

THRILLING STORIES OF R.F.C., R.N.A.S., AND R.A.F. ADVENTURE

AIR STORIES

7^D



S. DRIGIN

NOVEMBER

DUSTMEN

Long Complete Air-War

SUBMARINE SNARE

BY H. C. PARSONS

DON'T CARE

Adventure By G. M. BOWMAN

PHANTOMS FLY BY NIGHT

BY A. J. PELHAM-GROOM

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AIR STORIES

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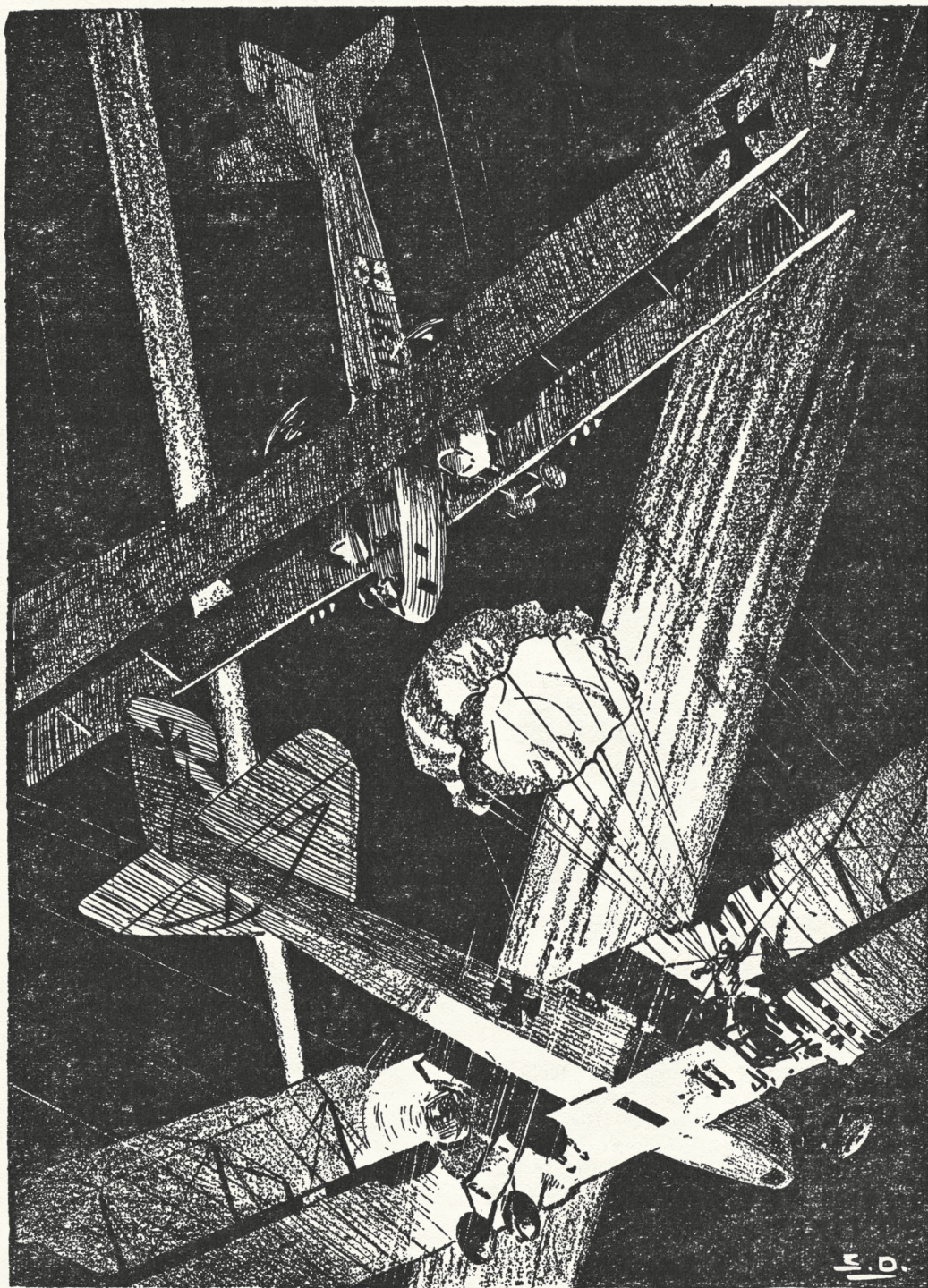
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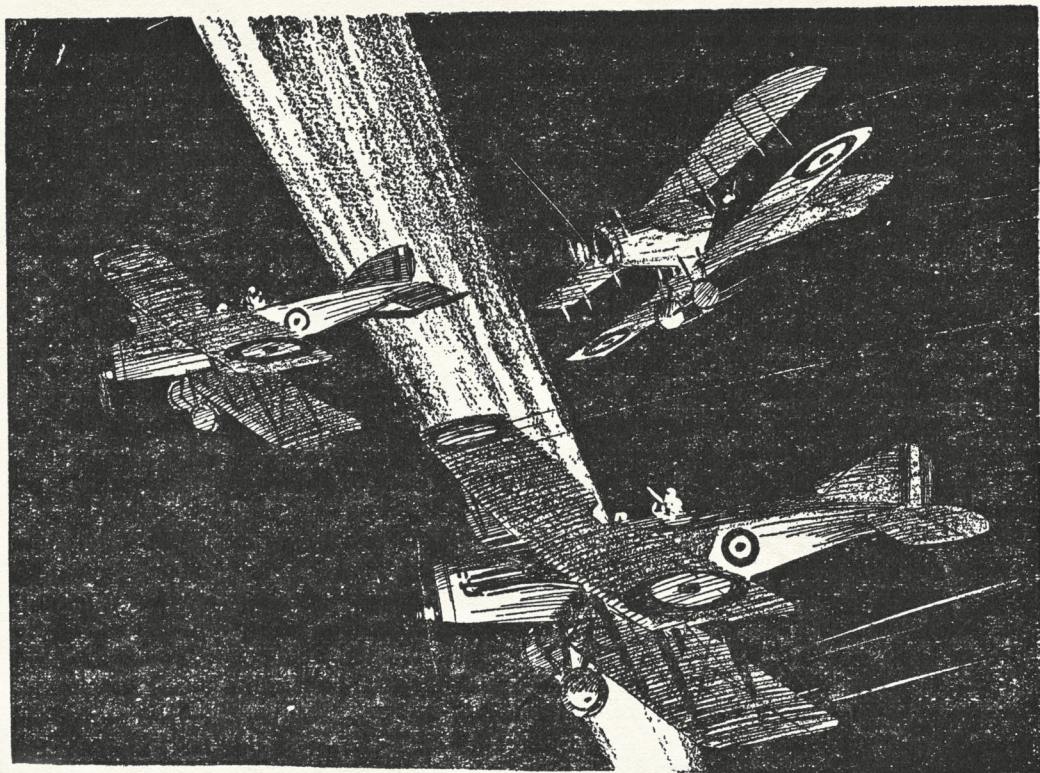
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A man clambered out on to the wing of the doomed wreck and loosed a parachute. . . .

***A Dramatic Story of War-time Adventure with the Royal
Flying Corps At Home and Overseas***



... as three Bristol Fighters came diving straight at the German leader's Gotha

DUSTMEN DON'T CARE

High in the Darkened Skies above a Frightened City
Two Englishmen Cruised in a Lone Gotha, the Bait in a
Strange Trap that was to Bring the Deaf and Dumb
Dustmen Plunging Down to Settle Accounts with a
Terror that Flew by Night

By G. M. BOWMAN

CHAPTER I

"The Deaf and Dumb Dustmen"

ANYONE misguided enough to become a member of the Royal Flying Corps in France during the Great War had to put up with a great many things. There was, of course, the German Army to be reckoned with, and the danger of getting shot. But the greatest of all hazards facing any newly-fledged air-warrior was the Royal Flying Corps' sense of humour. In fact, there are even those who hold that it was this

peculiar brand of R.F.C. humour which finally drove the German Imperial Service to desperation, and ultimately, to collapse.

Be that as it may, Major Nobby Clarke felt despairing as he stood outside Number One hangar of the "Very Famous Squadron" of which he happened to be the leader. True, anyone named Clarke might well despair of being called anything but "Nobby," in any section of the British forces. But the Major was not worrying about that. Secretly, he was rather thankful than

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otherwise, for his first name was Cuthbert, and he sometimes squirmed with horror at the thought of what the Royal Flying Corps would have done about it, had he ever been fool enough to let his dear comrades see his personal papers.

Major Nobby Clarke's despairing expression was due to quite another reason, one which had to do with a two-seater Bristol Fighter, now standing in the hangar—a Bristol Fighter on the fuselage of which was painted a sanitary-dustbin equipped with wings.

It cannot be said with any certainty whether a certain, talented lady-journalist had committed suicide, up to that moment. But the history of the "Very Famous Squadron" was closely connected with that nameless lady, who had met some of its members when they were on leave in London. In a newspaper-article, next morning, she wrote lyrically of those young warriors who had made their squadron the most famous in France, by "flirting with death in the far-flung battlegrounds of the sky . . ." etc., etc. With the bit fairly between her teeth, so to speak, the good lady fairly bolted through four columns of print, and finished by calling for "national homage to these Strong Silent Men who are so Full of Grit."

Which was why the squadron was immediately re-christened the "Deaf-and-Dumb Dustmen" by the rest of a delighted Flying Corps, whose appreciation of literary art was only exceeded by its chivalrous desire to please a lady.

Not to be outdone by such matters of etiquette, the chuckling squadron gracefully accepted their new title, and, from then on, each of the "Dustmen's" machines carried that whimsical badge.

Such is the power of the pen.

MAJOR NOBBY CLARKE, chief of the Dustmen, drew a deep breath and prepared to warm-up a machine-gun-like vocabulary, at the sight that met his eye. The sight was that of a flat tyre adorning one wheel of the Bristol's undercarriage. At the end of the first minute of the Major's performance, a shaken-looking rigger-sergeant

and half-a-dozen of his henchmen came running up, to stand rigid, waiting for the storm to abate.

"And in case I didn't make myself clear," stuttered the Major, after a brief pause for breath, "I'll put it in simple, ordinary words, so that you can understand. I ordered my machine to be ready at twelve o'clock, so that I could go and meet the morning patrol on its way home. It is now 12.10. Is my machine ready—or IS that a flaming, blistered, fairies—at—the—bottom—of—my—garden, flat-tyre? Correct me if I'm wrong."

"Yessir," gulped the sergeant, "but ———"

"Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking," went on Nobby, speaking with sinister softness, "I feel I cannot let this moment pass without clearing-up one point on which you gentlemen and I seem to be at cross-purposes. Gradually, and in some unaccountable way, the idea had grown upon me that when I gave an order, it would be obeyed. The outcome of war-strain, no doubt. But the point is that I *have* that idea, and I'm willing to back it up by having any number of thick-headed, insubordinate mechanics and N.C.O.'s shot at dawn, if in future——"

"It's Misteredison, sir!" almost howled the rigger-sergeant.

Nobby pulled up in full flow and looked slightly worried.

"Yessir," went on the sergeant, swiftly taking advantage of the lull. "It's Misteredison, sir. I mean Mr. Edwards. He's got a new idea, sir. Something to do with tyres. Five minutes ago he come and let that tyre down on your machine. I *told* him that you'd ordered it to be ready, sir, but he said he would have it all right, sir, by the time you come. Mr. Edison's a lieutenant, sir, and it's more'n I can do to disobey an orficer, or 'inder——"

A shadow fell across the hangar-opening, and Nobby Clarke, whose expression was now distinctly dangerous, whirled round. The owner of the shadow walked in and smiled up at him cheerfully. He was a lieutenant of middle-

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size, with a round, serious face and a high forehead. In his hand he held a peculiar-looking instrument which seemed to have started out as an air-pump, but changed its mind halfway and decided to be an alarm-clock.

"Oh, hullo, Nobby," said Lieutenant Edwards with the easy familiarity of the Squadron officers' "off-duty" relationship. "'Fraid I must have delayed you a little. But this automatic pump of mine—there's just a slight adjustment needed—"

The Major spoke over his shoulder, from between clenched teeth.

"Dismiss!" he snapped, and the relieved sergeant and mechanic departed speedily.

"You see," said Lieutenant Edwards, nick-named "Edison," "I've found out by timing it, that it takes a mechanic about five minutes to pump up one of those tyres. Now, I've thought it out, and——"

"EDISON," said the Major in a slightly choked voice, "Edison, you dangerous, comic-inventing-genius, will you kindly tell me just why you've had the almighty cheek to try one of your ruddy ideas on *my* machine, against *my* orders——?"

"I knew you wouldn't mind," smiled Edison. "You see my tyres haven't got the right type of valves. Now I'll have that tyre blown up again in half a jiffy."

But as he bent down, his superior officer bent too, and took his ear in a steely grip which forced him to let out a yell.

"Yes, you'll *get* it pumped up," breathed Major Clarke, sulphurously, "And in case you've done anything else brilliantly clever, you'll get the engine and rigger-sergeants, and you'll go over this machine from prop-boss to tail-skid, and take away anything that isn't perfectly normal. That's an *order*, Edison. And, while you're getting on with it, I'll take your machine. Meanwhile, just understand this. If you lay a hand on my machine again, and try and fix up any of your ruddy inventions, I'll have you put under close arrest."

And Major Nobby Clarke stalked off, snorting.

Behind him the crestfallen inventor caressed a stinging ear and went somewhat pink as he saw the grinning sergeant and his subordinates lurking in the shadows.

"All right," called Edison peevishly, "All right. I try to help to run things more efficiently, to improve on the material at hand. And this is all I get for it! If I didn't know what a decent chap you really are, Nobby, I'd write to the War Office——"

"And if I *wasn't* a very decent chap," answered the distant Nobby Clarke, who had now sworn himself back into a good humour, so that he had difficulty in not laughing, "I'd have written to the War Office about you, long ago, and you would have been taken back to your rightful home in Colney Hatch. Sergeant! Mr. Edwards wants your help in putting my machine back to its normal state. Now come along a couple of you, and get this one out——"

CHAPTER II

Something New in Fighters

FIVE minutes later, Major Clarke was roaring away off the ground at the controls of that machine which was usually handled by his subordinate officer. He was going on a mission which was part of his own, carefully worked-out plan, and one which had very largely helped in making the Dustmen the crack squadron of the Somme front.

From past experience, Nobby knew that a patrol is quite often in its greatest danger when all risk seems over, and it is returning home. The pilots are keyed-up, with overstrained nerves. They are tired. With home lying close ahead, they are apt to be careless. And that is just the sort of time when enemy machines, cruising high, can—and do—drop down out of the glare of a high sun and pick-off victims.

Nobby, therefore, always met the morning patrol in person, and to-date he had bagged four Huns who had tried just that trick. The afternoon patrol was his own, special show. And when this patrol came in, the rested and

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refreshed leader of the morning party came out to play escort, in his turn.

It was work that called for keen vigilance and concentrated attention. Yet as Nobby flew, his attention was certainly not up to full pitch. He was thinking about many things. And the first, which was Lieutenant "Edison" Edwards, made him grin.

Even judged by the standards of the Royal Flying Corps, Edison, the inventor, was a "lad." He had been with the squadron six months now, and had showed himself to be a first-class fighting pilot who could, on occasion, manage a back-seat gun with deadly efficiency. He was, in Nobby's opinion, one of the most likeable creatures unhung. Always cheerful, yet always completely serious-minded, the inventive Edison never really seemed to see that anyone was trying to pull his leg. He was intensely hardworking, full of enthusiasm, and had a cold courage beyond question.

"I'd make him second-in-command," muttered Nobby to himself as, with a gunner-mechanic in the back seat of his Bristol Fighter, he hauled up to five thousand feet. "He's the man for the job. Couldn't be better—if only he wouldn't invent."

Truly has it been said that the path of genius is rough and thorny. There had been both rough and thorny passages in the Army career of the inventive Edison. He had designed a patent chair for Nobby's use in the squadron-office—and it had taken a sergeant and three mechanics fully twenty minutes to disentangle their superior officer, who had goodheartedly sat down in it for the purpose of a test. As the harassed Edison pointed out while rescue operations were still in progress, Nobby had sat down too quickly, and without turning the special catch which controlled the chair's folding up mechanism. It was just the thing for small offices in War-conditions, its inventor said—made so that it could be shut up and put out of the way at a moment's notice.

His superior officer, with both little fingers firmly jammed in a painful position, ordered him to shut up, and in

the same breath ordered the rest of the delighted squadron to put him out of the way by the most painful and lingering methods known to ancient, Chinese torture.

"A second in command must have authority," mused Nobby to himself. "No, I'm afraid it's impossible. The men love him, but he's always fixing-up comic gadgets and getting himself laughed at. It's a pity. The time always comes when you've got to have real command, and you won't if the chaps regard you as a courageous but good-natured lunatic——"

Then Major Clarke suddenly gave up meditating on the shortcomings of his inventive subordinate, for in the far distance he caught the first faint glints which he recognised as the morning patrol on its return journey.

NOBBY hauled up still higher, pressed his gun-control to let loose a few shots and make sure that everything was in working order, and instinctively looked up in search of trouble.

Then he looked down again in puzzlement, for the gun didn't fire. It didn't fire for the simple reason that there were no gun-controls where there should have been, inside the spade-grip of the control-stick. Nobby bent down in the cockpit and looked around, swearing softly. He saw an unusual-looking hand-wheel fitted at the side of the office, and gave it an experimental turn. Immediately a Lewis gun, fitted to his top plane, swung round. Its movement, completely unusual and against all rules and regulations, startled Nobby considerably. For that reason his grip on the small wheel was an uncertain, pulling jerk.

The gun fired.

Now pointing directly backwards, it spattered out a hailing line of about a dozen bullets which came within an ace of removing the back-seat gunner's head. There was a faint howl from behind, and Nobby let go the control-wheel as though it had suddenly become red-hot.

"Damn that inventive genius!" he gasped beneath his breath. "Great snakes——"

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Heaving up, he stared round and was thankful to see his badly-frightened companion still alive.

"I don't like this machine, sir," yelled the man, ducking and clinging on to his Scarff mounting. "This thing don't act like it ought. The movement goes kinda queer, sir——"

He was fiddling agitatedly as he shouted, and casting apprehensive glances at the forward gun. Nobby gave an exasperated laugh and shouted in return.

"All right," he bellowed. "Better not touch anything on the whole flying box of tricks, or it'll probably blow-up! I suppose Mr. Edison's own observer is used to it. I ought to have brought him. Well, we'll just see the patrol home."

MACHINES flying towards each other at a combined speed of somewhere around two hundred and fifty miles an hour do not take long to meet, and in a few moments the homing squadron were passing directly beneath the Major with some of their pilots raising an arm to wave a greeting. Nobby kicked over the rudder to turn round and follow them, high up in the rear, in his position of fatherly protection.

But even as he did so, there was a sudden howling drone—then a vicious jarring stutter which appeared to issue from the sun itself.

Nobby hunched his shoulders and for a moment rubbed shoulders with death as a bullet-hail from an unseen, diving Fokker ripped his dashboard to splinters and tore long strips of fabric out of the centre-section. Then, acting purely by instinct, he was hard over in a vertical turn, with his engine full out and his stick forward as he dived after the plunging enemy.

Since a man moves solely by instinct when fighting for his life in the air, Major Nobby Clarke once again industriously pressed gun-controls that weren't there. The result was that a diving Fokker pilot, who was momentarily within the Bristol's ring-sights, went on living. As a matter of fact he lived so lustily that, in the next moment, he had swerved round at a sharp angle, flattening

his dive and coming up in a loop which reversed the position.

Whilst Nobby was grabbing blindly for that swivelling gun control-wheel, the Fokker turned flat on its back and German Spandau bullets once again missed the Major's head by inches, shuddering in a hail through his left wing-bay.

The rear-seat gunner on the Bristol had by now managed to take an active part in the proceedings. He found the catch which released the gun mounting, but the mounting moved a great deal more quickly than he expected. Actually it had specially been redesigned so that its movement could be helped by pressing one of two pedals on the floor, which gave it an extra boost to the right or left, and the rear-seat gunner was treading on the right pedal, without knowing it. The gun came round, registered on the Fokker's tail for an instant, and that red tail suddenly showed streamers of fabric as though it had been pawed by a giant cat!

The gunner was pleased. As he hung on by teeth and eyebrows in the way of aerial gunners, whilst the Bristol seemed to be trying to climb up its own exhaust-pipe, he left off shooting and tried to haul the mounting to the left. Whereupon he ceased being pleased, for only his unconscious pressure on the pedal had previously made such a movement impossible. Now it kept the gun moving to the right, sweeping it right round so that the underpart of its water-jacket clanged tunelessly on the back of Major Clarke's head!

Three-parts stunned, gasping, and very nearly going up in flames with temper, Nobby ducked down in his seat, saw the Fokker flashing by, and expected instant death.

But in spite of the inventive genius of the absent Edison, Death found no work to do that afternoon. The Fokker, with a shattered elevator-control, was now gliding ruefully away homewards. In any case it is doubtful whether the German pilot would have tried anything more, for a couple of the Dustmen's afternoon-patrol had realised what was happening and had turned back.

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With his heart in his mouth, Nobby straightened up. He waved his friends to turn about again as he followed the rest of the patrol homewards. But he was quite honestly and unashamedly shaking as he finally clambered out on the home aerodrome, while running mechanics came to take over his machine.

CHAPTER III

Menace of the Raiders

MAJOR NOBBY shot one glance at his white-faced rear-gunner who had just eased himself to the ground.

"I couldn't help it, sir!" panted the gunner. "It was a mercy I'd left off shootin'—but that gun seems to be fixed-up so that it will only turn to the right. I couldn't stop it——"

Major Clarke breathed deeply, and steadily.

"All right, Bates," he managed with difficulty. "I understand. Now get along and get your lunch, and be ready for the afternoon patrol."

"Will we—will we be taking *this* machine, sir?" asked Bates, uncertainly.

Major Clarke shook his head.

"It might come about," he said in a tense tone, "that this machine was the only one available. If that happens, friend Bates, I shall get one of the transport lorries, fix it up to a kite-balloon, and take the damned thing off, armed with bows and arrows. But I shall *not* take this machine!"

His voice dropped so that he seemed to be talking to himself.

"But," he continued, "I'm going to take a certain inventor apart from ordinary men, to some quiet place, and there I am going to take *him* apart. I'm going to collect up all his inventions and ram them down his throat! I'm going to soak him in petrol and put a match to him! I'm going to——"

Major Clarke fell silent, and as he stalked off to the anteroom he gave himself up to ingenious thoughts which would have done credit to an acolyte of the Holy Inquisition.

But the inventive Edison's star of good

fortune was evidently shining brightly that day, for, before Nobby got anywhere near the mess building, an orderly came running from the direction of the Squadron Office. In the manner of his kind, he came to a halt, leaning forward at what seemed to be an angle of forty-five degrees, and saluted with the effect of a tuning fork.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the orderly, "but the General's 'ere, and sends 'is compliments, and would be glad of a word with you."

"The General?" echoed Nobby, stopping dead in his tracks. Generals were not in the habit of paying visits to line-aerodromes, except for one reason. That reason was trouble. If there was trouble, if anyone was due to go on the carpet, the squadron commander always had to do a little carpet-treading himself, first. That is known as Army discipline.

"It only needed *this*!" breathed Nobby. "Oh, what a day! Here am I, off my head with worry because I haven't a decent second-in-command since Philipson crashed. Then I narrowly miss getting shot to pieces in a flying science museum which does everything except make ice cream. And now Headquarters have to start some sort of strafe——"

He pulled undone his flying suit, hopped out of it awkwardly as he walked, and handed it to the mechanic who was respectfully trailing him. Then, straightening his tie, Major Nobby Clarke entered the Squadron Office, came to attention smartly because he was wearing no cap, and prepared for the worst.

LOUNGING at a desk and tapping upon it meditatively with a short riding-crop, was a stout gentleman whose uniform was gorgeous with red tabs.

"Ah, Clarke," said the General. "Thought you'd be back before this."

Nobby very nearly announced that he was lucky to be back at all. But he checked himself, smiled with sickly sweetness, and moved forward to open a cigarette-box on the desk and push it forward hospitably.

"We were a bit delayed on the morning patrol, sir," he said. "A Hun

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came dropping down from upstairs, and——"

Inwardly he was thinking fast. He could not remember any especially heinous crime that any member of the squadron had committed, lately. Then suddenly he thought about the inventive Edison, and an awful fear touched his heart. Surely Edison couldn't have gone along to Headquarters with any of his brilliant ideas . . .

"They're having a pretty bad time at home with these air raids," said the General, conversationally. "The Home Defence Squadrons don't seem to be able to get to grips with the raiders. It's having a bad effect, Clarke—a very bad effect, indeed. In a war like this, the morale of the people at home has to be kept up. Most important, that."

"Yes, sir, oh certainly, sir," agreed Nobby with complete inattention.

Something pretty awful must be coming, he was thinking, or the General would not be hedging round the point, and making this aimless small talk, in the manner of a Chinese mandarin diplomatically approaching a bargain.

"Well, that's the point," said the General, tapping the desk with his crop. "They've been talking the matter over in Whitehall. You're going home."

If the General had suddenly drunk the ink, and then stood on his head on the desk, Major Nobby Clarke could not have been more completely and blankly surprised. He opened a dry mouth, but no sound issued forth. He passed a hand over his eyes.

"Did you say, sir," he asked, "that I—I was going——"

"The Home Authorities realise that something has got to be done," said the General, heaving himself up. "At the moment, the Hun is getting through to London in his Gothas, and dropping his bombs, and going back home again without losing a machine. So the Government have decided that the only thing to do is to put the best men we've got on the job—for the time being, anyway. Now, Clarke, the record of your squadron is higher than any in the line."

"Thank you, sir," gasped Nobby feebly, "but—but——"

"You'll clear out to-night," said the General. "Fill up your machines and take your squadron back across the Channel immediately after dark. Land at Northley. Don't say a word to anybody, of course. Just let your men think that they are taking-off at full squadron strength for special operations over the line. Can't have this kind of thing leaking out, you know!"

He moved towards the door.

"If we're careful, it *won't* leak out," he finished. "This aerodrome will still be working full steam by dawn, to-morrow. I've got an entirely new personnel arriving here, immediately after you leave. They'll be flying the same machines, carrying the same badges your squadron have now. Oh, by the way—directly you arrive home you must have all your badges painted out. When you meet the Gothas over London, it's possible that one or two may escape. And we don't want them to realise that we're having to withdraw squadrons from the line; which they will do if they catch sight of that badge of yours in a searchlight beam. Very well, Clarke, carry on."

NOBBY came back to life with a start. "Yes, sir," he breathed. "Yes, sir—but, sir, just one moment, sir."

This order, the whole idea, had been so utterly unexpected that it had taken some time to sink fully into his mind. Now that it had done so, however, Major Nobby Clarke, the war-wise veteran, was facing a very big problem.

"It's not my place to criticise, sir," he said, as the General hesitated, "but—but have the fellows in Whitehall really thought this thing over? The chaps at home are doing their very best. Amongst the London defence squadrons there are lots of men I'd be proud to have here, myself. You see, sir, the point about night air raids is——"

"What's the matter with you, Clarke?" asked the General. "After all your experience here in the line I should hardly imagine that you'd hesitate to

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take on——”

“If it was left to me, I *would* hesitate, sir,” said Nobby desperately. “And I’d hesitate for this reason. The Dustmen have got a—a pretty good reputation, as you said yourself. By drafting us back home, the War Office will expect big results.”

“They’ve got to *have* results,” said the General in a slightly edgy voice. “That’s just why——”

“But supposing they don’t get them?” answered Nobby, gesturing almost frantically. “Dealing with night raiders isn’t just a matter of a squadron’s fighting ability. Before you can fight a man, you’ve got to get to grips with him. It comes down to this, sir. If we can’t meet the Gothas when they come over, we can’t knock the beggars down. And if you’ll forgive me for saying so, sir, this squadron hasn’t got any better chance of meeting those London air raiders than the present Home squadrons have. That’s my point, sir.”

He saw that the General was hesitating, and pressed his argument as hard as he could.

“As things stand now, sir,” he continued, “with sound-detectors, search-lights, and all the rest of it in their present state, defence squadrons are just working on blind luck. If the War Office want to get results, they should tighten-up their efforts to *detect* the raiders and signal their exact positions so that defence squadrons can contact them. Even so, there’ll be a lot of hit and miss about it. I don’t really see how it can be otherwise.”

Nobby may not have known it, but he was voicing the biggest problem which air fighting has ever tackled—and with which it hasn’t got appreciably further even in this present Year of Grace.

The General, however, was a—General. He had learnt his fighting in South Africa, and Egypt. As a matter of fact, he still had a sneaking contempt for every war contrivance of a mechanical nature. In his subconscious mind—a solid and tenacious thing, as in all Generals—the word “battle” still con-

jured up a picture of horses and flags.

“I don’t care for excuses, Clarke,” he snapped. “I don’t deal in ‘em myself, and I don’t expect others to. Do you remember what Napoleon said—‘If a thing is impossible, make it possible by doing it’? That’s your job, now. You and your boys have built up a reputation; now it’s up to you to keep it. You’ll get every co-operation from other units that is available.”

Major Clarke risked the little gold crowns he wore on his shoulders—but then, by that time, he was in a temper.

“Napoleon didn’t fly, sir,” he barked. “And I can’t see this war being won on Napoleonic ideas—if you’ll forgive me saying so.”

Had Major Clarke been an ordinary Major, it is more than probable that he would have been withered, there and then, by a blasting reprimand, and marked down in future as a man unworthy of his office. But even his Napoleonic General had realised, by this stage in the War, that really good field-officers are few and far between.

“Good morning, Clarke!” he said, affecting not to have heard the outburst, as he opened the rattling door and stepped out.

Nobby drew a deep breath.

“Good morning, sir,” he gritted, and then sat down to pass an uncertain hand over his forehead.

NOBBY CLARKE went through a bad minute or two. Without having any highflown ideas about his job, he was a born soldier. To him, the Squadron was something more than just a squadron. It was a living thing which he, himself, had built up out of carefully-chosen material, through tragic and heartbreaking years. He was as jealous of its reputation as a lover might be of his lady’s good name. And now, because of a lot of fatheaded old gentlemen, talking from padded armchairs in Whitehall, the Squadron was due to meet failure and humiliation.

For, unless a blind streak of luck came their way, there was not the slightest hope that they would do any better in the black heights above London than any other

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fighting unit already engaged on the city's defence.

And when they failed, the old gentlemen of Whitehall would shake their heads and tell each other that the Dustmen were nowhere near as good as they had been thought—just another case of these freakish war-reputations which were as easily pricked as glittering bubbles.

CHAPTER IV

Edison Has an Idea

AS Major Clarke strolled towards the mess-anteroom to break the news to his officers, he had the traitorous but fervent hope that an obliging German would drop a bomb on Whitehall that night.

But in the anteroom, as general conversation ceased politely at his entrance, he walked towards the fireplace and turned to stare at the assembled group. Since it was just before lunch, everyone was present. The inventive Edison was sitting at a side table, with a stub of pencil and a paper covered with complicated drawings.

"Listen to me, everyone," said Nobby grimly. "Shut the door over there. All right, now. If anyone wants to see me shot at dawn he's got a first-class opportunity of doing so. I'm going to disobey orders just passed on to me by a fatheaded, pompous old—by the General in command of this section of the line. Before I say anything, however, you've got to listen to an order from *me*, and you've damned well got to adhere to it! Not one of you is to repeat a single word of what you hear inside these walls."

The Squadron were astonished. Except in cases of misdemeanour, or during flare-ups of his well-known, volatile temper, Major Clarke was seldom serious. He had the trick of making himself a lighthearted, cheerful companion, as well as a commanding officer. But now they recognised the new tone in his voice, and dead silence reigned. Edison looked up from his drawings, his square face as serious as ever.

Briefly, the Major outlined the orders

he had just had from the General.

"Well, that's the position," he concluded. "We leave to-night. Tomorrow night we shall be on duty at Northley Aerodrome, on the outskirts of London, waiting for a raid warning. When we get it, we've got to take-off and do what no other fully trained and experienced London defence squadron has yet managed to do. We've got to find the raiders and bring them down. In short, certain gentlemen in Whitehall have ordered us to find a needle in a haystack. And I've told you everything, in the wild, blind hope that one of you may be able to make a suggestion which will help."

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"I hate talking this way," he went on, "but I think all of you are glad that you are members of this squadron. I've carefully weeded-out every man who didn't seem as though he put the Squadron's reputation above everything else. And now, because a lot of old—because of these new orders, you can all realise that we're facing a bad failure, and a loss of that reputation, through no fault of our own."

Directly he had stopped, there was a general buzz of low conversation. Every man in the room was angry. Every one of them knew the impossibility of the task which they had been set. To have been ordered back to London to help in the business of home defence in the ordinary way would have been different—even welcome. But in this case, where immediate results were demanded in impossible circumstances—

"But surely you told him, Major?" said young Carter, the leader of the afternoon patrol. "Someone's got to tell these old dears in Whitehall that, although we'll do our best, they can't expect—"

"We have our orders," said Nobby who, as a dutiful soldier, was trying to control himself when he thought of the General.

"WELL, chaps, there's one thing we *could* do," said Edison from his distant corner of the room. "Whilst

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Nobby's been talking, I've been thinking. Now, you chaps all know that I'm a bit of a fellow for ideas, and——"

"Oh, for Lord's sake shut up!" snapped Major Clarke, his temper finally boiling over as he remembered his morning adventure in Edison's aerial trick-box.

"Well you asked for suggestions, Major," said the inventor a little ruefully, "and hang it all, I don't see that there's any reason to be rude."

"The only reason why I wasn't murdered to-day by that filthy bundle of tricks you fixed up on your machine," said the Major, heatedly, "has yet to become plain to my clouded intelligence. Look here, Edison, things can go too far, sometimes. We're speaking seriously, now. I'm willing to forget everything else, but if you waste our time with a lot of idiotic, cranky Heath-Robinson suggestions I'll—I'll—oh, for Heaven's sake have a bit of sense, and keep quiet!"

Edison smiled in a soothing way.

"My dear old Major, it's a good job I know you so well," he said. "I realise that you're overstrained, all keyed-up. Good Lord, I know what it's like, well enough. I've been like it myself for the past two or three days while I've been working-out the details of a new invention of mine—a quick-release parachute that opens of its own accord, and can be used by the pilot of a small machine. And if you think this interception business over, the first thing you realise is that the only reason defence machines can't get to grips with the raiders, is that they can't see them."

Nobby sat down suddenly, and held his head in his hands. It was better to let Edison talk—better than losing one's temper completely and saying unforgivable things to a man who, for all his faults, was a first-class fighter and a courageous soldier.

"It must have taken you a long time to work that out, Edison," said one of the others, sarcastically. "What a brain! What an intellect!"

"Just a matter of going logically to work," said Edison with perfect seriousness. "Now if we could arrange that the German raiders' positions were sig-

nalled accurately, we could get at them."

"Grand!" said Carter, viciously. "What are you going to do—get into Germany disguised as a sausage, and cover their Gothas with luminous paint when they aren't looking?"

"My dear Carter, this is hardly the time for joking," said Edison, shaking a reproving head. "Now, my idea is this. First of all we get a Gotha."

