

Now glue the rudder and tail-plane units to the rear of the fuselage. Then glue the exhaust pipe on top of the nose, fit the tail-skid, and attach the airscrew and guns to complete the main part of the model.

Bracing wires are made from fine florist's wire, cut dead to length, all kinks smoothed out, and the ends secured with minute spots of glue. As the wires on this model are rather difficult to follow from the drawings, here is a description of those in the interplane bracing:—

**Flying Wires.**—From the bottom of the undercarriage vee-strut to the tops of the inner interplane struts. From the top of the front undercarriage strut to the top of the rear inner interplane strut. From a point on the bottom of the fuselage beneath the gunner's cockpit to the top of the front inner interplane strut. From the bottoms of the front and rear inner interplane struts to the tops of the outer front and rear struts respectively.

**Landing Wires.**—From the bottom of the
front centre-section strut to the bottom of the rear inner interplane strut, and from the \textit{bottom} of the rear centre-section strut to the bottom of the front interplane strut.

From the tops of the front and rear inner interplane struts to the bottoms of the outer front and rear ones respectively.

\textit{Incidence bracing} is normal. The undercarriage is cross-braced from the bottoms of the vee-struts to tops of the front struts of the opposing vees. Tail bracing wires are apparent in the G.A. Drawing.

The "bloaters" for the control cables should be made from short lengths of thin wire pushed into the wing or tail unit, as the case may be. The cables are made from florist's wire attached in a similar manner to the bracing wires. It needs very careful work and a steady hand when gluing them to the ends of the "bloaters." A good amateur wireless expert should be able to solder them, but this method is not recommended to the novice with the soldering iron.

\textbf{Painting and Colour Scheme}

\textit{Painting} requires a No. 5 sable, or camel's hair brush and some small 3d. pots of enamel—red, white, blue and yellow. The cockades may be bought, either as transfers or else printed on gummed paper, from most model- or toy-stores.

French aeroplanes during the War were usually camouflaged green and buff, with cream undersurfaces. Cockades (red, white and blue, but reverse order to R.A.F. ones) were painted on the wings only. The rudder had red, white and blue stripes.

The green is mixed from equal parts of blue and yellow; the buff, from white and yellow with a dash of red. French aeroplanes used, and still use, a very light blue for their markings—about two parts of royal blue to one of white. Apply all paints evenly and thinly; allow each coat plenty of time to dry, and the result should be worthy of the model.

\textbf{(NEXT MONTH: The Gloster Gamecock Fighter)}

\begin{quote}
"We had no time to change for dinner as it was nearly eight o'clock and, hastily slipping off my flying-boots, I hurried into the mess. Failing to see Basset at the table, I committed a terrible breach of fighting squadron etiquette by asking where he was. The pilot sitting next to me said 'shush,' while Mannock, opposite me, gave my foot a kick. When the meal was over Mannock told me that Basset was in hospital and that, as the spirits of the younger pilots had to be kept up, we were strictly forbidden to mention a casualty at meal time. . . .''
\end{quote}

\begin{center}
\textbf{The Above is an Extract, taken at Random, From}
\end{center}

\textbf{FIGHTER PILOT}

\begin{quote}
A Vivid and Intimate Record of Personal Experiences during the War as a fellow-member with "Mick" Mannock of One of the Most Famous R.F.C. Scout Squadrons
\end{quote}

\textbf{By "McSCOTCH"}

\textit{Late of No. 40 Squadron, R.F.C.}

\textbf{also}

\textbf{ANGEL OF DEATH}

\textit{By G. M. BOWMAN}

\textbf{SUBMARINE SOLO}

\textit{By JEREMY HOOD}

\begin{center}
\textbf{In Next Month's Number of}
\end{center}

\textbf{AIR STORIES}

\textbf{On Sale June 11th}

\textbf{Price Sevenpence}

\textbf{548}
The Stunting Ace of Germany

Four Victories in the Course of a Single Flight was the Signal Achievement of Heinrich Gontermann, Whose Victory Score of Thirty-nine Allied Aircraft included Eighteen Observation Balloons

By A. H. PRITCHARD

The subject of this month's biography is another famous balloon buster, this time a German one, Oberleutnant Heinrich Gontermann, whose bag of thirty-nine Allied aircraft includes eighteen observation balloons.

Born on February 25th, 1896, the son of a typical German peasant-farmer family, Gontermann was attracted to the Army at the age of fifteen, and his military instincts soon won him high praise from his commanding officers. So it was that, on this twentieth birthday, he applied for and received a transfer to the Imperial Flying Corps, and in October, 1916, was sent to the Front to join Jagdstaffel 5.

During his training period Gontermann again won high praise, and his instructors predicted a great future for him, vowing that he was the best pilot and marksman Darmstadt had produced. He justified their confidence on his very first encounter with Allied aircraft, when, on November 14th, his staffel attacked four Sopwith Pups over the Ypres salient and Gontermann promptly accounted for one of them with a six-round burst of gunfire.

After this initial victory, bad weather called a halt to many offensive patrols, and Gontermann took advantage of the "wash-out" weather to study the various habits and weak spots of enemy machines. Out of these studies he developed his own technique, and became so familiar with the blind spots of enemy aircraft that he could manoeuvre to within point-blank range, where one burst was usually all that was needed to finish off his opponent. His flying also was remarkable, and he was one of the few prominent "aces" who believed and regularly indulged in stunt flying.

The return of fair weather in March found Gontermann anxious to try out his new ideas, and within the first three weeks he had run his score up to five. An F.E.2b fell in Bapaume on the 5th, another on the 11th, a Sopwith Pup on the 14th, and a Sopwith 1½ Strutter on the 19th. Then, on the 24th, he took a bad mauling from a Spad of No. 16 Squadron R.F.C., and landed his Albatros
minus most of the fabric of its upper wings, and with a badly-riddled undercarriage. This defeat rankled, and the following day found Gontermann over Cambrai looking for trouble—trouble that soon arrived in the form of two Sopwith 1½ Strutters. Then it was that he made one of the quickest kills of his career, for one quick burst from his gun riddled the petrol tank of the foremost Strutter, and a terrific explosion, followed by a cloud of smoke, was all that remained of two British war-birds and their machine.

**Twelve Victories in One Month**

As with many another German "ace," "Bloody April" marked one of the high spots in Gontermann's record, for the twelve victories he secured during that month brought his score to eighteen, and marked him for promotion. Actually, August was his best month so far as victories go, thirteen enemy aircraft then falling to his guns, but, as most of these were balloons, April was his best month for actual fighting.

He opened his monthly account on April 6th, when Staffel 5 attacked a flight of F.E.2b's over Valenciennes, and Gontermann forced one to land inside the German lines, after killing the observer and wounding the pilot. On the fuselage of this machine was written the name "Scotch Express," and the author has a photograph on which the bullet holes made by the shots that killed the observer may clearly be seen. If the pilot is still alive and reads this, the author would be pleased to hear from him and will let him have photographs of his machine.

Five days later, Gontermann made his first successful balloon attack, and within the space of three minutes the Armentières balloon line was minus two of its "bags," and another followed them to their blazing end on the following afternoon.

On April 26th, Oberleutnant Reinhold, C.O. of Staffel 15, was killed by a French Spad pilot, and three days later Gontermann took over the reins of the vacant command. Although he was to prove an able leader, Gontermann made very few friends, and he appears to have been a trifle overbearing and distrustful of any opinion other than his own.

However, he soon showed the pilots of his new command how to score victories, and on May 5th he shot the wings off a Nieuport, and quickly followed up this success with another on the 11th. As was the German custom, this, his twentieth success, brought the award of the *Ordre Pour le Mérite*, and a month's leave during which he could show off his new decoration. After a brief tour, during which he and several other prominent "aces" joined in a recruiting campaign for the Imperial Air Service, Gontermann made a hurried return to the Front, hastened by the news that his *staffel* had almost been wiped out during his absence. Within four hours of his return, on June 19th, he went up and destroyed a Spad. Four balloons fell to his guns within the next three weeks, but so badly battered was his *staffel* that he had to withdraw from action until August 12th, so that it might be brought up to strength.

**Caught in a Sky Trap**

GONTERMANN, however, had preceded his men, and on the 9th we find him attacking the French balloon line near Verdun. One balloon went down before his first attack, but the second proved to be a tougher proposition. As he flew level with the basket a myriad wasps of invisible death buzzed past his head, and one of his Spandaus gave up the ghost when a burst from the light machine-gun held by the French observer smashed the barrel to smithereens. One gun was enough for Gontermann, however, and the daring Frenchman died in the embrace of his flaming balloon.