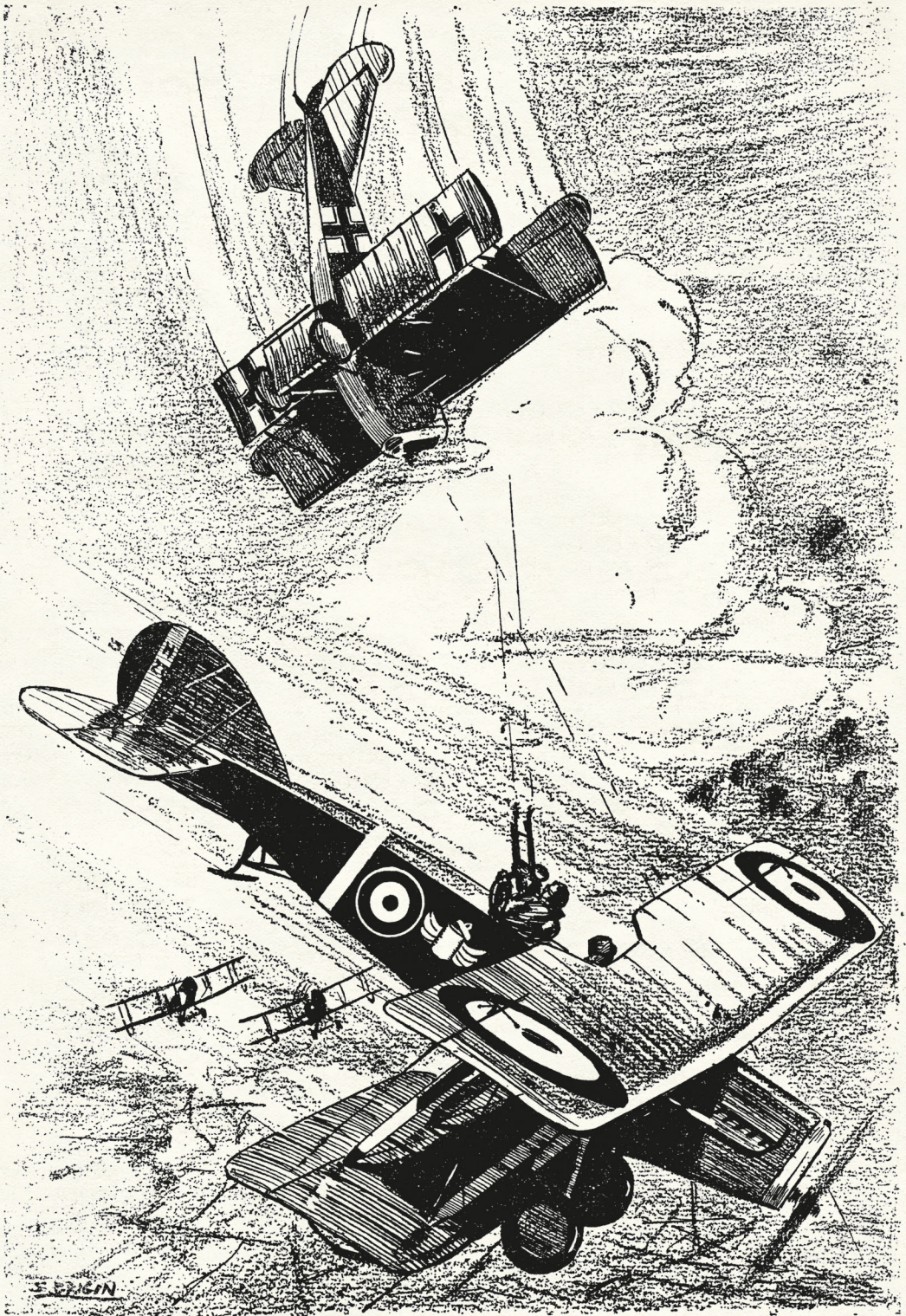
"It's certainly an *idea*," said one of the others. "Of course, the Kaiser may not be willing to hand one over when you first ring him up. But if you explain——"

"A Gotha came down, intact, on the outskirts of London last week," said Edison. "I read about it in the papers. Chap had a broken crankshaft, and they've got his machine, safe and sound, at some actodrome. So there's no reason why we shouldn't get the loan of it. Now then, if we could get that Gotha, a couple of us—say Nobby and I—could take it up after dark and fly it round London at about fourteen or fifteen thousand feet. There's plenty of room for a wireless set on board, and we should hear the first of the raid warnings. We should get good information of the direction in which the raiders are supposed to be coming. And don't forget that a Gotha, without her bombs, could be flown for seven or eight hours on end if necessary."

SOMEONE laughed, but in the main the Squadron were quiet. Vaguely they began to think that, by a fluke, the inventor had struck something with practical possibilities.

"By arrangement," went on Edison cheerfully, "we would have a searchlight playing on us the whole time. That searchlight would be careful to keep us in its beam. And that means that any other Gothas coming along would be sure to see us. If we were in an ordinary, British machine, they would see us at once and dodge away in the darkness before we could get to grips. But because we are an unmistakable Gotha—one of their own kind—they naturally won't try to avoid

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The Fokker turned flat on its back and Spandau bullets missed the Major's head by inches

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us. They'll think we're one of their own party. You know what night flying is, and how easy it is to get separated!"

"You know," said Carter, "you know, there *might* be something in that. Of course it's crazy, like everything else Edison thinks of, but—but I say, Nobby, it might be worth talking-over."

"I haven't finished yet," objected the inventor, ignoring the insult, "This is the real point of the scheme. It's quite obvious that the pilots of the other Gothas will come within range of the one we are flying, instead of avoiding it. They will come close because they will want to exchange signals; the raid-leader'll want to give his orders, and all that sort of thing. And directly we see them, we can go for 'em and at the same time let fly a shower of Very lights which will show our position to every other machine in the sky. Then the real fun will start."

MAJOR CLARKE was staring at the ground. At first he had been completely inattentive; then Carter's voice had brought his mind back to the conversation. The idea seemed wild and idiotic at first, then, almost immediately, it seemed to have possibilities. He sat up suddenly. In a case like this, the wildest and most improbable chance was worth taking. After all, it was better than cruising round the sky, once the raid warning had been given, and just hoping.

"The idea of our Gotha being kept spotted by a searchlight beam from the moment it takes-off is no good," he said quietly. "Half the trouble about these raids is that the Huns have usually arrived over the city before anyone fully realises they're there. We'd run the risk that the beggars were already there—in which case they'd see our Gotha coming right up from the ground and see through the trick at once. No, the thing to do would be for us to arrive at a certain spot at a certain altitude at a certain time, all by previous arrangement. A couple of searchlights could train just on that spot at the right second. There would be danger of them missing us, but we'd see the beams and

could fly right into 'em. Then, by signal-lamps underneath the fuselage, we could show them that we were the machine they were looking for, without any possibility of mistake. The ack-ack batteries would fire all round us instead of dead at us—not that it makes much difference, anyhow."

"A most valuable suggestion, my dear Nobby," said Edison, nodding solemnly. "I should have thought of it myself eventually, of course. But——"

"Wait a minute," said Carter excitedly, "wait a minute, why not have the whole squadron following the Gotha, from the moment it takes-off? The Gotha can show a white tail-light or something like that. We can follow that light at a distance of perhaps a mile, so that we'll be right there when——"

"No good, again!" snapped Nobby. "We don't know from just which direction the other Gothas will be arriving. When they do catch sight of us, they may be dead behind—in which case the following squadron would be silhouetted against the searchlight glare. That squadron would be easily recognisable as British machines and it'd ruin the whole show. No, you lads'll have to keep the opposite side of London to us, all the time. You'll know the spot where the searchlights will pick us up, and you can be watching for it. Then, when we show our Verys, it'll only take you a matter of minutes to cross the London sky and get to work."

Excited conversation immediately became general. Most of the men were on their feet, and all talked at the same time. But Edison, as was characteristic of him, immediately went back to his side table, took a fresh sheet of paper and began frowning over drawings and diagrams.

CHAPTER V

An Inventor is Discomfited

IT was just after ten o'clock the following night when a fifteen-strong squadron of Bristol Fighters, with freshly painted sides, dropped down into the ground floodlights of Northley aero-

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drome and landed, one after another, as quickly as possible. Directly the last machine had been counted in, the flood-lights were switched off and, like the rest of the vast area that was London, Northley became only a vague mass. Yet inside its biggest hangar, a small army of mechanics were already feverishly at work, unloading aircraft components from several huge lorries.

The components were those of a big, twin-engined Gotha bomber, on the front of which was the eagle of Imperial Germany, and on the wings and tail, the crosses of the German Air Service.

Since the previous night, Major Nobby Clarke had been busy on telephones, and now, in company with the C.O. of Northley Aerodrome, he walked into the big hangar to view the results of his conversations.

"I'll check-over the details with you later, Clarke," said his companion, "but I think we've got them all pretty well taped. From any height it's pretty easy to pick up the Hackney Marshes, and the River Lea. Subject to your agreement, we've arranged that two search-lights are to pick you out, right above that spot, at this time to-morrow night—which is the usual time the raiders arrive. Your height will be twelve thousand feet, and I'm having signal lights let into the fuselage underneath the Gotha so that there can be no mistake. You'll arrange, of course, that your squadron will be right on the opposite side of the city at that particular time."

"Good," said Nobby, and moved slightly as Edison came into the hangar and walked past them. So engrossed was the Major in his companion's remarks that he hardly noticed the originator of the scheme who, with a thick bundle of formidable-looking papers and drawings under one arm, went straight up to the great craft which was now being put together.

NONE of the Squadron saw anything more of Edison that night. They had dined before leaving France, and most of them went straight to their separate

sleeping-huts, so that his absence was not noticed. Until very nearly twelve o'clock, the Major sat in the squadron-office with his host, working at details, and telephoning gun-battery stations and searchlights at various points around London. It was not until quite late next morning that he sought Edison out, for the purpose of a careful rehearsal of the evening's show.

And when he did find Edison, he discovered that worthy struggling on the floor of his sleeping-hut, and looking rather like a hibernating snow-bear, in the midst of billowing folds of white silk.

"Oh, hello, Nobby," said the inventor, passing a hand over a perspiring brow. "This is my new parachute. Luckily I was able to find time to work on the thing. May need it to-night. You see, it's going to be a ticklish business—bomber fighting bomber. If we have any luck, we'll be in the middle of a whole crowd of 'em, and we may have to jump for it. So I'm fixing one of these up for you, too."

Nobby grinned but shook his head. He had all of the 1918-aeroplane-pilot's distrust of a parachute in any form. For in those early days there were constant tragic accidents, even amongst the kite-balloon men who were the experts of the parachute trade.

"If you think you're going to get me hooked-up in one of those damned, suicidal mushrooms, you can think again, Edison," he said. "My time will come when it's due; and meanwhile I'm not going to make things worse by hopping out on a footling, overgrown umbrella which, ten to one, won't open anyhow."

"Oh, but this one will," said Edison, standing up and taking a folded case from off his bed.

"This one on the floor is the one I'm making for you," he went on buckling the folded case on to his back. "I've got an arrangement of springs inside. The whole thing is forced open and chucked out. It's bound to act. All you have to do is to pull this lever, here, on the front buckle. Look, I can fold it back again—I'll show you——"

With a confident smile he pulled the lever indicated.

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Nothing happened.

Nobby gave a sudden, wild howl of laughter, and held his sides.

"Why—this—it's most peculiar! I was sure of that spring-release—" gasped Edison turning in an effort to see his own back, while he jerked at the handle again. It was an unfortunate movement. It brought the parachute-case directly facing Major Clarke, and at that very moment the new invention acted.

The case flew open and, propelled by a powerful spring, a folded parachute shot out, striking the Major in the face with such force that he staggered back and then fell flat with an alarming thud. The folds of silk spread in a wild tangle and Major Nobby Clarke entirely disappeared from view under a billowing, white mass.

"There!" said Edison delightedly. "There, you see? It's perfect! I must just ease that catch a little, but——"

Out of the billowing folds a very red face had appeared, followed almost immediately by a very hard fist. The fist impinged with violence on Edison's nose, and he rolled back with a howl.

"That's about enough of it," panted Major Clarke. "When I want to get myself up like a one-man Russian ballet, I'll give you full and due notice. Meanwhile come out. *Come out!* Come somewhere where your blasted inventions aren't lying-around, so that we can go over the details of the flight to-night in safety. And get *this*. The next ingenious gadget you try on me—I'll have you plugged right inside the nearest lunatic asylum in a straight-jacket. Do I make myself plain?"

The inventor dabbed at a reddened nose and staggered out of the hut. Like many a pioneer of other days, he felt himself to be a misjudged and ill-used man.

CHAPTER VI

Gotha Decoy

AT a height of twelve thousand feet over the Hackney Marshes at precisely ten o'clock that same evening, a

German Gotha steadily thundered along, following a circular course. In the control-cockpit high up in the nose, sat Major Clarke, looking out over the side and keenly watching the raking search-light beams which turned the London sky into a vast, white octopus with a black body. In the gun-cockpit immediately in front of him and slightly lower down, crouched Edison, the inventor, with a bulky parachute-case strapped to his back. Edison was working on the floor amidst a tangle of wires. He had a pocket-torch and a notebook covered in diagrams, on which from time to time he made cryptic marks with a stub of pencil. He was frowning and muttering to himself as he worked.

Apart from these two occupants, the great machine was empty. It carried only petrol and the front machine-gun. Extra tanks had been added in place of the usual load of bombs.

Yet, as a result of the ingenious Edison's work and his passion for detail, there was a nice little array of bombs slung beneath the fuselage, immediately behind. They were bombs made out of cardboard and covered in aluminium paint.

Certainly they looked quite realistic, and the Major had not objected to them being put into position, since it all added to the reality of the thing. Had he realised just what Edison had been up to in addition—and thought things over carefully as was his habit—he would have objected very violently. For Edison had arranged those bombs so that they would drop clear of their mountings in the normal way when toggles were pulled. He had led the toggle-wires through to his own cockpit. And in that cockpit he had also led the signal-lamp wires on a complicated circuit of his own design, so that by electrical means he could also send the necessary Very lights shooting out from pistols he had arranged in clips near the tail.

It was ambitious work on the inventor's part—perhaps even a little too ambitious, for that complicated wiring-system had not been completely finished by the time the Gotha left the ground—a fact which

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the inventor had tactfully kept from Major Clarke. Moreover, to add to his anxiety, in leaving the ground his notebook had been blown open by the tremendous forward draught, and he had lost a highly-important page. Now it was a case of going by memory.

Then, from immediately behind and slightly higher up, Edison suddenly heard a faint yell and glanced back over his shoulder. He started violently. The machine, as he could see it from his cockpit in the nose, looked altogether unreal. Its wings were white and transparent, with the spars and stringers making an intricate pattern. Then he realised that the Gotha had been caught squarely in a searchlight beam, and that Major Clarke was shouting and gesturing for him to show the electric signal lamps beneath the fuselage, which would assure the light-men and gunners below that they had got the right machine.

Edison thought feverishly. He groped amongst his wires and singled out two, which, so far as he could remember, were all-important. He crossed them and touched them together to make the recurring current which would send the necessary signal-message from the fuselage lamps. Unfortunately, he could not see the lamps, and had no means of knowing if they were acting or not.

Unfortunately, they were not !

Up in his eyrie at the controls, Major Clarke had no idea of the delicacy of the situation. He swerved the big machine from side to side as though trying to dodge the searchlights which moved with him—but he was careful, all the time, not to get out of their glare. He strained his eyes through the surrounding wall of gloom, eager to catch the first glimpse of any other Gothas that might be attracted by the illuminated decoy.

DOWN on the ground far below, the officer in charge of an anti-aircraft battery which had the range laid dead to an inch, dropped his binoculars on their strap and bit his lip.

"Now what?" he asked the world in general. "That machine's giving no answering signal. What the devil am I

supposed to do? If it's a real Hun we've picked up by a wild fluke, it will be dropping bombs and killing Heaven knows how many people inside the next ten seconds! I'd bet a five-pound note I could plaster it out of existence, with one shot. But if it *isn't* a Hun—if it's the one we're looking for—if the chaps have made some mistake about their signal-lights——"

The moment was tense. All over London, gunnery-officers were in a state of consternation at the absence of those signal lights. Meanwhile, according to prearrangement, they were putting up a barrage, well clear of the raider, to make things look real.

"Put one up near him," suggested one puzzled officer's second-in-command. "Tickle him up! If we put one close, and he doesn't give us a signal, he *must* be a Hun!"

His superior rapped out an order, and both men swayed slightly, clapping their hands to their ears, as a nearby gun, shrouded in darkness, let forth a shattering roar.

And twelve thousand feet higher up, as a high-explosive shell burst about a hundred and fifty yards dead ahead of him, Major Nobby Clarke ducked instinctively, and gave a muttered curse. It was all very well to keep up an appearance of reality—but that shell had been altogether too darned close for his liking! He leant forward and bellowed at the top of his voice.

"Tell that damned fool down there to be more careful!" he bellowed. "You can tell him in Morse, with those signal lights. Another concussion like that, and this crate will start to break up——"

Edison heard the message. With perspiration breaking out all over him, he realised that the lights couldn't be working, after all. He got busy with his wires again. Tracing them back as best he could, he found one he thought was correct, and crossed it experimentally.

Immediately there was a startling thud from immediately behind, and a white Very light went arching up from somewhere in the tail, to hang like a spluttering

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blossom in the black sky.

"*Edison!*" howled Nobby. "Edison, you damned idiot! What the devil are you doing? What do you want to call the chaps up for, now? We haven't seen anything——"

EDISON, the inventor, has one thing to his eternal credit. His idea acted! Entirely unknown to either of them, a five-strong squadron of Gothas, widely scattered apart, had been approaching London from the north at just about the time the decoy Gotha was first caught in the searchlight beam.

According to their usual arrangement, the Gothas had broken formation almost immediately after crossing the coast, and were now approaching London in a wide fan, out of sight and out of touch with each other. But the leader of the squadron, directly he saw what appeared to be one of his own companions caught in a searchlight beam, frowned in puzzlement. According to his own order, his followers should have been spread out to his right. How this one had managed to stray away to the left, was a problem.

It certainly indicated disobedience of orders, or else a bad error on the pilot's part. And to the discipline-loving German soul, either was a heinous crime which must be visited on the heads of the delinquents when they finally returned to their home aerodrome. For the sake of discipline, therefore, the erring machine must be identified by the number painted on its side, so that the right man could be singled out for correction.

The German leader changed course. Slightly higher up and keeping well clear of those searchlight beams, he came close in, trying to get near enough to see the number. And only when he could see no number at all did he have his first, faint instincts of suspicion.

It was at that moment that Edison, the inventor, gave his unintentional Very light display. The light arched up into the air, spluttering and blazing brilliantly, when the German leader was no more than a hundred and fifty yards distant. It lit up the German machine quite clearly.

And Major Nobby Clarke saw it.

Immediately, he brought his Gotha round in a slamming, headlong turn which so took the groping electrician by surprise that he rolled upon the floor of his cockpit and planted his face amongst the tangle of electric wires. Several of them sparked, so that he felt as though he had put his face into a hornets' nest. At the same time, four more Very lights rocketed out from the tail of the machine, so that the surrounding district was even more brilliantly illuminated than before.

"Get going, Edison!" bellowed Nobby, bouncing frantically in his seat. "*Edison! Edison, we've found them!* Come on, use your gun——"

Edison heaved himself up. In doing so, he managed to foul the toggle wires, and three bombs dropped away from beneath the machine. But they were distinctly queer bombs. Instead of falling straight down as ordinary, honest bombs should do, they turned end-over-end; some of them actually wafted up, as they were caught by the tremendous back-draught of the threshing propellers. Which, after all, was natural enough, since they were nothing much more than cardboard-covered balloons.

Now your German may be stolid and unimaginative, but he distrusts anything which acts directly against all the known forces of Nature. The astounded pilot of the nearby German Gotha had been puzzled by the Very light display—he could not understand if the pilot was trying to warn him off, or not. Then he saw those unreal, nightmare, floating bombs! And as the two machines came to within less than fifty yards' distance, he saw that there was no number on either side of the other Gotha's fuselage.

Through his telephone he immediately bellowed orders and turned sharply. His forward gunner jumped to his weapon and let fly at the big shape that was sliding through his ring sights. It was good shooting. A hail of very nearly a hundred Spandau bullets went through the right wing of Nobby's big machine, dead central. That hail split both the outer struts and cracked the lower main

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spar. The result was that the wing began to buckle, the lower wing surging upwards as the mighty strain of the engine told against the increasing weakness. Soon the whole engine-casing was wobbling and swaying alarmingly.

"Edison!" almost shrieked Nobby. "Edison, what the devil are you doing——?"

At the same time he reached forward and cut out his right engine altogether. But he was too late. There was a shuddering crash, the weakened bearers gave under the strain, the whirling propeller took a different angle, and next instant the shuddering engine had disappeared in a whirl of flying fragments of wood and fabric.

Nobby's Gotha dropped earthwards with a sickening, lurching movement.

CHAPTER VII

Descent of the Dustmen

IT was at that critical moment that the sprawling Edison first managed to get fully to his feet. He heaved up, facing backwards, and his parachute caught on the gun-handle behind him. Instinctively he turned round to grab the gun and fire it, but all he managed to do was to turn the gun-mounting where it was caught on his parachute-case, so that it wasn't there at all when he faced front.

"It's gone!" panted Edison. "Dear me, the damn thing must have been shot off! Oh, good Heavens, look at that wing——" Behind him, his parachute-case opened, the catch ripped undone by the gun-handle. The white silk began to flutter out. Nobby, fighting for control just above, saw it. The Gotha was drifting into a spin—there was not the faintest hope of saving it now. And in any case, the German leader had turned again and was now diving ponderously to the attack.

Nobby waved an arm wildly over the right side, pointing down.

"Jump, Edison!" he bellowed. "Go on, get clear! Use your damned umbrella—we haven't a hope!"

A rattle of machine-gun fire, opening at the same time, drowned his voice so

that Edison did not hear it. He only saw that gesture to the right. He thought Major Clarke was saying something about the smashed wing—he hadn't the faintest idea his parachute had opened.

Edison's faults did not include any lack of courage. He interpreted Nobby's gesture in his own way, in the way that seemed most obvious. There was not much time to think in that wild chaos of black, stark danger. The shaken and dazed Edison remembered having read how someone had once climbed out on a smashed wing to equalise the balance.

Without the slightest hesitation, he did so now, thinking he was obeying his leader's request. He heaved himself up out of the cockpit, clawed for a hold, grabbed a bracing wire and ducked through it on to the trembling and shuddering wing, most of which had already broken apart and disappeared. He meant to climb out as far as possible towards its extremity.

Whereupon he was dragged violently backwards by some unseen, giant force which he thought at first had plucked him clean away from the machine!

Only as the back of his head struck violently against cross-bracing wires did he realise that he was, indeed, still on board. Yet, even so, the pressure holding him there was terrific. What on earth it was, he hadn't the faintest idea. He could hardly breathe owing to the pull of the straps around his chest and which he could not undo. He could not move an inch.

Which was perhaps understandable, for, spreading out above and slightly behind that half-shattered wing, was a wide open, billowing parachute, firmly attached to Edison's back by his harness—harness which was now firmly jammed through the cross-bracing wires behind him!

Of all the things that had surprised the German squadron leader on that eventful evening, the sight which now met his eyes undoubtedly gave him the worst shock of all. A man had climbed out on to the wing of that doomed and spinning wreck, and let loose a parachute! Surely he had tied that parachute to the wing in

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some way? But its effect was immediate. It stopped the spin. It brought the disabled Gotha up with a lurching, slithering, drunken movement, so that it went down more or less level, like a falling leaf.

Nobby Clarke was nearly weeping.

"Edison!" he was choking, although he did not know he spoke aloud. "My God, Edison, that's just like you! Confound your crazy ideas—but I believe you've done it. I believe you've saved us both, if those beggars don't get us first. I believe I can get her down!"

From somewhere overhead he suddenly heard an ominous roar, and ducked instinctively. He expected bullets to come hailing into his back—yet no bullets arrived. In spite of that, there was a sound of continuous firing. And then as Nobby looked up for one moment from his drunken, crazy course, he saw something which made him give a yell that nearly cracked his throat.

Three Bristol Fighters, briefly caught in the jerking searchlight beam, were diving straight at the German leader's Gotha, which was no more than a hundred yards away!

ALTHOUGH Nobby Clarke didn't know it, the explanation was simple. From their vantage point high above London, the Dustmen, cruising in close, orderly formation, had watched the decoy Gotha picked up according to arrangement by the searchlight. At that distance and at that angle they had no means of knowing that the signal lamps were not showing. But they *did* see the first Very light which the groping Edison had unintentionally sent forth. And so far as they were concerned, a Very light was the signal that the decoy had brought its enemy to close quarters.

So, in delighted haste, the squadron proceeded flat-out across the sky. They were not surprised when they saw the second shower of Vercys released by the inventor's stinging face crashing amongst the tangled wires. But because the German squadron had been spread out, according to order and discipline, on its leader's right, they were clearly visible,

in those spluttering Very lights to the Bristol squadron which was on its way.

"By golly!" breathed Carter, in the lead of the Dustmen, "I'll never call Edison a cranky inventor after this. By golly, he's rung the bell. He's done it!"

In that clear light he raised a hand, and waved it in the signal for the formation to break in pairs. Then he saw Nobby's Gotha apparently breaking-up in mid-air—saw the parachute blossom out and open, just when its stabilising pull was most needed. And in a steep-angle dive he led his next man straight at the German leader, who appeared like a ghost out of the vague, surrounding darkness.

Any big bombing machine is a spiny creature to attack, at the best of times. Carrying four or more gunners, its angles of fire are almost limitless. It has no real "blind-spot," from which it may be attacked with impunity.

But the Dustmen were in no mood to worry about little things like that. They attacked, sweeping amongst those Gothas with a plunging fury that broke the already shaken nerves of the German pilots and gunners. Carter got a burst dead through the German leader's cockpit in the first attack and then swerved away, cartwheeling over as flames leapt up and the would-be avenger turned into a roaring mass of petrol-fire!

Two Bristols went down almost straight away, paying the price of that first, plunging dive into almost certain death. But their executioners paid the same grim fee almost immediately afterwards. The men inside the great twin-engined machines were already pulling frantically at the bomb-toggles to lighten weight, and bombs were raining down into the desolate wastes of the Hackney Marshes, where they sent up such a blaze of fire and caused such wreckage that the place looked like a battlefield next morning. Yet in spite of that, one bomb was struck fairly on the nose by a bullet from a swooping Bristol Fighter in the very moment that its catch was released. It exploded with deafening concussion, and completely wiped out that single machine,

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which seemed to turn into nothing but a rain of blazing petrol and fabric.

Gasping for breath, agonised and still dazed with amazement, Edison, powerless to move, watched that spectacular and historic battle. Nobby, meanwhile, was still fighting for control. He had shut off his remaining engine as he saw the ground approaching, and he could smell the drifting cordite-reek from the vast, explosive upheaval of the marshes. Somewhere nearby, a flaming winged wreck was still falling. Blazing bonfires showed dotted, here and there, about the black expanse around.

Then trees appeared ahead and Nobby jerked his stick frantically to try and get the nose up and lessen the force of the crash. Next instant he was catapulted clean forward out of his seat, went head-over-heels into the top branches of a spreading elm where he hung, senseless, with both arms broken and a collection of ribs like a stove-in lifeboat, until the ambulance-crews eventually found him.

IN a private ward of a large military hospital, three weeks later, Major Nobby Clarke once again began to find that life was reasonably worth-while. He could breathe without pain now. Lying propped-up in bed, he was completely helpless because of his bandaged arms. But he was smoking a cigarette which was obligingly removed from his lips, now and again, by a Very Senior Officer who was sitting on the side of the bed, chatting to him.

"Well," said the Senior Officer, "it's a queer position. I can't understand it. Can you give me any good reason why your Lieutenant Edwards refuses the decoration?"

Nobby shook his head. He and Edison had talked things over already. He knew the whole story. And in his next words he spoke with perfect truth.

"Edwards deserves the decoration more than any man I know," he said quietly. "I'd give him the Victoria Cross, if it was in my power, and if he'd take it. Incidentally I had the devil's own job to make him accept promotion

to second-in-command of the Squadron. But—well—you know how some of these chaps are. He's modest. And whatever happens, he's told me he's just not going to accept a medal."

The Senior Officer arose, looking puzzled. Obliging, he took the patient's short cigarette and tossed it out of the window.

"Oh, well, that's that, then," he said. "I suppose he's got his own ideas on the subject. We'll let the matter drop. Anyway——"

He smiled as he opened the door.

"Anyway, the Dustmen did their stuff!" he chuckled. "And knowing you, Nobby, I imagine you think more of that than you do of your nice little cross!"

Nobby grinned, but did not answer. He had tried to make Edison accept the offered decoration, though, in part, he had understood why Edison refused. In his usual, solemn manner, the inventor had pointed out that although his ideas had, by good luck, proved successful, they might equally as well, and by his own fault, have been the means of staging a great disaster.

Just after the Senior Officer had left, Edison, himself, appeared in the ward. In his hand was a bed-table of the type that can be propped across a patient. It had a wooden desk-like attachment, to which Edison pointed proudly as he placed it across Nobby Clarke's knees. Apart from an array of plaster and bandage about his face, he seemed none the worse for his stirring adventures.

"I made it for you, Nobby, old boy," he said. "I know you're keen on reading, so now all you've got to do is to put your book there. Press those catches, and the pages will turn over for you, automatically. Just a minute now, I'll get a book——"

Walking with a slight limp, he departed from the room. Nobby grinned. Gingerly he leant forward, raised one of his bandaged arms and pressed a metal catch on the desk. Instantly a lever sprang out of the desk-bottom and caught him smartly across the nose.

"Now then," chanted the returning

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Edison, appearing in the doorway. "You just fix the book so that the levers take hold of the pages——"

Edison suddenly stopped. He turned. A look of terror came over his bandaged face, and he gave a choking howl.

For Major Nobby Clarke was heaving himself out of bed.

With a crash, the automatic book-rest struck the floor, its levers buzzed so that it looked like a bluebottle stranded on its back.

"You," gasped Major Nobby. "Why, you dangerous, crazy, murderous——"

Fortunately, a Sister appeared just then, and the inventor wisely took refuge behind her skirts. In his new position as second-in-command of the Dustmen, he had to think on lines of sober caution.

And it is well known that the power of a good woman is the greatest in all the World !

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 and no letter should contain more than three separate questions

EUROPE'S 300 M.P.H. FIGHTERS (G. H. Royd, London, S.W.2). No, Britain is by no means the only European nation with fighters capable of more than 300 m.p.h. France has the Morane-Saulnier 405 (960 h.p. Hispano) which does 305 m.p.h. and carries four machine-guns and a cannon ; Germany has the Messerschmidt Bf. 109 (950 h.p. Mercedes) which does 310 m.p.h. ; Italy, too, claims 320 m.p.h. for the Breda 64-65 ; as does also Soviet Russia for her latest 960 h.p. Hispano-engined fighter. All the above, incidentally, are low-wing monoplanes.

BATTLE GUNS (Ken Thomas, Great Yarmouth). (1) You lose your bet. The Fairey Battle has one gun in the starboard wing, operated by the pilot, and another movable gun for the observer. (2) Yes, the Hurricane has several guns, but just how many it is not permitted to disclose.

MEDIUM BOMBERS (J. S. Wright, Dublin, I.F.S.). The Bristol Blenheim could make rings—or at least a ring—round Germany's latest equivalent type, the Heinkel III. Blenheim's top speed is 280 m.p.h., Heinkel's is 256 m.p.h., with two 960 h.p. Mercedes engines. Both types have an approximate range of 1,000 miles.

ROUND-THE-WORLD SOLO (Arthur Newton, Liverpool). Sorry to spoil your ambition, but a round-the-world solo flight has already been made. The late Wiley Post, one-eyed American airman, did it in July, 1933, flying via New York, Berlin, Moscow, Irkutsk, Khabarovsk, Fairbanks, New York in 7 days 18 hours 49 minutes. Still, there's yet a Pole to Pole flight to be made—if you're really ambitious !

THE MONOFOX (C. R. B. Elliott, Oadby, Leicestershire). (1) The Fairey Monofox is a high performance single-seater fighter biplane, the design of which was based on that of the Fairey Fox VI day-bomber, from which it differs only in its accommodation, armament and radiator position. The Monofox can be converted into a two-seater in less than one hour. (2) The aircraft depicted in the photograph you send is apparently a camouflaged Vicker Wellesley long-range bomber.

FOR EXTRA RANGE (R. C. Hayter, Addlestone, Surrey). The torpedo-like objects sometimes seen beneath the wings of a Vickers Wellesley are auxiliary petrol-tanks, by means of which the range of the aircraft can be very appreciably increased. They are not a standard fitting.

BOMBER SPEEDS (Bernard White, Northampton). (1) No performance figures have yet been released for the bomber types you mention. (2) The Battle has one forward firing gun, but no mention may be made of the armament of the other aircraft listed. In future, please note that a stamped, addressed envelope must accompany all enquiries.

MASS-BALANCES (J. M. Hale, St. Albans). (1) Mass-balances, usually in the form of streamlined metal weights, are fitted to prevent "flutter," or excessive vibration, on an aeroplane's control surfaces. (2) Names of military aircraft adopted by the R.A.F. are usually chosen by the makers and approved by the Air Ministry.

TOWED TAKE-OFFS (R. Janson, Leith). The lighters used by the R.N.A.S. for towing Camels behind men-of-war were specially built of steel with a stepped hull and were of such efficient underwater shape that they could be towed behind a destroyer travelling at 30 knots. A 30-foot deck was laid across the lighter and on this the Camel was mounted and secured in flying position. To launch the aircraft, the destroyer steamed fast into wind, the Camel's engine was opened up, and at a given signal the pilot operated a "quick release" gear and soared up into flight. Commander Samson's first experiments, made with a Camel on skids, ended in an accident, but subsequent attempts with a wheeled undercarriage and with the lighter's flying-deck tilted towards the bow, so that it was horizontal to the water when towing at full speed, were signally successful.

LAST FLIGHTS (W. G. Burt, Devonport). Mannock was killed while flying an S.E.5a and Richthofen met his death in a Fokker Dr. 1 triplane.
(More Replies to Readers on page 429.)

GO BY THE VULTURES

Six Thousand Miles was the Distance of the McGregor Air Race from England to the Cape—and Six Thousand Miles offer many Chances to a Ruthless Man with an Old Score to Settle

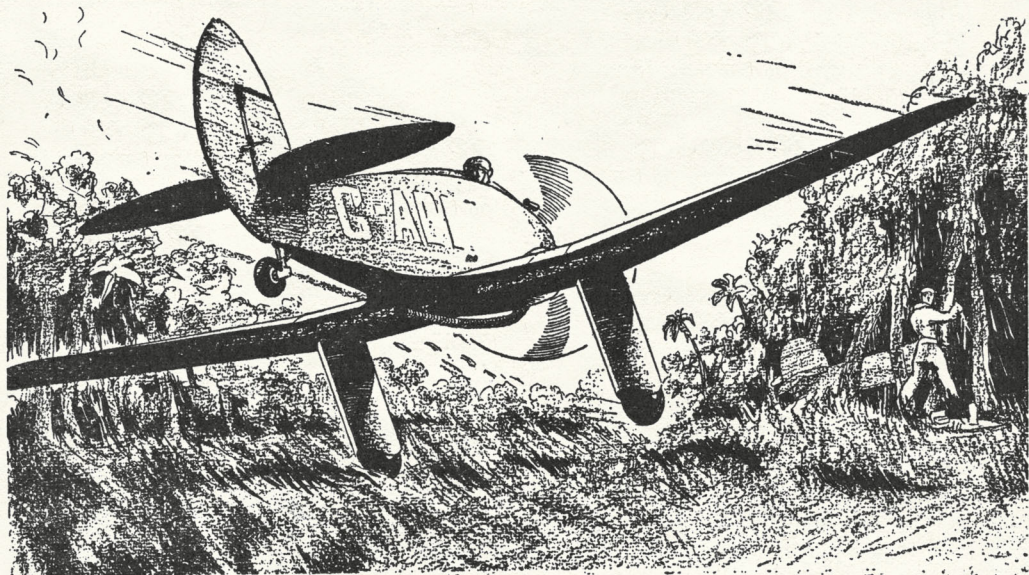
By WILFRID TREMELLEN

OUTSIDE on the dark aerodrome, the engines were warming up in the charge of mechanics. In the stuffy Pilots' Room that had been thrown open to the nine competitors, Thorley stood waiting with the rest. His face was white and drawn. There were sandwiches and coffee, and whisky for those who used it. Smoke wreathed up round the electric lights. It wanted fifteen minutes to dawn—and the take-off of the first 'plane.

Thorley stared about him. Of his eight rivals, all of them well-known stunt flight men, only Huskett, the Toad, was genuinely calm. Nothing disturbed Huskett—the smooth devil! Among the other seven there was a general air of ill-concealed restlessness; cigarettes were

lighted too frequently, thrown away with stubs too long. The laughter did not ring quite true. It was as though each man was trying to convince the others that this McGregor race to the Cape, with its £5,000 prize, was just another excuse for old friends getting together and talking shop; that it did not really matter much who won—after all it wasn't always the best man!

The Toad stood by himself, his stocky legs planted apart. In his immaculate white drill flying overalls he looked almost as broad as he was tall. From time to time he clapped the palm of his cigarette-hand over his mouth, drew in smoke through the fingers and, tilting his chin, expelled it in a long stream. Now for the fifth time the hunchback looked



The monoplane came streaking towards him, tail high for the take-off

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across at Thorley with his beady eyes, and leered.

"It's coming to you!" that leer seemed to say. "From here to the Cape it's six thousand miles! There'll be any number of chances to settle accounts! Six thousand miles; just you and me! All the time I'll be flying my machine just behind yours! You'll crick your neck looking round to see what I'm up to! Sometimes I'll creep level, and just when you think I'm going to hand it out to you, I'll drop back again! You'll never know when I'm going to strike! Before I've finished, you'll be a gibbering idiot and fly yourself into the ground! I'll drive you crazy!"

Thorley turned away and began pouring himself another black coffee, but to prevent the tremble of his hand being noticeable, he gripped the handle of the pot too tightly and broke it off. There was jerky laughter. He drank what he had poured, turning his back on the stocky figure in white at the other end of the room. He wished fervently that he could cancel his entry, but he was flying with Somebody's petrol, and Somebody Else's oil; even the machine was not his own. Honour forbade him let these benefactors down. The door opened.

"First competitor, please, gentlemen! First competitor!"

CIGARETTES were stubbed out. Cups were clashed down not quite centrally on to saucers. Thorley felt running down his spine the weak, warm, unbearable sensation of zero hour. There was a general movement out into the darkness to watch the first take-off.

Turning up his collar, Thorley looked at the first streaks of dawn, and shivered. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a white glow at his side, and knew it was the Toad.

"We're last to take-off, you and I," remarked the hunchback affably. "That'll be nice, won't it, Thorley? I want to keep near you."