Three days after this narrow escape, Gontermann made another attack on the same line, but this time the enemy was ready for him, and even as his first victim began to smoke, three Spads plunged for the tail of his Albatros. With masterly skill the German com-
THE STUNTING ACE OF GERMANY

pletely out-flew his opponents, and instead of receiving credit for a "black cross," one of the French pilots earned the tragic croix de bois, the little decoration placed on the graves of vanished airmen. On the 18th, the same balloon-line gave him his twenty-ninth and thirtieth victories, but two days later he excelled all his previous efforts and secured four victories in a single flight.

Flying alone, Gontermann ventured far afield in search of fresh victims, and badly battered the British balloon line near Soissons. So well delivered was his surprise attack that the two officers in the basket of his first victim died in the flaming wreckage of their balloon without even seeing the machine that had thrown them across the threshold of Valhalla. Two more balloons went down bathed in the queer greenish-red flame so well known to all balloon destroyers, but still Gontermann had not called it a day. A French pilot had also chosen this particular day to desert his own territory, and summoned by the sight of the three flaming balloons, he had hurried to intercept their destroyer. Gontermann calmly watched his approach and then, a slight pressure on his triggers, and the Frenchman died with twelve bullets in his body.

Two more victories, a balloon and a Nieuport Scout, fell to Gontermann before the month closed, but the strain of constant fighting had been too much for him, and with his score at thirty-six he was sent home for a month's rest.

A Scrap with Camels

RETURNING to Staffel 15 on September 24th, it soon became apparent that his leave had not done Gontermann much good, for on his very first flight he damaged his machine in a bad landing. Then again, he met a Sopwith Camel on the 29th, and the British pilot actually forced Germany's master stunt-pilot to "high-tail" it for home with twenty-seven bullet-holes in his machine. On October 1st, his old skill returned, and during a dog-fight between seven Albatros scouts and five Sopwith Camels, he shot the wings off one Camel, and sent another down in flames. Two days later he destroyed his thirty-ninth and last victim—though little did he guess as he watched his victim disintegrate in mid-air that very soon he, too, would meet a similar end.

While in Berlin during his last leave, he had applied for one of the new Fokker Triplanes, and on October 22nd, Fokker D.R.I No. 615/17 had arrived at his flying-field. Bad weather prevented him from making a test flight until the 28th, but on that date he made a short test, and announced that he would make another test before taking the machine into action. Let a squadron mate, Leutnant Otto von Karnap, describe just what happened on that fateful afternoon of October 29th, 1917:

"At roughly 4.15 a.m." he wrote, "we all went to the hangar which held Gontermann's new Fokker, and within a few moments he had taken it into the air. At a height of 1,500 feet he began a series of manœuvres known as loops and falls, and then we saw the machine plunge towards the earth. This, we thought, was part of the test, but it soon became evident that something had gone wrong with the controls and that Gontermann was helpless. We then saw several fragments fall from the machine, and within a few seconds the complete top wing section had buckled. The machine crashed less than five yards from its point of take-off and we rushed to extract the pilot from the débris. He was still alive, but despite an emergency operation and every possible attention, his gallant spirit fled during the early hours of the following morning."

So died Gontermann, the farmer boy who made good, untouched by Allied bullets, and far from the sounds of war. Whether the controls jammed, or the Fokker collapsed due to its inherent weakness, or whether Gontermann, worn out by war, fainted during a peaceful flight, will remain a controversy for all time. Whatever the true explanation may be can be known only in the Valhalla where Gontermann joined his friends and his foes.
VITAL BOOKS

Books which supply knowledge of the facts of Life and provide answers and explanations to the many problems with which we are all confronted, are a necessity to every adult. The undermentioned books, by authoritative authors, provide information over a wide range of subjects. You are urged to make your choice without delay—

THE FAMOUS "BEALE" BOOKS

By Dr. G. COURTENAY BEALE.

WISE WEDLOCK 6/4
This volume is full of sane information. It is a necessary book for every adult. Dr. Norman Haire says: "I consider it to be one of the best, if not the best, of its kind available in English."

THE REALITIES OF MARRIAGE 6/4
This work deals in comprehensive manner with the whole subject. It is a necessary book, alike for the married and those contemplating marriage.

MARRIAGE BEFORE AND AFTER 1/2
This introductory manual will be found full of indispensable information and advice.

THE COMPLETE HUSBAND 1/2
The reader of these chapters will be grateful for the skilled guidance the author affords him.

THE PERFECT WIFE 1/2
In this manual the author, in the words of an enthusiastic reviewer, "discusses the most intimate matters in an altogether charming way."

WOMAN'S CHANGE OF LIFE 2/3
Special Paper Covered Edition
It behoves all women on the verge of this period to provide themselves with the knowledge which will ease their difficulties. This book deals in practical manner with this important subject from all its aspects.

THE RIDDLE OF SEX 8/-
By Dr. J. Tenenbaum. The sanest, completest and most practical work available on the subject. Vera Brittain says: "All questions after practical wisdom should buy a copy of this rational and constructive work."

THE ART OF COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE 2/9
By W. M. Galbraith. A popular guide for young people.

HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY

KNOW THY BODY—The Wonders Within Us
By Medicus, M.A., B.Sc. 3/10
The most entertaining, stimulating physiological work ever written. Each chapter tells its own amazing story, each sentence is pregnant with information and interest "... makes plain to the layman the processes by which he lives."—John o'London.

NUDISM (SUN-BATHING)

NAKED AND UNASHAMED 3/10

MENTAL AND HEALTH CULTURE

MEMORY EFFICIENCY and how to Obtain it
An Efficient Memory is the basis of all success—the value of an immeasurable. Mr. J. L. Orton in this new book tells How to Train your Memory—of Memory Machinery—How to Memorize, etc., etc.

PHYSICAL CULTURE SIMPLIFIED

By W. R. Lucas. Captain Sir Malcolm Campbell, in an autographed foreword, says: "This book should be the means of bringing home to everyone the supreme importance of being physically fit."

BETTER SIGHT WITHOUT GLASSES 3/10
By H. Benjamin. The Author cured himself of rapidly approaching blindness, and has embodied his successful methods in his book for the benefit of all sufferers.

THE CURE OF STAMMERING and Other Functional Speech Disorders

By J. L. Orton. The simple non-operative means which have cured hundreds are completely and clearly set out.

HOW TO REMEDY RHEUMATISM

HOW TO CONQUER CONSTIPATION

HOW TO CURE COUGHS, Colds and Catarrh

HOW TO CURE LIVER, KIDNEY AND BLADDER TROUBLES

Four popular booklets by W. R. Lucas wherein the simple, effective home treatment for the respective disorders is clearly explained.

All prices include postage. These books can be obtained through your bookseller or direct from

THE WALES PUBLISHING CO., Dept. 117, 26, Charing Cross Road, London, W.C.2.

Complete Catalogue of vital books sent free on request.
CALL ME JENNIE

Major Sharpness was determined to make Tigers out of his Rabbits and it was no fault of his that the First Tiger he made should promptly win a Most Untigerish Nickname

By MAJOR L. S. METFORD
(Late of No. 13 Squadron, R.F.C.)

CHAPTER I

Arrival of a C.O.

They heard him before they saw him. Later a tiny speck, high in the north-east, appeared.

"S'pose that's the Old Man," muttered Bobby Lefroy without enthusiasm, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Hear he's a bit of a thruster," put in his friend, one Second Lieutenant "Bronc" Haskins.

"Mm," agreed Bobby. "If what one hears is true, something's going to start popping in the old squadron before long."

Then others joined the little group gathered on the tarmac at Froiselles, and their several comments were suggestive of acute uneasiness.

The little speck grew larger, and the rumbling echo of the throbbing radial increased in volume.

"Wash-out," remarked Bobby.

"Good enough. That can't be the blighter. He's carrying right on."

Suddenly the distant aircraft became fore-shortened as its nose dropped. The sound of the engine died away.

"'Strewth," remarked the owner of a pair of field-glasses as he lowered them from his eyes. "Whoever that lad is, he must be pretty sure of himself. He's stopped his prop."

The whining song of singing wires

553
came to their ears a moment later as the little 'plane dived vertically downwards. Up came the nose and over she went in a tight loop. Six times was the loop repeated, then over went the controls and the 'plane corkscrewed like a gimlet.

"Gee-whiz," grinned Bronc, a recent transfer from the Canadian infantry; "an' some of us guys figured we were the cat's whiskers when it came to aviatin'. Got another think comin', boys."

But nobody was listening to the young ex-cowboy from the cariboo trails. They were far too interested in what was happening overhead.

Five hundred feet above the ground, the gimlet-like spiral ceased and the nose came up. There was a blur of a red muffler in the cockpit and the amazed spectators saw the diving Sopwith surge upwards in the beginnings of yet another loop.

"He'll never make it," gasped one onlooker. "The blighter'll shove her right through to Australia."

Silence. Utter silence, broken only by the sound of singing wires and the regular clink-clink of hammer against anvil in the distant squadron-blacksmith's shop.

Every man there was unconsciously holding his breath—waiting.

Then the tense features of the little crowd relaxed. The 'plane had straightened out with wheels almost grazing the short grass. A moment later it swung in a wide curve up to the tarmac.

Major Sharpness had arrived.

The officers on the tarmac advanced in a body to meet the newcomer. They had heard of this Sharpness over at Villeron, and again at Roubiers, but, strangely enough, perhaps, none of them had seen him. They had heard of his lone flights over the lines, of his ever-growing list of victories. They had heard, too, of his taciturnity, of orders given but once, and woe betide any pilot unlucky enough to fail to carry them out. Oh, yes, they'd heard of Sharpness all right. There was even an unconfirmed rumour that on one occasion a pilot had disobeyed an order and still remained in the squadron; fellow named Hawkins, they thought it was, who had landed behind the lines and brought the Major home after he had crashed. Funny thing, that; but perhaps the grape-vine telegraph had got it mixed.

They saw a little man, burly and thick-set, in an old R.F.C. maternity jacket, very oil-stained, and with an ancient red muffler tied round his neck. He acknowledged their salutes with a curt wave of the hand.

"Who's in command here?" he demanded abruptly, looking from one to the other.

The senior Flight Commander edged forward.

"My name's Mortimer, sir," he announced. "Major Smithers handed over to me temporarily when he left last night."

"Mm." Sharpness looked him up and down grimly. "Then why the blazes are all these pilots standing about doing nothing?"

"We—er—we were just waiting to welcome you, sir," Mortimer stammered uneasily.

"To—welcome—me? What the deuce for?" He looked at his wrist-watch. "How long have you been waiting to—er—welcome me, may I ask? Damned waste of time."

He sped a swift glance round the tarmac.

"Only one aircraft on the aerodrome! Where are the others?"

"In the hangars, sir."

"Serviceable?"

"No, sir."

Major Sharpness' eyes seemed fairly to pop out of his head.

"You mean to tell me not a single 'plane is serviceable?"

"Only a few, sir." Mortimer's face was a study in red. The others shuffled their feet and looked unhappily at one another.

"'Only a few, sir,'" mimicked Sharpness. "'Only a few. By Gad!" he exploded wrathfully. "No wonder
CALL ME JENNIE

Major Smithers moved out in a hurry.

‘Only a few, sir!’"

He paused a moment, glaring at the group before him.

Then he gave his first order.

‘Flight-commanders will remain here. The other officers will break off.’

Jephson and Manton joined the unfortunate Mortimer, whilst the rest, saluting hastily, dissolved into thin air.

‘Now then, gentlemen,’” began Sharpness without preamble. “When I was offered the command of this squadron I was warned it was the most slovenly, the most inefficient and the most casual unit on the Western Front. I . . .’”

“That’s not true, sir,” broke in Captain Mortimer, daring more greatly than he knew. “We may have been unfortun——”

“When I want your comments, I’ll ask for them,” cut in Sharpness icily. Mortimer subsided, fuming inwardly.

“When I was interrupted,” continued Sharpness, “I was about to say that I refused the command. However, it was put to me in a certain light, and in the end I accepted.

“I am not accustomed to slovenly, inefficient and casual commands. These three defects will cease from to-day. Now, gentlemen, we will go round the hangars and see what kind of decrepit aircraft you’ve got here.”

Before nightfall, one five-ton Leyland lorry and two Crossley light tenders with twin-tyred trailers were speeding along the road towards the Supply Depot, armed with indents for enough technical stores to place all the squadron’s ‘planes in repair.

Everybody, from the Technical Sergeant-Major down to the lowliest air mechanic, was sweating blood as they worked on long-delayed repairs, and in and out of the sheds and from sailmaker’s den to workshop lorry moved the squat form of Major Sharpness.

He did not say much. He seldom did. He had probably used more words that morning than during the entire preceding month. He didn’t like words. Action was what he wanted. Action—action—action and still more action. And he got it. He put the fear of God and the Devil into each and every living thing on that aerodrome.

Even Tinker, the mongrel mascot, rescued from a doorway near Félix Potin’s in Amiens, when the squadron first came to Froisielles, shoved his tail tight between his legs, beetled into his packing-case kennel and hid all day.

There were more barked knuckles and broken nails amongst the riggers and fitters of the squadron in the following three days than in the whole previous three months. And in the end, they liked it.

‘Tain’t as if ‘e wor an ord’nary bloke, ’Arry,” as 1st A.M. Rogers remarked to his pal, one 2nd A.M. Bilkins, as they gingerly washed old crankcase oil off cut and grimy fingers before supper on the third day. ‘E’s a bleedin’ slive driver an’ no herror, but ’e knows wot’s wot.”

“W’ich is more than Major Blinkin’ Smivvers ever did,” agreed Harry, tying a dirty rag round the knuckle of the middle finger of his right hand. “’E may be a slive driver like wot you sed, but ’e ruddy well gets things done.”

“I’ll tell the cock-eyed world he does,” grinned Lieutenant Bronc Haskins, who, passing by on his lawful occasions as Orderly Officer, had overheard the last remark. “How’s my engine running now?”

The two men jumped to attention. Half a week ago they would possibly not have done so. They answered promptly. Another innovation.

“Like a clock, sir,” answered Harry, who happened to be Lieutenant Haskin’s fitter. “Givin’ full revs, sir. All ready for the morning.”

“’Bout time,” commented Haskins, as he moved away. “Carry on.”

CHAPTER II

Sharpness Leads the Squadron

MAJOR SHARPNESS had arrived on Monday. On Thursday morning he addressed his officers. It was four o’clock. Ten sleek aircraft, whose freshly
doped planes glistened palely in the grey pre-dawn, stood on the edge of the tarmac whilst mechanics with electric torches gave final touches here and there.

His address was characteristic:

"Gentlemen," he informed them, "I see a faint ray of hope for you. It may even be that the Devil's not quite so black as he's painted. Get aboard, and if you lose station, God help you, for I won't."

He gave a tug to his red muffler, and made for his 'plane.

A FEW minutes later they were in the air and Bronc Haskins plugged in his 'phones and spoke into the mouthpiece.

"Say, buddy, c'n you hear me?"

"In spots," replied Bobby Lefroy, fiddling with Lewis drums in the rear cockpit. "The Old Man's a holy terror, isn't he?"

"Boy! You said a mouthful!"

And Bobby could hear the chuckle in Bronc's voice.

Haskins sat and watched his instrument-board: saw the revs. gradually increase as the engine warmed up; saw the altimeter needle crawl slowly round its arc as the propeller thrust the chilly morning air behind it; saw the oil pressure gauge pulsating regularly as the vital fluid was forced through the bearings. From his station at the right rear of "C" Flight's "V," he had a clear view of all the other nine 'planes, and he grinned to himself, though somewhat ruefully, as he noted the raggedness of their formation.

"C'n you tie that?" he demanded through the 'phone. "Where the heck is 'A' Flight's number three going to?"

"Estelle lives somewhere down there, doesn't she?" came Bobby's voice tinnyly. "Maybe he's going to drop in for brekker."

Bronc laughed back at the reference to young Sanders' latest conquest behind the bar of the "Tros Feuelles," near the little hamlet over which they had just flown.

A moment later, however, Bobby's suggestion was proved incorrect, as No. 3 weaved back into position.

They were approaching the lines now, and Bronc looked uneasily beneath him. Exactly a week ago, he remembered, they had flown over the trenches at precisely this same spot. He recognised the curious salient outjutting towards the German lines, profiling at that height, a human face. A gigantic shell crater even provided the similitude of a staring but sightless eye.

It was just beyond this that they had been "archied" almost to pieces, and he could still see the agonised look on young Rumbold's face as, still alive, but riddled with shrapnel and his 'plane a shapeless mass of wreckage, he shot past him in his last dive.

Three other aircraft had been brought down by the enemy, while the rest of the squadron—and he felt his face reddened painfully at the memory—had promptly high-tailed it for home. Smithers, he recollected, had been very nice about it when they reported to him on their return, telling them they would probably have better luck next time.

Next time! Ye Gods! They had sworn there wouldn't be a next time, and here they were, only a week later, flying towards the very spot, led by this fellow Sharpness.