"Why?"

"Why! We-e-ell, if you have a forced landing anywhere, I'll be able to

help, see?" He chuckled oafishly. "Long way, six thousand miles, isn't it, Thorley? And there'll be some lonely stretches to fly over—desert, jungle, mountains that no one ever climbs. There'll be chances for anyone with—old scores to settle."

"Look here, Huskett"—Thorley's voice was low and unsteady—"Viola ran away from you because you were a brute to her—a foul brute. She came to me, and for the two years before she died, she was happy—we both were. I'm glad I made her divorce you, and always will be."

"Oh!" The Toad's voice was full of friendly interest. "So the divorce was your idea, was it? I'm glad to be sure of that, Thorley. Yes, if any little accident *should* happen on your way across the Dark Continent, be sure I'll take *great* care of you! Think what might happen, if I weren't there. You might forced-land in the Sahara and wander round in circles till you dropped. Or you might come down on the tree-tops in the French Congo—that's where the gorillas are. Or you might—" Thorley quickened his pace and left him.

He was glad when he was seated in his cockpit and ready to start. It gave him confidence to feel his feet on the rudder-bar and the control-stick in his hand. He almost forgot the Toad in the excitement of the take-off. At the wink of a light from the control-tower he pushed forward his throttle-lever to the limit and heard the engine's answering bellow. *Bumpity-bumpity!* Now he was trundling forward, the monoplane dancing on the springs of her undercarriage. The speed increased. He pushed forward the stick to get her tail up. Now he was racing along with engine roaring crescendo and wind shrieking past him. He eased back the stick, until a sudden smoothness told him that his craft was air-borne. The blessed moment! He cleared the further hedge by an ample margin, and went roaring up into the twilight of the dawn.

To the Cape!

WHEN the red sun rose above the rim of the horizon, Thorley looked

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back, and there, surely enough, was the Toad's green monoplane keeping a companionable distance behind him. He remembered that the green machine was handicapped at 200 m.p.h. and his own at 182. The Toad could fly rings round him, if he chose. But he determined not to worry ; over Europe, at least, he was safe.

The Channel swept past beneath, and then league after league of the fair land of France. Soon azure blue stretched ahead. It was while they were crossing the Mediterranean that out of the corner of his eye Thorley saw the green monoplane drawing up abreast of him, and nervously turned his head. The hunchback grinned fiendishly at him, drew his finger across his throat, and then dropped back again.

At Oran they landed side by side to refuel, eat and sleep. "We'll be getting to lonely places soon!" the Toad murmured pleasantly over the rim of his coffee-cup.

At Reggan, a lonely outpost in the desert, Thorley's knees almost gave under him as he climbed down from his machine. His clothes were soaked with perspiration. The strain of keeping one eye on his navigation and the other on the Toad had told on him.

"It seem," marvelled a French officer, "zat you two keep always neck to neck in ze race!"

"That's right!" answered the Toad heartily. "We're friends—*amis*!" He reached up and flung one of his great arms affectionately round Thorley's shoulders. "Inseparable friends—that's us!"

Only with great difficulty did Thorley secure a room to himself for his few hours' rest.

The crossing of the desert was hell ; for now the Toad intensified his terrorism. Sometimes he would come roaring up on Thorley's right, sometimes on his left, and always he was gesturing and grimacing, taking fiendish delight in the torture he was inflicting. Mile after mile of that ocean of sand unrolled itself, and each mile Thorley thought would be his last. Most nerve-wracking of all was the

night flying. He flew without lights, hoping to give the slip to the devil in the green machine, but the Toad stuck to him like a leech.

Niamey ; Duala, in the Cameroons ; Loanda, in Portuguese West ; each provided fuel and food, and a few hours' rest in the shade. And at each place the affable Toad would come sidling up with a few more words of poison for Thorley's ear. "Shan't be long now ! This is the *really* lonely bit !" Something like that he said every time, until Thorley almost ceased to care. Fear and exhaustion had reduced him to apathy.

It was when they were continuing their southward course down the west coast and were still an hour's flying from Untebbi that the Toad suddenly changed his tactics. He opened up his throttle and sent the green monoplane roaring ahead. With alarm, Thorley saw that he was closely examining the ground below. Except for occasional clearings, it was virgin forest ; they were flying some miles inland to avoid the bumps.

Finally the Toad seemed to have found what he wanted. He banked his machine sharply and came thundering round in a tight circle that brought his wheels within a few yards of Thorley's head. He leaned out of the cockpit, and a moment later Thorley saw a red ball of fire come streaking from the signal-pistol in the hunchback's hand. It passed through the arc of his propeller shattering it completely. With a curse, he switched off his juddering engine, and put down the nose of his machine to gliding angle. This was the end ; the Toad had struck at last.

NOW the hunchback had shut down his engine to a tick-over, and was also gliding down. Placing the stick between his legs he raised both hands and, grinning from ear to ear, rubbed them together in hearty self-congratulation. Thorley was to land down there, where he pointed—the big triangular clearing where the striped zebra were feeding.

With dread in his heart, Thorley made several circuits of the clearing and landed into wind on the border of the gloomy

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forest. He knew that no place could have been selected farther from human habitation. The Toad came taxying up to him and, dropping to the ground, advanced towards him, smiling affably, revolver in hand. Disturbed by his engine, a huge tree cobra poured itself carefully over a fallen log and slid away into the jungle.

"Let's sit down, shall we?" Stooping suddenly past Thorley, the Toad placed one stocky leg behind his knee, and with a shove from his immense shoulders, hurled him to the ground. Sitting on his chest, he snapped handcuffs on his wrists, and turned to tie his feet.

"What are you going to do?"

"You'll soon see, Boysie!—That's what she used to call you, wasn't it—Boysie?" The Toad rose to his feet, mopping his forehead. "Bit hot here, eh?" He took off his overalls, and then his jacket. "Now for the concealment of the crime! Wouldn't do to have any nosey searchers coming and finding you here—not the way I'm going to leave you!" He stooped his immense shoulders and picking up the tail-unit of Thorley's machine, began wheeling it under cover. "Wouldn't do to burn it!" he explained cheerfully. "That'd show up a mile away!"

Hindered by the handcuffs, Thorley felt in his pocket, and found a cheque-book and an indelible pencil. Writing on his knee, he requested his bank to pay to A. Huskett, Esq., or order, the sum of £500.

By the time the Toad returned he was perspiring profusely, but Thorley's machine had been pushed well into the jungle in a position that made it invisible from the air. He came over, rubbing his hands in oafish glee. "Now! All set for the great starvation act!"

"Huskett," Thorley said in a low voice, "this is a cheque for five hundred—ante-dated four days. Will you take it and call—call it all square? I'll keep my mouth shut; I swear I will."

Grinning, the Toad took it from him, and turned it over and over. "To-day's kind thought! Thank you, my dear Thorley, thank you! But, unlike the

highwaymen, it's not your money I want, but your life. 'Sides, it'd be too damn dangerous to cash that." He tore the slip of paper into pieces, and untied Thorley's legs. "Come along now!"

SOON Thorley found himself embracing a tree. The Toad was clicking his handcuffs locked on the other side of the trunk. He realised that he was to stand there till death released him. He thought of the tree-cobra, and shivered. The Toad took a step back, admiring his handiwork.

"That's right! You look quite affectionate, you and your wooden bride! 'Minds me of Viola. Don't know about you, but she was always wooden with me."

"You are not going to leave me here—like this!"

The Toad seemed not to hear. He clapped his cigarette-hand over his mouth, and thoughtfully sucked in smoke through the fingers. "Something I forgot—ah, I know!" He returned from a visit to Thorley's machine with a paper package and a flask. Stooping, he set out the sandwiches in a neat pile on their paper, and leaned the opened flask against them. Everything was just out of the victim's reach.

"That's right! It's all there when you're feeling like a snack. Oh, and smokes! You'd like one now, I expect." The Toad drew a cigarette from his case, placed it between Thorley's lips, and lighted it with a flourish. Thorley drank in the smoke hungrily, filling his lungs with its balm.

"Lovely, the first smoke after a long flight, isn't it? Like nectar!" grinned the Toad. "Don't smoke it all at once, though!" He took the cigarette from Thorley's lips, and, moving round to the other side of the tree, placed it carefully between the fingers of his manacled hands. With a look of hatred Thorley let it drop to the ground. From far off came the roar of some wild beast.

"That was a lion, if you ask me!" remarked the Toad cheerfully, as he got into his overalls again. "You must expect a lion or two round. Kick 'em on

GO BY THE VULTURES

the nose if they get unfriendly. They're just like big cats, y'know—'cept when they're hungry. Well, ta-ta, Thorley! I'm just going to have a drink, and then I'm off!"

Brrmp! Brrmp! Brr-rr-mp! With short bursts of engine-power the green monoplane taxied to the leeward end of the clearing, and turned into wind. Thorley heard the rising thunder of its engine, and turning his head, saw that it was streaking towards him, tail high for the take-off. A moment later it slid smoothly into the air, and went roaring overhead, the Toad waving cheerily.

When the leaves were quiet again after the whirlwind of the green monoplane's passing, Thorley sank to his knees and shut his eyes. In a few minutes the last faint drone had been blanketed out by distance. Then the life of the jungle came surging in to take its place in his consciousness—the shrill cries of birds, the sound of small bodies pushing their way through the undergrowth, and farther off in the hot, steamy interior, an occasional ominous crashing of branches.

Twisting his head, Thorley could see a vulture sailing on effortless wings in the brazen sky. An hour later there were more than a score, wheeling and wheeling, patiently and hopefully, "waiting for the flesh that dies." Thorley counted them until they became uncountable. He was glad there were so many.

THE Toad's green monoplane taxied up to the hangars at Untebbi, and its propeller flickered to a halt as the hunchback switched off.

"Gimme a drink while they're filling her up again and I'll be off," he announced. "Last but not one, am I? Who's that?—Oh? Haven't seen him

since dawn to-day."

The aerodrome-manager led him into the bar, greedy for the conversation of anybody from Home. "How's London Town?" he asked, splashing soda into his guest's second whisky.

"So-so. Got another sandwich?" answered the Toad with his mouth full.

The manager went to fetch another plate.

"Nice, those white overalls. Where'd you buy them—Piccadilly?" he asked, wistfully naming the Mecca of the Empire's exiles. He stepped back to admire.

"Tcha! You can buy 'em in any town in England," answered the Toad briefly. "Well, one more drink, and I'll be getting away."

There was no answer to this. The aerodrome-manager was standing behind him. The Toad turned his head.

"One more drink's all right," agreed the exile slowly. "But as for getting away—No! Not till we've made sure this isn't a joke."

"What'n hell d'you mean?" the Toad demanded.

"Slip off that white suit of yours, and take a look at the back," advised the other, and at a sign from him the barman whipped open a drawer.

For a moment the Toad stood irresolute. Then, with quick movements, he unbuttoned and stepped out of his overalls. The manager spread them over the bar. "You don't leave here," he said, "until we've sent a machine out to inquire into this."

The hunchback's face turned grey as he read the message Thorley had written in indelible pencil on the white cloth.

"Tuesday 1.45 p.m. Huskett shot Thorley down in triangular clearing 180 miles N. of Untebbi and five miles from coast. Go by the vultures."

IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

SECRET OF THE MONSTERS

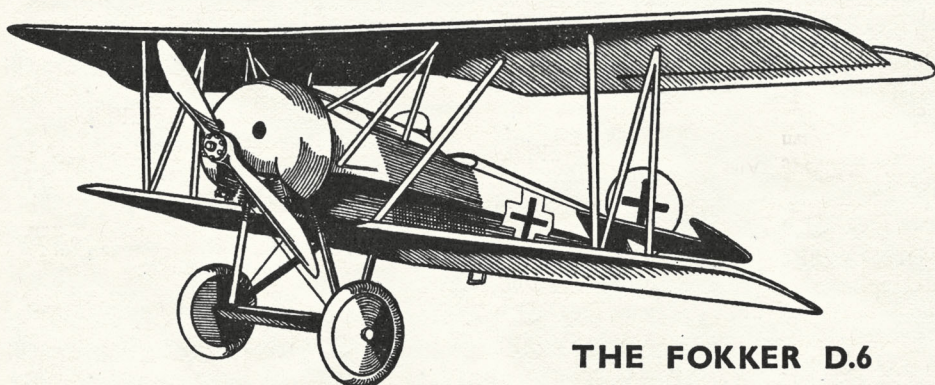
A Great Long Story of War-time Adventure in the R.F.C.

By MAJOR L. S. METFORD

Late of No. 13 Squadron, R.F.C.

THESE WARPLANES WERE MARVELS—

Notable British and German Fighters of the Great War Days



THE FOKKER D.6

THE Fokker D.6, forerunner of the more famous D.7 biplane, first appeared in October, 1917, and saw considerable active service, chiefly on the Italian Front. As is obvious from its appearance, it was nothing more than a biplane version of the famous Fokker Triplane D.R.I, and was fitted with the same type of engine, the 110 h.p. Oberursal. Its maximum speed was in the region of 122½ miles an hour, and it had a comparatively rapid rate of climb, being able to reach 10,000 ft. in 9 minutes. Its service ceiling—

the height at which its rate of climb dropped below 100 ft. a minute—was 19,000 ft.

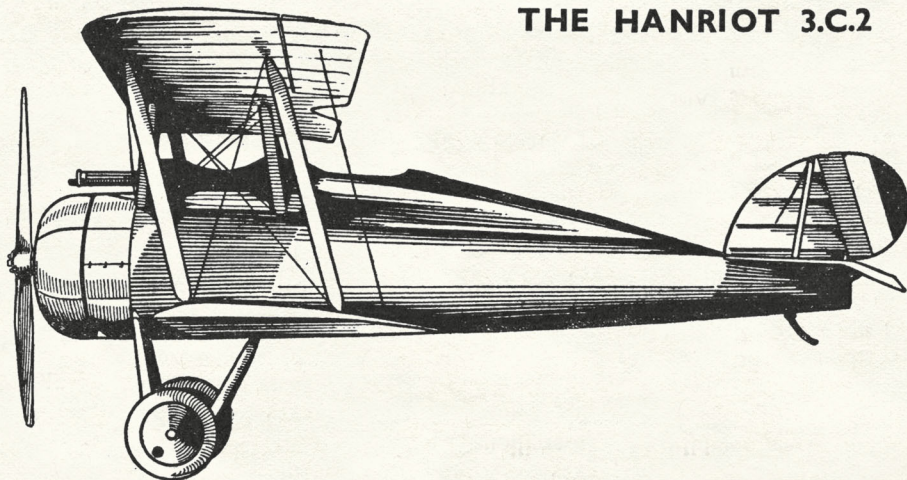
As a comparison, it is interesting to note that the Triplane version, the D.R.I, had a top speed of 121½ miles an hour at 8,000 ft., while the D.7, the successor to the D.6, did 119 m.p.h. with a 160 h.p. Mercedes and, later, 135 m.p.h. with a 200 h.p. Mercedes.

Chief dimensions of the D.6 were a span of 25 ft. 5 ins.; a length of 19 ft. 6 ins.; and a height of 9 ft. 3 ins.

FIRST produced in August, 1918, the Hanriot 3.C.2 was used in small numbers by both the French and Belgian Air Services during the closing months of the War, and gave an excellent account of itself. The object of its designer was to build a two-seater fighter which would possess all the good points of a single-seater scout, with the additional virtue of an efficient rearward defence. Considering the difficulties involved, the designer succeeded remarkably well, for the 3.C.2, as well

as being highly manoeuvrable and very pleasant to fly, could attain a top speed of 127 m.p.h. with a full load.

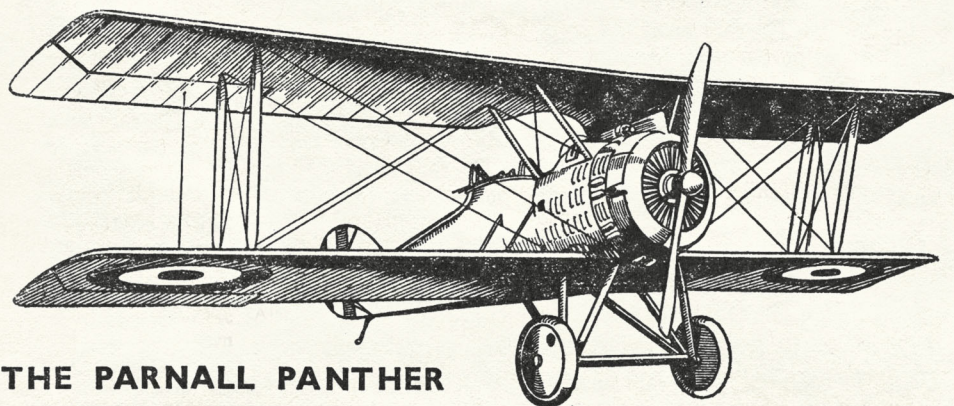
The machine was fitted with a 230 h.p. Salmson engine, and its standard armament consisted of a Vickers for the pilot, and any one of various types of twin-guns for the rear gunner. It was 22 ft. 3 ins. long, 9 ft. 11 ins. high, and had a span of 29 ft. 7½ ins.



THE HANRIOT 3.C.2

— ONLY TWENTY YEARS AGO !

Described and Illustrated by A. C. LEVERINGTON



THE PARNALL PANTHER

THIS speedy looking biplane was produced as a shipboard 'plane late in 1918, but was not in production early enough for the type to see service during the War. It was designed by Mr. Harold Bolas, who had been released from the Admiralty Air Department to join the aircraft-constructing firm of George Parnall and Sons, of Yate, near Bristol.

The Panther proved so successful that it con-

tinued to be used by the R.A.F. in various capacities until 1925. Several types of engines were tried out at different times, until the 230 h.p. B.R.2 was finally adopted for standard use. With this engine the Panther had a top speed of 126 m.p.h. Principal dimensions were as follows : span, 29 ft. 6 ins. ; height, 10 ft. 6 ins. ; length, 24 ft. 11 ins.

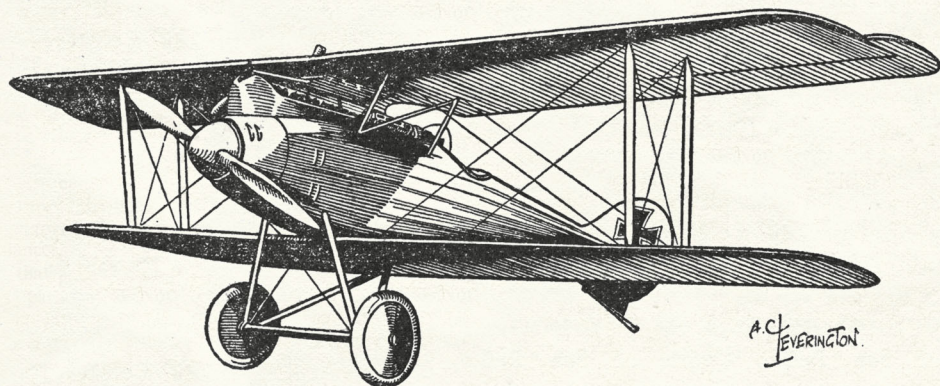
THE ROLAND D.6A

BETWEEN 1916 and 1918, nearly thirty different Roland designs were produced by the L.F.G. Co. (Luft Fahrzeug Gesellschaft), the firm which succeeded the old German Wright Aeroplane Company. One of the most popular models was the D.6, a biplane scout whose 185 h.p. Benz engine gave it a top speed of 118-120 miles an hour.

The D.6a, illustrated below, was an improved version of the D.6, and identical with it except for its more powerful 200 h.p. Benz engine.

With this power plant the D.6a had a maximum speed of 124-125 miles an hour, and would undoubtedly have been more widely used than it was had it not been unpleasantly heavy on its controls.

The R.A.F. recorded only eight meetings with this particular Roland model, though several squadrons of D.6a's were, at one time, opposed to the U.S. Air Service. Chief dimensions were a span of 26 ft. 3½ ins. ; length, 22 ft. ; and height, 9 ft. 1½ ins.





Just as his machine was about to turn nose down, Van Dusen glanced skyward . . .

Twenty Thousand Feet above the Frontiers of a South American Republic, a British War Bird led his Motley Air Force against the Guns of an Enemy Armada, Staking the Fate of a Capital on the Success of a Desperate Gamble

CHAPTER I

Challenge to Combat

IN the Air Ministry is a certain department which assists time-expired officers to obtain suitable jobs on their return to civilian life, and here, one day, was a certain flight lieutenant, Van Dusen.

"Well," said the departmental head, "will you accept it?"

Van Dusen took a little time to reply. A small republic in South America, which for the purposes of this story may be called San Prado, had become acutely air-conscious. A suitable man was required to take over the command of its microscopic air force and to bring it

up to date. Van Dusen was a South African who had served through the War and then stayed on in the R.A.F. on a medium-service commission. When this had terminated he found himself in a civilian world which had conveniently forgotten the fulsome promises made to its soldiers during the War, and was resentful of any reminder.

Not that this troubled Van Dusen much. What with gratuities, savings from pay, and his War-time "blood-money" he was in a fairly comfortable position. He had intended to return to his own country to see what civil aviation had to offer when there came a request to attend the Air Ministry, followed now

WINGS OF RECKONING

A Thrilling Story of Aerial Warfare and High Adventure in South American Skies

By HUGH STANDISH

by the offer of this job. It appealed to him; building up a little air force sounded an interesting and straightforward job. Also, he could speak Spanish.

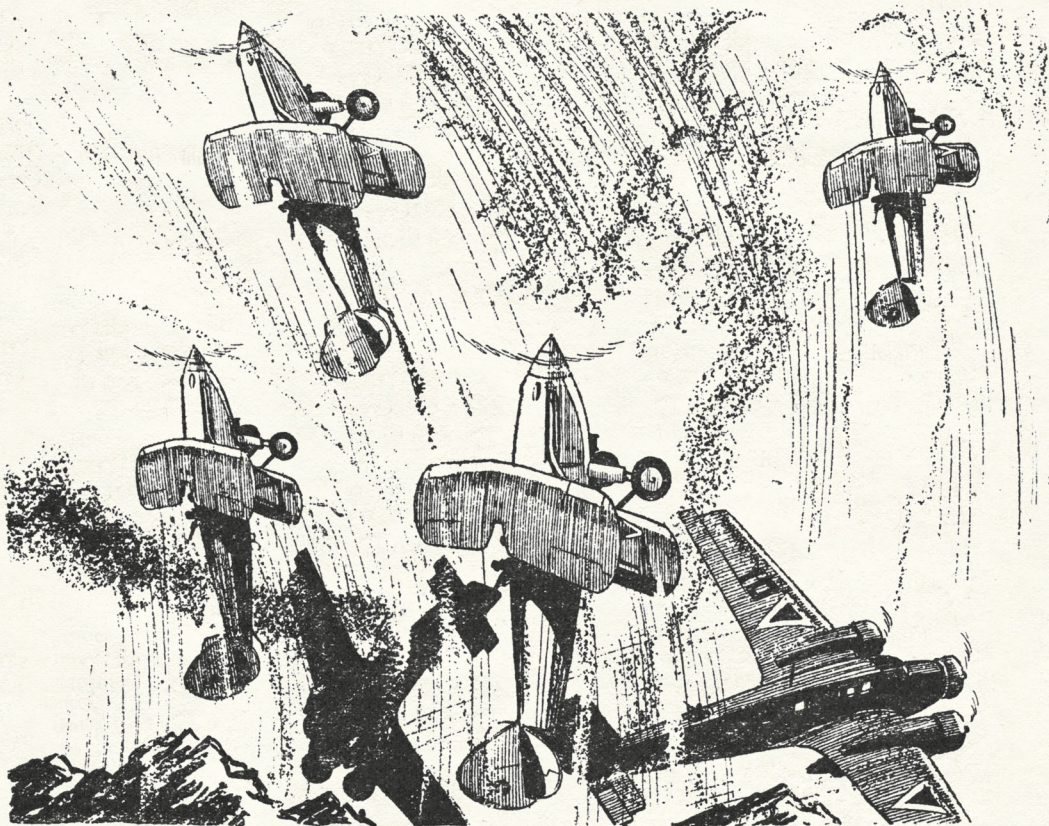
"Very well, sir," said he at last, "I'll take it."

"Good!" said the departmental head, and then he looked curiously at Van Dusen. "By the way, have you ever heard of a man called Kront?"

For a moment Van Dusen was at a loss. Then he remembered.

"Why, yes!" he exclaimed. "I

met him in rather extraordinary circumstances. During the War, I had to fly over the lines after a German spy who had got away in one of our Special Duty machines. I was stranded in Hunland and by an amazing bit of luck managed to masquerade for a time as a flying officer in the staffel of which Kront was the leader. Eventually I escaped in the very first of the new German tripehounds—I mean triplanes—and I fancy old Kront took it rather badly. He was one of those efficient, stout-hearted, and absolutely humourless Germans."



... out of the sky was sweeping a formation of six Fairey Fantômes

AIR STORIES

"Took it badly," said the departmental head, toying with an envelope, "seems to express it mildly. I have been told to inform you that just after the affair of which you speak so airily a message was dropped on one of our aerodromes in France and brought to Air Force G.H.Q. where a certain eminent Chief of Staff had its contents suppressed. I believe his exact words were, 'This is a ruddy public war, not a private one!' The message was from your friend, the staffel leader, asking you to meet him at a rendezvous over the lines in order to settle the propriety of your conduct."

"The deuce it was!" whistled Van Dusen, half-pleased, half-regretful. "And this is the first I ever heard of it."

"No doubt," agreed the departmental head, "and what is more, just after the end of the War, the Censor intercepted a letter from the selfsame staffel leader, Kront, demanding a meeting with you, a letter which the authorities took it upon themselves to answer to the effect that you were still a serving officer for whom duelling was strictly forbidden."

"Poor old Kront," murmured Van Dusen, "he must have taken it badly. Well, he's had plenty of time to get over it by now."

"I doubt it," said the other and flicked across the table the envelope with which he had been playing. "This came addressed to you, care of the Air Ministry."

A LITTLE perturbed by these revelations, yet greatly interested, Van Dusen opened the letter and read:

"You have dishonoured our most honourable profession. You have brought shame on the memory of my own staffel. Now no longer can you shelter under your commission in the Air Force. I demand that you meet me with any weapons you choose."

Van Dusen whistled, grinned, and finally assumed a somewhat worried expression. Like many men of his generation, he had had his bellyful of killing, especially of such decent fellows as this Kront.

For a moment he thought. Then he

looked across the table at the head of the department.

"You needn't worry, sir," said he. "I'm not going to fight this chap. You see, for several years now I have fenced Number One for the Air Force fencing team, so I don't feel I have anything to fear from him. But it might be difficult to avoid hurting him and that is just what I won't do. In fact, I have always felt rather rotten about that affair. Living amongst the flying men of the staffel—a darned decent crowd—eating, drinking, and fighting with them—or rather I should say flying with them for, of course, I had to sit tight while the R.F.C. tested their gunnery on me—and all the time I was really no better than a spy."

He thought for a bit. "No," said he, at last, "I owe Kront something, but nothing like what he wants. I'll write as apologetic a letter as I can about that wretched affair. Poor old fellow! With Germany being defeated, it must have put a man like him a little bit off his rocker."

The departmental head stood up. "Good!" said he. "If you had shown signs of doing otherwise, I was instructed to take certain steps. As it is, I hope you'll like this San Prado job."

They shook hands and Van Dusen went home to concoct in his best German the most conciliatory letter he could to the German staffel leader whom, he could not but help feeling, he had wronged.

CHAPTER II

A General is Unhelpful

SOME weeks later saw Van Dusen in a strain which was labouring up the slopes of the mountains in the heart of which lay the capital of San Prado. Already it had climbed to an elevation of some eight thousand feet, and San Prado, he was told, was two thousand feet higher.

This fact he had not taken in until now, and it was giving him furiously to think. How was he to get the out-of-date aircraft of San Prado off the ground in the thin air of that altitude?

WINGS OF RECKONING

In his carriage was a man called McLeod, a hatchet-faced newspaper man from New York, who grinned when Van Dusen told him the job to which he was going.

"The General," said he, "will, no doubt, be of the greatest assistance to you in building up the Air Force."

Van Dusen eyed him uneasily.

"Who is this General, anyway?" he asked.

McLeod's eyebrows went up as he looked at Van Dusen through a cloud of cigar smoke.

"Your commanding officer, and head of the armed forces of the Republic," said he.

Then he added, "—and the biggest grafter in the whole administration—and that's saying some."

Van Dusen began to feel that this job might not be the simple matter of re-organisation to which he had looked forward.

"What's bringing you to San Prado, anyway?" he demanded.

The newspaper man did not reply directly. Instead he asked: "Ever heard of Bolaro?"

"The Republic beyond the mountains to the north of San Prado?" replied Van Dusen. "Yes, I've heard of it, but that's about all."

The train had stopped at a halt. McLeod stood up and stretched himself.

"You'll be hearing a lot more about it very soon," said he, and sauntered down the corridor to the door.

AN hour later the train pulled into the station of San Prado, and as it drifted jerkily to a standstill Van Dusen peered through the windows at the motley collection of people on the platform.

There were various uniforms in the crowd; two especially magnificent ones caught his eye.

"Gee whizz! Some colour scheme," murmured Van Dusen.

Then his heart nearly stopped beating, for on the breasts of the wearers were two of the largest pairs of wings he had ever seen.

"Heavens!" he thought, "am I expected to wear that comic gent's suiting?"

He made his way down the carriage to the door.

There was no doubt about his identity; the two gorgeously-arrayed officers saluted and introduced themselves.

One of them, Ramon de something or other—Van Dusen could not catch his surname—seemed a decent chap, he thought. He was slim, tall, dark, and very good-looking, but with a certain air that spoke of guts and a sense of humour.

They took him in charge, gave instructions about his baggage and then led him to a car driven by a uniformed orderly. As they drove through the city, the two officers pointed out the various places of interest.

The air, Van Dusen soon found, had a great kick in it, due, no doubt, to the city's altitude. Cafés and pavements were crowded with brightly-dressed or uniformed people; it was all very Spanish, very gay—and quite the hilliest thing in cities that Van Dusen had ever seen.

They were driving down one of the terrific gradients when a furious honking sounded behind them. Their driver immediately pulled the car to one side and slowed up as a glittering Rolls overtook them. In the back seat was a stout person in a super-resplendent colour-scheme of a uniform.

"There," murmured the officer whose name was Ramon, as he eyed the car, "goes the Kestrel Fury."

Van Dusen caught the glint in his eye, and grinned in sympathy, though at the moment he missed the point. But he noticed that the other officer scowled.

Their car resumed its journey, and shortly afterwards they passed a palatial house outside which stood the Rolls. As his companions made no reference to the house, as they had done to other buildings, Van Dusen ventured a query.

There was the briefest delay in answering. Then Ramon said bitterly: "Oh, that! That's a flight of Hawker Hart bombers."

Again there was that glint in his eye,

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and a very decided motion of protest from the other.

The drive continued in silence until they reached the aerodrome, where the two officers deposited Van Dusen at his quarters and then left him. Shortly afterwards his baggage arrived, and for the rest of the day he was busy settling in.

His quarters were a pleasant, single-storied building with a verandah overlooking the aerodrome. It was run by an orderly, Michele, who acted as Van Dusen's personal servant; the rest of the staff consisting of a peon and his wife, the latter acting as cook and a very good one—as Van Dusen was later to discover.

By the time Van Dusen had things arranged to his liking night had fallen, and he went out for a breather on to the verandah.

Around the darkening aerodrome, red boundary lights stared unwinkingly. On the far side he could just make out a hangar and a control-tower from the top of which a light was occulting with monotonous regularity.

"Some craft's expected," he thought, and was surprised by the apparent modernity of the airport's equipment. It seemed far better than he had dared to hope for.

He was yet to learn that an American transport company was responsible for the lights and control-tower, just as they were for the safety of the craft now approaching. It was the mail 'plane from San Francisco, thousands of miles to the north, and presently Van Dusen heard the roar of its engines and saw its lights. Swiftly it circled the aerodrome with decreasing height and diminished roar, red light ringing the changes with green as it turned. Then, in silence, from the downwind side it came, its landing lights gleaming like two great eyes.

The slick, efficient landing that followed and the well-equipped ground organisation cheered Van Dusen. That his own house was lit by oil lamps did not at the moment strike him as strange.

THE next morning a car, sent by the "General," called for Van Dusen.

It deposited him outside the palatial residence which Ramon, with mysterious humour, had described as "a flight of Hawker Harts."

Van Dusen went up some steps leading through a door opening into a hall where a flunkey took him in charge. He was led through a corridor to a large room, where he had to wait for half an hour before a secretary informed him that the General was ready to see him.

He was shown into an enormous room, in the centre of which, at a table, sat an obese man out of whose heavily-jowled face peered cunning eyes.

With a sinking heart Van Dusen came to attention on the other side of the table.

But the General was apparently in an amiable mood. He waved Van Dusen to a chair beside him and then shook hands.

"So *Commandante*," he began in execrable English, "you think you can place our Air Force on a footing suitable for war, eh?" That is not exactly what he said, but for the purpose of intelligibility it has been so transcribed.

"Yes, sir, given the right men and machines," was Van Dusen's reply.

"The right men are undoubtedly yours. The valour and skill of the men of San Prado in all matters pertaining to war is without question," intoned the General as if he was speaking to a crowd.

"That may be," interposed Van Dusen drily, "but it is in the air where they will have to show those estimable qualities, and I have yet to hear of a machine in our equipment which is capable of doing much more than staggering off the ground at this altitude."

The General's face changed from amiability to something very much the reverse.

Van Dusen went on quickly.

"I suggest we should concentrate on one flight of fighters for the present, as I understand defence is the line the President wishes us to take. Admittedly, bombers are the best defence, but I can understand his point of view with regard to relations with neighbouring states. Now for fighters I suggest Furies, if you can get them, or, if you prefer to purchase

WINGS OF RECKONING

from the U.S.A., then the Boeing P.26 —”

“Fury? Boeing?” murmured the General. “I do not know those names.” He had picked up a list from the table and was scanning it.

“No—no, *Commandante*,” said he finally. “Not those can I supply. But S.E.’s, Dolphins, D.H. Fours——” he was reading from his list of obsolete aircraft—“Excellent machines,” he leered at Van Dusen, “for our purpose.”

The airman’s face grew grim, but before he had time to explode a secretary interrupted them—there was something that required the General’s immediate attention. Van Dusen was dismissed.

He drove back to the aerodrome fuming. Then, as his sense of proportion returned, he grew calmer. After all, the only real trouble was that this General bloke obviously had no idea whatsoever of modern machines. He had never even heard of Furies. He had a Great War mind so far as aviation went. And that was just where he, Van Dusen, came in. It was up to him to make this General realise what was needed. It only meant that he faced more of an uphill job than he had realised.

CHAPTER III

Van Dusen Takes Command

VAN DUSEN dismissed the car and walked over to the Air Force hangar, which lay, along with his house, on the opposite side of the aerodrome to the control-tower and the hangar of the transport company. He had decided to take a look at his motley collection of aircraft, and was not surprised at the absence of any officers and men about the place. He had learnt that the former mostly lived in the city—closer to the bright lights. It was one of the things which he was planning to alter very soon.

The main doors of the hangar were shut, and Van Dusen entered by a small side door. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light they took in a disastrous collection of War-time craft, most of it in some form of crashery.

Then he became aware of voices and

lights at the far end. He made his way through the jumble until he saw a man working on the engine of an S.E.5, with three assistants doing his bidding.

“Hey you, Pietro! Tighten uppa that turnbuckel no muchee, savee?”

There were further instructions in the same vein, and the men, though grinning, were working well. Apparently the man at the engine had a way with him.

He was a red-headed little Cockney, with begrimed overalls, a face not much cleaner, and a cigarette stuck behind his ear. Then he caught sight of Van Dusen standing in the shadow.

“And ’oo the ’ell may you be?”

Van Dusen stepped into the light.

“I imagine I’m your commanding officer,” he said with a smile. “I’m Van Dusen.”

“Coo! Gorbliney! Beg pardon, sir.”

The little man sprang to attention. “I’m so blurry used—I’m so used to these ’ere uniforms——”

“What’s your name?” interrupted Van Dusen.

“Wilkins, sir. Late flight sergeant, R.A.F., G.E., A, B, and C.”*

“Dismiss those men, I want to have a talk with you.”

“Okay, chie——. Beg pardon, sir. Very good, sir.

“Hey! you ruddy dagoes! Vamoose! Scram!”

He waved his arms at them.

Van Dusen smothered a grin.

“Let’s go out,” he said. “The sight of these craft gives me a pain in the neck.”

“Not ’arf they don’t me, sir.”

AN hour later Van Dusen stood alone on his verandah.

Across the aerodrome, a Bellanca was being made ready for its flight to San Francisco.

From Wilkins he had learnt a lot. Out of the whole boiling of the San Prado Air Force he had, it appeared, only two first-class men, this tough little squirt of a ground engineer, and Ramon.

* In other words, a qualified Ground Engineer holding Class A, B and C Air Ministry licences.

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"A ruddy dook and doesn't know a carburetter from a mag., but he sure can fly," said that non-respecter of persons—Wilkins.