He must be mad. Either that, thought Bronc, or he didn't know of the hidden danger. Why couldn't they go round? What were they out for, anyway? The beggar had given them no orders; just told them to follow him, and keep station.

*Kerrumph*! A brown fluff-ball mushroomed out just to his right. Instinctively he ruddeder away from it.

*Kerrumph! Kerrumph! Two more. One just behind and one to his left. Bracketed. The next would be a direct hit. He stuck the stick forward and dived steeply. He was still diving when a 'plane whirled alongside him, a 'plane with a red streamer flying from an interplane strut.

Sharpness shook his clenched fist at him and pointed upwards, then zoomed to regain his place at the head of the squadron.

"Migosh," muttered Bronc as, guiltily,
CALL ME JENNIE

he climbed back into position. "How the devil did he do that? That guy's got eyes all over him!"

HASKINS had scarcely got back into position when there came a terrific concussion which nearly threw him out of his seat. Fighting the stick, he finally managed to get the 'plane back on to an even keel, and was surprised to find he was still in the formation.

Then he looked to the left, searching for his "opposite number."

"Na-poo!" came Bobby Lefroy's voice unsteadily through the ear-phones. "Martin got a direct hit from 'Archie.' Blew him to bits. I saw it."

Brons Haskins shuddered. He didn't like direct hits—on principle. To Hades with this flying game, anyway. Why hadn't he transferred to the cavalry instead?

Kerrumph! Kerrumph! Kerrumph!

Brown evil-smelling acid clouds were bursting everywhere now. The grey sky seemed full of them. The aircraft rocked and bucked at each concussion as their pilots strove to keep them under some sort of control. What the devil was Sharpness playing at? Why didn't he dodge or do something? Sixteen pairs of fear-stricken eyes fastened themselves on that cursed red muffler which deviated neither to right nor left, but forged steadily ahead.

Now they were in the very midst of the shelling.

The sky was a maelstrom of bursting shells, and the Sopwith One-and-a-Half Strutters were tossed this way and that like corks upon a stormy sea.

Suddenly Sharpness lifted an arm and thrust it forward and downward. An instant later every pilot was standing on his rudder-bar with stick well forward, and engine whining, as they shot downward in the wake of the leading 'plane.

"What the heck?" muttered Bronc.

"What's the game now?"

He was soon to see. Down they flashed in a zig-zagging power-dive. Above them the shells still burst, but more erratically, as the gunsners strove frantically to alter range and timing. Down they sped, their taut wings drumming and quivering beneath the enormous pressure. Then, and not till then, did they see Sharpness' purpose, as to and fro, back and forth, they "strafed" that "Archie" battery, contour-chasing at times only a few feet above the ground.

'Plane after 'plane roared down, spraying the gunners with a leaden hail and then zooming up again to repeat the dose. Half a dozen times in all was the attack repeated, and then Sharpness gave them the signal to cease fire.

He climbed slowly whilst they re-formed, and then continued on his way in no apparent haste, unharried by a single "Archie."

For an hour they patrolled the lines uneventfully, after which Sharpness waggled his wings and led them home.

NOT a word did Sharpness say when they landed, but made straight for his office.

A few minutes later an orderly sought out Lieutenant Haskins.

"Good-bye, old man," said Bobby with mock solemnity, shaking him warmly by the hand. "Give my love to the Infantry."

Brons swore with cheerful fluency. He wasn't going to be sent back to any blasted infantry. Not for a little thing like losing station in the air—not he. He'd darn well tell this guy Sharpness a thing or two.

But as he marched hurriedly in the wake of the orderly, his mind was far from easy. Somehow, he decided, Sharpness hardly seemed the kind of guy a fellow did say things to. It rather worked the other way. By the time he knocked on the door of the squadron office, therefore, he was feeling decidedly chastened in spirit.

There were, as usual, no preliminaries. "You transferred from the Canadian infantry, I understand?" remarked Major Sharpness, looking up from the squadron roll.

"Yes, sir."

"Anxious to go back, eh?"

"Why—no, sir."

557
“Next time you disobey my orders,” said the little squadron commander incisively, emphasising each word with a forefinger stabbing on the table, “you go back so dam’ fast you’ll never know you left it. The same applies to any officer who sees fit to do as you did to-day. Understand?”

“Y-y-y-yes, sir,” stammered Haskins, oozing perspiration at every pore.

Major Sharpness referred to his papers again, folded them up and threw them aside.

Then he looked up.

“What are you waiting for?” he roared.

Bronc nearly jumped out of his field boots.

“Me, sir? N-n-nothing, sir.”

“Then get out!” shouted Sharpness, half rising in his chair.

In something less than five seconds flat, Bronc Haskins was on his way back to his quarters, agitatedly mopping his neck.

“Cripes,” he muttered savagely. “If that little blighter ever talks to me like that again, I’ll . . . I’ll . . . er, I’ll darn well let him,” he concluded with unwonted meekness.

Which expressed rather well the general feelings of the rest of the members of the squadron so far as their new C.O. was concerned.

CHAPTER III
The Man who Made Tigers

A FEW days after this somewhat one-sided conversation it so happened that Bronc Haskins was about to enter the door of the squadron office to see the Recording Officer about a little matter concerning certain pay and allowances which seemed to have gone astray since his transfer.

His crooked knuckles were actually poised to knock on the weathered boards when he heard the voice of his C.O. They remained poised for a few seconds then he lowered his hand, and began to turn away.

“But I have no good pilots, sir,” he heard him expostulate. “Not one.”

A pause. Haskins stood his ground, hesitating between anger at the slur cast on the squadron, and dislike for eavesdropping.

“Not a dam’ one, sir,” the voice continued, obviously into a telephone. “They’re the worst crowd I’ve ever had the misfortune to command—bar none, sir.”

“Goshdarn the lil’ skunk,” breathed Haskins furiously, now listening intently—eavesdropping or not.

“No, sir,” continued the voice inside the flimsy building. “I wouldn’t think of it. Quite useless, sir. I’ll go myself. G’bye, sir.”

Bronc heard the clatter as the instrument was hung up. Then he started suddenly as he heard his name called.

“Come in, Haskins!” shouted Major Sharpness.

Bronc hesitated for one unhappy moment, then obeyed the summons, wondering how on earth the C.O. had known he was waiting outside.

“Well; what did you make of it?” greeted Sharpness grimly.

“Er—what, sir?”

“Of what I was saying?”

Bronc saw the steely glitter in the cold blue eyes into which he was looking, and wished himself safely elsewhere. Then rage boiled up within him. He hated Sharpness—hated him like hell. What right had this sawed-off little runt to treat them all as if they were just so much mud beneath his boots? What right had he to say what he had just said over the ‘phone? The squadron weren’t a bunch of skrimshankers; they’d just had bad luck; that was all. He’d tell him.

“How’d you know it was me, sir?” he asked defiantly.

“Tell those big feet a mile away,” grunted Sharpness, reaching for the tobacco jar. Leisuresly, whilst Bronc regarded him in silent fury, for he knew his boots were outsize, though nobody—much—had commented on the fact since he had left school, he filled his pipe, lit it, and shoved the jar across the litter-strewn table.
“Fill up, young fellow,” he grunted between puffs. “And don’t make a confused idiot of yourself.”

Completely taken aback, for he had not yet learned how accurate a student of human psychology was this same Sharpness, Haskins obeyed.

“Now then, what’s on your mind, fellow? Take a chair,” and Sharpness jerked his thumb towards an up-ended box.

Again, more surprised than ever, and with his anger strangely stayed, Haskins once more complied.

“As a matter of fact, sir,” he answered, “I was coming in to see the Recording Officer about a bit of pay. I heard you telephoning and waited. That’s all, sir.”

“Not a bit of it,” disagreed Sharpness succinctly. “You may have started with the idea of seeing Bateson, but you came in here with your hackles on end, to tell me off for what you overheard. Don’t. I’m not accustomed to being told off. What you heard, incidentally, was the truth. At the present time the squadron is a complete wash-out.”

Again Bronc felt his fury rising, and he leaned forward.

“That’s not true, sir,” he gritted. “We’ve just been darned unlucky, that’s all.”

“You’re a bunch of rabbits,” countered Sharpness without heat. “I don’t want rabbits. I want tigers, and I’m out to make tigers.”

“Rabbits—nothing,” interrupted Bronc furiously. “We . . .”

But Sharpness stopped him with upraised hand.

“Rabbits,” he repeated. “Now listen. I’ve just been instructed by Wing H.Q. to send a good pilot on a special mission. You probably heard me say I hadn’t one I could trust, and that I was going myself. That’s all.”