The little man himself, with a living genius in his hands for machinery, and none at all in his head for dealing gladly with fools, had been buffeted from job to job, his undoubted ability ever warring with his utter lack of respect for those over him, if they did not know their business. Finally he had drifted south in the employment of the air transport company, and had been fired for expressing a too frank opinion of the aerodrome manager. With all their craft out of commission the San Prado Air Force snapped him up gratefully. Fortunately, the officers were unaware of the meaning of his frequent and candid remarks.

He knew nothing about San Prado, its politics, or its administration, except that supplies for the Air Force were pretty hopeless.

That afternoon Van Dusen and he went over the machines in detail.

Three S.E.5's, fitted with the 120-h.p. Hispano, and an Avro 504 were all that there was any hope for.

These Wilkins had managed to put into commission.

"To fly to-morrow?" asked Van Dusen.

"Can do, sir. But I'd like to change the airscrews. It may help to get them off the ground."

"To-morrow at ten hours, then."

Thinking furiously, Van Dusen walked across the aerodrome to his quarters.

There was the ground organisation to bring up to date if as much flying was to be done as he intended. Then, there was wireless, squadron office staff, and endless other things to get under way. It looked as if Wilkins with his scratch crew of dagoes would be overworked.

And how to get in touch with his flying officers? There was no record of their addresses, in fact no record of anything. The administration was inconceivably bad.

He chanced to look into the dining-room shortly after entering his house. There Michele was laying the table.

There certainly was an air about the way they did things out here—when they did anything—thought Van Dusen. The silver and napery were superb, gleaming in the soft glow of shaded lights. Then Van Dusen noticed that the table was laid for two.

He asked Michele who his companion was to be.

"El Capitano Ramon de Cordoba de Mantera," intoned Michele magnificently, "will dine here to-night."

Van Dusen was surprised but relieved. It would help to put him in touch with his officers, and perhaps from Ramon he would learn a way out of the fog of inefficiency which surrounded him.

THE night was rather wonderful, bright and starry, and Van Dusen was on the verandah enjoying it when a car purred up and presently Ramon mounted the short steps. Michele took his cloak. He had discarded his efflorescent uniform for a dinner jacket, and now Van Dusen liked him decidedly better.

Yet, as the evening progressed, he became more than ever aware of an impenetrable reserve, an air of dignity that became Ramon very well, but was most exasperating to Van Dusen, who wanted to come to grips with his difficulties.

He explained about the need for wireless gear, operators, and above all up-to-date machines.

"The wireless," agreed Ramon, "you will get without trouble. But I fear it will not be easy to get your Harts or your Furies."

By this time Van Dusen was beginning to have an inkling of the state of affairs in the administrative departments of San Prado.

"Exactly," he grinned, "—a—Rolls-Royce and a palace."

There was the glint of humour in Ramon's eyes, but that inherited instinct of a Spain that was dead and gone held him from coming out into the open. He changed the conversation.

They talked flying far into the night. Ramon may not have known the first thing about the innards of aircraft, but

WINGS OF RECKONING

he very surely knew a lot about their performance, and, of course, everything connected with the flying of them.

When at last he stood up to go, Van Dusen accompanied him to his car. The evening had gone without his finding the key to getting supplies as they should be got. Formal requisitions to the General, he felt, would be useless. Should he beard that obese officer with un-Spanish directness? Or was there someone else he could approach?

In the car, the point of Ramon's cigar glowed.

"You have not yet met the Secretary for War," remarked that Spanish exquisite. Then he pressed his starter switch, revved his engine and, slipping into gear, glided away.

"*Buenos noches, Señor Commandante,*" he called.

"*Buenos noches !*" echoed Van Dusen.

Was that a hint?

Or wasn't it?

CHAPTER IV Rumours of War

THE following morning, Wilkins and his squad had the three S.E.'s out on the tarmac and their engines run up and tested by the time Van Dusen and Ramon arrived, accompanied by one, not very enthusiastic, flying officer.

There was a fresh wind blowing in the direction of the best take-off, and Van Dusen was hopeful of getting the San Prado Air Force—all three of them—into the air.

He told his two companions to rendezvous at one thousand metres above the aerodrome, for conditions most certainly did not warrant a flight take-off. Uneasily, he watched them stagger into the air, and then followed himself to meet them at the pre-arranged height. Once he had them in formation he climbed to two thousand metres. It was no easy matter, for the small Hispanos were in poor condition, and, having reached their "ceiling," not another foot of height could Van Dusen scrounge from the thin atmosphere.

However, as the engines seemed to be

keeping up their mediocre revs., he led the formation off to the mountains which formed the frontier. Over them, he felt, if ever war came, would be the scene of the air fighting.

An hour later he looked down on a waste of snow-capped ridges scarcely four hundred feet below his fuselage. Between the ridges were narrow, rock-bound valleys, deep and forbidding. A tough place for a forced landing.

Staggering at the very limit of the aircrafts' ceiling, he led his flight along the range. He meant to learn all there was to know, from the flying point of view, about these mountains.

Absorbed in the details of the rugged terrain he did not keep an eye on the other two. When he did look up there was Ramon waving cheerily to him, but the third man was a speck in the distance, heading for home and safety.

San Prado discipline !

Van Dusen thought grimly how he would remedy this, and, a few minutes later, he led Ramon back to the aerodrome where they landed safely, if a little speedily, in the thin air.

Ramon was delighted. Not for months had they done such a flight. But Van Dusen was silent, thinking of the machines which an enemy might bring against him, and after a few words with Wilkins about the performance of the machines, he retired to his quarters.

There, while rummaging in the study, he came on some files of what appeared to be the Government newspaper in San Prado. In one was a leading article applauding the work of the administration in granting one million dollars for the Air Force.

One million dollars !

So money was not the difficulty ! Then he thought of the General—and was not so sure.

He telephoned the General and demanded an interview.

AT the interview, the General was again all amiability. Since their last meeting, he explained, he had argued in this manner with himself : the English, he had been credibly informed, were a

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commercial nation. This Van Dusen was English. Well, then, this was his proposal——

But, in spite of the General's logic, before the interview had lasted ten minutes, Van Dusen rose to his feet.

"General," he said, through lips white with rage, "I have the honour to give you my resignation, and beg leave to quit your country immediately."

Without waiting for the dumbfounded General's reply, he turned on his heel and marched out of the room.

"Double-crossing traitor!" thought Van Dusen wrathfully, "to think he could rope me in on his dirty finance."

His one wish now was to see the last of this intrigue-infested country. What ambition he ever had to reform the Air Force of San Prado had evaporated.

Michele was upset by the order to pack which Van Dusen flung at him on his return. The Inglese suited his temperament.

They were both in the middle of packing when there came the sound of thudding hooves at the gallop and presently a uniformed messenger dismounted outside the verandah. To Michele, who had gone to meet him, he handed an official envelope. Van Dusen opened it and read:

*"Dear Commandante—Will you please do me the honour to dine with me to-night at 8.30?
(Signed) Robillida, Minister of War."*

Van Dusen was about to scribble a curt refusal when he remembered Ramon's hint. This letter did not give the impression of another "General." It was written in straightforward English. Finally, he wrote an acceptance and went on with his packing.

THAT evening the car which had been sent for Van Dusen brought him to a pleasant house set deep in a large garden.

The Minister of War proved to be a grey-haired, tall man utterly unlike the General with his crafty mind and coarse body. This man had the easy assurance of one born to authority and that air of unassailable integrity that is associated

with the best type of Civil Servant in the British Administration.

Van Dusen took to him at once, and through the somewhat formal dinner found himself talking readily of his own life in South Africa, the War, and the peace-time Air Force.

Afterwards, when the servants had left them to their coffee and cigars, the Minister of War spoke.

"The General," said he, "tells me that he has had to dispense with your services."

"The General," said Van Dusen drily, "did not mention that I had previously given him my resignation."

"H'm, I thought it might be that way. Look here, Van Dusen, your real complaint is that you can't get up-to-date machines, isn't it?"

"Up to this morning, sir, that was true. Now there are other reasons why I cannot carry on."

The Minister of War skilfully skated off the thin ice.

"The political forces against me are too strong to allow me to do absolutely what I wish," he said. "But by making improvements quietly—not by rushing them—I hope to get an efficient air force in time. You, I had hoped, were going to be one of my major improvements."

Van Dusen could see where this was leading to. He nipped it sternly in the bud.

"You have my best wishes, sir. I feel sure if my successor is familiar—er—with the customs of this country—that he will prove in the long run more useful to you than I."

The Minister did not take an opening which he saw would at this stage lead to a direct refusal of what he was going to ask. Instead he said:

"Completely up-to-date types such as the Fury are out of the question. I could never get the money for them out of the General. But after all there are others only lately gone out of service in your country, such as Siskins, for example."

Skilfully the Minister had laid his bait. Van Dusen woke up.

"Siskins, now! They wouldn't be so

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bad, sir. If you could get them——”

“I *could* get them—and I would—if I had a reliable man in charge of the Air Force.”

But this reminded Van Dusen of his interview with the General. He grew reserved and stubborn.

“I’m sure you will get a good man, sir.”

Then the Minister played his ace of trumps.

“H’m, a pity,” he mused, “you’ll miss the war.”

“War?” snapped Van Dusen. “Against whom and what sort of air force?”

Ten minutes later Van Dusen’s capitulation was complete.

NEXT morning, the General swore as he read a suave communication from the Minister of War to the effect that Van Dusen would remain in command of the Air Force and that instructions were going through immediately to order six Siskins, “*which will still leave you, my dear General, with ample funds for the other onerous expenses in the equipment of your Services.*”

The General did not appreciate sarcasm directed against himself. And now there was that accursed Englishman who, henceforth, would always be a stumbling block to all his plans. He had been more than glad to get his resignation, and now here he was back again and in direct touch with the Minister.

The General endeavoured to console himself with the knowledge that his own political following, along with the host of jackals in the administration who depended on him, would certainly be strong enough to prevent any serious inroads on the funds which lay in his grasp.

Of course, there was this new spectre of war for which the General had not the slightest use. It meant more expensive, if less spectacular, things than gaudy uniforms.

Perhaps, after all, he had better accept that formal invitation from the High Command of the Bolaran Forces to visit their manœuvres next week. Outwardly the countries were still friendly. From

that visit he might learn something useful.

He did.

CHAPTER V

The General Finds an Ally

WITH the Minister of War’s conversation fresh in his memory, Van Dusen plunged into the business of training the personnel of his command. He made his flying officers turn up daily at the aerodrome, where he took them up dual in the Avro 504 until he knew their flying abilities thoroughly.

With the exception of Ramon, they were a pretty poor lot when all was said and done. Probably they could have flown well enough if they had had the guts for it, but swanking about the city in their gorgeous uniforms seemed to be the limit of ambition with most of them.

The men were rather better, and under the efficient, if unorthodox, training of Wilkins, they were shaping quite promisingly.

As for gunnery, it had seemed at first that he would have to leave it severely alone for the present, as there was no one to whom he could entrust it. Later, however, he ran to earth an American of doubtful antecedents but with a first-class knowledge of machine-guns, and thereafter the gunnery showed signs of improving. Ramon was keen and often shot up the ground target, but when it came to anything the least bit mechanical he was lost. Number one and two stoppages were about all that he could deal with.

Van Dusen saw no more of the General, but there was a marked improvement in supplies. Even the Siskins, he had definite assurance, were on their way.

Meanwhile, he was learning quite a lot about the political position of San Prado from Ramon.

Territorial trouble, it seemed, was a perennial affair between the Republics of San Prado and Bolaro. But recently, with a discovery of mineral wealth in the intervening mountains, it had become acute.

There was some talk that Bolaro had also engaged an expert to reform their

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Air Force. The General, said Ramon one day, was paying an official visit to Bolaro that very week. No doubt when he returned he'd have something to say.

When he did return Van Dusen was surprised and a little uneasy to get an order to report forthwith. Yet, when the interview came, he found a genial General who asked him a lot of questions about their progress, expressed himself as well pleased, and promised a more assiduous attention to supplies in future.

Van Dusen was relieved. It looked as if the visit to Bolaro had put the wind up this obese commanding officer, and that he was now going to take the defence of his country seriously.

During a pause in the conversation he had asked Van Dusen, jokingly, if the English indulged in duelling, a question to which Van Dusen had replied with words to the effect that Englishmen were much too busy with worth-while things to bother about learning how to kill each other in so-called affairs of honour.

"So it is not a recognised part of the training of your officers to learn how to use a sword or a pistol?" the General had asked, carelessly.

"No," Van Dusen had replied, his mind occupied with the problem of supplies. "I don't suppose there are a hundred men in the Air Force who have the slightest idea of how to use a duelling weapon."

But the General had seemed to lose interest. He had spoken of other things.

A WEEK later Van Dusen received an invitation to a reception at the President's Palace. The guests of honour were to be a few members of the fighting forces of Bolaro. Outwardly, at any rate, appearances were still being kept up.

Van Dusen arrayed himself in the colour scheme which he loathed and resigned himself to a dull evening.

But a dull evening was not exactly the description for what ensued. He was in his place on one side of the hall, watching the arrivals, when a dark, hard-bitten man came in, dressed in the uniform of the Bolaran Air Force. To Van Dusen

there seemed something familiar about his appearance.

The Secretary for War, who was making the introductions, announced:

"El Capitan Kront."

"Gosh!" Van Dusen became suddenly alert.

Then a curious thing happened.

After Kront had been introduced to the President, he looked around deliberately as if he were searching for someone whom he expected to see. His glance fell on Van Dusen and he marched across the open space in front of the President, all eyes watching this unusual conduct. Up to Van Dusen he came and struck him across the face with his open hand.

"Now send me another apology for that!" he sneered.

Van Dusen's reaction was swift and instinctive. His fist connected with the German's jaw and sent him sprawling.

Whatever the other faults of the inhabitants of San Prado might be, inability to deal with such a situation as this was not one of them.

For a moment there fell a sudden hush. Then an officer walked swiftly up to Kront and helped him to his feet. A few low words were exchanged and both men left the assembly room.

The ceremony proceeded as if nothing had happened. Van Dusen remained standing in his place, a bright flush on the cheek that had been struck being the only record of the startling interruption. He saw Ramon make a sign by which he understood that he was proposing to take charge of the matter.

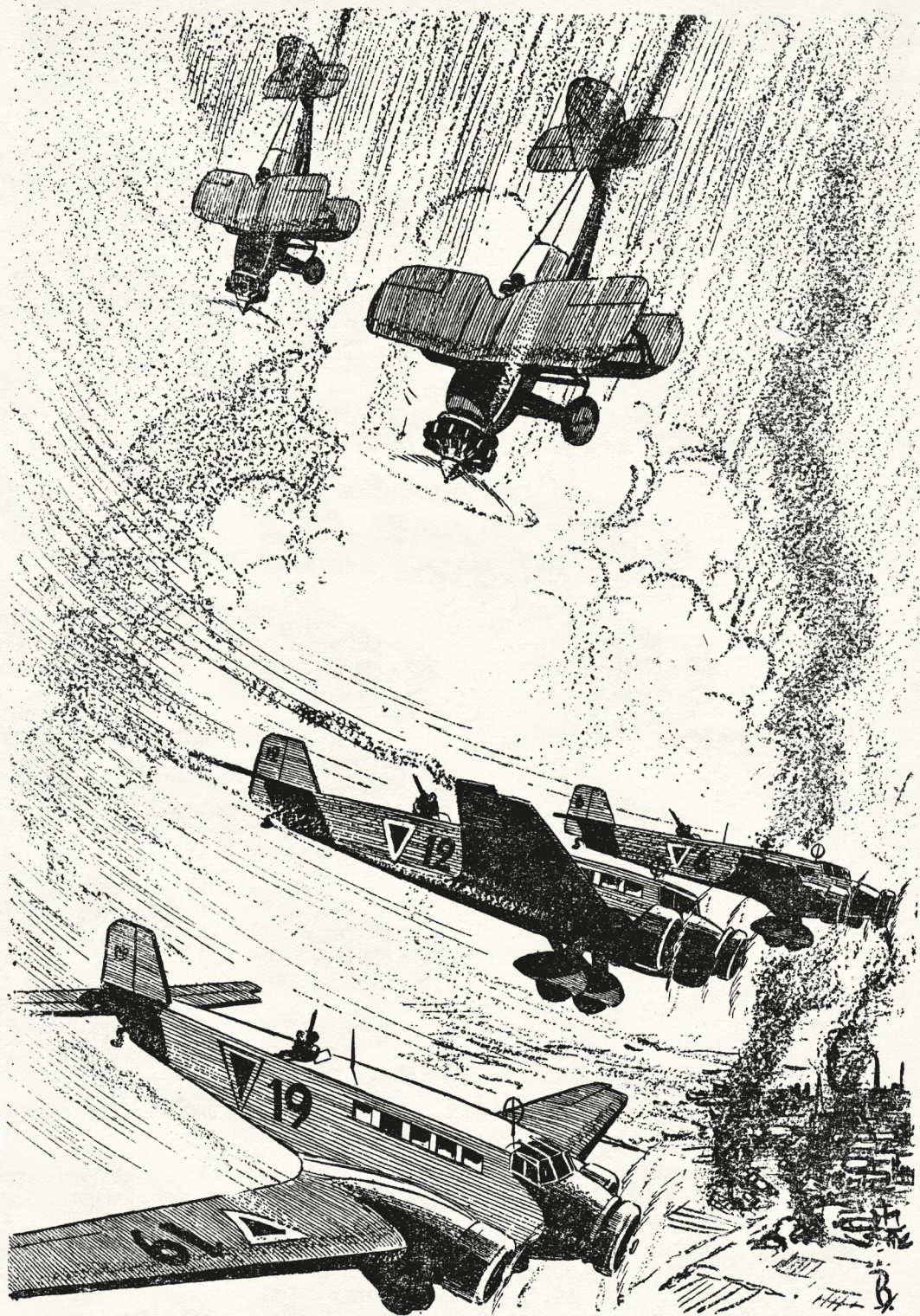
Then Van Dusen caught the eye of the General. In it he read triumph, ill-concealed.

The old fox! So it had been his doing!

Van Dusen understood things better now. On the General's visit to Bolaro he must have met Kront and learnt of this Heaven-sent opportunity to remove one who was eating up money in supplies.

DIRECTLY the ceremony allowed him to leave, Van Dusen returned to his house on the aerodrome.

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The Siskin leader had set too steep a dive. . . . The bombers were too directly beneath him for his sights to bear on the target

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To him, came Ramon, later in the evening.

"To-morrow morning at six," he said. "What about weapons? I gather the other side can use a sword, and I presume you cannot. So I take it that pistols will be your choice."

"I can use an *épée*," said Van Dusen.

Ramon looked surprised, gratified, and then dubious.

He called Michele and asked him a question. To the man's reply he said: "*Bueno! Las portas aqui pronto.*"

The orderly went away, to return a few moments later with a pair of buttoned *épées*, masks, and gloves.

The two men got ready. Michele held the points of the blades just touching.

"*En garde, Senores!*"

"*Tirez!*"

Arms outstretched, points of *épées* circling warily, the two men set to.

Van Dusen held a slightly central guard, thereby ever so slightly exposing his arm in *sixte*—a cheap and obvious opening—but it led to other things.

Ramon took it at its face value. Like lightning, his blade disengaged and thrust.

Like lightning, Van Dusen took the parry with a counter *carte* and *riposted*, clearing his opponent's blade from his own body and landing neatly on Ramon's forearm.

"*Bueno!*" cried Ramon, and settled down to it seriously.

For half-an-hour they fenced, Ramon showing him every tactical trick of the South American school that he knew. And presiding over the whole affair was the beaming Michele. At last the two duellists threw their weapons aside and called for drinks.

Then, for the first time, Van Dusen told Ramon about the time he had impersonated a German flying officer in Kront's staffel, and of the origin of this unfortunate and one-sided quarrel.

Ramon was interested, and sympathetic with the German—he understood his point of view.

"Ah, well," he sighed, adding with the attitude of a true second, "it is a pity that to-morrow he dies."

"Dies be blowed," retorted Van Dusen, and then, continuing in Spanish, he explained that he had no intention of trying to kill his opponent for whom he felt nothing but considerable admiration as a first-class staffel leader, admiration tinged, admittedly, by exasperation with him for this absurd attitude.

Ramon raised his eyebrows.

"Kront very surely means to kill you if he can," he said.

But that did not trouble Van Dusen.

"Look here, Ramon," he said, "we must try to work a reconciliation afterwards. This feud has gone on long enough."

SHORTLY after six the following morning, Van Dusen found himself in vest and trousers facing Kront.

"*En garde!*"

"*Tirez!*" And they were at it.

Again, Van Dusen left his arm ever so slightly exposed in *sixte*. Kront took the opening like a flash, but only as a feint. As Van Dusen's blade moved over in the parry, this time of simple *sixte*, his opponent's met it fiercely in a *fleche* which finished in *tierce* accompanied by a determined lunge full at the body.

Van Dusen only just cleared in time with a parry in *septime* aided by a jump back.

But so determined had been the lunge that it had left Kront's body scarcely two feet from his own point. Van Dusen only just stopped the instinctive *riposte* in time. It would have pierced Kront's stomach, and Van Dusen was still determined not to kill this honourable enemy of War days. Kront's arm jerked back in the simple parry of *carte*.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, rattled the parries to *riposte* and *counter-riposte*, and then they were both back *en garde* out of reach of each other.

But with that gambit, Van Dusen felt easier. Kront was out to kill him. Therefore, he would avoid any attack on the forearm which would merely paralyse the hand and compel the seconds to stop the fight. Therefore, Van Dusen could afford to neglect such attacks; they would only be feints on Kront's part.

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Of course, he must not refuse to answer such feints, or it would give the show away. But with the knowledge that no attack would finish on his arm he had an enormous advantage, unknown to his opponent.

The end came quickly.

Kront feinted at the head. Warily, Van Dusen made to stop him under his outstretched arm. Back came Kront's blade, as quick as a mongoose dodging a striking cobra; back in *septime* it came to meet Van Dusen's blade and then shot out again in a quick *riposte* at the forearm.

But Van Dusen, wary, did no more than start the movement of his blade for his defence. Kront, anticipating a correctly formed parry, flicked under in a disengage to *carte* and lunged like a flash full at the body. But Van Dusen's blade had not come back to make the parry to the feint at arm. It was still outstretched to stop. Skipping his feet together and curving his body away from the deadly point, he stopped Kront full on the forearm. He felt the indescribable sensation of his blade sinking into flesh. Kront's sword clattered on the ground. He sunk on one knee groping for it with nerveless fingers. The seconds, ever alert, sprang in, pinioning their principals' blades to the ground with their own weapons.

The fight was over. The German's arm was paralysed.

Van Dusen dressed as Kront's wound was attended to. Then, followed by a Ramon outraged at such scouting of etiquette, he went over to his opponent.

"Kront, old man," he began earnestly. "Can't we finish this wretched matter? I will give you any apology you wish for what I did in your staffel. Heaven knows that we all owe men like you an apology for ever having been opponents to such stout-hearted and decent people."

Kront turned away.

Sick at heart, but accompanied by a jubilant Ramon, Van Dusen returned to his house for a breakfast of which he ate nothing.

No sooner was the meal over than word came that the Siskins were arriving, and

for the next few weeks Van Dusen did not give a thought to Kront; he was too fully occupied in chasing his picture-palace flight, as he called his gorgeously-uniformed flying officers, into the air. He had insisted that they should wear neat overalls when flying and, with the exception of Ramon who did not mind what he wore so long as he could fly, they had not liked it at all. Then there was gunnery, gunnery, and yet again gunnery; even Ramon began to learn how to clear a number three stoppage. The American gangster was proving his worth.

So immersed was Van Dusen in all this that he failed to note a growing state of tension in the country, until one day he found mobile, and not very efficient, anti-aircraft batteries on the aerodrome, accompanied by a car containing the Secretary for War, and a reluctant, morose General who demanded that the one and only air target should be towed aloft for gunnery practice.

From the point of view of Van Dusen who was towing the target—his officers having found urgent business elsewhere—the shooting that followed was not such as to inspire confidence in the safety of San Prado; but from the ground, where altitude errors were unnoticed, it may have looked impressive enough.

When he landed, the Secretary for War questioned him closely about the state of his command.

CHAPTER VI War in the Air

A FEW days later, in the true modern Aspirit, Bolaro bombed San Prado without any declaration of war. Fortunately for that city, Kront had a poor meteorological service, and therefore did not know the weather had broken badly on the San Prado side of the mountains; so badly, in fact, that Van Dusen had washed out flying for the day and retired to his quarters.

At the first unusual, faintly throbbing note from the sky he had run out on to the aerodrome. There they were, four powerful-looking bombers heading for

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the city through the scattered, low clouds—heralds of the coming storm.

Van Dusen streaked for the hangar and found that Wilkins with his squad had beaten him to it. The doors were already open and the Siskins were being brought out.

As the first engine coughed into life, a car screeched up the road and deposited Ramon and four rather reluctant officers whom he had snatched, all in their colour-scheme uniforms, from the pleasures of the city.

The enemy bombers looked efficient. Van Dusen briefly told his flight about his plans, assuring them of the tactical advantage of height with a confidence he was far from feeling after his glimpse of the enemy.

THANKS to his unique flight-sergeant, Van Dusen got his men into the air in record time, to find that the enemy were now somewhere over the city. He got occasional glimpses of them through the clouds, and realising that the weather would hinder them in spotting their targets, he led his flight away from the city as he made height. A surprise attack was his one hope. He glanced back uneasily at his companions.

"H'm! Formation decidedly sketchy!" he thought, and bitterly regretted that the inter-machine wireless he had planned had not yet been completed. By its direct contact he could have maintained morale and kept the formation together.

Presently, he reckoned that he had sufficient height in hand. He turned, and still climbing, headed for the city and the enemy who, by now, were invisible behind the screen of scattered clouds.

Then he caught sight of one machine, and gave the prearranged signal by which it was understood that he and the next machine on his left, Ramon's, would attack, the others to remain aloft on guard.

By just keeping it in sight through the fringe of an intervening cloud, Van Dusen managed to stalk it for a time. Then its occupants must have caught sight of him and, as if launched from a

catapult in mid-air, it streaked away from him.

Obviously it was making for the protection of its fellows hidden somewhere beneath the clouds invisible to Van Dusen. Instantly he wagged his wings at Ramon and thrust his stick forward. There was no time now for a circling dive if he was to catch that streak of lightning. Upwards he floated against his shoulder-straps as the nose of his machine went down, and swiftly the range closed.

It was gun against gun now. No height nor performance to permit of manœuvring. Overtaking tracers flew past him on the right—good old Ramon was with him!

Back against the two fighters came a stream of nickel steel. But superior training told in those half-dozen seconds.

The upward stream of tracers stopped, the bomber toppled awkwardly into a left-hand turn, its nose went down, and it plunged for the ground.

Van Dusen zoomed fiercely, with Ramon riding hard on his tail. Upwards and backwards in a climbing turn he shot, to where his flight should be.

There were two of them. The other two were streaking for the aerodrome, home, and safety.

Grimly, Van Dusen collected the remaining two, and with Ramon in his place on his right, turned again towards the enemy. He saw them flying in a neat formation that spoke of thorough training. They had not yet unloaded all their eggs, and what few had been dropped appeared to have done little harm; a few clouds of smoke were drifting from some open spaces, none at all from the streets.

Once again Van Dusen gave the sign, this time for a general attack and, wagging his wings, he dived straight for the enemy close beneath him. In a second or two they were within range. Then, just as he was about to press his triggers, the bombers turned to the left as one machine, and a swarm of streaking tracers soared upwards. The dive Van Dusen had set was too steep, and the bombers were too directly beneath for him to keep his sights on his targets.

It had been a skilfully performed

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tactical manœuvre on the part of the enemy. Down Van Dusen swept, sacrificing his tactical height in one last throw in order to get on the outside of the turn and on the enemy's blind spot—if they had one. Around him he heard innumerable faint cracking sounds.

As he flung his stick over to the left and brought it swiftly back into his stomach, he caught a glimpse, behind and above, of Ramon's craft, its nose pointing skywards, its fuselage a dirty yellow. Next moment it was a plunging inferno of smoke and flame. Ramon! his friend and the only man in this tawdry lot—for, by now, the other two were nowhere to be seen.

This was the end. Numbly, he thought of Kront, probably in the leading bomber. Now, at last, he would be satisfied.

THE Minister of War's residence stood sufficiently outside the city to render it safe from the air raid.

On a beautifully-kept lawn in front of the house, three men lolled in easy chairs, legs stretched out, heads thrown back, each of them staring upwards through field-glasses.

Every few seconds from out of the still air came a stammering sound. High up against the swirling storm clouds three specks circled and dived on another. Suddenly one speck seemed to increase in size. A smoke cloud broke away from it.

One of the men, the General, clad in his magnificent uniform, lowered his glasses and said with a touch of spitefulness :

"Nombre de Dios ! Sic transit Van Dusen."

The one next to him, the hatchet-faced newspaper man, McLeod, snorted :

"Sic transit my left leg ! You gotta 'nother guess comin', General. Look !"

The third member of the group, inconspicuously dressed in civilian clothes, did not speak, but maintained his close observation of the drama which was being enacted far above him.

He was the Secretary of State for War.

IN the upper air, Van Dusen circled, dodged, and side-slipped, sneaking height whenever he had a chance, but

always keeping his attackers abeam, never on his tail.

He dare not spin out of the scrap. Beneath him was the capital of San Prado, every citizen of which would be watching the fight.

They would say he had the wind-up if he quit. And that was the last impression he must give, things being as they were, with disaffection creeping in.

His guns spat viciously as he caught one of his enemies in a passing sight—that was one for Ramon, anyway.

But the next instant tracers flashed past him. Something cracked. From the bottom of the cockpit leapt a searing flame.

Thinking and acting now with the speed of instinct he slipped the pin from his harness, steadied the controls at central position, pushed himself up until he sat on the fuselage—"Thank goodness the old kite isn't spinning," he found time to think—and with the pressure of the wind helping, rolled backwards and sideways into space.

Grimly he took the delayed drop, one hand clutching the rip cord handle of his parachute. He dare not pull it yet with those three foes circling above him.

As he fell, he got a glimpse of the ground sweeping up at him.

Two thousand feet !

Good enough ! He pulled.

Crack !

Aching in every muscle from the jerk of the opening 'chute, he grabbed the lines and, skilfully spilling the air, side-slipped to a landing in the principal park of the capital of San Prado.

In the high sky, intimidated by the unexpectedly bad weather and their hostile reception, the Bolaran fleet were retiring in tidy formation.

Ten minutes later, Van Dusen was standing on the lawn saluting the General who was still lolling in his chair.

"So ! *Commandante* Van Dusen. The airmen of Bolaro have proved too much for you, in spite of that so excellent training of the English Air Force !"

The loss of Ramon still obsessing his mind, Van Dusen eyed his commanding officer grimly.

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"I've told you, sir, we can't do the impossible. We must have 'planes capable of nine thousand metres ceiling : not to speak of——"

He stopped. He couldn't slang the men of his command.

"Not to speak of ? Well, *Commandante* ?" silkily came the General's words.

Authoritative as the crack of a whip, yet low and evenly modulated, came a voice from behind them.

"General !"

The magnificently-uniformed one scrambled to his feet.

"General," quietly the Secretary for War spoke. "The *Commandante* Van Dusen is removed from your command. From now he will be responsible direct to me. You may go."

He turned then to the newspaper man who had risen to his feet on Van Dusen's appearance.

"You also, Mr. McLeod," he said.

The newspaper man bowed, winked at Van Dusen, and sauntered off regretfully.

This Bolaran attack, he thought, already mentally making up his dispatch, has given the Minister for War his chance to take the reins out of the General's hands. And things usually happen when the Minister of War gets going.

McLeod was a true prophet.

CHAPTER VII

"Battle Flight ! Attack !"

EL Capitan Kront, his hand forced by Bolaran politicians, had launched his attack too soon, as he very well knew.

His air force was not yet effective enough to maintain pressure on San Prado. But the meagre results of the raid had at least had the effect of frightening his political superiors. They now gave him a free hand and he was enabled to strengthen his squadron.

The process, however, took time and seemed also to give the Secretary for War in San Prado just the breathing space he needed.

In three weeks, Van Dusen was able to inspect the reconstituted San Prado Air Force. It now consisted of himself, six

flying officers and six gunners, all time-expired officers and men of the British Air Force, together with seven Hawker Demon two-seater fighters. Men and machines had been snatched from jobs all over the world, rushed by air and assembled in San Prado with such speed and efficiency as only a man of the calibre of the Minister for War could achieve.

There followed two weeks of the hardest, most intensive training these men had ever experienced, even though they had been through the mill of Service squadrons in the finest training ground in the world.

Up and down the grim mountains of the frontier Van Dusen led his men on training flights. Those deep valleys, towering rock and snow-filled corries were fast becoming as familiar to Van Dusen as the layout of his own aerodrome.

Two weeks and a day later, urgent news came through from secret agents of San Prado : the full Bolaran fleet had crossed the frontier at twenty thousand feet. Within five minutes, Van Dusen was sitting in his machine at the head of a "vee" of growling aeroplanes on the aerodrome, his gunner behind him with hand uplifted.

"Now," said Van Dusen.

Down came the hand, and with a mighty roar of engines the San Prado Air Force took-off.

Twenty-five minutes of leisurely climbing saw them at twenty-five thousand feet—five thousand feet in hand. Half-an-hour later they sighted the enemy flying in a close "vee" formation. It looked as if they expected trouble, and Van Dusen was surprised, for he had fondly believed that his recent air force expansion had been a well-kept secret.

"*Battle flight, Change !*" came his radio command. "*Change !*"

Van Dusen had invented his own terms of command, employing the simplest words, and immediately, with finished neatness, the San Prado Air Force became two "vees" of three, with Van Dusen ahead of them.

Losing three thousand of his five thousand feet in hand, he closed with the enemy formation at full throttle and

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at a speed of some three hundred miles per hour.

"Formation on the low line, Attack!" he ordered. "Attack!"

In a wide circle, the San Prado fighters swept down at terrific speed. Down and down they came: level with the enemy now, yet still Van Dusen held the dive. But the men behind him, knowing their leader, followed in perfect formation. The dive became easier: now they were level, now sweeping upwards at forty-five degrees still holding the speed gathered in their dive. The pilots of each flight of three were converging with their double guns on a single enemy: all three gunners of each flight concentrating their fire on the enemy next astern and now above their heads.

Ahead of the two attacking flights, Van Dusen and his gunner, working with the unison of perfect training, shot down an enemy 'plane and swept upwards in a loop.

When the flight manoeuvre was completed, four of the enemy had been accounted for.

ON his back now, Van Dusen glanced quickly to each side. "Oh, good men!" he cried involuntarily as, in perfect formation, his two flights came sweeping up behind him.

Then, just as his machine was about to turn nose down, he glanced for a moment skyward.

His heart missed a beat.

Out of the sky was sweeping a formation of six fighters, Fairey Fantômes, each armed, as Van Dusen well knew, with four guns and an Oerlikon cannon. It was appallingly obvious that, unknown to the San Prado Secret Service, the Bolarans had obtained a fighter flight.

For the first time in his adventurous life Van Dusen knew real dismay, real fear—though not for himself. For one moment temptation held him.

Those men, all friends, those N.C.O.'s, all trusting to his leadership, was he to send them crashing to their death for the sake of a wretched little republic to which they were strangers?

Then he thought of the bombers, of the

little capital that would become a shambles, of that steadfast man, the Minister for War, who had placed his trust in him.

Over the wireless came his voice, clear and strong.

"Enemy fighter flight observed. Attack on bombers continues."

All this in the space of a second or two—ground folk do not know the meaning of swift thinking as men who fight in the air must think.

"Flights, on the low line—attack!"

"Attack!"

Down swept the seven fighters of San Prado with death riding hard on their tails. Once again they staged their concentration of fire, the essence of modern air war. This time, three enemy bombers whirled downwards in flames.

But with them went four of the San Prado Air Force who, gallantly braving the merciless fire from the enemy fighter flight, had concentrated on the bombers.

Stricken, Van Dusen peered down. One was in flames; what of the others?

"Thank Heaven!" he breathed, as, far beneath him, one after another, six parachutes fluttered and blossomed out.

"Remaining machines form on me," came his sharp order.

By now, the attacking flight had soared upwards, much as the San Prado Air Force had done on their first attack. They were now circling for their next onslaught.

But Van Dusen, steadfast, never heeded them.

"Flight, on my lead—attack!"

"Attack!"

Down they swept, concentrating on one enemy machine this time and sending it hurtling down. But on their tails now stammered the deadly message of four times six guns.

Van Dusen felt a lurch and glanced over his shoulder.

His gunner had crumpled, his piteously white face resting against one corner of his cockpit.

Then it seemed to Van Dusen that a mule kicked him violently on the left shoulder. Something knocked a foot off the rudder-bar. Clumsily he regained

AIR STORIES

control ; his leg was numb. With an effort he surveyed the sky. The last two San Prado craft were spinning. He could not see if the occupants had jumped, for the next instant everything went woolly. What was it ? Sight gone ? Then, just as quickly his vision became clear again.

Clouds ! An outlying patch !