“What about me, sir?” demanded Bronc quickly, leaning forward precariously on the edge of his box in his eagerness.

“As a matter of fact,” said the other thoughtfully after a pause, “I hadn’t thought of you—specially. You’re all duds.”

“I’d like to go, sir,” pleaded Bronc.

“Really I would. Take a chance, sir. I won’t let the squadron down.”

There are two kinds of judgment with which mankind has been endowed by a gracious Providence. One of these is a considered judgment; the other a snap judgment. Both are equally useful in their respective spheres, but practically never are both possessed by the same individual.

Statesmen of a high order possess the former, whilst successful stockbrokers, by the very nature of their profession, have the latter to a marked degree. Major Sharpness was no exception to the general rule. Of the first he had almost nil, but he was possibly in a class by himself when it came to a snap judgment.

Therefore, to Bronc’s vast surprise, he announced suddenly:

“All right. Now listen.”

And, for the next ten minutes, Bronc, leaning over the Major’s hunched shoulders, paid very particular attention to his instructions whilst studying with minute care the large-squared map spread out before them.

“Got it?” demanded Sharpness at length, leaning back and relighting his cold pipe.

“Yes, sir.”

“Sure? Good. Then clear out, and send Captain Mortimer to me at once.”

Lieutenant Bronc Haskins saluted hastily, and “cleared out.” Cleared out very rapidly, lest Sharpness should rescind the order and decide to go himself. Cleared out so fast that he forgot all about his pay as he hurried over in search of his flight-commander.

A LITTLE after dusk he was in the air. The gunner’s cockpit behind him was empty, whilst in front of him the 130-h.p. Clerget rattled steadily away with a comforting sound of power.

On a section of map before him was a quarter-inch circle of red ink. In the middle of this was a tiny pin-point, also of red ink, which marked his destination.

He climbed for twenty minutes or so, and at ten thousand feet the layer of fleecy cloud which dotted the airscape
fell away beneath him, and became a sea
of cotton-wool islands—grey to the
westward and inky-black where the
fading light left them in shadow. Through
these the earth, already shrouded in
night, was almost invisible, save where
a river or some patch of water, showed
steely-grey.

He was over the lines by this time, and
he calculated that half an hour should
see him above his objective. Now that
he was actually embarked on the mission
for which he had begged, he began to
wonder if his enthusiasm has not been
perhaps a little misguided.

Sharpness had not minimised the
danger nor, in fairness be it said, had he
exaggerated it. He had merely pointed
out that as far as he could reckon the
chances of returning safely were about
four to one against.

And four to one against, Bronc had
decided, were good enough: fair enough
odds, as he put it to himself, to have a
shot at “giving the old squadron a bit
of a boost.”

What he had to do, put very briefly,
was merely to fly to a little field, pick
up a passenger, and return home. On
paper it seemed simple enough. In
actual practice, however, Bronc visualised
certain small difficulties.

Item: He had never been there
before, and was none too certain he could
find his way there in the dark.

Item: The field was stated to be small,
with only a one-way landing and take-off.
He had prepared for this as well as he
could by spending half the afternoon in
landing in a corner of the aerodrome
with a dead engine, much to the annoy-
ance of the perspiring mechanics who
had been detailed to start him up again
each time. After eighteen such landings
without anything untoward occurring,
he thought he was pretty good.

Item: and a big one: He had to
return in complete darkness without
losing his way.

This, however, did not worry him
unduly. He had done quite a bit of
night-flying; he was keeping close watch
on his compass course, the night was
still, so he would have no drift to com-
pensate for, and they would set out
flares when he fired a couple of red Verly
lights.

The thing, at the moment, was to get
there. He flew on steadily, glancing
continually at the compass-card illu-
mined by the tiny shaded bulb. Over
the leading edge of the lower wings he
watched the distant countryside two
miles beneath him slip almost imper-
ceptibly behind.

As he realised that, to his advantage,
the clouds were now becoming much
thinner and considerably fewer in number,
he found himself thinking about
Sharpness.

“Hard-boiled little devil, but he might
be worse. He’s almost human in spots,”
he had just decided, when his jaw tigh-
tened suddenly as thin pencils of light
began searching the skies about him.
One by one their numbers increased
until there were over a dozen searchlights
cutting through the blackness.

He could see they formed a rough
circle, and nodded with satisfaction as
he checked their position on the map.
Very helpful indeed, he decided. That
was the battery of searchlights which
formed part of the anti-aircraft defences
of the vast ammunition dump at Voor-
steen. He was right on his course, and
with any luck he would get through
without being spotted.

Then he swore as a blinding glare
swept across the skies and caught him
in its midst. Instantly the others joined
it, and he found himself the apex of a
skeleton cone of light.

INSTANTLY he flipped over on a wing-tip
and slid down a thousand feet. A
moment later the sky above him, which he
had just vacated with such commendable
promptness, blazed into crimson fire as the
“Archie” gunners loosed off at
him.

He began climbing again, zig-zagging
in irregular arcs, whilst round him the
shells burst and crashed in frantic efforts
to find their target.

He carried on, thanking his luck that
he was by now almost out of range, and
finally, as the darting fingers of light
faded away and the "Archie" bursts became fewer and fewer, he breathed more freely again.

There was one thing which worried him, however. In his necessary dodgings and twistings he was by now well off his course, and he was hard put to it to find it again, but after a hectic ten minutes of anxious search he settled back cheerfully as he picked out a small lake of a shape he had noted before and which—glory be—was in the right place.

Some little while after, with a slight shiver of apprehension, he closed the throttle and switched off. The roar of the Clerget changed to the metallic rattle of valve gear and rocker arms as he sped downwards in a wide spiral, searching the ground around him.

Presently, far below and to the right, he saw a tiny light shine out for an instant and then disappear. He felt his heart thumping against his ribs as he ruddered in its direction.

Again it came, but this time it was more distinct. Three shorts—three longs—three shorts. "S.O.S."

CHAPTER IV

Special Mission

HASKINS could have shouted aloud with relief as he recognised the pre-arranged signal. It was repeated at half-minute intervals, and Bronc knew it proceeded from the end of the field in which he had to land, and that he was to put the One-and-a-Half Strutter down so that the aircraft would run towards the light.

Lower he dropped and lower, the friendly signal his sole guide. Dimly he became aware of a forest of trees beneath him, their topmost branches reaching up towards his undercarriage.

Down he swept, the perspiration running down his face with the concentration he was devoting to his task. Then he stalled, wheels and skid seemed to sink and touch ground at the same instant, and the Sopwith rumbled forward over the short grass towards the winking light.

As the 'plane slowed to a standstill, the light was extinguished and, listening intently, Bronc could hear footsteps running towards him.

He felt in his pocket for his own flashlight and switched it on in the direction of the sound. Then Bronc Haskins had one of the biggest surprises of his lifetime. Into the rays of the beam there ran the one thing he had not expected to see—a girl. Her short skirt was flying in the breeze and she was bareheaded. Under each arm she carried a heavily wrapped parcel from which came sounds of gentle cooing.

"Well I'm damned!" Haskins swore in disgust as the girl reached the side of the 'plane and hung on to it to regain her breath. "Well I'm—er—how d'you do?" he enquired with an enormous effort at politeness, his hand automatically lifting towards his flying cap.

She didn't answer his question directly, instead: "Hop out," she said, "and I'll help you turn round. You'll have to go back to the end of the field and get off in the same direction you landed in. Did they tell you that? And," she implored, as he nodded quickly, "for Heaven's sake look sharp. They're after me. I thought you'd never get here. Here; take my pigeons, will you?"

Bronc climbed out stiffly, saying nothing. He didn't like the idea of girls getting messed up in this war business, especially, as his flashlight had told him, pretty ones with red hair and grey eyes. Also he disliked intensely having to take orders from one—pretty or not. However, he recognised the wisdom of her suggestion and together they turned the 'plane round.

"How big's this field, anyway?" he demanded when this was accomplished.

"It isn't big at all," she answered from the darkness beside him. "It's very small."

"Mm. How small?" he amended. "Tell you what. I'll run down to the end of the field and stick your flashlight on the ground, then I'll know how much of a run I've got. You wait till I get back. Shan't be a minute. Here," he
added, fishing in the rear cockpit, "better slip into these while I'm away. It'll be cold upstairs, Miss."

And he threw a Sidcot suit and a flying helmet into her arms with complete lack of ceremony.

He was back in less than a minute and started the engine. As he taxied back the girl held on to a wing-tip, and at his orders, dug her heels into the ground and hung on whilst he blew the Sopwith round, then she climbed aboard and he passed her back the pigeons.

As he fastened his belt and slipped the goggles down over his eyes he was surprised to see the little pin-prick of light at the other end of the field go out suddenly.

However, there was no time to spare for making investigations, so he opened the throttle wide and hoped for the best. At all events he had covered the ground in front and knew there were no obstacles in his path until he came to the fence at the end. At the precise moment that the aircraft began to move along the ground, he saw half a dozen orange spurs leap out of the blackness where the flashlight had been. Above the roar of the Clerget he heard the crack of rifles, and before he got the tail off the ground a dozen shots had been fired at him. He heard one strike against the forward cowling and ricochet off with a whine; another plucked at the shoulder of his Sidcot but an instant later they were in the air. He looked over the side as the wheels left the ground and made out several indistinct forms leaping from the path of the onrushing aircraft.

Then he settled back with a sigh of relief. The worst was over—or so he thought.

Through force of habit Haskins connected the two-way Gosports to his ear-phones and climbed towards the west.

As he neared Voorsteen he veered off towards the north. "One dose of 'Archies' in one night is quite enough, thanks," he decided, but, unfortunately, he did not turn off quite soon enough. Having, evidently, recognised the sound of an enemy engine on its eastward journey the "Archie" gunners were on the look-out for its return. They picked him up almost at once.

Promptly he repeated the manœuvre of a little earlier in the evening, but to his surprise no "Archies" greeted him this time. Had he been more experienced he would probably have realised the reason, and looked out for squalls; as it was he continued on a northerly course. He was turning westward again when he heard a tinny voice in his ear.

"Fokkers," it said hurriedly. "Three of them; close behind."

"Damn 'em!" he replied curtly, wondering how she had known enough to connect her ends of the 'phone, for in the hurry of their departure he hadn't thought of telling her. "Keep an eye on the blighters, there's a good little sport, an' tell me what they're up to."

He fiddled with the fine adjustment until he had coaxed an extra seventy-five revs. out of the Clerget, but even so he knew that with the bare hundred miles per hour which he could get out of the One-and-a-Half Strutter the pursuing Fokkers could make rings round them.

Less than a minute later the voice behind him announced that the Fokkers were much closer, a statement which was quickly substantiated by a rifle of tracers which ploughed their way through his left upper wing.

He could see them glow in the darkness as they flashed ahead of him, and he slipped aside and barked off into skids, wondering what he had better do. He was about to turn and face them when he felt the fuselage shudder. Simultaneously the chattering of a Lewis gun sounded sharply in his ears. Dumb-founded, he craned his head round, and found the girl crouched with her back towards him. Over the top of her flying cap he could see orange spurs of flame jetting from the muzzle of the machine-gun.

"My gosh," he muttered awestricken. "Of all the goldarmed game li'l scouts. Where in heck did she learn that?"

Up till now, strangely enough perhaps, Bronc hadn't had much use for girls,
but now he fought as one possessed, intent only on bringing down the trio of Fokkers before a bullet hit the girl. For himself, he didn’t worry at all, but he shuddered at the thought of a German bullet biting through the soft flesh of the passenger behind him.

“Gosh,” he thought suddenly in the middle of a ninety-degree bank, “I don’t even know her name. Say, you,” he shouted into the ‘phone, “what’s your name—hey?”

“If you can call me Jennie—if you like,” came back the reply after an almost imperceptible pause.

“Okay, Jennie,” he called back. “Stick it, kid!”

And as he pointed the prop. of the Sopwith straight at one of the enemy ‘planes and pressed the Vickers trip with joyful abandon, he decided it was the prettiest name he had ever heard.

Dodging, banking, skidding, never on an even keel, Bronc taught that One-and-a-Half Strutter tricks it had never learned before that summer night. Taught it tricks he had never known himself to possess before. Taught them because he had to, because he wasn’t going to let any Spandau bullet come within half a mile of Jennie—if he could help it.

And all the time the Lewis behind him was stammering away in short bursts, with an occasional pause when a fresh drum was clipped on to the post. One Fokker had gone down in flames and another had disappeared, but whether it had retired from the scrap or been disabled, Bronc could not tell. He only knew that he had not accounted for it himself.

There remained but one machine to deal with. It was on his tail, and, try as he might, he could not get a sight of it, but he knew it was there both by the stray bullets which zipped through his wings from time to time and by the regular tat-at-tat of the Lewis behind him.

Suddenly he heard a groan, almost a sigh, coming to his ears as from a vast distance. Simultaneously, the Lewis stopped firing. Bronc’s heart skipped a beat and he yelled frantically into the transmitter.

“Jennie! Jennie! Jennie, dear! Are you hit?”

But no answering sound came back.

CHAPTER V

LOOKING fearfully over his shoulder, Haskins saw his passenger slumped against the side of the cockpit, one arm hanging limply in slipstream, and he swore lustily, thumping the padded cockpit beside him.

Then he whirled and faced the one remaining Fokker. At least he tried to, tried again and again, but without success.

“Well, if I can’t, I can’t, and that’s flat,” he groaned in despair, and set the nose of the ‘plane for home.

He did not greatly care that he was offering an unprotected back to the enemy. He did not seem to care very much about anything now that Jennie was dead. She must be dead, he decided. There was not a movement of the sprawled body.

“Gosh,” he muttered, “What a scrap she put up! What a pal for a guy!”

He crouched low over the stick, offering as small a target as he could to the German pilot behind him. He could feel his ears laid back—flat against his head as he strained them for the ominous rattle of the Spandau. His hair wrinkled on his neck as he waited for the stream of bullets to bite into his spine; the stream which he could almost feel spewing from the pursuing machine-gun like a swarm of angry hornets from a disturbed nest.

Gradually, as nothing happened, he found he could stand the strain no longer. Banking on a wing-tip, he spun round. If Death still stalked him he would at least make one last effort to meet it face to face. His thin lips bared in a snarl which showed his even white teeth. The Sopwith shuddered at the sudden strain, and an instant later he was facing the direction from which he had come.

Long and carefully he searched the
darkness for the tell-tale glow of Mercedes exhausts. Hither and yon he sped, turning and twisting in his lust to meet or deal out death, but the skies seemed empty of all but themselves—himself and the dead girl behind him.

Finally, he gave up the search and turned for home. There was no room left in his mind for any feeling of relief at his reprieve, or of regret that he had so signally failed to accomplish what he had set out to perform. “A bunch of rabbits.” Perhaps Sharpness had been right after all, he thought without bitterness. There was nothing but sorrow now—sorrow and a feeling of frustration that her death had been unavenged.

And as he flew towards the west, a Fokker pilot, his ammunition belts empty, came in to a careful landing some ten miles away with a rueful story of one of those despised and out-dated Sopwiths which had brought down two of his comrades and fought him to a standstill.

HALF an hour later, with fuel tanks almost empty and his engine missing on one cylinder, Bronc unclipped his Verey pistol and fired two red lights from its blunt muzzle.

Five seconds later half a dozen petrol flares burst into smoky red flame. Bronc closed the throttle and circled the aerodrome. As the wheels touched, he pushed the throttle open again and sped down the line of flares. Mechanics waved at him in alarm, but he did not heed them. Straight between the two flares at the end he drove—straight for the tarmac, and there, with his prop. almost touching the canvas curtains of the end hangar, the Sopwith came to a stop.

“Stretcher-bearers!” he screamed hoarsely, snatching the plugs from his flying-cap and leaning over the decking between the two cockpits. “Stretcher-bearers! Double up there, damn and blast you! Where the hell...?” He stopped suddenly as Sharpness trotted alongside.

“What’s all the hoorooosh about?” he demanded quietly.

“She’s dead, sir,” Bronc burst out hysterically. “A bunch of Fokkers got on our tail. She fought the Lewis like a crackerjack, but they got her. My God, sir—she’s dead,” he wailed, throwing his long legs over the side and dropping heavily to the ground.

They laid her on a stretcher and carried her to the Crossley tender as the M.O. came hurrying up.

By the light of electric torches he bent over the still form, and then straightened his back.

“Still breathing,” he announced tersely. “Drive to the C.C.S. as fast as you like,” he ordered, seating himself on the opposite seat and opening a box of dressings.

Silently Bronc jumped up beside the driver as he let in the clutch and roared out of the gate past the sentry, whilst, as the tender passed, Sharpness swung himself up behind and talked to the M.O. in a low tone.

At the Casualty Clearing Station, all the while the examination was being made, Bronc walked up and down outside, smoking cigarettes chain fashion. After what seemed an eternity he could stand the suspense no longer. He crushed the last cigarette under his heel and went into the low whitewashed building with the red cross painted on its roof.