The fight had prevented his noticing that the weather had been getting steadily worse. Swiftly he reckoned the position ; they had accounted for eight of the Bolos. That left twelve—still ample to play havoc over the San Prado capital, and, in addition, they had their six fighters intact.

Clouds might stop them from finding their objective on this occasion. But the next day, or the day after—with the San Prado Air Force wiped out—they could take their choice.

Then, germinating at the back of his brain, the Great Idea suddenly blazed in his mind !

Yes ! Crash their whole fleet !

By Golly ! It might be done ! And he'd have a dashed good stab at it before he cashed in his checks.

THE bombers were circling uncertainly, obviously having a consultation on the wireless as to what to do now that the thick weather was upon them. Nor were their fighters bothering about the last San Pradan machine. They could polish it off at their leisure.

Then Van Dusen acted.

He made a dive for an opening between two great cumuli clouds. The fighter flight were after him like a flash ; then a few seconds later, as though changing his mind, their leader pulled up in a great climbing turn. His flight streamed after him, and soon they had reassembled behind the bombers, which were very slowly straightening out into formation.

And following Van Dusen !

Exultingly he flew on, throttling down to allow the Bolo fleet to keep up with him.

So the wily Kront had fallen for it !

He was relying on the one remaining and disabled 'plane of the San Prado fleet to guide him through the mountain passes

to the capital where they would spread death and destruction at their leisure.

Lower and lower swept Van Dusen, the white cumuli changing to a sullen, dark canopy overhead. He was level with the snow-capped mountains now, yet he went still lower. Now, with mountains on each side, he was flying up a valley. Rapidly it became a veritable corridor, black cliffs on each side, and above, the menacing pall of clouds.

Would the Boleran fleet follow, or would they refuse the risk and turn before it was too late ?

He glanced astern. They were still following !

Not far to go now.

Around a corner of forbidding rock Van Dusen swept and momentarily out of sight, he gave his craft full throttle, keeping the nose down as far as he dared in order to accumulate the maximum speed for what was to follow.

For Van Dusen knew these wild mountains like a book.

A forbidding mass of towering rock loomed up ahead, and another corner. Just before sweeping around it, he glanced astern.

There they were, in full cry, sweeping round the previous bend. Around the rock he tore at full speed and with a nearly vertical bank. Once clear, he immediately levelled out, and then, with joystick hard back, he shot vertically upwards. For ahead of him, so menacing, so near that almost he felt he might have touched it, was a rocky cliff towering right up into the black pall of clouds. And on either side, sheer walls of rock hemmed in the valley.

It was a certain death trap for the Bolaran fleet which, heavily loaded and slow, would never have the speed for the swift vertical climb that alone could carry them to safety.

THE pilot of the San Francisco-San Prado air express was feeling very comfortable. Sitting high above the clouds, in clear sunshine, he was flying on a directional wireless beam.

Below him, a few dirty-looking places betokened holes in the dazzling white of

WINGS OF RECKONING

the cloud carpet. He saw one ahead and flew towards it.

"Better have a look at the weather underneath," he shouted to the navigator sitting next him.

Just as he came over the gap in the clouds something shot vertically out of it and rolled into normal position.

"Holy Smoke!" gasped the pilot, astonished.

Next moment, a dull red glow flared at the bottom of the hole. Then another, and another . . .

All thought of his job now left the pilot of the express, and he circled down rapidly.

It was a fearsome place he saw, a regular dead-end of rock. And strewn at the foot of the cliffs or on the bed of the dead end was the burning wreckage of eighteen aircraft.

He glanced up at the 'plane now above him.

"Something wrong with that chap!" he muttered and, pushing the throttle forward, climbed quickly.

VERY weak now with the loss of blood from his wounds, dizzy, vaguely aware of sunshine and white clouds, Van Dusen had just enough consciousness left to keep his craft flying on a level keel.

What was he to do? Where was he? Which way should he fly?

His dazed brain could not grapple with the problem.

Yet, somehow, he felt no astonishment when a great shape loomed up to starboard, and a cheery face, beaming from a cabin window, waved encouragingly.

Van Dusen waved a feeble acknowledgment.

Well . . . he could . . . keep . . . formation-distance . . . anyhow.

* * * *

To the Minister of War waiting on the tarmac came the control officer of the Transport Company.

"San Francisco express coming in on directional beam, sir. Seems excited——"

He stopped, staring up at the clouds. Emerging from the mist was the express, and flying inside its wing was a lone fighter.

Five minutes later the Minister of War was excitedly clutching the sleeve of the pilot of the express as he stepped from the cabin.

"The Bolaran fleet," he cried. "Did you see it? Where is it?"

The American turned both thumbs down.

"The whole boiling lot," he said, cheerfully. "And yon lad," he pointed to the fighter which had landed with him, "yon lad with the dead gunner was the man who crashed 'em!"

But the lad with the dead gunner, sitting wearily in his cockpit, was thinking numbly, "Kront . . . Kront . . . sorry, old man."

HERE'S THE ANSWER

More Replies to Readers' Enquiries

MCCUDDEN'S MARKINGS (G. E. Jackson, London, S.W.2). McCudden's S.E.5 in 56 Squadron was dark green with cream undersides. Its struts were varnished spruce, airscrew blades were grey and it had a red spinner, taken from the aircraft of one of his victims. The machine number, carried midway on the fin, was A.4891, and McCudden had a black "6" on his fuselage and top planes. The "6" on the fuselage was behind the target and almost midway between it and the rudder.

NIMROD (M. Courtenay, Chalfont St. Giles). (1) The Hawker Nimrod Fleet Air Arm Fighter is

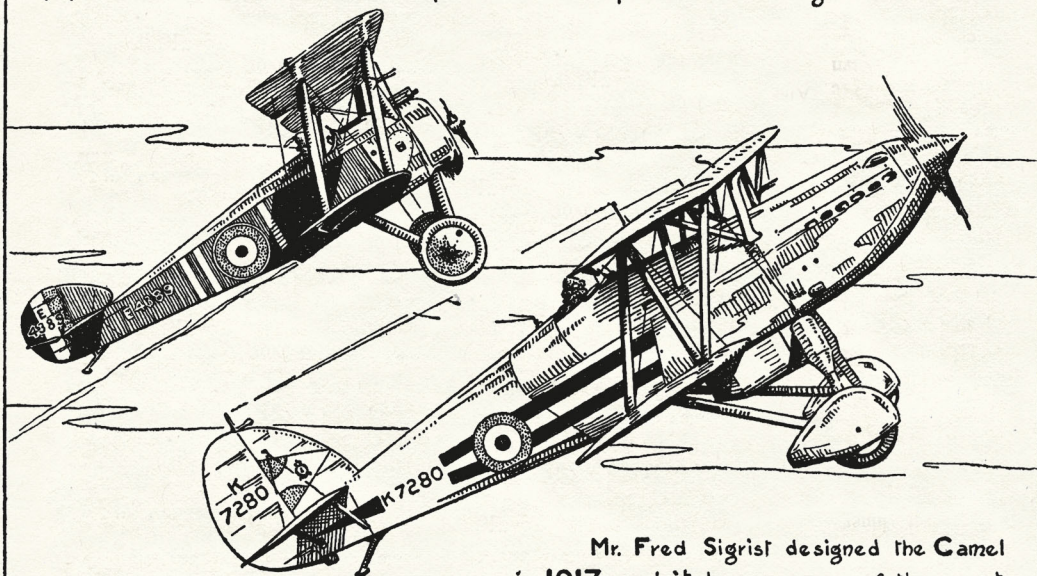
identical with the Fury except that when modified for deck catapulting it has a slightly greater wing area. (2) Dimensions of the Fury are: span, 30 ft.; length, 26 ft. 8½ in.; height, 11 ft. 5 in.

WAR-TIME COLOUR SCHEMES (Lance-Corporal T. Morgan, Middlesex Regt., Singapore).

(1) Most R.F.C. and R.A.F. aircraft were painted either in silver, yellow, green or brown shades or combinations of these. Night bombers were usually black or olive drab. Nieuports were silver or yellow, Spads yellow, and Camels green with olive drab or green wings. (2) Up to the time of the Armistice 1,213 American-built D.H.4's had been delivered in France, but only 543 saw action. No other American-built aircraft saw service during the war, though the Thomas Morse S.4E and the Ordnance Scout were both built in the U.S.A. about September, 1918. Glad to know you like our covers and that they are popular for wall decoration.

HEREDITY

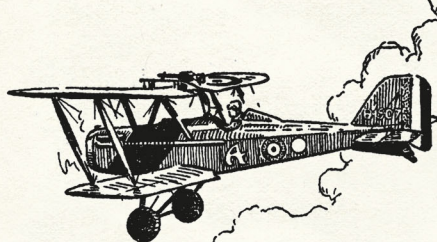
TWENTY YEARS AGO, in 1917, two famous designers were responsible for the major part of the R.F.C. fighter equipment, The same men are responsible for the present R.A.F. fighters.



Mr. Fred Sigrist designed the Camel in 1917 and it became one of the most successful single-seaters of the War. Although the Hawker Fury II (produced under his directorship) has a liquid-cooled engine, it bears a decided likeness to the Sopwith Camel.

Camel - 130 h.p. Clergét, 113 m.p.h. at 10,000 feet.

Fury II - 650 h.p. Rolls Royce Kestrel, 240 m.p.h. at 14,000 feet.



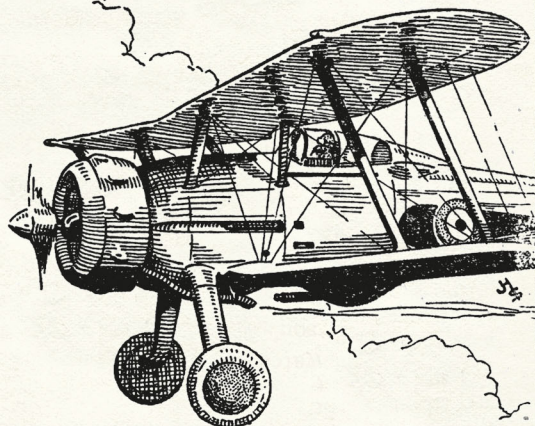
Mr. H.P. Folland designed (for the Royal Aircraft Factory) the S.E. 5., widely used in 1917 by the R.F.C.

The Gloster Gladiator is now the latest fighter to reach the R.A.F.

Squadrons and, while the designer has changed from a liquid to an air-cooled engine, this new machine retains the distinctive outline of its originator's genius.

S.E. 5. - 150 h.p. Hispano-Suiza, 115 m.p.h.

Gladiator - 840 h.p. Bristol Mercury, 253 m.p.h. at 14,000 feet.



BLACK CHANDIVER

In League with the Devil, Men said of Black Chandiver of the Spad Squadron—How Else Could One Explain his Strange Immunity from Spandau Steel?

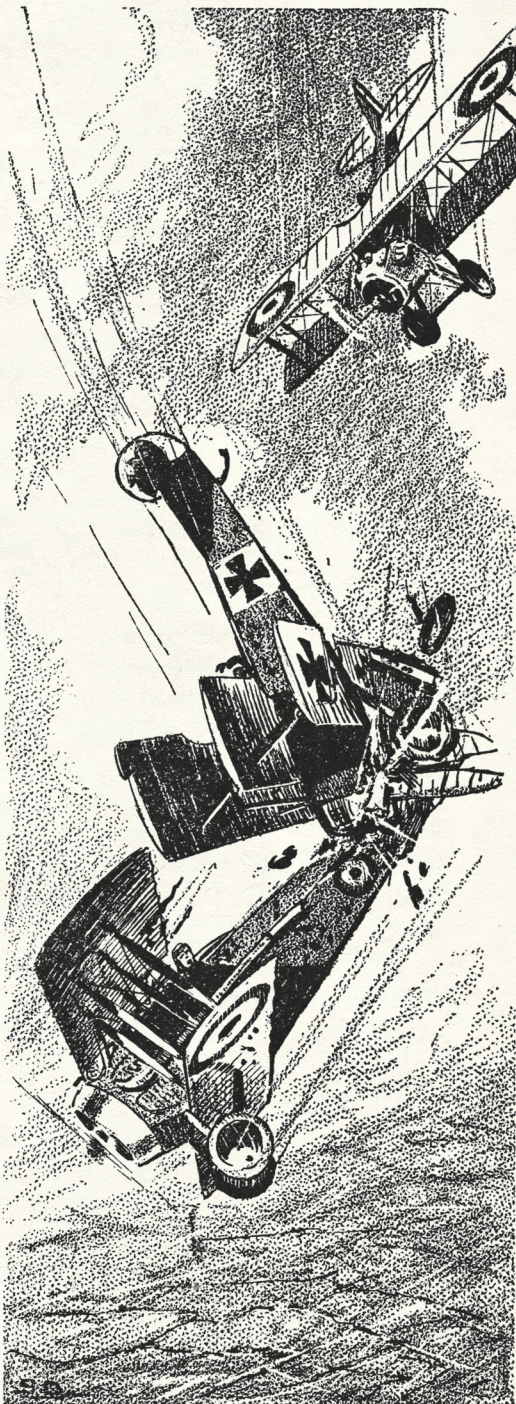
By

E. N. T. MELLER

THE feud between Black Chandiver and the jolly Baron Heinrich von Seichtfurt began when each leader was in the neighbourhood of his thirtieth victory in aerial combat. On both the French and the German sides of the Line interest in their rivalry was widespread—and this even before the two aces had exchanged a single burst.

The Baron was a fat little, round little, red little tub of a baron who loved to sit unbuttoned with a tankard at his elbow and beat time while jolly fellows sang the old songs in chorus. He was a clever leader, but a shade cautious in taking personal risks, and he had accumulated most of his victories slowly and in well-chosen singles. The majority he had secured by the "overhead method"—which meant that the Baron sat up above the whirling dog-fights and pounced on the French stragglers. Now and again it happened that the "straggler" was some unfortunate who had already received his *coup de grâce* from a junior member of the *staffel*. In that case the junior was unlucky; the victory was tacked on to the jolly Baron's score.

The Frenchman, Count Chandiver, on the other hand, with the ferocious courage of the congenital killer-man, sent his all-black Spad screaming into the centre of every fight and stayed there like a terrier in a rat-pit as long as a single enemy remained in the sky. He hunted and killed because he had a passion for it, because the lust that was in him could only be sated with blood. Rather than return from a patrol without deaths on



The blue Fokker met the all-black Spad in hideous impact

AIR STORIES

his hands he would dive along the trenches of the front line to spray the ducking heads, or, "hedge-hopping," he would flush a column of troops on their way back to rest billets and leave the road strewn with writhing bodies.

He was handsome, devilishly handsome, was the Captain Count Charles Haillart de Joigny de Chandiver, and belonged to the *haute noblesse* of Gascony. For him only aristocrats were "people." He kept a couple of black panthers at his castle below the Pyrenees, had eyes of which few men could support the gaze, and was in league with the Devil—or else certain simple folk were simpler than they looked.

"The vampire who sweeps above our heads on moonless nights is none other than our Black Count," swore the peasants who lived round the castle, and crossed themselves, called the children in at dusk, and bolted door and window before they crept between the blankets.

CERTAINLY there was some strange compelling power in those fierce dark eyes of the Count Chandiver. Peasants who sent their spokesman up to the Château with their grievances received him back mysteriously converted to the Count's way of thinking and eager to convince them of the error of their ways. Oh, he possessed the evil eye *sans aucun doute*, did Black Chandiver. Was it not true that good milk turned sour where his shadow passed, and that an hour after she had cursed him old Mère Fleuriau had gone home to find that her cow had given birth to a calf with two heads? *Assurément* his master was the Black One himself.

To the ladies of the Paris *salons* he was "*ce beau Chandiver*," the dark one who never smiled, lithe and tiger-like in his Dragoon uniform. Resistance there was none: ("*Oh, ma chère*, it is like being kissed by a demon, so terrible are his eyes!").

Even in his own squadron he was an enigma. Here, where high birth and dark handsomeness counted for nought, he was the strangely privileged "Black Chandiver," the sombre and the haughty

one, he who had more than once crashed his fist into the face of a stupid *mécane*, he who had brought down the cream of the Boche air-fighters as one who takes a blow-lamp to moths against a window-pane, he who sat in his darkened hut when good men were drinking their wine.

The legend had grown in the *escadrille* that by the dispensation of his master, the Devil, he was invulnerable to shell and bullet alike. For a long time it seemed so. Who else but Black Chandiver could hurl himself into the middle of every Squarehead formation he came upon? Who else could, time after time, glide in to land with very square foot of fabric peppered with bullet-holes and every strut hoary with splinters, and yet himself be untouched? Assuredly the Devil looked after his own.

But this legend died a sudden death. There came an occasion—two occasions—when the Black Count suffered ignominious defeat—and at the hands of no other fighter than the jolly Baron Heinrich von Seichtfurt.

Once already they had fought in single combat. Honours had been even, and the Baron became more cautious. What he liked was his position of Jove-like superintendence at a dog-fight, his sparrow-hawk dives on the stragglers, his easy victories. After that first encounter he planned to keep the Gascon at his distance.

So the next time the bloodthirsty Black Chandiver came screaming up to tangle with his enemy sitting aloof he found himself stoutly set upon from behind by a brace of trusties that the wily Baron had detailed for the duty.

Gnashing his white teeth in fury the Black Count pulled in his stick for a loop, whirled over on his shoulder, and fought them burst for burst until both were spinning down out of the engagement, the one a dead man, the other dying.

But there still remained the Baron. And the Jolly Baron, chuckling comfortably, pressed his firing lever the moment he had his enemy on his sights. He had been sitting for the last few seconds on the Gascon's tail. And the Gascon didn't know it. A double stream of tracer came

BLACK CHANDIVER

raking through the all-black Spad and Black Chandiver, hurling his machine into a spin, barely got home with his life.

A bullet had cut a furrow along his forearm. It was trifling, as a wound, but it served to destroy the flattering legend of his invulnerability.

"If I do not grill that Baron in the flames of his accursed Fokker," swore he over wine, "may I myself grill in the flames of Hell for eternity! Bring me paper, bring me pen!"

He was livid with rage.

The officers of the Squadron, whose private opinion was that in any case Black Chandiver was destined for the hottest floor in the nether regions, respectfully kept their thoughts to themselves. They waited till his stabbing nib had finished moving over the paper, and then one of them flew across the Line and dropped his message down on to the German aerodrome.

It was a challenge to single combat; the time specified was next day at dawn; the place, ten thousand feet above the Salt Lakes of Carvilliers.

THE Jolly Baron was at a beer party when the message was handed to him. His round, red face took on a thoughtful expression as he read it. He folded it and slid it without comment into his pocket, hoping that none of the merry singers had been looking over his shoulder; that French devil had underlined the word "single" twice—an insult to his honour! He decided to say nothing, for the present anyway. But:

"It is the matter of a duel with Black Chandiver?" hazarded his senior *hauptmann*. (What else could be the purport of a message from the squadron of the Gascon count dropped on the aerodrome of the Jolly Baron?)

The Baron moistened his lips. "Ja!" he admitted, and reached for his tankard. The merry singers ceased their merry singing.

The Baron forced the smile back on his rosy face. "The impudence of the rascal!" he managed to bluster with a show of good-natured contempt. But his thoughts were not in keeping. Already

the collar of the *Pour le Merite* was around his red neck and he was beginning to feel that the laurels he had won were sufficient to rest upon. Only a week ago he had begun correspondence with highly-placed friends in Berlin, and in day-dreams he fancied the position of chief instructor at some school of aerial combat. Perhaps, even, he would give up flying altogether and spend his days sitting back comfortably in a swivel chair, beer at his elbow, and his feet on the desk of the *Ortskommandatur** of some Belgian town not too near the Line. Pleasant thoughts. And now there comes along the challenge of this French maniac. *Teufel!*

The shadow of a smile played round the lips of the senior *hauptmann* as he watched his chief. Should, most unfortunately, the *staffel* lose its leader, then a *hauptmann* would have to be promoted to take his place, and if there were any justice in the world it would be the senior *hauptmann*.

He leaned forward—the merry singers had moved to a distance. "The Herr Baron will accept this challenge?" he asked softly.

"*Natürlich!*"

The senior *hauptmann* nodded his approval. "For the good of the morale of the squadron the downfall of this *französischer Teufel* is imperative. Already the younger pilots speak of him as though he were Death incarnate. It is not well. I had made up my mind that I myself——"

The *staffel*-leader drained his tankard and did up the buttons that were undone.

"I will fight him," he announced firmly.

THE two aces met at the appointed time over the appointed place.

For twenty-five long minutes the blue Fokker and the all-black Spad whirled and whirled about each other, tail-chasing in an endless series of circles, darting and spitting like wild cats. Until, after a final few minutes without a burst of fire being fired from either machine, the Baron

* A post corresponding to that of "Town Major."

AIR STORIES

waved a cheery goodbye and broke circle to go.

Black Chandiver, not of the waving kind himself, answered with a scowl, but, his own ammunition being also expended, he put down his nose for home.

Whereupon the German pilot treacherously whirled round upon him, took up a position beneath his tailplane, and put in such a murderous burst of fire that the Black Count slumped forward in agony against the control-stick.

Then for three months the sky belonged to the Jolly Baron and the merry singers. Black Chandiver lay in hospital on his face (his wounds were such), biting the pillow because of the pain and the indignity of his wounds, and scheming his vengeance.

During three days he was like a caged beast. Nurses feared to go near him ; fellow patients complained that they were unable to sleep at night because of the ferocious teeth-gnashing, the groans and the animal noises that came from the bed of the Gascon. It sounded like a soul in torment.

Then, on the fourth day, he called for pen and paper, wrote one short letter, and was afterwards calmer.

IT was about this time that a certain Etienne Clou was chosen from the lowly ranks of the *mécaniciens de la troisième classe* for training as a pilot.

The choice had caused considerable amazement to two worthy *sous-officiers* who happened at the moment to be watching the attempts of the young man, Etienne Clou, to sweep out a hangar.

"As for me," said the sergeant, pushing back his *képi* to scratch the back of his head, "I do not comprehend it at all. This witless one has the body of a white slug, the eyes of a dead mackerel, and the intelligence of neither. Why then should he be selected for training as a pilot ? I speak to *Monsieur le Commandant* : ' *Mon Commandant*, ' I say to him, ' this imbecile Clou, this frog, this slug, this—— ! ' But at once he checks me. ' Say no further word, *mon sergent*, ' he says to me. ' The Count Chandiver has wished it ; it is enough ; the young one must go for

training.' What thinkest thou of that, *hein ?* "

His friend the corporal shrugged his shoulders, spreading out his hands to show that he was equally at a loss.

"Only regard him for me at this moment as he sweeps the hangar ! " groaned the sergeant. He stamped his foot suddenly and his voice rose to an angry yell :

"*Hé, toi ! Clou ! Dépêche-toi, crapaud !* "

Etienne Clou turned his head slowly at the sound of his name and stared vacantly at the two *sous-officiers*. His mouth drooled spittle at the corners ; his tunic hung like sacking round his ungainly form ; his feet turned inward like those of an ape ; in all the land of France there could be found no lower specimen of the human race.

"*M-m-moi ? C'est moi que vous voulez ?* "

"Only look at him for me ! " implored the sergeant. "To think of that animal at a school of aviation ! For myself, I would prefer to train a rhinoceros ! "

But the corporal was not listening.

"*Tiens !* " he murmured meditatively.

"And now I recall a certain thing : it is that this same Clou, *cet animal-là*, happens to have been born beneath the walls of Black Chandiver's castle."

"*Comment ?* "

"I was recalling that that animal over there was born within the shadow of the Château de Chandiver. I also am from the Pyrenees and the castle is well known to me. Now there is a tradition in our country—— But no—I am a fool ! "

"*Bien entendu !* But the story ? "

The corporal drew out a paper packet of cigarettes and placed one in his own mouth and one in the sergeant's.

"It is that in the old days," he began slowly, "the Counts of Chandiver received from the King of Navarre this privilege, that on returning from hunting (the day not being a Sunday or Saint's day) they might bathe their feet for refreshment in the blood of a serf."

"*Dégoutant !* In any case I do not believe it."

"*Peu m'importe*. So much is historical," asserted the corporal. "*En bien*, the story goes that a serf of that time—who had

BLACK CHANDIVER

been chosen to provide the *petit bain* on that occasion—preserved his life by vowing the souls of himself and his posterity to the Counts of Chandiver for ever and ever.”

“What has this to do with that imbecile yonder?”

“Only that the name of the serf according to the tradition was Chilperic Clou. Now would it not be strange if this Clou of ours, that *crapaud* over there who strives to sweep the hangar, were a descendant of——?”

The sergeant scoffed. “We are of the twentieth century and this which we fight is the Great War for Civilisation. Moreover what could Black Chandiver, our invincible ace, want with the soul of that animal there?”

“That I cannot say, *mon ami*, but I feel that in going to the war as an *aviateur* this Clou is more likely to earn a cross of wood than a *croix de guerre*.”

AS soon as he left hospital and returned to his squadron, Black Chandiver took up the feud. Pale from convalescence, his ferocity frozen into a dangerous calm, he wrote out his challenge. No mention was made of the previous duel; the Herr Baron Heinrich von Seichtfurt was politely requested to meet the Captain Count Charles Haillart de Joigny de Chandiver at the same time and at the same place on the following morning.

The Jolly Baron gave a raucous shout when he read the dropped message. He was in his cups; the merry singers were all of them in their cups; they were celebrating.

Staggering slightly, and holding a dripping tankard aloft, the *staffel*-leader read it aloud to them. They cheered. One last fight for the Jolly Baron before he exchanged the machine-gun for the pen! He had been promoted and transferred to a staff job at a desk in Berlin. It was this promotion they were celebrating that very moment, but now—one more fight for the Jolly Baron! *Hoch! Hoch!* Beating their tankards on the table they broke into vulgar songs about Frenchmen in general and Black Count Chandiver in particular. The merry singers were in

their merriest mood.

Later in the evening the Jolly Baron slipped out for a breath of fresh air. The first enthusiasm for the fight had worn off with the effects of the alcohol, but he still felt confident. Chandiver could never be the fighter he had been—not after a defeat like that last. Also there was that bullet-proof seat of steel that the Baron had had fitted in his cockpit; it gave a man confidence, a sense of security. He made his way over to the armoury shed and gave orders that his ammunition-belts were to be filled with armour-piercing and explosive. Black Chandiver would have no such protection for his person. On the steps of the armoury-shed the Jolly Baron stared appreciatively at the blood-red sunset and smiled benignly. Red was his lucky colour.

THE all-black Spad of Count Chandiver taxied out from the shelter of the hangars, and as it did so the *officier de service** stepped from the threshold of the guard-hut. It wanted half an hour to dawn. He buttoned his greatcoat at the throat; it was damp and chilly out on the aerodrome, but any take-off of Black Count Chandiver was well worth watching.

Usually the Gascon brushed the turf with one wing-tip the moment after his wheels had left the ground and went screaming upwards in a corkscrew climb that made the spectators hold their breath. It was a take-off that few dared imitate, a death-defying demonstration that the Black Count had made his “signature stunt.”

The watcher clapped his glasses to his eyes and waited for it.

He waited in vain. The all-black Spad taxied soberly forward, slid into the air, made a careful turn and headed for the Line, climbing slowly.

The *officier de service* shook his head sadly as he turned away and made for the guard-hut. Black Chandiver was a sick man—too sick a man to seek combat with such an adversary. He should have waited a week or two and got well. Too late now. With a bad man’s death a

* *Officier de service*: Duty Officer.

AIR STORIES

fine fighter would be lost to France.
Tant pis !

AND in actual fact the black Spad made poor showing against the Baron's blue-painted Fokker triplane. From the very first the German seemed to sense that it was with a sick man that he had to deal.

Three or four circuits of tail-chasing they made together, and then the blue Fokker, whirling over in a loop, fastened itself on the tail of the Spad and poured into it a double stream of lead from its Spandaus. Beneath this hail the all-black Spad seemed suddenly to wither. Her nose dipped. She shot screaming earthward, engine still racing all-out, propeller shot to matchwood.

"Thou hast lost thy skill, my Count !" roared the Jolly Baron, and sent his triplane howling down in pursuit. A happy smile creased his jovial face as he fingered the firing-lever. Already he was thinking of that desk in Berlin, of the comforts of the capital, of the brilliant fighter's career that would stand behind him. Flame jetted from his guns, bullets poured into the all-black Spad.

It was at that moment that a third machine came streaking down full pelt from the cloud-bank above.

At the wailing of its wires and the shrill clatter of its guns the Jolly Baron's face turned pale. He whipped round his head to find a second Frenchman on his tail and knew that his end was very near.

With the bullets drilling through his back he knew that only seconds remained. *Jawohl !* But for his purpose seconds were enough. At any rate he would make an end of the Black Count before this new-

comer claimed his life.

With an effort he thrust forward the throttle-lever to its limit, and with control-stick and rudder-bar directed the whole weight of his machine against the all-black Spad.

"If I burn in Hell, Count Chandiver, then thou shalt burn by my side !" he swore.

In answer to his dying efforts with the throttle-lever the engine-note rose sharply up the scale ; there was a wailing of wires that was a torture to the ear-drums ; and then both sounds ceased suddenly as the blue Fokker met the all-black Spad in hideous impact.

It was a spectacular exit from life—even for an ace—but it cannot be said that the Baron died a happy baron.

Because a second before the final crash he had caught a glimpse of the face of his victim, white and horror-stricken at the imminence of death. And that face was a face which the Baron did not recognise. How should he ? It was the face of a somewhat stupid-looking peasant from the Pyrenees.

Had he lived a few seconds longer the Baron might have guessed at the truth ; but, as it was, the bullets were piercing his body in an almost continuous stream. For the newcomer was following down the collided machines, spraying them impartially, and it was not until the flames burst from the jumbled wreckage that he let up with his firing.

Then with a smile of satanic satisfaction on his face the survivor of the three pilots pulled out of his dive and headed for home.

"*Tiens !*" murmured Black Count Chandiver. "Even peasants have their uses !"

Remember to Read—

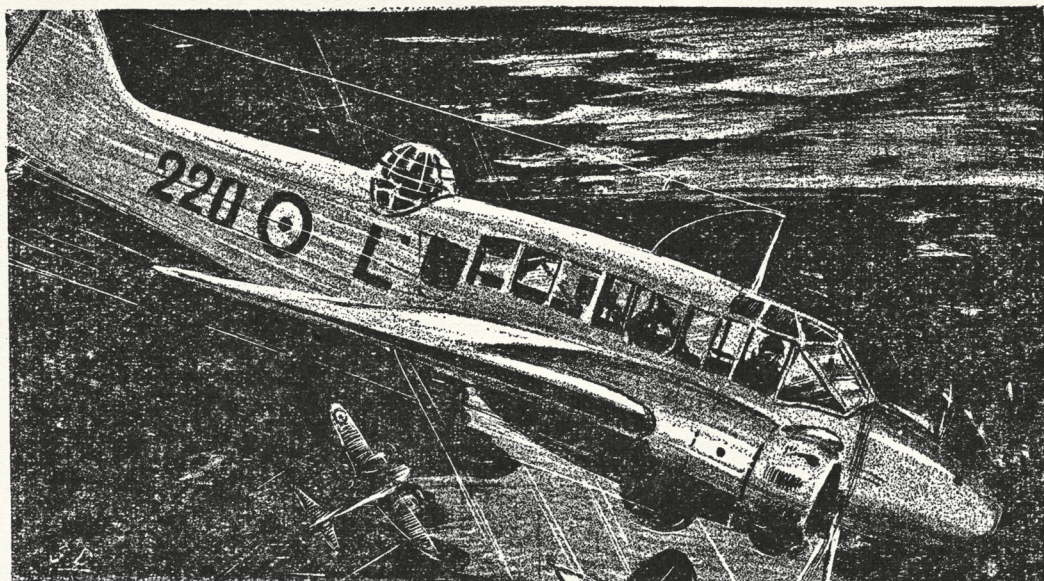
FLAMING PUPS

A Great Long Story of Aerial Adventure in an
R.F.C. Scout Squadron on the Western Front

By MILFORD HYDE

Late of the Royal Flying Corps

—in Next Month's AIR STORIES



PHANTOMS FLY BY NIGHT

A Modern Mystery-Thriller of
the R.A.F. at Home

By

A. J. PELHAM-GROOM

CHAPTER I

Contraband

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT JEREMY JEFFERSON, R.A.F., leant back in his chair and yawned prodigiously. From the darkness behind him a quiet, melodious voice broke the silence.

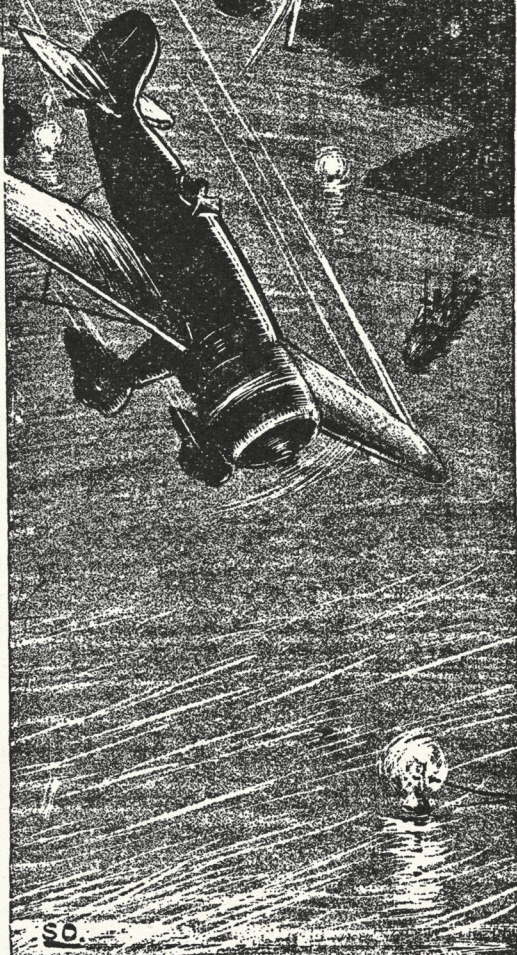
"Getting you down, Jeremy?"

Jefferson, better known to his friends as "J.J.," flung out his arms and stretched luxuriously.

"Sweetheart, it surely is," he said.

His wife moved forward and pushed a glass tankard of sparkling ale into the small patch of light which fell upon the desk.

"Try this," she suggested, and Jefferson required no pressing.



*In between the Anson and the sea shot a shadow,
diving straight at the buoy . . .*

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The room, a small one, quietly but comfortably furnished, was in darkness save for the shaded light on Jefferson's desk, which was situated in front of an open window through which one could see the brilliant moon high above the North Sea.

"Will you finish to-night, Jeremy?" his wife inquired.

Jefferson shrugged his shoulders and drew an ivory box forward.

"Cigarette?" he suggested.

"No, thanks, I'm for bed."

"Lucky little devil. Would you like to leave me another bottle of beer? I'll give another hour to this puzzle."

His wife glanced down at the papers and books which littered his desk.

"Do you think you'll be able to get him off?" she asked.

Jefferson's thoughts of courts-martial in general, and one in particular, remained unuttered, for at that moment the gravel crunched on the drive outside as a car drew up to the front door.

"Damn!" said Jefferson.

"Damn," agreed Mrs. Jefferson.

"Whoever it is, there's going to be no party for me to-night," Jefferson declared with emphasis.

Then from the darkness, a voice hailed them.

"Jeffersons, ahoy!" it called. "May I come in?"

"It's Carson," declared the girl with resignation.

"Carson, it is," agreed her husband, and then, into the darkness, called out, "Come along, Sunshine!"

Footsteps crossed the drive, and a heavy tread could be heard along the passage and mounting the stairs.

"Saving the odd light bill," said the newcomer, and flicked the light switch down.

"What! Working, J.J.?" he continued, blinking in the bright light. "This is unlike you!"

Jefferson laughed. "Have some beer," he suggested, "and take a pew."

brilliant liquid as it cascaded into a tankard.

"Good evening, Tiny," came a feminine voice.

Carson shot to his feet and bowed deeply.

"Rosalind, my dear, I'm all contrition. I abase myself, and I bid you good evening. To tell you the truth, my mind is preoccupied."

"I know, watching the beer," Rosalind suggested with a smile.

"Partly, partly," Carson admitted.

"But the real trouble is that we've got a job of work on hand, and I'm dashed if I quite know how to tackle it."

"Then why not leave it to the C.O.?" suggested Jefferson.

"He's away. But I've spoken to him over the 'phone. He wants me to prepare a scheme, and . . ."

"And so you came to Jeremy," put in Rosalind.

"I thought it would interest him," Carson protested.

"Old man, nothing would interest me at the moment," Jefferson declared, "I'm defending in this adjectival court-martial on Tuesday, and it'll take me all my time to prepare any sort of a defence."

"Poppycock!" was Carson's retort. "All you've got to do, is to say . . . er . . . well, *you* know, it's quite simple, really."

"Oh, quite," Jefferson agreed, "but tell me a little more, won't you?"

"Well, I suppose the first thing is to decide whether he's guilty or not."

"That's generally the last thing that's decided."

"Yes, but surely you know whether he did it, whatever it was."

"Oh, he did it all right," said Jefferson. "He socked a corporal under the chin, and is now charged under Section 8 of the Air Force Act with striking."