The smell of disinfectants greeted his nostrils as he walked unsteadily towards a cot at the end of the long room. Sharpness was there, and the M.O. They were seated on each side of the bed and listening intently to what the occupant of the cot was saying. Sharpness was taking notes.

Draped over the back of a nearby chair Bronc saw some unmistakably feminine garments. He noticed bloodstains and turned away with a shudder. He stood still, looking about him dazedly. Sharpness glanced up; called him over. He walked forward in a daze, fearful of what he might see.

“I want you to meet Jennings of the Intelligence,” Sharpness introduced. The young fellow in the cot grinned, and held out his hand.

“Want to thank you for getting me
away," he said in a shaky voice. "The M.O. says I'll pull through all right. I don't think many pilots could have got down into that little field and out again as neatly."

"Whatcha mean—what field?" demanded Bronc, looking about him vaguely as he took the proffered hand.

"Say," he demanded sharply, "where's Jennie? How is she?"

Even when all three men grinned up at him the thing was not quite clear. He glared from one to the other truculently, his tired brain trying ineffectually to fathom the reason for their obvious amusement. Then a girlish voice said quietly:

"You can call me Jennie—if you like."

BRONC took one long startled look at the face of the erstwhile "Jennie," then dropped into a chair. His descent dislodged a curly reddish wig. He stared at it incredulously.

"Migosh!" he exclaimed as the unpalatable truth began to dawn on him. Then a broad grin overspread his good-natured face.

"Well, I don't give a darn," he declared. "You're one heck of a good machine-gunner, anyhow; an' I don't mean maybe."

"Sorry, old man," apologised Jenkins, "but I'd been wearing girl's kit for such a deuce of a long time, and when you seemed so utterly fed to the teeth when I hove in sight, I—well, I just couldn't resist pulling your leg a bit. Sorry, and all that," he smiled.

"Aw, forget it," grinned Bronc with admiration in his tones. "A guy who has to get around dressed like you were, deserves any laugh he can get out of it, I'll tell the world."

Later, when he walked into the squadron anteroom, the tale seemed to have preceded him, for he was greeted by delighted shouts of "Jennie!"

And "Jennie" Bronc Haskins remained.

THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER:

THE WORLD'S FASTEST BOMBERS

Large Numbers of the New Bristol Blenheim Medium Bombers are now being Delivered to the Royal Air Force

A FORMATION of Bristol Blenheim medium bombers, claimed to be the fastest twin-engined military aircraft in the world, form the subject of this month's cover painting by S. R. Drigin.

Large numbers of these formidable new aircraft are now under construction for the equipment of the expanding Royal Air Force, and deliveries to squadrons have already begun. The only difference between the Blenheims depicted on the cover and those now going into service with the R.A.F. is that the latter are painted in camouflage colouring, officially known as "shadow shading," which makes them difficult to detect from above.

All R.A.F. bombers and army co-operation craft are now to be camouflaged in this manner, and four different schemes of shading, one for heavy bombers, one for twin-engined medium bombers, a third for single-engined medium bombers, and a fourth for army co-operation machines, have been devised. In all cases three colours are used; dark green and dark earth, deposited in irregularly shaped patches on the upper surfaces, and a dull black, called "night," for use on the under surfaces. The colouring on the upper surfaces, it is claimed, blends with the variegated green and brown of the countryside, thus making the bombers difficult to detect from above.

All R.A.F. bombers and army co-operation craft are now to be camouflaged in this manner, and four different schemes of shading, one for heavy bombers, one for twin-engined medium bombers, a third for single-engined medium bombers, and a fourth for army co-operation machines, have been devised. In all cases three
"THE CORONATION OF OUR KING AND QUEEN" is lavishly illustrated on every page with most magnificent photographs, and the covers are beautifully printed in four colours and gold. The life-story of King George and Queen Elizabeth is graphically told in simple, moving language, as well as all the romantic detail of the Coronation Ceremony in history and at the present time.

Here is a superb production to be treasured in your home, to be looked at and read again and again. A magnificent Pictorial Souvenir to commemorate a great occasion.

Make sure of your copy to-day—all demand will be phenomenal!

6d

Of all Newsagents and Bookstalls, or by post 8d. from the Publisher, George Newnes Ltd., Tower House, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.
IN his recent account of the brilliant war record of the late Captain G. E. H. McElroy, M.C., D.F.C., Mr. A. H. Pritchard referred to the dearth of reliable information about the early life of this great fighter. As a result, we have now been favoured with details, of unquestionable accuracy, of McElroy’s pre-war career by one of his former comrades in 40 Squadron.

“McElroy,” our informant writes, “was born at Donnybrook School, Dublin, on May 14th, 1893. He was the eldest son of Samuel McElroy, B.A., ex-Principal Teacher of that school and grandson of the late George McElroy of Boyle, County Roscommon. He was of Scottish descent and his ancestors, who were ironfounders, settled in the Boyle district some 250 years ago.

“After winning scholarships both at the Dundalk Educational Institute and at Mountjoy School, Dublin, McElroy entered the Civil Service, but shortly after the outbreak of the War he volunteered for service as a motor-cycle dispatch-rider and landed in France on October 1st, 1914. He served on the Armentieres front until May, 1915, when he obtained a commission in the Royal Irish Regiment. After a serious ‘gassing,’ he was transferred to Home Establishment, and fought through the Dublin rebellion of Easter week, April, 1916. Two months later, he entered the R.M.A., Woolwich, as a cadet and, having been gazetted to the Royal Garrison Artillery, was attached, in the following February, to the Royal Flying Corps.

“The manner of his death in action on July 31st, 1918, has never been disclosed by Germany.”

This confirmation of McElroy’s Irish nationality may come as a surprise to many readers in Canada where, for some unknown reason, it has frequently been stated that McElroy was a Canadian. In the interests of historical accuracy, we are grateful for the opportunity of publishing this authoritative statement.

Contact !—At Last

WE are glad to be able to announce that the aircraftman who, for some months past, had been endeavouring to start the engine of the Bristol monoplane—as depicted in the sketch formerly used as a heading to this feature—has at last succeeded, and that the machine has now flown off the page.

Regular readers will recall that critics were not lacking to point out that the airscrew, assuming the usual anti-clockwise turning engine, was being swung in the wrong direction. This accusation we countered—rather neatly, we thought—by announcing that the engine was of the clockwise-rotating type. The following letter from Mr. F. B. A. Hennessy, of Beckenham, Kent, came, therefore, as rather a shock to us:

“You cleverly avoided your Cambridge reader’s brickbat,” he wrote, “but now you have put yourself in the path of an even bigger one. Have you noticed that, if, as you state, the engine is right-handed, then the airscrew pitch is the wrong way round and your aeroplane, when the engine starts, will fly backwards!”

That, of course, is the last thing we should like to have happen, and we were rather stumped for a reply until another reader, Mr. H. W. Wilkinson of Penrith, a former Leading Aircraftman in the R.A.F., very kindly came to the rescue:

“When I was a mechanic with No. 47 Squadron at Helwan, Egypt,” he wrote, “we were equipped with D.H.9a’s and we found that their 400 h.p. Liberty engines would start most easily if the props, were first swung back on to compression. Nine times out of ten they would then pick up first time. How’s that for a knock back at your anonymous reader?”
Curiously enough, our artist now assures us that the Bristol monoplane’s engine was equally responsive to such treatment but, distrusting the credulity of our readers, we have this month introduced a new heading sketch.

And any reader who writes to point out that the title is inaccurate because the torpedo has not yet made contact with its target will *not* be popular.

**A Tribute to Colonel Bishop**

IN Mr. F. Seddon of Shrewsbury Colonel W. A. Bishop, V.C., has a doughty champion who writes:

“As a regular reader of AIR STORIES and a keen student of military flying, I have just finished reading ‘King of Air Fighters’ by Squadron Leader Ira Jones, D.S.O., M.C. In this book frequent mention is made of Bali, McCudden, Guynemer, Fonck and Richthofen, but only one very scant reference to Lieut.-Colonel W. A. Bishop, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., who brought down 25 German scout machines in 72 days, attacked a German aerodrome single-handed, and who, when he was recalled to England in June, 1918, had a total victory score of 72 machines brought down, only one less than Mannock’s final score.

“If he had stayed in France only one week longer, it is probable he would have headed the list of Allied Aces, and in my opinion he was the finest individual air fighter of the Great War.

“I have a great admiration for Major E. Mannock, but feel strongly that in ‘King of Air Fighters’ Colonel W. A. Bishop has not been given the mention which is his due, and suggest that in fairness to him you publish this letter in your very excellent magazine.”

Colonel Bishop’s gallant record speaks for itself. It does not need our defence, nor is it likely to be affected by any omissions of unofficial historians. But we gladly publish this letter as the tribute of a reader to a very gallant officer, though we happen to know that he loathes the very word “ace” and is the last person in the world to care about the order of his precedence in the Hall of Fame.

**Bouquet Department**

BREAKING a two years’ silence, Mr. Kenneth R. Sparks of Morden sends us the following welcome note of encouragement:

“I have not written to you before, but I feel I must congratulate you on your excellent magazine.

I have read AIR STORIES for two years now, and wouldn’t part with my back copies at any price.

“When the magazine first came out I thought it would be just another of those magazines with stories by writers who don’t know the difference between an aileron and a 3-point landing. Fortunately, I was wrong, and AIR STORIES has definitely planted its tail-skid on the landing-ground of British aviation literature.

“I would specially like to congratulate you on securing Wilfrid Tremellen as a writer. His stories are ‘super,’ and I feel as if I have known ‘Wogy’ Wane, old Haystead and the R.E.8’s for years. A. C. Leverington’s drawings, too, are fine, and the model section is particularly appreciated as I am a keen scale-model maker and have already built 51 ‘planes to a 1/72nd scale. Keep on with the good work!’

This is the kind of letter we like, and it doesn’t really do us any harm because, however good the last issue of AIR STORIES was, we are always determined to make the next one even better.

**“Fighter Pilot” Starts Next Month**

NEXT month we start publication of a vivid account of air fighting during the Great War written by a distinguished member of one of the most famous scout squadrons of the R.F.C.

The squadron was No. 49, and the author, who prefers to be known by his wartime nickname of “McScotch,” is not only an “ace” in his own right, but was also a close friend of that most famous of all British air “aces,” “Mick” Mannock, V.C., D.S.O., M.C.

“Fighter Pilot” is the title of this astonishingly vivid record of personal experience, and it is full of first-hand descriptions of fighting in the air, written with a directness and simplicity which make them all the more exciting and impressive. Here, too, are vivid glimpses of great fighters like Mannock, McElroy and Tudhope, seen as they really were, in the heat of action and in their moments of relaxation, by a man who lived and fought with them.

“Fighter Pilot” is a true story of enthralling interest, ranking with such famous successes of the past as “Cundall of the Camels” and “Winged Warriors,” and no reader should miss the first great instalment that appears in next month’s issue of AIR STORIES—on sale on June 11th.
"NOW FOR THE ATLANTIC" 
by 
JIM MOLLISON 
IN THE MAY 
POPULAR FLYING

6d. OUT NOW

FREE SERVICE FOR READERS

READERS requiring information concerning goods or services advertised in AIR STORIES should give names of Advertisers from whom particulars are desired. Any number of names may be included and we will obtain for you catalogues, lists, and any other information you may be wanting. THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THIS SERVICE.

Post this to
ADVERT. SERVICE DEPT., 
AIR STORIES, 
8-11 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.2

Please obtain and send to me particulars from the Advertisers in your May issue whose names I give on list attached.

Advertiser | Page No. | Information Required
--- | --- | ---

NOTE: If you are a beginner send also for A.B.C.'s of Model Airplane Building, 6d. post free.

Full of Hints and Instructions on all types of Model Building.

All our lines are sold by HOBBIES LTD., HAMLEYS of Regent Street, and Dealers almost everywhere, so ASK YOUR DEALER FIRST! ... but don't forget... There is no substitute for a MEGOW KIT!

Norwegian builders: Get your kit from Messrs. L. W. Tornoe, A.S., Bergen.

AER-O-KITS (Sheffield), Sheffield, 3.
The largest distributors of American Model Kits in Gr. Britain.

THE WEBLEY SERVICE AIR RIFLE MAKING NO LICENSE REQUIRED TO PURCHASE

WRITE FOR DESCRIPTIVE FOLDER

Squirrels, Rabbits, Rats, Sparrows and similar vermin can be destroyed by this extremely accurate and powerful Air Rifle. Ideal for Target Practice.

CALIBRE 0.177 or 0.22. Letters or postcards. 
WEBLEY & SCOTT LTD. I.C.I. WEAVER ST. BIRMINGHAM 4

EMPIRE MATERIAL

EVERY kind of accessory required by the Scale Modeller. "Mercury" Motors, Cowling Rims, Wheels, Spats, Airscrews, Guns, Letter and Cockade Transfer, Cockspurs, Figures, Pilots, Mechanics, Petrol Tenders, etc.

SIBYR LEAGUE LTD. H.Q. DESERTS 3 ALDEAubar SC HAWKER STREET, LONDON, E.C.2

BE TALLER (INCHES PUT YOU MILES AHEAD) INCREASED MY OWN HEIGHT TO 6 ft. 4½ ins.

Full Details 6d. Stamp, or Complete System 2½ £s. Mailed privately in plain cover.

A. M. MALCOLM ROSS, Height Specialist, Scarboro'

-scale- Scale Model Construction Kits

Kit for Flying Model Biplane (Semi-Scale), 24ins. Wing Span. Duration of 2 mins. 17 secs. obtained. Average Guaranteed 90 secs. All Materials supplied, also Super Plan with full instructions for making. Price £1.5s. Plan Only 2/6.

Send for FREE illustrated literature describing the above Kit, also all Aeromodel and Aeromini Kit, and Price List of Model Builders Material Supplies from:

Aeromodels Ltd., Wellington Buildings, Strand, Liverpool, 2. Dept. B.

ALL ADVERTISEMENTS FOR "AIR STORIES" should be addressed to Advertisement Department, George Newnes Ltd., Tower House, Southwark Street, Strand, London, W.C.2. Telephone: Temple Bar 4363.
THE MOST MAGNIFICENT RECORD
IN PHOTO AND STORY OF THE
MODERN MASTERY OF THE AIR

For the Student, the Pilot, the
Air-minded, Young and Old

AERIAL WONDERS
OF OUR TIME

Edited by SIR JOHN HAMMERTON

AERIAL WONDERS OF OUR TIME has been produced at a most
opportunity moment. Hitherto, there has been no adequate or
reliable survey of the progressive movement of mankind in its
conquest of the air. But in this new work the reader finds a treasure
house of enlightening information.

No pains have been spared in making AERIAL WONDERS a truly
outstanding publication. On every page there is something to rouse
the reader's interest and stir his imagination. For those who seek the
why and wherefore of mechanical flight or wish to know the intricacies
of piloting, there is a mine of expert information. The marvels of modern
machines are revealed for all to understand. The spirit of the heroic
eyears has been skilfully recaptured, and the mighty exploits of gallant
airmen during the Great War are vividly recalled to life.

THE CHIEF CONTRIBUTORS

Sir Alan J. Cobham,
K.B.E., A.F.C.

T. G. A. Moore-Brabazon, M.C., M.P.

Major Oliver Stewart,
D.C., A.F.C.

Amy Mollison, C.B.E.

Sir Alliott Verdon-Roe,
O.B.E., F.R.Ae.S.

Major C. C. Turner,
A.F.R.Ae.S.

David Garrett,
Boyd Cable,

Hamiton Fyfe.

Capt. J. Lawrence
Pritchard, Hon.
F.R.Ae.S.

Don't Miss This
Opportunity!

Just sign and post the form below (or
send postcard) and we will send you
these two splendid volumes, carriage
paid, to examine for one week free. You
may either return them to us, carriage
forward, within eight days, to end the
matter, or keep them on the very easy
terms outlined on the form.

Send To-day!

POST THIS FREE FORM AT ONCE OR SEND POSTCARD

To the Waverley Book Co. Limited,
96 and 97 Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.4

Please send me, carriage paid, for seven days' FREE Examination,
"AERIAL WONDERS OF OUR TIME" complete in two volumes. It is
understood that I may return the work on the eighth day after I receive it
and that there the matter ends. If I keep the books I will send you on the
eighth day a First Payment of 2s., and, beginning thirty days after, seven
further monthly payments of 4s. each, thus completing the purchase price.
(Price for Cash on the eighth day, 25s., 6d.)

Name __________________________
Address _________________________

Occupation ______________________ State if householder ____________

Parent's Signature __________________ Date ______________________

Age.S. 3. PLEASE FILL IN ALL PARTICULARS ASKED.

Published on the 10th of each month by GEORGE NEWNES LIMITED, Tower House, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.4,

Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand—Gordon & Gotch Ltd. Sole Agents for South Africa—Central News Agency Ltd.

Subscription rates: Inland and Abroad, post free, 3s. per annum (Canada, 8s. 6d.).