"Then why defend him?"

"Justice, my lad!"

"It may be good justice," Carson replied, "but it's rotten discipline. Anyhow, let's leave that for a moment, I want your advice. We've had a signal, all in code and whatnot, to the effect that apparently there's some smuggling

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT CARSON, adjutant of Jefferson's squadron, sank into a chair and watched the

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going on in these parts. It's on a large scale too. Customs, coastguards, police, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides all completely foxed. And we've been asked to co-operate."

"How?" Jefferson inquired, his interest now caught.

"Precisely what I want to know," Carson replied. "All I'm told is that we're to co-operate. Apparently they've got certain proof that the stuff is coming through, and they're pretty sure it's dope—you know, heavily bearded foreigners, bright knives, slinky women, bubbling glasses—incidentally that reminds me."

Tiny Carson stretched out a long arm and seized a bottle from a side table. The bottle tilted and, gazing lovingly at his replenished glass, he raised it to his lips and continued.

"As I was saying, slinky women, bubbling glasses, and all the stock-in-trade of Phillips Oppenheim. They've caught one or two of the smaller fry, and by some clue or other—probably the villainess was wearing Whitstable oyster shells as ear-rings—they've come to the conclusion that the stuff is smuggled in on the Kentish coast. How and when they don't know, but, as usual, aircraft at night are suspected. They always are."

"Sounds impossible," Jefferson remarked. "What with our squadron night flying, Continental air lines flipping to and fro, and other Service craft co-operating with the searchlights, they'd never get away with it. No, I should think of something else. Anyhow, what can we do?"

"It's obvious that I'll get no help from you," said Carson resignedly. "Your brain—defend the word—is all wrapped up in *prima facies*, *res gestae*, 'writs of mandamus,' and in 'such less punishment as is in this Act mentioned——'"

"Rosalind, our guest's glass is in its customary condition—empty," Jefferson interrupted. "I admit, Tiny," he continued, "that you're right for once. Law is really interesting. There's a rule that you should study, it'd be rather useful for a man of your mental capacity to

know. It's called the Rule in *McNaughton's Case*. Deals with the plea of insanity."

"I shall turn exceeding queer with you in a minute," threatened Carson, using the latest R.A.F. expression. "Meanwhile, how about coming up to the Club for a quick one?"

"Not for me, old man," Jefferson said firmly, "I want to get this taped."

"Then I must be off," said the visitor. "Spare a second of your time for my problem, won't you, old horse?"

Carson's huge body emerged from his chair.

"I'll see you off," offered Jefferson.

"That's right, speed the parting guest," laughed Carson. "Show him it's time to go. I don't mind, I'm used to insults."

A massive hand descended on Jefferson's shoulder and banged him back into the chair that he had just risen from.

"I'll see myself off, J.J. You get back to your torts and whatnots."

From the windows, the Jeffersons watched his car sweep out of the drive, then Rosalind went up to bed, leaving her husband to his interrupted work.

Seated at his desk, Jefferson flicked open the Manual of Air Force Law at "Rules of Procedure," but Carson's visit had broken his concentration, and the steady drone of night-flying aircraft disturbed him. For a while he watched the slender tracery of searchlights sweeping the skies, then his gaze fell on the lights of ships on the horizon, and the brilliant pinpricks from light buoys. Subconsciously, he jotted down their positions on the blotting-pad before him, but still concentration eluded him, and, at last with a smothered expletive, he slammed the law book shut, and, placing it on top of "King's Regulations," retired to bed.

CHAPTER II

Smugglers' Patrol

THE wide silver sweep of Anson wings, framed against the black depths of the open hangars, made a

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glittering picture in the morning sun. Airmen in blue overalls moved to and fro discharging their several duties. Then the first Cheetah started with a roar, closely followed by its team mate, and, just as the first bird on a spring morning sends its song as a reveille to the others, so in their turn the rest of the powerful engines of the fleet woke to active life. Now pilots, white-clad and laden with charts and parachute harness, made their first appearance from the sanctuary of the Pilots' Room.

A group of four, dominated by the massive shoulders of Tiny Carson, gathered near the tail-plane of the first aircraft.

"And that's how it stands at the moment," Carson was saying. "The smuggling is believed to take place at night, but keep your eyes skinned now all the same."

"What for?" asked a slightly-built listener, completely dwarfed by the Adjutant, who now raised his shoulders in despair.

"Why ask me? For anything suspicious you may come across, I suppose."

"Don't have to go far for that," said Toby Jarrold, of the slight stature. "I saw you walking past the Sisters' Quarters at one o'clock this morning. That's suspicious enough, in my opinion."

"Youngster," grinned Tiny, "you may have just been elevated to my dizzy rank, but, I'd have you remember that I'm your Adjutant—and that reminds me," he turned to another pilot whose wide shoulders and length of arm had earned him the soubriquet of "The Ape," "Jalden, looking for suspicious characters does not include low-flying or taking obliques of the lovelies who disport themselves, thinly clad, while sunbathing. Artistic as your last lot of photographs undoubtedly were, the C.O. has no desire to make a mural decoration of the local nudery. Now, get to it! J.J., I'm coming with you."

"O.K." Jefferson replied. "You can fly her while I get on with the case for the defence."

"The devil you will. I want you to listen carefully."

The two men walked round the wing, and Jefferson pulled open the door of the fuselage and slipped inside, closely followed by Carson. The A.C.2* sitting at the controls left his seat as the pilot approached, and Tiny eased his massive bulk behind the wheel while Jefferson slipped into the corresponding seat on the other side of the gangway.

Behind them, the wireless operator was already at his instruments, and the A.C.2 selected a seat at the back of the cabin near the door leading to the gunner's dome. Tiny slid his side window open and looked around. His hand sought the throttles and the two Cheetahs roared in unison, dying away to a contented purr as the pilot withdrew his hand.

After a final look round, Carson waved the chocks away and the Anson, one of the trimmest twin-engined aircraft ever designed, was taxied out on to the wide expanse of the aerodrome. With a clear run ahead, the monoplane moved forward and the hangars of the sister squadron at the far side of the landing ground seemed to rush towards it. Gently, Tiny Carson eased the 'plane into the air and climbed steadily.

It was a summer's day such as exiles in the Colonies imagine to be England's heritage; they flew across a vivid blue sky, bereft of cloud, and below, Kent was laid out in neat array for their inspection. Here a cart, built before aircraft were thought of, was being loaded with hay; there a meshwork of poles, laden with verdant garlands, indicated a hopfield. Ahead, the sea sparkled as the sun kissed it.

JEFFERSON leant back in his seat, and stretched out his long legs.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"Over the Estuary. Thought we might spy out the land."

Jefferson laughed and rising to his feet wound up the undercarriage, watching the two green indicators in front of Carson disappear as he worked.

"You mean the sea; but what's the

* A.C.2 : Aircraftman, Second Class.

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use? I know, and you know, every ripple, every channel, every mudbank and every light on this coast."

"We think we do. Still, I'm not saying there is anything to find, I just say we might."

"Have you any theory at all?"

"No, old horse, I haven't. Candidly, I don't think we're likely to be much help to the laddies, but we must show willing."

They flew on, and the steady drone of the Cheetahs acting as a soporific, Jefferson soon closed his eyes and dozed.

"That's the North Edinburgh Channel down there," said Tiny a few minutes later, "all the big stuff has to go up there."

Jefferson woke up. "Stale news, old lad," he said. "I've seen 'em many a time. Three of the light buoys are dead in line with my window. I was watching them only last night, looked just like fireflies blinking in the darkness."

"Fireflies don't blink," remarked the practical Carson.

Jefferson ignored the retort and closed his eyes again. Tiny swung round to the east and made for the Kentish Knock light-vessel.

"You know, J.J.— Hi, are you awake?"

"Sure."

"Well, sit up and take a little interest. As I was saying, I can't see where we come in on this act. Suppose the stuff does come from the Continent. It can come all the way by one boat, or it can start off on one boat and be transhipped. It might even come all the way by air, or, again, I suppose it could come half-way by air, be dropped and picked up by a boat. The broken journey is obviously the more likely because it means that whoever does it from this end need only leave this coast for a short while, and wouldn't cause the Customs wallahs to get their eyes working. No, it seems to me that we must look out for a launch or something like that. We can rule aircraft out of it because they'd have to land in the water to pick the stuff up, and privately-owned seaplanes are altogether too rare birds to pass unnoticed."

Jefferson pondered this argument for a while.

"Then aircraft can be ruled out altogether," he said, at length, "for it's obvious that to do the job successfully it would have to be done at night, and a private aircraft flipping about after dark always causes a certain amount of local interest."

"Come, come," Carson objected, "it'd be as easy as pie, what with our squadron night flying, searchlight co-operation aircraft littering the heavens, air liners droning along and people from various civilian airports scuttling about the sky."

"Yes, I know, but actually all that flying, apart from the air liners, is localised."

"It covers the whole of Kent," his companion pointed out.

"True, Tiny, but you've admitted that if an aircraft is used it must operate from the Continent. Are they indulging in their spasm of night flying . . . ?"

Tiny was silenced. They were now well out over the North Sea, and, after turning for home, he pushed the 'plane's nose down and dived for the water.

CHAPTER III

The Man Who Wouldn't Look Up

THE Anson was less than a hundred feet above the sea when Carson straightened out and, flying due west, made for the Thames again. Away to the right a destroyer fussed on its way, and to the left a twin-funnelled liner of the New Zealand Shipping Company moved majestically on her way to Panama.

Even at the low altitude at which the Anson was flying the differences in the depths could easily be discerned. Beneath them, its confines clearly marked, was the Knock Deep, with its depth of fourteen fathoms, and giving place to the Long Sand where, in some places, the bottom was only two feet beneath the level of the sparkling water. Beyond the Long Sand, another channel was encountered, the Black Deep, running diagonally across their course. They

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turned and followed it to the south-west and over the cluster of light buoys to the North and South Edinburgh Channels. On their left was the West Shingles, and beyond that, separated by the Alexandra Channel, was the Girdler, one of the shallowest places in the Estuary.

"Look there, Tiny," Jefferson called suddenly, "there's a poor devil bringing his heart up."

Beneath the Anson lay a motor-launch, and over the cockpit of it a man was hanging in the attitude that poor sailors know all too well. In the stern his companion lay back nonchalantly staring up at the aircraft. Carson went lower and circled the craft.

"Struth! He must be bad—hasn't even turned his head to look at us," Carson remarked.

"Don't show off, Tiny! Why should he?"

They flew round again, but the seasick sailor did not change his position, and his companion maintained his recumbent attitude.

"I'm going to shake him up," announced Carson. "I'll 'larn' him to treat us with contempt."

"Don't be an ass," Jefferson said. "Remember you're not a Pilot Officer . . ."

But Jefferson's protest was of no avail; the nose of the Anson went lower, and turning with the skill of a master pilot, Carson skimmed over the launch. Yet still no movement came from the lazily rocking boat.

"Tiny, you're right!" came Jefferson's excited voice. "I think there is something wrong there. Go over again, I want to have another look-see."

Again the Anson turned and again it crossed the launch, this time so low that, had the undercarriage been down, it must have hit the cabin of the boat beneath it.

"Well?" demanded Tiny as they gained height again, but got no answer from Jefferson, who was already moving back to the wireless operator.

"Give me that mike and headphones," he demanded, perching himself on the side of the operator's chair.

"Hello, Spearpoint!" he called into the

mouthpiece. "Hello, Spearpoint! Ack One calling! Ack One calling! Hello, Spearpoint! Hello, Spearpoint! Ack One calling! Over!"

Immediately the answer came.

"Hello, Ack One! Hello, Ack One! Spearpoint with you. Over!"

Jefferson spoke again.

"Ack One calling! Ack One calling! Have located stranded launch on Girdler Sand. Crew of two. Crew of two. Believed dead. Crew of two believed dead. Reference AK.6040. Reference AK.6040. Over!"

He switched over to listen to the reply.

"Hello, Ack One! Hello, Ack One! Your message, O.K. Your message, O.K. Will you please stand by to direct relief party? Will you stand by to direct relief party? Over!"

Jefferson raised the mike to his mouth.

"Hello, Spearpoint," he called, "Hello, Spearpoint! Am standing by. Am standing by. Over!"

Returning the headphones to the operator, Jefferson walked back to Carson and stopped with his foot resting in the raised bulkhead.

"Circle round for a bit, Tiny," he said.

"They're sending a search party out."

"O.K."

Jefferson moved across to one of the windows in the fuselage and opened it to lean out and watch the launch which was now forming the centre of a circle whose circumference they were travelling.

THE officer in the Operations Room at the aerodrome must have worked quickly for within ten minutes Jefferson had caught sight of an R.A.F. launch throwing the sea on either side of it as it dashed along the coastline.

"Hope he doesn't run aground, too," Carson shouted.

He need have had no fear on that score, for the launch skipper knew both his job and the channels, and with a cheery wave to the Anson above him he soon came to a stop almost alongside the other launch, but with his keel in a good two fathoms of water.

The bodies were quickly transferred to the R.A.F. launch, and while the Anson's operator, in response to Jefferson's order, got into touch with the launch, the pilots watched the crew below

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them fasten a cable to the empty launch and back away. The cable tightened, quivered as it took the strain. Then, with a shudder, the boat shook itself free of the sand which held it and glided clear, into deep water.

The wireless operator's head appeared round the cockpit bulkhead.

"One man's dead, sir, the other's unconscious," he announced.

"How come?" Jefferson asked.

"Shot, sir, so they tell me."

"Shot! Wonder who they were."

"The launch didn't say, sir," replied the operator, and returned to his instruments.

There was nothing more the airmen could do and, with a final glance round the horizon, Carson turned the Anson for home.

"An interesting morning, Tiny," Jefferson remarked as the blue gap between them and the Kentish coast rapidly shortened.

"Most," Carson agreed, and then asked, "What are you doing this afternoon, J.J.? Golf?"

"No. I'm going up to the Aero Club. There's a lass up there with a new Gull that I dearly want to fly. Care to come?"

"I'll be there—I like their beer."

A few minutes later the Anson, which had been climbing steadily as it reached the coast, glided in to land. Jefferson released the undercarriage and the green indicators hopped back into sight. They were the last to return and the duty flight were waiting for them impatiently. The crew of the fire-tender sighed with relief—they would not be late for dinner, after all—and the driver of the ambulance, who also had to wait until the last aircraft had landed, started up his engine thankfully.

There was hardly a quiver as the monoplane touched down, and within five minutes the two pilots were on their way to the mess—where they were besieged with countless questions.

Saturday afternoon is generally a free time in the Royal Air Force, but the Squadron's present liaison with the Customs meant that a flight would have to

stand by for night flying. Neither Jefferson nor Carson, however, were wanted on that score, for it was Toby Jarrold's flight which had been detailed for the first night's work.

"See you at the Club after lunch, Tiny," Jefferson called as, having escaped from his questioners, he was starting out for his home.

"I'll be there," Carson assured him.

"And the drinks'll be on you!"

CHAPTER IV

Mystery of the Missing Buoy

TINY CARSON and Rosalind Jefferson sat at a metal table on the lawns of the airport, enjoying their tea and watching Jeremy perform at a height of two thousand feet above their heads.

"You ought to be proud of him," remarked Tiny.

"I am," Mrs. Jefferson admitted. "Hello, who's this?"

Carson glanced up at the man who had just arrived at their table.

"Hello, Merrivale!" he greeted him.

"Take a pew." He turned to Rosalind, "You know this blighter, don't you? One of the moneyed rich; half a dozen aircraft of his own, and whatnot."

The newcomer grinned, and sank into an empty chair while far above him Jefferson went into a spin.

"Hear you're working with the Customs," opened Merrivale.

Carson looked up at the sky. "Wish J.J. would come out of that spin."

Merrivale laughed. "Demonstration of Tiny being diplomatic!" he said. "Sorry, I didn't know it was a State secret. It's general knowledge here—as a matter of fact it was I who suggested it."

The spin came to its correct conclusion and Tiny turned to the speaker.

"You suggested it. How was that?"

"Well, I saw a report of this smuggling business in the paper, and suggested that an air patrol might be a good thing. In fact, I offered myself, and it was from the Air Ministry that I heard about your present show."

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Jefferson's aerobatics came to an end ; he shut his engine down and glided in to land. A few wide turns and a vicious sideslip followed by a swish of the tail, and he had landed. In a few minutes they saw his tall form striding towards them, a flying-helmet swinging in his hand.

"What's she like ?" demanded Rosalind.

"It's a he, my dear. And it has no vices—in fact, it's perfect."

"Cad ! Have some tea ?"

"Rather. Hello, Merrivale ! I hear you've something new in 'planes."

The civilian raised an eyebrow. "News travels fast round here," he remarked.

"Yes, I have a Lockheed. Show it to you sometime, if you're interested. I've got it over in the end hangar. Was just telling your man-mountain here that I'm going to use it on an unofficial smuggler patrol."

"Better be careful," Jefferson warned him. "Old Tiny himself is on that game, and he's not to be trusted after dark, either in the air or on the ground."

"*Sacramento* !" cried the indignant Tiny. "I have men shot for less than that ! I *was* going to eat bacon and eggs with you and your missus this evening, but you can darn well eat the lousy things yourself now."

"Good," was Jefferson's callous reply. "An early night'll do me no harm—besides, it'll ease the strain on our beer !"

BUT at ten-thirty that evening the gravel on the Jeffersons' drive crunched again under the weight of Tiny and his car, and once more his bulk was coaxed into one of the Jeffersons' chairs.

"Still at Rules of Procedure," he grinned as Jefferson produced the customary beer and glasses.

"No, as a matter of fact, I was looking at the light buoys," Jefferson replied.

"Well, forget 'em for a moment, I've news for you. Those unfortunate chap-pies we fished out of that boat this morning were a coastguard patrol. They got

some information out of the second one before he died. Apparently they pulled alongside a boat——"

"What sort ?" snapped Jefferson.

"Poor bloke died before he could say that, but he did manage to tell 'em that on hailing the aforementioned craft they were met with pistol shots. His pal dropped instantly. He caught the second shot, and fell, but as he did so he clutched something which must have been the throttle, and his boat shot off into the night. He didn't remember anything else until he came to in hospital. He was a gonner from the first, poor devil—spine smashed."

"So actually we've learnt very little from the business," pondered Jefferson, "except that the stuff—whatever it is—is picked up by a boat, and that the crew who're running it aren't shy of gun play. Are we to carry guns ?"

"Shouldn't think so."

"Well, fill your glass, Tiny, and turn the light out."

"What, so that you can concentrate on the problem ?" chaffed Carson as he reached for the switch and flicked it off. "Now what ?" he demanded.

"Take those glasses," said Jefferson. "Now, see out there, dead ahead, are two lights."

"What's the idea," Carson demanded, "a lesson in navigation by night ?"

"No. This is serious—or, it might be. Last night there was another light, away over to the right. T'aint there now."

"You imagined it, I expect ; or, perhaps, it was a fishing boat."

"No. It flashed intermittently."

"Some one walking backwards and forwards in front of it."

"Not good enough. Try again."

"Imagination then—as I said before."

Jefferson's answer was to switch on the desk lamp which threw a patch of dazzling brilliance on to the blotting pad before him.

"See those lines," he said. "I drew them last night. Is that imagination ? There are three lines, there were three lights."

"You're right, J.J.," admitted Carson. "This becomes interesting. Though, of

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course, it may be that one of the buoys just isn't working."

"Even that won't do," Jefferson announced.

His hand rustled paper in the darkness and soon an Admiralty chart was spread across the lighted desk. Carson's head bent over it.

"You're right again, old horse," he agreed. "It won't do."

"Exactly, Tiny, there's no buoy marked there on the chart."

"What's our next move, then," Carson inquired.

"To-morrow at sparrowspit we search for that buoy," said Jefferson. "We've got the bearing from here. Of course, I can't say if it was as far out as the others, but that won't matter as we can fly along the bearing and see. The coincidence of the shot Customs men and the missing light seems to me a bit too strong to be ignored."

EARLY next morning the Anson took the air again. Levelling out at a height of two thousand feet they headed for Jefferson's house, then, setting their course for the mysterious buoy, they moved out to sea. Margate Sands, Queen's Channel, Prince's Channel, the entrance to the two Edinburgh Channels and the Long Sand slipped beneath the speeding monoplane, but no sign of the missing buoy was detected by the airmen.

"It beats me," Jefferson announced at last.

"And me," admitted Tiny. "I suppose you're certain there *was* a third light. No, damn it, that's unfair. I know there was. How about telling the Coastguard people?"

"No," said Jefferson. "For two reasons. A—they'll laugh at me, and B—they'll clutter the area up with their craft and scare the bird away. No, we'll meet guile with guile."

"And just how?"

"Well, first of all, we'll get Rosalind in on this so that when I'm on night flying she can keep watch. If she sees the light she can 'phone us, and off we'll go. When I'm not on duty I'll keep

watch and Taylor and Jalden can do the trick. How's that?"

"Seems to be all we can do. Home now?"

"Home it is," agreed Jefferson, and the Anson dipped a wing in a graceful turn towards the land.

The journey back was uneventful. They flew low behind the "Crested Eagle," whose passengers waved happily, rose higher along the coast where a multitude of holiday makers covered the sands, and at last turned inland for home.

Slipping in to a perfect landing, Carson taxied the Anson up to the tarmac where the duty flight were waiting to take charge of it.

"Flies all day, flies all night, now 'e 'as to fly on Sunday as well. Must think they're training for angels," grumbled the corporal whose job it was to supervise the lifting of the Ansons back on to the trolley and the stowing away of the aircraft.

CHAPTER V

The Phantom 'Plane

JEFFERSON spent Monday evening at home working on his case for the morrow's court-martial. Busy as he was, he found time for repeated glances out of the window over the estuary, but, though he kept his vigil far into the night, fortified by relays of black coffee, never more than two lights winked back at him. At last, his case for the defence completed, he gave the buoy up as a bad job and retired to bed.

The following night, still glowing with the satisfaction of having got his marr off with a much lighter sentence than he knew him to deserve, Jefferson was on duty in his flight office. He was to have been playing a squash match at the Aero Club, and the futility of his present occupation annoyed him. The entry of Toby Jarrold, Carson, and Jalden soon after half-past nine was a welcome diversion.

"Rosalind on watch to-night?" asked Tiny.

"She certainly is, she——"

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The strident ringing of the 'phone bell interrupted him. He grabbed the receiver. "Jefferson here," he said.

"Rosalind here," came his wife's voice. "J.J., your light's at work."

"O.K. Same spot?"

"Same spot. It's bearing fifteen degrees."

Jefferson turned to his companions. "Get moving, you fellows," he snapped. "Tiny, I'll come with you." Then, turning again to the telephone, "Well done, old lady. See you later."

"Right, dear, and be careful, won't you? I'm going up to the Club to wait for any news."

"O.K. I'll pick you up there later. 'Bye."

Grabbing his helmet, Jefferson sprinted out of the office, through the hangar and into the waiting Anson. The Cheetahs were already purring, and a flare path was blazing merrily.

"All set, Tiny?" he demanded as he slid into the pilot's seat.

"All set, let her go!"

The chocks were whisked away; a green light glowed from the Duty Pilot's hut in answer to Jefferson's signal, and they were off. Five seconds later, Jarrold and Jalden in another Anson had followed suit.

The scheme had been carefully planned in advance. Both aircraft were to fly high, and while Jefferson would shadow the boat from the English coast, Toby would keep on the track of the expected boat from the Continent. Meanwhile, in the hangars, the Station Duty Officer was informing the coastguards and police of the air action.

The night was black; black with a denseness which could be felt, but stabbed here and there by the searchlights of Territorial Army anti-aircraft crews. The two Ansons were by no means alone in the sky; in several directions Jefferson saw the navigation lights of aircraft glimmering like fireflies but none came near enough to cause him anxiety.

They flew on, and soon gained the open sea. Tiny Carson, straining his eyes into the night, picked up the two light

buoys at the entrance to the Edinburgh Channels. He looked to the right.

"It's there, J.J. ! My God ! It's there," he shouted.

UP went the Anson's nose and the Cheetahs roared in unison. Three thousand feet, and the light was directly beneath them. They passed over it, left it a mile behind and turned. Jefferson's hand was poised above a switch, his index finger flicked downwards, and, in an instant, night became day as a magnesium flare bit into the blackness.

No secrets could be kept now. A quarter of a mile from the mystery buoy lay a tramp steamer and Jefferson saw Toby dive down towards it. Then, in between Jefferson's Anson and the sea shot a shadow. Straight at the light buoy it dived as if to plunge into the sea. The buoy wobbled frantically as the dark 'plane shot past it, to roar up again into the sky, heading for the Kentish coast.

Down went the Anson in a breathtaking power-dive.

"My God, J.J. ! Did you see that?" gasped the amazed Carson.

"Yes, and I can still see him."

Carson recovered his breath.

"I don't mean the 'plane," he explained. "I mean what it did. There were two buoys, he dived between them. Get it? Just like we pick up messages from the ground—a rope between two sticks. Only he dives between two buoys on a pitch dark night, lets down his hook and picks up the rope and a bag of dope. My God, what a stunt—and what a pilot!"

Jefferson made no reply, his whole concentration was needed to keep track of the 'plane beneath him. As yet, the magnesium flare was still suspended by its parachute, but in a few seconds it would fall into the sea and all would be darkness again.

He pushed the nose down into a steeper dive, and now he was gaining. The smuggler, flying without lights, was dead ahead; then, as though someone had depressed a switch, the light went out. Instantly Jefferson flicked on his headlight, and the 'plane ahead lay dead

PHANTOMS FLY BY NIGHT

in its beam. Nearer and nearer drew the Anson—and then Fate stepped in to take a hand in the game. A searchlight swung across the sky, found the Anson and held it. Dazzled to a degree that was unbearably painful, Jefferson was beaten. Too late, the beam released him from its grip, for by the time his eyes were accustomed to the darkness again, the 'plane had gone. In vain they flew around in wide circles: their prey had eluded them.

"Death and damnation! What a lousy break," fumed Jefferson. "Any news from Toby?"

"Yes," replied Carson, who had been busy with the wireless. "He's had to dive on his ship twice, but the coast-guard cutter is coming out now, he says. I've sent a warning out to watch for a 'plane flying without navigation lights."

"Well, that's something, I suppose. We'd better make for home."

TWO dispirited flight lieutenants slipped from the Anson and entered the flight office.

"What luck, sir?" asked the flight sergeant.

"You tell him, Tiny. Words fail me. I'm going to the Aero Club to collect Rosalind. Good night."

"Good night, old horse," Carson responded. "Don't take it too hard—better luck next time."

Jefferson grunted.

Ten minutes later he entered the bar of the Aero Club and was greeted with obvious relief by his wife.

"Hello, J.J. Any luck?" she smiled.

"Nothing to write home about. Is it too late for a drink?"

The club steward smiled broadly.

"No, sir, it's extension night."

"Grand. Two whiskies, then. Oh! And I want a squash ball."

"You're not going to play to-night, J.J.?" gasped Rosalind.

"Good Lord, no—just want one for a match to-morrow. Here's how!"

Jefferson downed the whisky at a gulp, and looked out of the window.

"Still got your flare path going, I see," he remarked.

"Yes, sir. We've got a Belgian pilot here—a Monsieur Funck—he does a bit of night flying."

"Really! I'd rather like to see his 'plane."

"He'll be back soon, sir, I expect. Doesn't usually stay up long."

"Grand," said Jefferson. "I'll go and wait for him in the hangar. Which one is he in?"

"The end one, sir."

Picking up his squash ball, Jefferson, after a brief word of whispered explanation to his wife, made for the hangar. As he was striding along the tarmac a voice hailed him.

"Hello, J.J., what are you doing up here at this time of night?"

Jefferson turned and saw Merrivale standing inside the first hangar.

"Waiting for a Mr. Funck," he replied with a smile. "Can I come in?"

"Surely."

"By George! What a beauty!"

Merrivale's new Lockheed monoplane, glinting in the rays of the powerful lamps, certainly presented an attractive picture and Jefferson stepped back to admire it better. As he moved his foot caught an oil drum and in stumbling he released the squash ball which bounced off across the hangar and came to rest under the Lockheed's resplendent fuselage. Recovering his balance, he walked over and was bending down to retrieve the ball when Merrivale ran forward.

"All right," he said. "I'll get it for you."

Merrivale stooped to push past, but Jefferson was already under the body of the 'plane. Picking the ball up, he started to back out, but, misjudging his distance, straightened up too soon and caught his head on a sharp projection on the underside of the fuselage.

"Damn!" he exclaimed. "What the hell's that."

He turned his head, and found himself staring directly at a message hook so neatly concealed in a slot in the belly of the 'plane as to be quite unnoticeable on casual inspection.

He backed out slowly.

"A pity you noticed that hook," said

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Merrivale, and, raising a heavy spanner he had in his hand, he struck viciously at Jefferson's head.

But Jefferson had anticipated an attack and at the sound of Merrivale's voice he rolled swiftly to one side. The spanner, missing his head, caught him a paralysing blow on the shoulder, and he fell back under the fuselage.

Merrivale stooped. "I've a gun here, so no funny business," he warned.

Jefferson's foot shot out and, catching it full on his knee, Merrivale staggered back. In a flash, Jefferson had hold of his right hand, caught the wrist that held the pistol and pulled it across Merrivale's body, bringing his head down. Then round came Jefferson's left fist, balled and hard, in a vicious swing. There was a crack as it landed behind Merrivale's right ear—and Merrivale was out.

Unhurriedly, Jefferson picked up the pistol and stuffed it into his pocket, then turned to greet Tiny Carson who at that moment came bursting into the hangar.

"Hello ! Hello !" said Carson, halting abruptly as he caught sight of the figure on the ground. "What's been going on here. If you've finished your little frolic,

I've some news for you."

"Go ahead, Tiny," prompted Jefferson, "our friend here's a bit tired and is taking a rest, that's all."

Still obviously puzzled, but unable to keep his news any longer, Carson continued :

"Well, it seems our bird dropped his dope at the appointed spot," he said, "and his men were there to pick it up—and so were the police ! Toby's boat-load have been caught too, so it hasn't been such a bad night's work after all. Our bird——"

"Is Merrivale," Jefferson interjected.

"What !"

"Yes. Quite by accident I spotted the hook under his 'plane. If I hadn't known then I would have when he lashed out at me——"

"And what did you do ?" demanded Tiny. "Knocked him out ! J.J., you disappoint me. I thought that with all your legal knowledge you'd first have warned him and then charged him under Section 8 of the Act. . . . That's good justice, you know !"

"Yes, but bad discipline," grinned Jefferson.

"BEFORE THE BREAK OF DAY"

The War-time Song of No. 54 Squadron, R.F.C., sung to the tune of "So Early in the Morning"

The orderly bloke was asleep in bed ;
He woke up with an awful head ;
The telephone bell began to ring,
More hot air from the 80th Wing !

Chorus—

So early in the morning, so early in the morning,
So early in the morning
Before the break of day !

The orderly officer said, "Who's that ?"
The Wing replied, "There's a Halberstadt
Over Albert, so they say,
Go and drive the beggar away !"

*Chorus—*So early in the morning, etc.

Six unfortunate sleepy heads,
Known as pilots, left their beds ;
And the Flight-Commander wiped his eye,
As he led his formation into the sky.

*Chorus—*So early in the morning, etc.

And they hadn't been gone five minutes, I'm sure,
When the 80th Wing rang up once more ;
"It isn't a Hun, the patrol must stop ;
It's only an old two-seater Sop."

*Chorus—*So early in the morning, etc.

Then the mists began to rise
Till they filled the wintry skies.
The patrol, it should have been back by nine ;
At eleven o'clock there was no sign.

*Chorus—*So early in the morning, etc.

Then old John Russell began to swear,
He said, "Chaps ! Oh dear, oh dear !
What has happened, I want to know ?"
When a message came through from our C.O.

*Chorus—*So early in the morning, etc.

"Oh ! Oxo's down by Combles way ;
Foster's crashed at Dieppe, they say ;
Nobby's on some French aerodrome ;
None of the rest have yet got home."

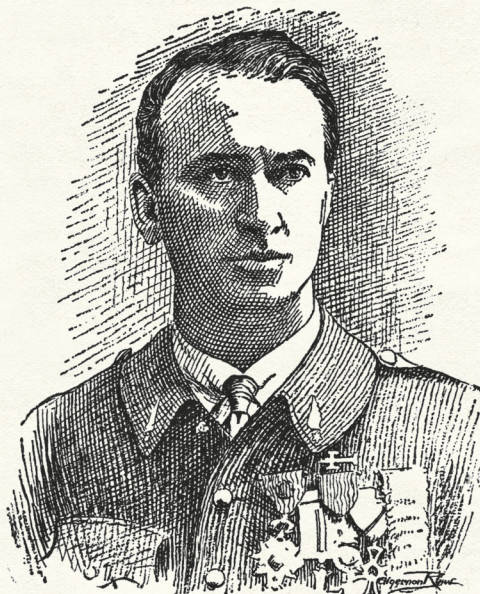
*Chorus—*So early in the morning, etc.

Now at last my song is done,
And as you see, there was no Hun ;
The moral of it's very clear—
We must have much much less hot air !

*Chorus—*So early in the morning, etc.

France's Greatest Balloon "Buster"

**Fifth on the
List of French
Aces, Hero of
Amazing
Escapes from
Death, and
Twice Reported
Killed—**



**—Maurice
Boyau Scored
35 Victories, in-
cluding 20
Balloons, before
meeting the
Fate that Dogged
the Balloon
"Busters"**

The Amazing Record of Maurice Boyau, a Leader among the Air Aces of France

By A. H. PRITCHARD

THE eventful War histories of Coppens and Gontermann, famous "balloon busters" of the Belgian and German Air Services, have already been recorded in these pages. Now we present the story of their French counterpart—Maurice Boyau, fifth on the list of French Aces, whose thirty-five victories include no less than twenty *drachens*.

Born at Mustapha, Algeria, on May 8th, 1888, Boyau had had no military experience prior to the outbreak of the War, preferring the sports-field to the parade ground of a military academy. He was an all-round sportsman in every sense of the word and at school won high honours in boxing, running, and football. On two occasions, he had been chosen to captain the International Rugby team.

When the Republic sounded her call to arms, Boyau enlisted in a mobile ambulance unit, but soon tired of this and transferred to an armoured-car section

with which he saw considerable action, and won the Croix de Guerre. With the stagnation of trench-warfare, however, the armoured car soon lost much of its value, and when, in July, 1916, Boyau's unit was disbanded, he transferred to *L'Aviation Militaire*.

Boyau secured his *brevet* in record time and proved such a finished pilot that the authorities refused to send him to the Front, but, instead, transferred him to Buc as an instructor. The monotonous duties of his job soon palled upon him, however, and after a series of hair-raising stunts that nearly drove the field commander frantic, he was eventually promoted to corporal's rank and, in February, 1917, assigned to the newly formed *Escadrille Nieuport 77*. The commander at Buc heaved a sigh of relief and predicted an early death for the madman who held so little regard for his life as to stunt the school's antiquated training machines.

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Boyau's First Balloon

AT the time of Boyau's arrival at the Front, many of the French scout *escadrilles* were being ordered to fit their machines with bomb-racks, and to indulge in bombing when not engaged in offensive patrols, and his first two months in action brought Boyau considerable fame as a bomber-cum-fighter pilot. He won his first victory on March 16th, 1917, when he caught a Roland two-seater over the Bois de Muiemare and shot its wings off. His first bombing raid came on the 23rd when he attacked the German aerodrome at Marimbois, and exactly two months later he had his first taste of balloon "strafing."

An enemy balloon had been the source of much trouble to the French infantry for several days, for it had directed the fire of two field batteries with remarkable precision. Hard words were sent back from the infantry commander about the alleged courage of the French Air Service, and, as a result, a Nieuport was sent out on the morning of May 23rd to attack the balloon, but was intercepted by two Albatros Scouts and shot down. Boyau then volunteered for the job, and set off just after mid-day. Flying low, he reached the balloon unobserved by the protecting scouts, and so swift was his attack that the flaming gas-bag collapsed on the observer just as he attempted to jump clear.

While out with Lieutenant de Sardier on June 5th, Boyau destroyed another balloon, but while returning home his engine gave up the ghost, and he landed in a field five miles behind the German lines. His companion reported him captured but, two hours later, a bullet-torn Nieuport limped back to its aerodrome and Boyau made out his report. For over an hour he had worked on his engine, spliced a severed fuel pipe, and then managed to restart his engine. With the Le Rhône spluttering fitfully, he had crossed the lines at less than five hundred feet—and it was then that his machine had collected the 107 bullet holes which were afterwards counted by awed mechanics.

Two Amazing Escapes

THE next few weeks saw Boyau experience two more narrow escapes. Flying with two companions on June 24th, he went down and destroyed a balloon, and then saw that the other Nieuports were being attacked by four enemy scouts. Climbing to their aid, he failed to observe another Albatros crossing his line of flight, and the wheels of the German machine ran along his upper 'plane, the impact sending both machines into spins. Boyau was the first to recover from the shock of the collision and a short burst from his gun sent the Albatros down in flames, whereupon the four remaining scouts left their intended victims and fled for home. When the mechanics inspected Boyau's machine after the affray, they reported the V-strut on the left wing cracked, and four broken ribs in the top wing. The machine had to be sent back to a repair park, and completely re-serviced.

On July 13th, Boyau destroyed an L.F.G. two-seater, but on the 31st he was once again forced to land behind the enemy lines. Under fire from the German artillery, he coolly changed his plugs, started his engine, and took-off. He paused only to find the battery that had made things hot for him and give it a few rounds in return, before he returned home to find that he had again been reported missing.

A balloon on the 20th was his only victim during August, but his daring work as a raider won him promotion to *sous-lieutenant*. On the 23rd, Boyau, d'Hautefeuille, Rebourg, and Sardier, attacked the railway station at Fresnes-en-Saulnois and inflicted severe casualties on an infantry regiment that was about to detain. Next morning Boyau took-off alone, loaded to the limit with small bombs, and "strafed" the railway tunnel at Frescati. That same afternoon he bombed the aerodrome at d'Hampton, set fire to a hangar, machine-gunned the squadron office and men's quarters, and shot up a machine-gun post. After this raid he was attacked by nine Albatros and Fokker scouts, which chased him

FRANCE'S GREATEST BALLOON "BUSTER"

home ; but although they fired at him for ten minutes after he had landed, he escaped injury.

By October, his score had reached ten, and on the 5th he was appointed a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, with the following citation :

"A pilot of exceptional audacity, who has proved an incomparable master of all branches of the service. Since March 16, 1917, he has destroyed six drachens, four enemy aeroplanes, and carried out three remarkably audacious bombardments from a low altitude. Has already received the Medaille Militaire."

Seven Victims in Six Days

EARLY in November, Boyau left the Front on leave, and was subsequently kept at the base, testing Spads and instructing in aerial combat. When he returned to his squadron in May, 1918, he proved that the rest had not impaired his skill by running up seven victories in six days.

While acting as escort for a Breguet on May 29th, he was decoyed away from his charge by a feint attack, whereupon six scouts pounced on the luckless two-seater and sent it down in flames. Thirsting for revenge, Boyau returned home to refuel, and then set out to look for trouble. He met an aimlessly-meandering D.F.W. and shot it down before the scouts that had used it as a bait had realised what had happened. Four Pfalz scouts then came down out of the sun to give the daring Spad pilot something to think about. Within five minutes one lay on the ground a blazing wreck; another, with a dead pilot in the cockpit, was going down like a falling leaf, and the other two were making for home and safety, with the Spad busily filling their tails with lead.

Another Pfalz went down before Boyau's guns on June 2nd, and two days later he decided to re-visit his old friends, the balloons. Two columns of smoke soon rose from the balloon line, and Germany was another £1,600 out of pocket. A frantic winch crew hauled the third balloon to the ground and walked it rapidly away. Their labours were in vain—for Boyau filled the bag so full of

holes that it collapsed drunkenly upon the heads of the ground crew. Incidentally, although this third balloon was undoubtedly destroyed, Boyau only received credit for two, the third being too low down for observers to see.

Boyau was now at the height of his career, and his score increased rapidly. He destroyed a balloon and a Fokker that was supposed to be protecting it on June 27th, and by the end of July he had thirty victories to his credit. The French authorities decided that the era of free-lance fighting was over and forbade Boyau to cross the lines unless accompanied by one of his comrades.

Flying with d'Haeglen, who was to survive the War with twenty-two victories, Boyau destroyed two balloons on July 2nd, while his companion accounted for another, and on the 22nd he and Sergeant Guerrier attacked eight Pfalz and Fokker scouts over Fismes. In the first diving attack both pilots destroyed an enemy machine, but Guerrier was then forced to pull out in order to clear a split cartridge which was jamming his gun. Boyau fought it out with the six enemy machines and by the time Guerrier had his gun going again, his companion had downed a Fokker and another Pfalz, and had put the sole survivor to flight. For this fight and his good work since the beginning of June, Boyau was made an Officer of the Legion of Honour.

The Fate of the "Balloon Busters"

ON August 11th, Boyau was informed that he would proceed on a month's leave commencing on the 13th, and he went up that same evening and accounted for two Rumplers over Ressous-sur-Matz.

Returning from leave on September 13th, he rejoined the Escadrille at 2.0 p.m., and at 4.0 p.m. he was fighting six enemy machines which chased him home and put nine bullets through his flying-coat. His thirty-third and thirty-fourth victories, both balloons, went down on September 14th and 15th, but the law of averages was now against him and he was soon to meet the fate of most of the great "balloon busters."

At 10 o'clock on the morning of

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September 16th, Boyau and Corporal Walla attacked a trio of balloons eight miles inside the German lines. Walla missed his balloon at the first attempt, but after noting that Boyau's was going down in flames, he again attacked. Once again, he was unsuccessful, and on turning to look for his companion was horrified to see him beset by seven German scouts. Even as he raced to his aid, Boyau's machine burst into flames, and fell into a spin. Walla just had time to see the Spad recover for a moment before the smacking of bullets through fabric reminded him that his own life was in peril.

Back at the aerodrome, Boyau's comrades refused to believe him dead. Had not his machine been seen to recover, they said, and had he not returned twice before after landing inside the enemy lines?

Higher authorities, too, believed that Boyau was alive, and it was not until September 20th that he was officially reported as killed in action.

So passed Maurice Boyau, a hero on the battlefield as he had been on the sports-field, decorated with the Legion d'Honneur, Medaille Militaire, Le Croix de Guerre with twelve palms, and the British Distinguished Service Order.

THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER :

A NEW R.A.F. HIGH-SPEED HEAVY BOMBER

The Latest Whitley Bomber Weighs over Nine Tons and Cruises at more than Three Miles a Minute

CAUGHT in the dazzling beam of a searchlight, an Armstrong-Whitworth Whitley monoplane bomber forms the subject of this month's cover painting by S. R. Drigin.

Recently adopted by the Royal Air Force as a standard type of night bomber—a class now officially known as heavy bombers—the Whitley is being produced in quantity at the new Armstrong-Whitworth factory at Baginton, near Coventry. It is also in service use, a squadron of Whitleys having taken a prominent part in this year's R.A.F. Display at Hendon.

A twin-engined, high-speed, long-range, middle-wing monoplane, the Whitley is built entirely of metal, except for the fabric coverings of its relatively unstressed components. Its undercarriage is retractable, and in its original form as the Mark I type it was fitted with two 795 h.p. Armstrong-Siddeley Tiger IX 14-cylinder radial air-cooled supercharged engines, weighed 21,098 lbs. fully loaded, and had a top speed of 192 m.p.h., and a range of 1,500 miles. In its latest form, as the Mark III, it is driven by two 920 h.p. Tiger engines, has a top speed of 215–220 miles an hour, and a considerably longer range. The Whitley's fuel tanks are carried inside the wings, leaving the fuselage interior free for the accommodation of a bomb load claimed to equal that of any foreign type.

A Crew of Five

The Whitley carries a crew of five, comprising a pilot and an assistant pilot, two air gunners, and one radio operator. There are three gun positions for defence against attack by fighter aircraft. One is located in the extreme nose of the fuselage,

another in the tail between the twin rudders, and a third amidships in the belly of the fuselage behind the wing, a position from which the zone of fire downwards is unrestricted. Both nose and tail positions are provided with the Armstrong-Whitworth balanced and enclosed gun-turret, in which the gunner is completely protected from the airstream by a transparent cupola. The ingenious manner in which the weight of the machine-gun is balanced by the weight of the gunner, together with the air-balancing of the gun-barrel, makes this gun-turret practically effortless in operation.

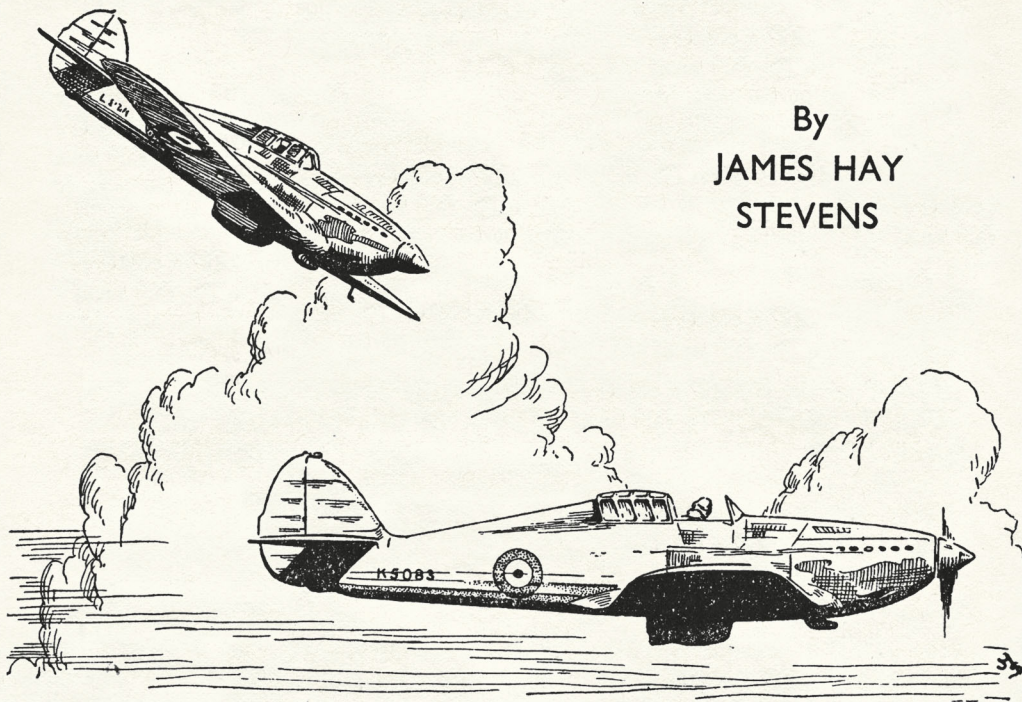
Camouflage Colouring

In accordance with the Air Ministry's new policy of camouflaging or "shadow shading" all new heavy bombers, medium bombers, and Army co-operation aircraft, the Whitley is painted in the standard camouflage colour scheme of dark green, dark earth and dull black. There are regulation camouflage patterns for single-engined medium bombers, twin-engined medium bombers, heavy bombers, and Army co-operation machines respectively, each class being allotted two alternative systems of colouring, one being the "mirror image" of the other. The Whitley depicted on the cover carries its regulation colouring, which includes the painting of all under-surfaces in a dull black in order to deaden the reflection of searchlight beams, and the addition of a concentric ring of yellow to the periphery of the R.A.F. "target."

Principal dimensions of the Whitley are a span of 84 ft., a length of 69 ft. 3 ins., and a height of 12 ft. 9 ins.

BRITAIN'S LATEST FIGHTER

By
JAMES HAY
STEVENS



Capable of a Speed in Excess of 300 m.p.h., the Hawker Hurricane is One of the R.A.F.'s Latest and Fastest Fighters. This Article contains Full Instructions for Building a Solid Scale Model

THE Hawker Hurricane fighter is a rather astonishing aeroplane, not only because of its fine performance, but also because its design, while being a complete breakaway from the Hawker biplane tradition, yet retains so many characteristic Hawker features. Most designers of British military aeroplanes have by now essayed the monoplane technique, but few have so completely succeeded in keeping the ancestral character in the new guise as has Mr. S. Camm, the Chief Designer of Hawker aircraft.

The Hurricane was a much-talked-of secret during the late autumn and early winter of 1935. Rumour—as fast-travelling and as unreliable in aviation circles as elsewhere—was rife. Hawker's were building a monoplane—a fighter

with a racing performance. It was to have a Rolls-Royce engine of colossal power! Whispers went round about an astonishing number of guns. Brooklands, which is also the Hawker aerodrome, is not a very secluded spot, and, as soon as engine installation trials started, the Hurricane could no longer be kept secret. The mighty roar of the Merlin's thousand horses awoke echoes in the concrete bowl of the racing-track that could be heard for miles.

The machine was first flown in November, and was presented to the Press in the first few days of the following month. The Hurricane, therefore, is now by no means new, although it is still a semi-secret aircraft and only the scantiest details of it may yet be given. No doubt this is due to the fact that the machine is

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still in its production stages and has not, at the time of writing, been issued to any Royal Air Force squadrons.

Details of Construction

CONTRARY to the present general trend towards stressed skins, the Hurricane has a tubular skeleton with fabric covering. The wing has a thick bi-convex section and is fairly heavily tapered. The fillets at the wing roots are large, and over the central portion of the chord they merge completely into the fuselage. The undercarriage legs fold inwards and backwards into recesses cut in the wing and fuselage. Split flaps extend along the underside of the trailing-edge between the inner ends of the ailerons. The ailerons, it will be noticed from the G.A. Drawing, are inset from the wing-tips, a practice which is now almost universal on high-speed aeroplanes.

The fuselage is extensively covered forward with metal panels, the whole of the after part being fabric covered. The pilot is placed very high, where his forward and downward view—always the weak spot on a low-wing aeroplane—should be very good. The cockpit has a large transparent top which can be slid back when the machine is in flight.

The engine is a Rolls-Royce Merlin. This is a liquid-cooled unit developed from the Rolls-Royce R-type Schneider racing engines and the famous Kestrel.

Like its predecessors, it is a twelve-cylinder sixty-degree "vee" type. It is supercharged and the intake for the supercharger can be seen beneath the nose of the machine. Although of very high power, the Merlin is only slightly greater in dimension than the Kestrel.

Very few details of the Merlin have so far been released, and these are as follows :

Take-off power	. . .	1,050 b.h.p.
Maximum power	. . .	1,050 b.h.p.
Normal power	. . .	900 b.h.p. at 12,000 ft.
Dry weight	. . .	1,318 lb.
Capacity	. . .	27 litres.

The prototype Hurricane is fitted with a wooden airscrew with an astonishing pitch angle, which is not very good for the take-off. The production machines will almost certainly be fitted with controllable-pitch airscrews.

The tail surfaces are metal framed and fabric covered. They maintain the Hawker outline, characterised in the Fury and Hart, to a remarkable degree. The tail-plane was originally strut-braced, but it is now fully cantilevered. The tail wheel retracts into the fuselage when the undercarriage is folded.

Unfortunately, no mention may be made of the Hurricane's armament, except to say that it is a multi-gun fighter. As regards performance, the Hurricane is officially stated to be capable of attaining a maximum speed "in excess of 300 miles an hour."

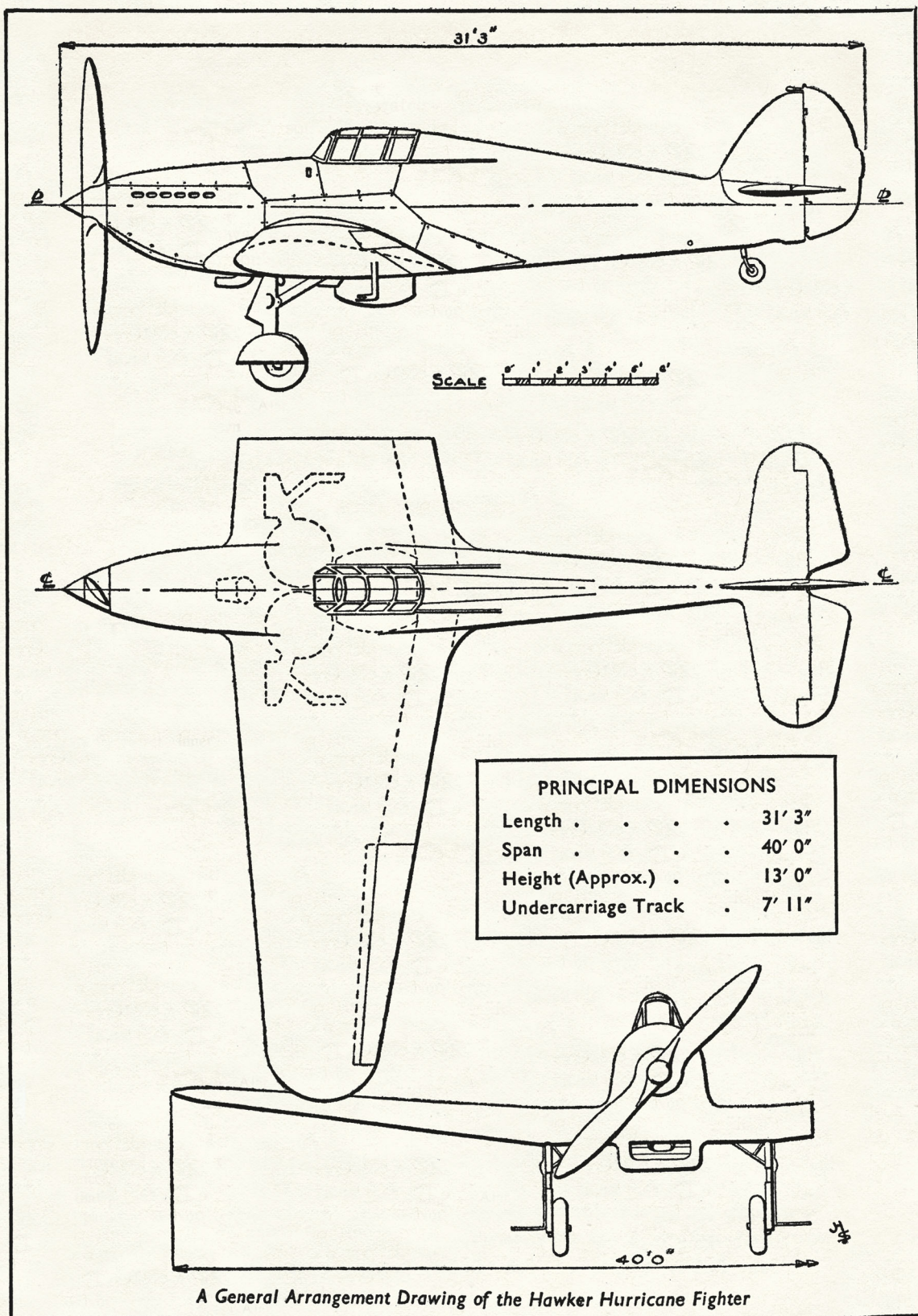
HOW TO BUILD THE MODEL

Complete Instructions, Simply Explained, for the Construction and Assembly of a Solid Scale Model

ON the opposite page there is a one-seventy-second scale General Arrangement Drawing of the Hurricane. The dimensions of materials and the dimensional line-cut in this article refer to a model to this scale, so that, should the reader prefer another scale, he will have to revise his raw material accordingly. It is advisable to re-draw at least the side-elevation of the G.A. if another scale be decided upon.

Materials and Tools

THE following list of the essential materials, with their approximate sizes, is given here to help the tyro modeller : a block of wood, $4\frac{5}{8} \times 1 \times \frac{5}{8}$ in., from which to carve the fuselage ; a sheet of fretwood (not ply) to make the main plane, $7 \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{4}$ in. ; a piece of fibre, $6 \times 6 \times \frac{1}{12}$ in., for the tail surfaces ; some 18 in. of 20-gauge brass wire for the undercarriage legs and other details.



AIR STORIES

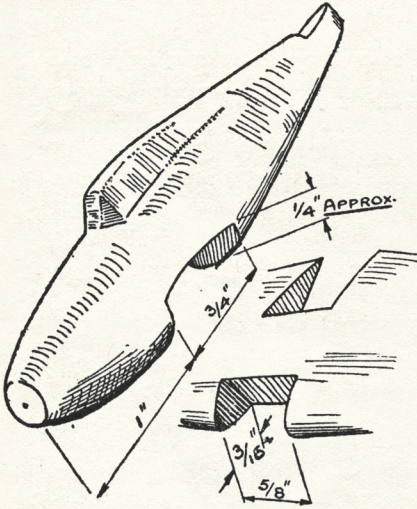


Fig. 1.—The finished fuselage, showing the dimensions of the cut-out for the wing

The wheels (both main ones and the tailwheel) are better purchased from a model or toy dealer, than made.

The tools which the average modeller will find most useful are : a $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. chisel ; small plane ; penknife ; oilstone ; small half-round file ; $\frac{1}{16}$ -in. bradawl ; archimedean drill ; fretsaw ; small long-nosed pliers ; plastic wood ; 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.

Method of Construction

IF the reader is new to model making, he will find it advisable to read these instructions right through and then to assemble all his tools and materials before getting to work.

The first step is then to trace the side elevation of the fuselage from the G.A. Drawing, including the transparent cockpit covering and also the cut-out for the lower plane, which is dimensioned in Fig. 1. Place the tracing on the fuselage block, pin-prick the main features, remove the tracing and line-in the outline of the fuselage with a pencil. Cut away the surplus wood with chisel and plane. Now proceed to the shaping in plan. The G.A. Drawing gives the shape of the fuselage except in one section at the mid-chord of the wing, where the wing fillets make it too

indefinite to be shown by a line. The shape of the fuselage is obtained by making the block parallel over this section. Draw centre-lines on both upper and lower surfaces of the block, and then draw the plan of the fuselage and cut away the unwanted wood. The cubist caricature of the fuselage is next rounded to its correct section throughout its length.

The cockpit cover is the next point to consider. For this a piece of transparent material, cellophane or something similar, is required. It should be fairly thin, but not so thin as to be floppy. The material is softened in hot water and then moulded over the cabin top on the model and allowed to cool and stiffen. The spare ends are trimmed after the cover is removed from the model. The first attempt will probably be unsightly, but with one or two experiments a good result should be obtained. When a good cover has been produced, the wooden cabin is cut off and the cockpit hollowed out. A point which must not be forgotten when finishing off the fuselage is the hole beneath the tail for the retractable tailwheel.

Now draw the outline of the main plane on the sheet of wood. The fillets at the root ends are ignored and the cut-out for the fuselage is made to the size shown in Fig. 1. The wing is first tapered in thickness with the help of a small plane. The bi-convex wing-section is clearly shown in the G.A. Drawing, and it is produced by planing and filing the wing. Unless the wood is very strong, it should be possible to get the dihedral angle by heating it and bending between finger and thumb ; if this is not successful a transverse saw-cut will have to be made in the undersurface, the wing gently bent and the cut filled with plastic wood. Then cut out the holes for the undercarriage in the undersurface. The outlines of the ailerons are scored on the upper and lower surfaces of the wing, and those of the flaps on the undersurface only.

The tail surfaces may be drawn on the fibre by pin-pricking and lining-in with a pencil. The rudder and fin and the tail-

BRITAIN'S LATEST FIGHTER

plane and elevator are made as two single units. The parts are cut out with a fretsaw and cambered with a file and glasspaper.

Fig. 2 shows the undercarriage in the down position. The struts are made from brass wire, the side struts and drag struts being soldered to the vertical compression leg. The fairing is cut from thin card. To attempt a description of the retractable undercarriage would, unfortunately, require more space than that available, so it will have to be left to the modeller's ingenuity.

The airscrew is carved from a piece of waste wood from the wing, in the manner shown in Fig. 3. The spinner is built up with plastic wood. The radiator and the air intake under the nose are carved from odd pieces of wood, and the pitot-head under the port plane is made from brass wire.

Method of Assembly

NOW glue the wing to the fuselage. When the glue has set, the two parts should be carefully faired, either with plastic wood or special fairing paste obtainable from model dealers. When the fairing material has set, rub it down thoroughly with fine glasspaper. Glue the blocks for the radiator and the air intake beneath the fuselage.

Having first soldered up the undercarriage legs, holes are made in the wing for their upper extremities and they are glued in place. (If the reader is doubtful about his soldering abilities, a very successful undercarriage may be made by first fixing the main strut firmly and then fitting the auxiliaries with glue.) To complete the undercarriage, the wheels

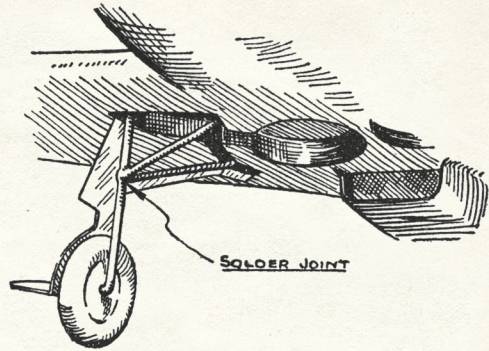


Fig. 2.—A leg of the undercarriage in the "down" position. The struts are of brass wire and the fairing is cut from thin card

are put on and held in place by burring the ends of the wires. The fairing panels are then glued on.

Next, the tail surfaces are carefully glued to the fuselage so that they are accurately aligned. These parts have to be carefully faired with plastic wood. The tail-wheel is mounted on a little wire fork and glued to the fuselage.

The fitting in place of the airscrew and the cockpit cover complete the assembly of the model. Unfortunately, no details of the cockpit may be revealed, so the modeller will have to use his own judgment.

Painting and Colour Scheme

ALL that is required for painting this model is a No. 5 sable brush and a small threepenny pot of good quality silver paint. The only colours, besides silver, on the machine are the R.A.F. cockades, and these can be bought from model or toy shops in the form of transfers.

Put the silver paint on thinly and evenly in two or three coats—allowing ample time for the paint to dry between coats. The number of the prototype Hurricane (K.5083) is painted in black on the sides of the fuselage only. On a model, this numbering is easily done with a mapping pen and Indian ink. The positions of the cockades on wing and fuselage are shown on the sketch which heads this article.

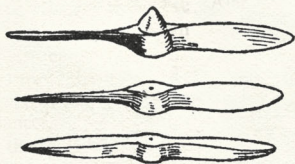
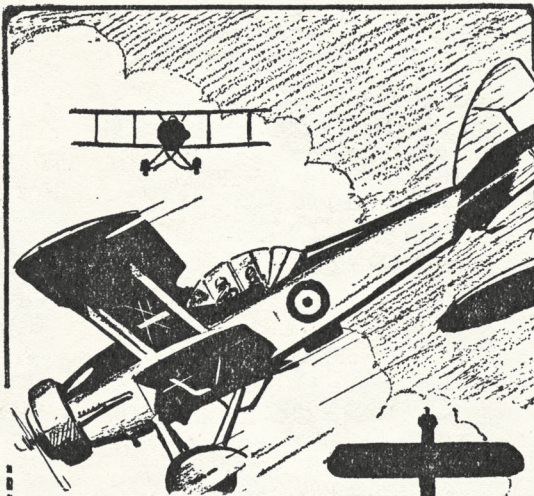


Fig. 3.—Three stages in carving the airscrew. The spinner is built up of plastic wood

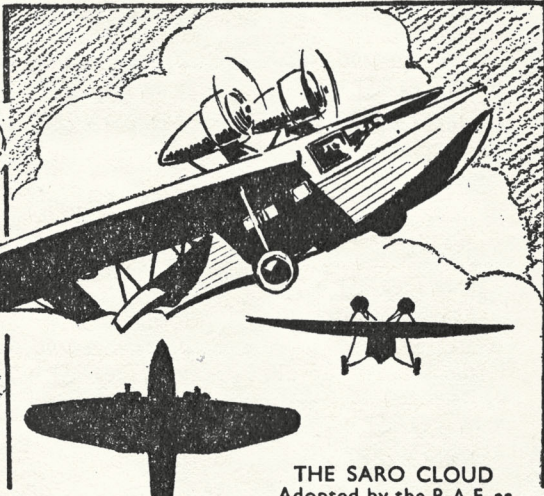
(NEXT MONTH: *The Nieuport Two-Seater*)

A GUIDE TO SKY-GAZERS



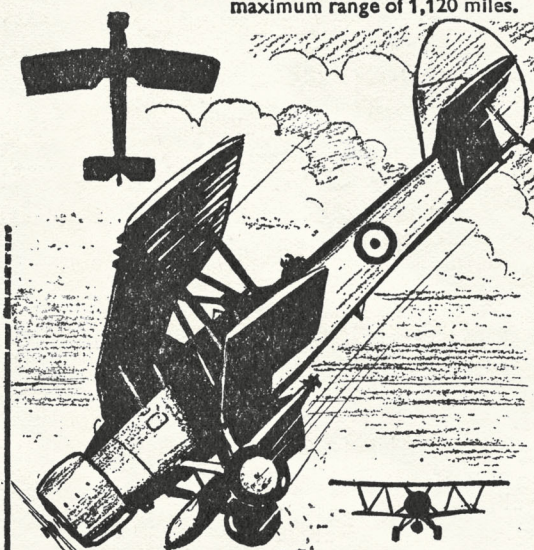
THE WESTLAND WALLACE

A two-seater, General Purpose 'plane, the Wallace can be used for day-bombing, reconnaissance, photography, army co-operation, or as a two-seater fighter, with equal success. Fitted with a 570 h.p. Bristol Pegasus engine and armed with two machine-guns, the Wallace has a top speed of 158 m.p.h. at 5,000 ft. and a maximum range of 1,120 miles.



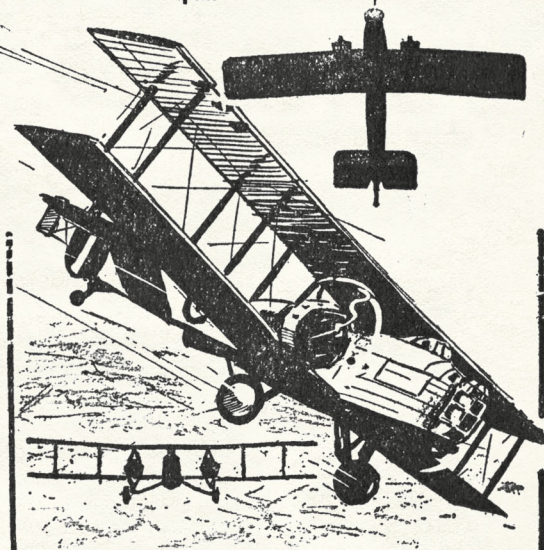
THE SARO CLOUD

Adopted by the R.A.F. as a Flying and Navigational Training type, the Cloud is an amphibian monoplane driven by two 340 h.p. Siddeley Serval engines. The large cabin allows space for a number of pupils to be given instruction in navigation in the air. The amphibian Cloud has a top speed of 118 m.p.h. and cruises at 95 m.p.h.



THE BLACKBURN SHARK

The Shark is a three-seater torpedo-bomber fleet-spotter or reconnaissance machine and forms part of the standard equipment of the Fleet Air arm. Armament consists of one fixed gun forward, a rear movable gun and a 1,500 lb. torpedo carried in crutches below the fuselage. A 700-h.p. Siddeley Tiger engine gives the Shark a top speed of 153 m.p.h.



THE BOULTON PAUL OVERSTRAND

A high-performance twin-engined Day Bomber, the Overstrand is driven by two Bristol Pegasus engines and has a speed of 153 m.p.h. at 6,500 ft. Of particular interest is the enclosed, rotatable gunner's turret in the nose; there is also another gun position behind the wings and a prone gunner's position in the floor for defence against attack from below.

Three-view sketches of R.A.F. aircraft that should make recognition easy

SUBMARINE SNARE

Far out in the North Sea, Death, Swift and Mysterious,
took Persistent Toll of the R.N.A.S. Pilots from Yareton,
Victims of a Strange New Peril of the Deep

By H. C. PARSONS

CHAPTER I

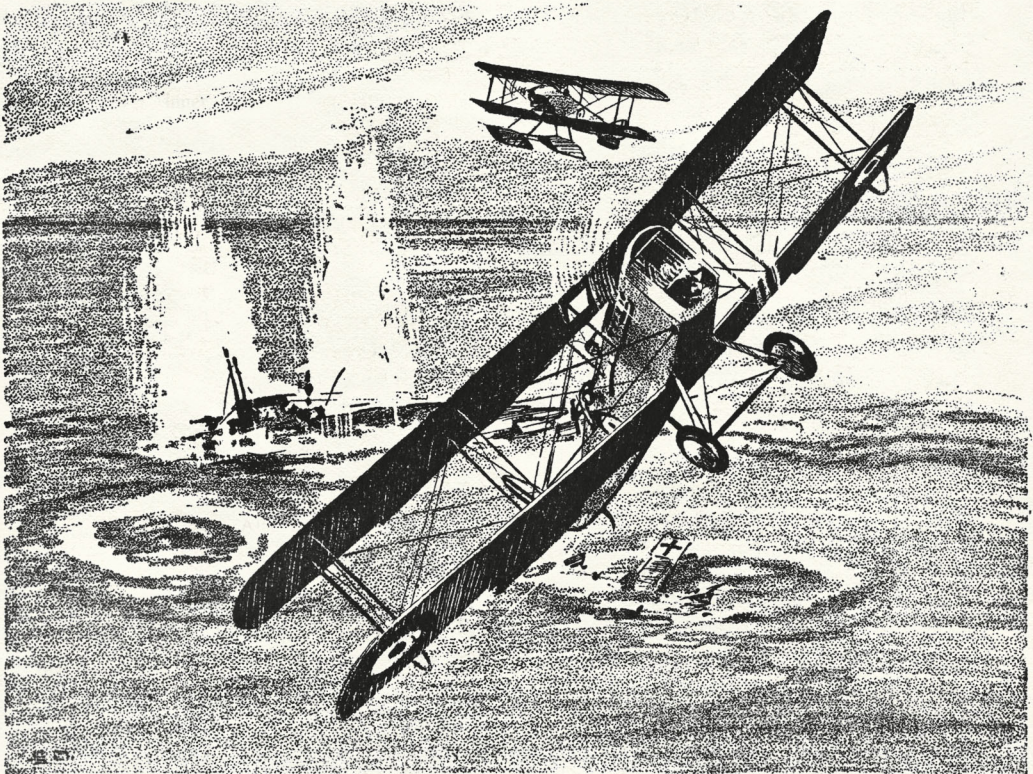
Smoke of Death

LIKE many another man, Sub-Lieutenant Lywood, of Yareton R.N.A.S. Station, never knew that he died. On dawn patrol along the coast of Croham and back, he had gone most of the way to the north point of his "beat" with his Sopwith Schneider seaplane—that moody maid-of-all-work—humming away placidly, without a submarine or, indeed, any other craft, being sighted. Then, a few points to starboard, he had spotted a spread of

smoke low down through the light morning haze, and, pushing his machine's nose down in that direction, had been astonished to observe what appeared to be a small seaplane on fire.

He alighted on the water, but, even as he taxied towards the smoke to see whether he might be able to pick up somebody, something had exploded clean inside his cockpit, and, in a fraction of a second, he and his machine had been torn into red pieces.

Three hours later, a palaver of some gravity was taking place at Yareton, where an anxious-looking junior pilot



Two more bombs exploded, one on either side of the luckless submarine . . .

AIR STORIES

had just finished delivering a verbal report upon his special patrol to a triune of grim-faced senior officers.

"So it amounts to this, Peyton," summed up Commander Rutherford, Yareton's Commanding Officer. "You patrolled carefully at 300 feet between here and Croham, saw nothing up to the Croll lightship, where you alighted. The Croll had seen Lywood's Schneider fly over half-an-hour before, but knew nothing more. Then you took-off again for Croham, but at a position approximately three miles south-east of Croham you noticed some wreckage down below?"

"Not quite that, sir," replied the youngster. "I saw the smoke first, and went down to examine that."

The C.O.'s keen eyes approved the pilot's accuracy. "Right, you saw nothing to cause the drift of smoke, but spotted the wreckage of a machine some five or six hundred yards away?"

"Yes, sir. I circled round, but could see nothing except what appeared to be a rudder, pieces of wing marked with our target, and a float. I then went on to Croham and telephoned you."

Commander Rutherford nodded.

"Good, Peyton. You've done your piece." He turned to his colleagues.

"Anything you want to ask, Belton, or you, Ware?" he inquired, and, receiving negative shakes of the head, dismissed Peyton.

Leaning back in his chair, the C.O. then raised an eyebrow towards his second-in-command:

"What do you make of it, Belton?" he asked. "Three gone the same way at much the same place in a week. When we send a pair of machines nothing happens, but we can't always do that. Can hardly be enemy aircraft, or the Croll lightship would almost certainly have seen them."

Lieutenant Commander Belton reflectively stroked his chin.

"No, sir," he agreed, "and few German seaplanes carry guns firing shells. The trawler that picked up the bits wirelessly that a chunk of small shell-casing was embedded in the trailing edge of the piece of plane, and that no traces

of fire showed on any of the wreckage. Might be a submarine. Doubtful, though."

Rutherford considered the point without comment, and turned an inquiring eye upon Captain Ware, an R.F.C. man temporarily seconded to Yareton.

"Seems to be some hanky-panky about, sir," responded the latter with unwonted seriousness of mien. "If enemy 'buses had attacked, any one of our three men would have put up a fight and Croll or Croham must have heard. If it was a submarine, none of the three would have walked into its gun muzzle, and certainly not before trying a bomb on it. No, I wondered whether they might have spotted a floating mine, come down close to pop it off by machine-gun, and gone up with the mine. A poor theory, sir, I'm afraid, but my best contribution to this feast of reason."

Rising to his feet, the C.O. shook his head.

"'Fraid it won't wash, Ware. Might happen once by the very devil of a fluke, but not three separate times. I'll think out something. Meanwhile, Belton, put up an order that dawn patrols will in future consist of two machines, one of which must not voluntarily alight for any reason."

RUTHERFORD strode out of his office, and the two men followed more slowly to the top of a slipway, where they continued the discussion.

"This business has got the Skipper under the collar," remarked Belton. "What does the R.F.C., Military Wing, make of it?"

The friendly rivalry between the R.N.A.S. and the R.F.C. was never far below the surface with these two.

"The R.F.C., Military Wing, my dear Bo'sun," replied Ware, "feels that this should be a matter for the sea-dogs. Nevertheless, I propose aiding and abetting to the point of flipping around between Croll and Croham, but high up, in my D.H., about the time our dawn patrol staggers along."

Belton nodded, then briskly set off along the concrete way, backed by

SUBMARINE SNARE

hangars, to attend to the multifarious duties arising in a busy air-station on the North Sea, where at any time swift death might swoop from the east in the shape of German seaplanes, Zeppelins, or even a few tip-and-run destroyers. And when these were not troubling them, there were always the ceaseless submarine and convoy patrols, and raids to be made on the Hun flying bases some two hundred miles across the unfriendly sea.

CHAPTER II

On the Trail of a Raider

CAPTAIN WARE was not fated to try out his plan the next morning, nor yet the next, for one hour before dusk found him twelve thousand feet up in his D.H.4, gradually overhauling a fleeing Zeppelin, sixty-odd miles out from Yareton.

An abortive daylight Zeppelin raid, made under cover of low thick clouds, had sent Yareton up in full force, and for an hour Ware had hung on the tail of this airship, just beyond striking distance. His oil-pressure—that eternal bugbear—did not seem altogether happy, while a terrific north wind with storm in its heels called for the exercise of all his strength and faculties.

Not for a moment did Ware think of giving up the chase, for, as he shouted to his 'bus : "It's bad for you, old lady, but it's a damned sight worse for that bloated, blessed gasbag"—which was true to a great extent. For, instead of heading north-west for Nordholz or Cuxhaven, the airship's huge bulk had been blown right off its course by the gale, and Ware, who had been flying crab-wise for most of the time, calculated that South Holland would be their final landing-place, although he hoped to chalk up a bout of gunwork before then. The greater probability of his finishing in the sea never entered his cheerful mind.

Evidently the airship commander was thinking along much the same lines. Nightfall could not be far off now, but this pertinacious English machine was slowly getting nearer and control of the

great airship in this wind was difficult enough without having to bother about enemy action and the very real chance of one incendiary bullet turning the great craft into a vast column of flame falling rapidly into the invisible sea below.

Thus Ware was hardly surprised to see the Zeppelin, almost indistinguishable in the rapidly failing light, suddenly turn south-south-east, her speed vastly increasing with the now almost following wind.

"Going to make for Gontrode, I suppose, old lady," roared the R.F.C. man to the D.H. "Zeppelin sheds there, so must get her now or never. The purlieus of Ghent won't be too healthy for us."

But not another ounce would the D.H. pull, and, the pilot, by the time he had hauled her back to an even keel after some rough treatment by a wicked smash of wind, realised that it was indeed black night, that the airship had disappeared into the darkness, and, worst of all, that he was roughly over the coast of occupied Belgium, with enough juice to last about an hour.

"Shall we try north and internment in Holland, brave heart, or south and run with a fifty-mile wind for the good old front?" demanded Ware of his machine.

For answer, the D.H. bucked mightily in a fierce gust, nearly rolled over, and finished with nose pointing due south. Encouragingly, Ware patted the fairing.

"Line of least resistance, is it? Right-ho, let's go all out for a little grey home in the south. Whose, we know not, but so long as there's life in us, who cares?"

Evidently some of the little black cherubs that dwell up aloft or elsewhere did care, for an alarming series of explosive coughs emanated from the engine. The blowback made the whole machine shudder, and the pressure gauge bobbed up and down like a jack-in-the-box. There was one half-hearted roar and then the engine gave up the ghost.

"Very well, Mr. Rolls, if you object, there's no more to be said," remarked Ware reprovingly to the engine, "but if our friend, de Havilland, not to mention

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myself, is drowned or damaged beyond repair, you've only yourself to blame."

And, pushing the stick forward, Ware plunged into a belt of cloud of unknown thickness.

AFTER a nightmare glide through two thousand feet of whirling wet cloud, the D.H.4 broke through the lower layer and Ware saw that he was above land.

A little to the north, a searchlight stretched a lean finger into the sky, and assuming the ground were level, Ware judged he was 300 feet up at the most. Below, a small light shone from a window, but the rest of the ground was wrapped in complete darkness. However, it was ground and not sea, and the pilot pressed his Holt flare switch, planning to land as well as he could, set fire to the D.H., and then await developments.

Again, his luck was out—the flares would not work!

Peering now over the side, now forward, he glided as slowly as he dared, and suddenly saw trees thirty yards ahead. Swiftly he put on port rudder and flattened, felt the wheels bump once, jerk up, bump again; then his cockpit rose in the air, and as the D.H. pitched forward on to her nose a splintering of the prop. coincided with a vigorous crack of his head against the centre-section.

Captain Ware lost all immediate interest in anything.

FROM a dark and quiet world Ware awoke, remorseless hammers thumping in his head, to find himself lying at full length upon a pile of assorted material. An old French Army greatcoat had been flung across him, and, gingerly touching his head, he discovered it to be roughly bandaged.

His throbbing eyes looked on to a scene reminiscent of an old Dutch painting, but more sombre. He was in a room lit only by a candle flickering in the middle of a table, at which a woman appeared to be sleeping with her head on her arms. From the shawl round her head, her dress of peculiarly depressing

material, and her curious footwear, she was obviously a peasant, and this impression was confirmed by the general appearance of the room. It was poor but clean; a few stringed onions hung from the roof, a small wooden crucifix adorned the corner, and a mound of neatly-stacked wood lay near the door.

Clearly, it was a tiny peasant home, its owners still valiantly carrying on their life in occupied territory. Occupied territory! As Ware remembered his situation, he wondered why he was still a free man. Perhaps, by some chance, none of the enemy had noticed or heard his arrival, and these peasant folk had picked him up and were hiding him until he could escape.

More likely—since such sheltering would be as much as their lives were worth—they were only keeping him until they could hand him over to the authorities and claim a reward. Probably the man of the house was even now giving the Town Major, or his German equivalent, a racy account of his desperate capture; in which case, Ware reflected, it might be as well to attempt to give the Huns a run for their money.

The door was the one way out—the only window had evidently not been opened since the house was built; and he would have to go round the table to get there. Crawling was the line indicated, and Ware promptly rolled off the bed with the intention of steering a course for the door; but his head had made him much giddier than he anticipated and he collapsed in a heap on to a hitherto unnoticed bowl of some liquid which had been placed by his improvised bed.

In that small space, the ensuing crash sounded like the bursting of a bomb in a glass-works, and the slumbering woman at the table awoke with a start. Hurriedly she got to her feet, stared at Ware with startled black eyes, then, in a low harsh voice, poured out a torrent of what Ware imagined to be French, but was, nevertheless, complete gibberish to him.

The woman stopped, and waited, evidently for a reply, but the only French the R.F.C. man could manage was a self-conscious "*Bon jour, Mam'selle.*"

SUBMARINE SNARE

A flicker of what might have passed for grim amusement flashed for a second across the woman's lined face, probably at the thought of the long years since she had been addressed as "*Mam'selle*." Then she came round the table and, with astonishing strength, lifted Ware back on to the bed.

"*Anglais, M'sieu' ?*" she asked.

This was something that Ware could grapple with more successfully.

"*Oui, Mam'selle,*" he replied, delightedly. "Right first time. *Mais, perhaps vous ne comprends pas ? Oh la, la !*" The last homely little touch he added upon a sudden remembrance of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

It appeared, however, that the woman had never heard of the Pimpernel, for the welcoming smile of comprehension, expected by Ware in response to his magnificent Gallic effort, failed to materialise. Instead, the woman gazed unwinkingly at him and asked again in an insistent tone : "*Vous êtes Anglais, M'sieu' ?*"

Ware beamed tolerantly upon her, and started afresh.

"What a disbelieving old soul you are, *Mam'selle !* Or perhaps you didn't hear too well. Let's have another stab at it." He raised his voice and with immense deliberation intoned, "*Je suis Anglais, Mam'selle,*" then, with a flash of inspiration, added, "*et vous êtes belle, oh, la, la !*"

The woman suppressed a glance of astonishment and nodded.

"*Anglais, bien,*" she said, and was about to say more, when, stiffening suddenly she looked at the window, and then crept quietly to the door where she stood listening.

What she heard evidently alarmed her, for, swiftly coming over to the bed, she covered Ware up again, put a finger to her lips and made motions of one sleeping. Thoroughly mystified, but not unwilling to close his throbbing eyes, Ware did as she wished, while the woman went back to her original attitude of sleeping at the table.

A MINUTE or two later, heavy footsteps stamped into the doorway, and a man who, from his peasant garb,

might have been the woman's husband, looked round the room.

The woman awoke, rubbed her eyes, and entered into a quick argument in French with the man, at the end of which the latter came over to the bed and stared down at the apparently unconscious man. Ware produced a few artistic mutterings that caused the man to bend down, lift the pilot's arm and let it go, to drop back as lifelessly as a leg of mutton.

Seemingly satisfied that the wounded man was still unconscious, the peasant went to the door. "*Heinrich !*" he called softly, and in response to his hail there entered a heavily-built man clad in the uniform of the German Naval Air Service.

In quiet tones the two men started a conversation in German, and Ware, who had spent a year at Heidelberg just before the War, was a keenly interested listener.

"Is the Englishman's machine repaired?" asked the peasant.

"*Ja, Kurt.* There was little damage, except the propeller, and we've put on a new one," replied the German airman.

Kurt, whom Ware had quickly placed as a disguised German officer, grunted his satisfaction, considered Ware's limp body, then continued :

"He has been unconscious, or asleep, for about twenty hours, but his pulse is good. I think he will wake presently, Heinrich, and I can get off in the morning. He will be fit enough by then."

Heinrich laughed. "You waste no time, Kurt. But what will you tell the Englishman?"

"That's easy," answered his companion. "I telephoned Struber a description of the machine and he is sure it's the one that followed his airship from England. So it is most unlikely that the pilot knows this countryside."

The German airman looked puzzled.

"How will that help, Kurt?" he inquired.

"Help? Why, it's the whole point, Heinrich. Under my guidance, he'll land me, an accredited French officer, somewhere south of the Front—the usual place—and then he will bomb

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the great new French dump at Erqueville, under the impression that it's our main reserve dump north of Dunkirk."

Heinrich smote the speaker on the back, "*Wunderbar!*" he chuckled. "You're a genius, Kurt. Nobody will suspect a British machine until it's too late. But now you must come and see the Overursels before the submarines go."

Nodding agreement, the German spy flung a word or two of French at the woman and, with a final glance at the bed, followed Heinrich out of the cottage.

Ware had understood the entire conversation, except for the matter of Overursels, whoever he, she, or it might be, and now he carefully opened one eye, slowly sat up and grinned at the woman.

"Thanks for the stop press news, *Mam'selle*. If you can *donner moi* a hand, I'll follow those lads, and see *mon ami Overursel*, too."

Fear shot into the woman's black eyes as she tried to understand, then she came over to Ware and hissed at him, slowly, emphasising each word—" *Il—est—espion—Allemagne*," she said, and repeated the word "*espion*."

Painfully, the R.F.C. man pulled himself to his feet, swayed a little, and nodded. "Where is this place?" he asked. "I mean, *ou ici?*"

Displaying five fingers, the woman told him. "*Cinq kilometres de Zeebrugge*."

Zeebrugge! Submarines! This matter was worth looking into, Ware decided, and started to stagger towards the door. The woman, after a vain attempt to dissuade him, placed a lumpy billet of wood in his hand, made urgent signs that he should return soon, then blew out the candle and opened the door.

With a word of thanks, Ware lurched out into the darkness.

he set out to trail them as closely as he dared.

Some three miles away, the sky reflected a haze of light, which, if the woman had been truthful, might indicate Zeebrugge. Wherever it was, it was apparently not their destination, for the two men were now bearing away to the left, in the direction of several smaller but nearer lights.

After half a mile, the way gradually rose, until at one moment the two Germans were silhouetted against the light, and next, had suddenly disappeared from sight.

Ware, who had approached within a hundred yards of them, stopped and considered. This Overursel business, he argued, must be over the edge there, where the lights were, but to arrive there without being spotted was going to be no easy matter.

"S'pose I'd better follow the Army's example and march on my tummy," he decided at last, and, worming his way with infinite care to the edge of the hill, he was soon crouching behind a stunted bush, and peering down with amazement on the scene below him.

In a creek, probably dredged for the purpose, lay half a dozen submarines, three of them moored to a wooden landing-stage. Opposite each of these three, on the platform, stood a tiny amphibian flying-boat, the smallest of its kind Ware had ever seen. The two men he had followed were standing by one of the little machines, and the one known to him as Heinrich gave a sharp order. At once four ratings purposefully dashed upon the flying-boat, dismantled it within two minutes at the most, and stowed it away in the submarine.

The R.F.C. man rubbed his eyes in amazement, and was wondering whether the arc lamps or his bumped head were making him see things, when a brisk footfall along the near road gave him something else to think about. It was useless to bolt; the only thing he could do was to cover up his bandaged head, lie still, and hope for the luck of the Navy.

His luck held, and the footsteps having passed on, Ware cautiously lifted his

CHAPTER III

Mystery of the Overursels

REFRESHED by the cool night air, Ware stood for a moment listening carefully. The voices of the two men were still audible, and, stepping on to a grass verge that ran beside the roadway,

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head again, only to be dismayed at the sight of Kurt and Heinrich now climbing the slope straight towards him. They were not ten yards away from his hiding-place when they stopped, and, to the watcher's intense relief, seated themselves comfortably on a slab of stone.

"So that's our Overursel, Kurt," Heinrich was saying. "We've trapped three or four seaplanes along the English coast with them already; submarine comes to the surface, four men assemble the machine in three minutes and put it in the water alongside. A smoke-screen is put up, hiding the submarine, the enemy seaplane generally alights to investigate another aircraft apparently burning, and the submarine's gun puts an end to the inquirer's curiosity. They've been useful, too, for scouting for the submarines."

Ware's face grew tense as he realised the extraordinary circumstances of the deaths of Lywood and his companions. Certainly he was not dreaming, for even while the two below had been talking, he had watched the three Overursels dismantled and packed into their respective submarines in less than two minutes each.

Now the spy was speaking.

"Very clever and very simple, Heinrich," he said. "Are they all off again now?"

The German airman dropped his voice in replying, and the Englishman had to strain every nerve to hear.

"Yes, Kurt, but it's a special secret job, so keep it quiet. Yareton has been a damned pest for some time, chiefly to the airships from Nordholz and up that way, and we're going to put them out. To-night, our airships will raid England, and at dawn most of the active machines at Yareton will be up after them, while their flying-boats will probably make for the Dutch coast to lie in wait for our returning Zeppelins. I am taking ten Friedrichshafen seaplanes over to bomb Yareton into the sea, leaving here before dawn. We shall lie some ten kilometres off Yareton, and the submarines will watch, sink any inquisitive surface craft, and send an Overursel along to tell us

when to get busy. Then we shall make off north-east after the flying-boats."

THE hidden listener had learned more than he had ever hoped to discover, and now deemed it high time to return. He started to crawl quietly backwards, but flattened again as soon as he began, for the Germans had risen to their feet and were clearly making their departure. If he could get a hundred yards' start, he might be able to reach the cottage before them, but he could not crawl on his stomach far enough before they reached the road, and he wanted that road himself.

Grimly Ware clutched his billet of wood, and had already poised it for action when desperation flashed a better use for it into his mind.

Wriggling back into the darker shadows, he lobbed the lump of wood as high as he could and towards the far group of downward-shaded lights. Then he followed up the wood with a large stone.

The splash of wood as it smacked out of nowhere alongside a far submarine was forgotten in the turmoil that started up immediately afterwards as the stone crashed into a cluster of light-bulbs, extinguishing several of them.

Attracted by the sudden din, the two Germans turned, and while they doubled back down to the scene of the excitement, Ware took to his heels and was soon sprinting all-out up the road.

Nearing the cottage, he slowed down and approached cautiously, but finding the woman waiting anxiously at the door, he slipped in and sat down, exhausted, on the table.

"*C'est bien, M'sieu?*" the woman asked the panting Ware.

"Absolutely top-notch, *ma belle*," laughed Ware. "Prettiest bit of lobbing you could imagine. *Morceau tres joli de lobant, n'est-ce-pas? Tout temp un cokernut!*"

Despite Ware's improving fluency in the French tongue, his listener was little the wiser and, soon abandoning her efforts to understand, she took his arm and sat him on the improvised bed. From an adjoining room she next produced a

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bowl of boiling coffee, some tough bread, a great hunk of cheese, and an onion or so, all of which she put on a box beside the Englishman.

A sudden fierce and justifiable hunger assailed Ware, and, the woman having refused his courteous invitation to join in the feast, he set to with gusto. As the last onion disappeared, quick steps were heard outside, and the woman had time only to indicate to Ware that he should appear a little more like one newly risen from a sick-bed before Kurt strode in.

After shooting an appraising glance at the Englishman, the spy fired off a spate of French at the now expressionless woman, then turned to the dazed-looking pilot.

"*Vous parlez Français, M'sieu'?*" he inquired.

The man on the bed looked up, slowly. "If you mean can I speak French, laddie, I can't—except for about six words."

The German came over to the bed, smacked the startled speaker on the shoulder, and remarked with a show of jubilation, "*Bien, il n'importe pas*. You are English and it is a tongue I speak. I am a French agent anxious to get away, and you came suddenly, pouf! like an angel from the skies."

Secretly admiring the German's excellent representation of a Frenchman, Ware wearily wagged his head.

"That's fine, old sleuth, but the angel's wings are unstuck, and I'm expecting to be made a prisoner at any minute."

Kurt smiled. "*Non, non, M'sieu',*" he replied in a dramatic whisper. "You came down some way east of Bruges, in a ploughed field just by this cottage that belongs to this peasant woman who is a friend of mine. We pulled your machine into a barn, and, with an Alsatian friend at Ychem aerodrome, I procured another propeller, attached him, and your machine is now filled with petrol ready to go. *Bien, n'est-ce-pas?*"

The R.F.C. man's eyes looked brighter as he rose to his feet, and smote the spy's back in turn.

"Napoleon was a bungler in com-

parison, comrade. So not a single jolly soul knows I'm here? Well, what's the programme?"

Rubbing his hands together, the pseudo-peasant threw out his chest. "*Vive la France! Vive l'Entente!* It is simple. An hour before dawn is full moonlight. We will take-off from the field behind the barn and fly south-west. I know the country and will tell you where to land me, but it will be a little way behind the new German lines. ("Cunning, that," thought Ware.) Then you can fly some kilometres west, bomb their great reserve dump at Osterbergh and get to Dunkirk a little way to the south. The dump guards will not expect an attack from behind, so you will get your life, your machine, and a medal, while I shall serve my country in another way."

To the German's astonishment, the R.F.C. man staggered over to the woman, clasped her waist with one arm, and proceeded, albeit wobbily, to trip a measure round the room. But the spy's veneer of Gallic gaiety was not proof against such levity, and the woman ceased her gyrations at a snarl from the man.

"You are pleased, *mon ami*, no doubt," he snapped. "But it is better you now rest. I will wake you in a few hours' time."

There was nothing that Ware could do in the meantime, and as his still-aching head had not been improved by his sudden burst of energy, he allowed himself to be persuaded to follow the German's advice, and, very soon, had sunk into a genuine slumber.

CHAPTER IV

Death in Disguise

IT seemed to Ware but a few moments later that he was drowning the remains of his sleepiness in a bowl of strong black coffee, and devouring another dose of cheese and onions. Through the half-open door of the cottage could be seen the white moonlight, and Ware felt that life again held some promise.

The woman, standing in silence by the door, suddenly swung round and beckoned

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to him. Quietly he crossed the room and stood beside her.

"*L'espion*," she whispered, with fear and hate in her eyes, "*ce bête sale—retournera bientôt. Vous allez avec lui?*"

The R.F.C. man caught the drift of her query, but was incapable of answering in French. Instead, he pointed to himself and in the direction of the missing German, and flapped his arms in illustration of flight.

"*Comme l'oiseau de mon oncle, ma belle*," he murmured.

After a moment's puzzlement, the woman nodded her understanding, drew a wicked-looking knife from her dress, and handed it to Ware. "*Coupez la gorge du Boche*," she hissed, and drew a finger across her throat.

A moment later a shadow appeared across the moonlit yard, and Kurt entered the cottage to find an apparently dozing woman, and an Englishman placidly consuming his last onion.

"Ach, you are ready, *mon ami*?" he inquired, genially. "Then let us go."

WARE rose obediently, and, after giving an instruction to the peasant, the spy led the way through the door. Pausing on the threshold, Ware turned and threw a kiss at the woman, whose only reply was a repetition of her previous grim pantomime of throat-cutting.

On the other side of the ploughed field beside the cottage loomed a long black barn, evidently housing the D.H.4, and Ware noticed with interest that the ground rose gradually to the north, and that a small road ran in the same direction. Beyond that ridge, then, must be the creek, and the thought of the submarines, probably half-way across to Yareton by now and carrying their treacherous little Overursels and smoke paraphernalia, filled him with anxiety to be off. What he was going to do with the spy he had no idea as yet, but, to get away undisturbed, he would have to take him.

As the two men turned into the great doorway of the barn, which faced a curiously smooth field next to the

ploughed land, a man emerged from the shadows and greeted the spy.

"*Ich habe*——" he began, then a hurried look from Kurt changed his speech into French, "I have fixed new racks and ten small bombs; the first two pulled will be incendiary. The gun-trays are filled with English cartridges from that other——"

Kurt broke in abruptly in English. "Good," he said, "Adolf, this is our English ally."

The Englishman shook hands cheerfully with Adolf and looked with pleasure at his aircraft. The new prop. gave it a queer appearance, but no doubt it would work, which was the only thing that mattered.

He turned to Kurt.

"Well, Sherlock," he remarked, "how about saying our farewells to your friend here and getting away? Might be as well to be farther off before daylight comes."

Kurt agreed. "We will get in," he announced, "and Adolf here will do as you wish with the propeller. Nobody will be flying round here at this hour."

The D.H.4 having been wheeled half out by the three men and the wheels chocked up, Ware and the spy climbed aboard. Adolf seemed familiar with the method of starting an aero engine, but despite his energetic efforts on the propeller and Ware's expert manipulation of the engine controls, the Rolls obstinately refused to emit even a splutter. Five minutes, ten minutes, a precious quarter of an hour passed, and still the engine showed no signs of life.

Leaving his switch on, Ware decided to swing the prop. himself, but, as he faced the D.H., he heard the distant undulating roar that can come only from a large number of machines flying at the same time. He glanced at Kurt, but as that gentleman appeared to be busily engaged in investigating the inside of his cockpit, he decided to say nothing and to get on with the job. Nevertheless, he realised that he would have to move quickly if he was to reach Yareton before the Friedrichshafens which, evidently, had just passed over.

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At Ware's first swing, the engine spluttered and burst into an alarming roar, which was joyously echoed by the swinger. Climbing quickly into his cockpit, Ware "revved" the engine up for a few minutes, then throttled right down and shouted to Adolf to pull away the chocks. The man obeyed promptly, and, with the light of battle in his eye, Ware took-off in the moonlight, heading into the strong westerly wind.

THE D.H.4 rose like a bird, and a glance to starboard showed Ware the creek, with only three submarines at their moorings, and, straight ahead, the broad sea glistening in the moonlight.

Ware circled, gaining height, until a tap on his shoulder made him look round, to see the annoyed German pointing southwards. Over his shoulder, Ware roared out an explanation that the D.H. had to circle to climb speedily, and the spy sank back disgruntled. As the machine came round again with her nose to the north, Ware noticed that a coast town, obviously Zeebrugge, was almost below them to port, its hangars and submarines clearly distinguishable.

The D.H. was five thousand feet up when the German again imperatively bade the pilot set a course south-west, according to plan. Unfortunately, Ware's plan, hurriedly formulated, had been to drop an egg or two on the Zeebrugge hangars and submarines from the greatest possible height, and then to light out for Yareton. It appeared, however, from the gathering frenzy in the aft cockpit that a bullet through his ear might well be Ware's portion if he showed any such obvious recognition of his whereabouts. Meanwhile, time was passing.

"Are you strapped in, Napoleon?" Ware suddenly yelled to his companion.

"Yes, but why?" was the surprised reply.

Ware laughed loudly. "Because you'll need to be," he announced, and forthwith pushed the D.H.'s nose almost straight down towards Zeebrugge!

Before the whine of wires and the engine's roar drowned all other sound, the pilot heard one wild shriek of

"*Gotteshimmel! Er ist rein verrueckt!*" and mad he certainly must have seemed to the German who suddenly remembered that Zeebrugge had been warned not to worry about the British machine. All he could do was to cling breathlessly to the side of his cockpit and hope the madman in front would recover his senses and amiably turn south upon the delayed journey. That his own identity was suspected, or his ingenious plot known, never even entered his head.

But Ware had forgotten his passenger in the excitement of the moment. Down roared the D.H., faster and faster until it seemed that another ten seconds must surely see it buried in the ground in fragments. Along the Mole, a double searchlight flashed out, but it might as well have tried to pick up a whistling bullet.

At the crucial moment, the pilot flattened out in line with the hangars, released his incendiary bombs, and his terrific zooming speed had taken him nearly half a mile away before the leaping flames proclaimed a direct hit on the seaplane sheds. Searchlights leapt out all round and every sort of gun added its flash to the pandemonium, but, like a mad wolf, the D.H. had banked vertically, dived snarling on to the submarines' moorings, and dropped two explosive bombs.

In spite of its speed, the machine rocked furiously and nearly rolled over with the force of the explosions. By the sudden cessation of abuse from the aft cockpit, Ware gathered that his passenger thought the 'bus had been hit, but he knew well enough the nasty shudder that signals a bull, and confidently pointed his nose to the dark western sky, climbing swiftly.

At six thousand feet, he looked round for a final view of a thoroughly alarmed Zeebrugge, and found himself staring straight into the face of his enraged passenger. The German had worked his way over the coaming covering the petrol-tank between the cockpits and was now struggling in his pocket, evidently trying to produce a weapon.

For a second, the black rage in the

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man's face froze action in the pilot, but, with the immediate realisation that life and death were in the balance, Ware let go the joystick, turned round and grappled with the gibbering spy, who had at last managed to extract a revolver from his pocket.

The German had evidently decided to put a bullet through the Englishman's head, and had planned to be as near to his victim as possible so that he would be able to slide into the forward cockpit when the pilot had been settled. Fortunately for Ware, his chance backward glance at Zeebrugge had been taken a second too soon for the spy, whose wrist Ware had grabbed after the first second of astonishment. Whether the R.F.C. man would have succeeded in overcoming his opponent is doubtful, for the German was strong, but a violent plunge as the now uncontrolled D.H. suddenly stalled lost the German his balance and his life. The revolver, momentarily pointed at his own head, went off as he was thrown suddenly forward.

As the dead spy released his hold and slumped down, Ware fell heavily back into his cockpit, his foot catching the joystick as he dropped. Acrobatics inside the cockpit of a steeply-diving machine are difficult, but somehow Ware twisted himself round, took his foot off the joystick, and gently eased it back.

Shrieking its protest, the D.H. came out of her dive beneath the pilot's strong fingers, and continued roaring her disturbed passage over the invisible North Sea. Forward, she carried a haggard and anxious-eyed man, and behind him a dead German spy stared sightlessly skyward.

CHAPTER V

East Coast Ambush

WARE glanced at his dashboard watch and calculated that he should reach Yareton a little after dawn. Probably it would be too late to warn the station of the impending attack, but at least he should be in time to prevent the submarines from achieving their purpose, and perhaps he might even have a satis-

factory few minutes himself with the German seaplanes.

He snatched a look behind, noticed that the sky seemed already a little lighter, and waited with what patience he could muster while the great Rolls engine thundered unevenly onwards across the North Sea.

"Come on, old lady," Ware shouted to the D.H. "I know you don't like that Hun prop. stuck on your nose, but we'll change it as soon as we get back."

Gallantly the machine responded, but the eastern sky was a pale yellow before Ware caught his first glimpse of the sight he had been hoping to see—the proof that he was not yet too late.

Two wakes of foam, not far ahead, had caught his straining eyes, and peering over the side a few moments later he made out a series of white trails. One, two, three, four, yes, by God! there were ten, and although he could not distinguish the seaplanes themselves, Ware knew that he had caught up the slower-moving Friedrichshafens, cruising on the water off their rendezvous. He might yet reach Yareton in time.

A fierce temptation to swoop upon the seaplanes assailed him, but, with a sigh, he decided that the possibility of warning Rutherford's squadron, and perhaps diverting it to an attack on the unsuspecting Hun, was more important, quite apart from the separate menace of the submarines.

Therefore, murmuring a benediction upon the low ceiling that handily offered itself in the rapidly lightening sky, he shot the D.H.4 up into the clouds and sped on towards Yareton.

Ten impatient minutes dragged by before he cautiously put the D.H.'s nose down through the thin cloud. He whooped with joy to see land below and, after a quick bank to port, spotted Yareton some few miles to the south.

Now for the submarines! They were the first concern, since, if Rutherford and his flying-boats had gone off, the Overursels would now be preparing to inform the German seaplanes. And if Rutherford had not yet left, he could spring an unpleasant surprise on a submarine or

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two, and still have time to stop the Yareton squadron. Submarines, however, cannot be spotted at four thousand feet, so, reckoning that they would be some little way to the north to avoid being seen by the Yareton machines, Ware dived down towards the sea.

"By all the gods, de Havilland," he roared to his 'bus, "we're in luck. So here goes!"

Flattening out at three hundred feet, the D.H. raced towards a submarine the pilot had spotted travelling slowly awash, and before it had even noticed its aggressor a column of water shot up a few yards from its bows. A few seconds later a second bomb had exploded clean amidships, and a smother of oil was spreading slowly over the water.

With a grunt of satisfaction, Ware looked around and saw a small seaplane—perhaps a mile to the north—bumbling along; evidently a "quirk" on dawn patrol. As he watched, a gun-flash spurted some six or seven hundred yards to its starboard and the attacked seaplane at once banked round steeply and charged down towards the flash.

"Good lad," muttered the R.F.C. man, opening his throttle full out, "I'll be with you in two shakes."

Meanwhile the "quirk" was valiantly endeavouring to annihilate his assailant with repeated bursts of machine-gun fire, and Ware cursed at the senseless risks the boy was taking.

However, the little Schneider served to hold the submarine's attention so successfully that the D.H. was able to thunder upon the sleek craft before its crew had noticed the second aeroplane's proximity. At once the submarine tried to "crash dive," leaving the tiny Overursel alongside to its fate, but before it had sunk even to periscope depth two bombs blew its winged offspring to smithereens. Ten seconds later, following a hair-raising vertical bank by the D.H.4, two more exploded one on either side of the luckless vessel, and the submarine, cocking her stern, rolled over and capsized.

Circling the grave of his victim, Ware signalled the astonished but jubilant Schneider pilot to return to the air

station. Any Friedrichshafen that might reach here would make mincemeat of a "quirk."

It was probable, too, that the enemy squadron, lying out there to the south-east, had heard the explosions, though Ware was banking on the hope that they would wait for a time for the expected message from the submarine. Nevertheless, he saw no point in rousing or increasing their suspicions and, coming down to within fifty feet of the land, he "hedgehopped" his way to the air station.

AS he zoomed over a line of huts and landed neatly on the ground at the back of the air station, Ware sensed the tense atmosphere by the movement afoot and in the face of Commander Rutherford, who hurried up to the machine. That lean and terse R.N.A.S. officer gazed with something approaching amazement at the odd head that looked out from the cockpit—a grubby bandage on top, weary blue eyes beneath, and a face sprouting a halo of golden whiskers.

"By the Lord Harry, it's Ware!" he gasped. "Gad, but I'm glad to see you back—even if you do look like the Old Man of the Sea. Come out of it! Looks as if a week's sleep would do you some good."

Ware realised suddenly how tired he was, but thrust the thought aside, and grinned at the Skipper.

"Must confess I omitted my bath this morning, sir," he said, "but there's still more work to do. Your lad in the Schneider out there, with a bit of help, has just scuppered two submarines. They were scouts for ten Hun seaplanes now lying less than ten miles south-east of here, waiting to raid Yareton. I want to go back to scrag my old pal, Heinrich, but if you can muster a few 'buses within five minutes we shall catch them napping."

The Skipper knew his man.

"Right," he snapped. "Anything you want first?"

Pulling himself together with an obvious effort, the R.F.C. man nodded.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Juice, some

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goggles, and a gunner instead of Kurt here. Also, if there's time, a sandwich and a tot of the old and bold."

The C.O. for the first time peered into the aft cockpit and lifted an eyebrow.

"Is this Kurt?" he inquired. "Looks in a bad way."

"He's dead, sir," replied Ware. "He was a German spy."

Commander Rutherford wasted no more words. Within ten seconds, ratings were dashing in all directions. Five minutes later three B.E.2c's were ticking over in line with the D.H., and a thrilled but brisk sub-lieutenant was squatting happily behind Ware, whose spirits had been revived with a strong dose of rum.

The Skipper's long form emerged from the hangars and he had a brief word with the D.H.'s pilot.

"One flying-boat and two seaplanes are just off in front," he said. "I've wirelessly the other boats to return. The ceiling's low, so you get off and try to come down on top of them. We'll go a little north-east and turn south. All set? Right. Good hunting, Ware," and, with a salute that held in it more than formality, Rutherford strode off to his flying-boat.

CHAPTER VI

A North Sea Engagement

CAPTAIN WARE glanced contentedly along the line of revolving propellers and raised his right hand. The chocks were pulled smartly away and the four machines took-off as one into the morning sky.

Spiralling to four thousand feet, the formation was soon above the tenuous layer of cloud and Ware promptly led the way south-east, hoping that the Friedrichshafens had not yet moved off.

"Ready?" he shouted back to his eager gunner some minutes later.

The youngster whooped with joy. "Rather, sir," he called. "Give 'em hell!"

The D.H. dived swiftly through the clouds, followed by its three companions in diamond formation. A two-thousand

feet plunge earthwards and they were clear of the cloud vapours—to see a mile ahead the enemy seaplanes in the act of taking-off to meet the menace of the oncoming Yareton flight of flying-boats.

The Germans fanned out to spread the target, but Ware's swooping hawks were too swift to be dodged. Three Friedrichshafens smashed down into the water as the land machines spat out their streams of lead and zoomed for a fresh dive. The remaining seven seaplanes, however, were now well up in the air, and obviously only too willing to fight.

Ware singled out a red Friedrichshafen with curious streamers, and the challenge was speedily accepted by the German. Round and round the two machines circled, rolling and diving, while all about and between them flashed whirling machines, until the sky seemed full of black crosses and coloured circles. Suddenly, from above, a B.E.2c dropped in flames, and falling like a stone caught the red German's tail so that the two aircraft plunged down to the sea locked together in a fiery embrace.

Glancing round for a breather, Ware saw three Friedrichshafens making off north-east, hotly pursued by Rutherford and a Short, while the two surviving landplanes appeared to be finishing a hot dispute below with another black-crossed seaplane.

By now the fight had roared well away from the opening scene, and the R.F.C. man looked back to the smoking fragments of the first seaplanes brought down. To his astonishment, he observed one, apparently unharmed, taking-off towards Yareton with no defender to interfere. Already it was two miles away and, grimly, Ware set the D.H. diving in pursuit.

But the German, despite his load of two fair-sized bombs, was fast, and it was a toss-up as to which would reach Yareton first. The seaplane pilot evidently intended to deposit its cargo whatever the cost to himself, and so determined was his effort that it was not until the seaplane was within five hundred yards of the beach in front of the air station, where, helpless in dock, lay seven

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valuable machines under repair, that Ware was able to overhaul him. Everything depended on a quick dive and his twin guns, for the man behind was helpless to do anything. So, with a steady hand on the trips, Ware roared down upon the racing German, pressed his levers and promptly shot off his own prop. !

Adolf, back in distant Belgium, had not, perhaps, been so big a fool as he had seemed, and no doubt he would have been well satisfied with his handiwork had he seen the disaster which now ensued. For the D.H., its wings gaping and its control wires severed by pieces of the splintered airscrew, had smashed down upon the tail of the Hun seaplane, and the two machines went hurtling together into the sea to crash with a mighty uprush of water hard by the station's mooring buoys.

With water filling his eyes, ears and nose, Ware felt himself pressed down by a weight on his head ; fore and aft, struts and unseen obstacles prevented his escape. Desperation was seizing him, when, by some trick of Fate, his hand accidentally closed round the Belgian woman's knife, which, hours before, he

had casually stuck into a staple at the side of the cockpit. Madly he stabbed upwards, ripping the canvas of the centre-section to pieces. Lungs bursting, he gave a last despairing kick and shot up into blessed daylight. A few moments later he was being swiftly hauled aboard a launch that had rushed out from the station even before the machines had hit.

In the sternsheets, Lieutenant Commander Belton, Officer of the Day, surveyed the dripping figure with relief.

"Nice work, Ware," he remarked. "How're you feeling?"

The exhausted man spouted forth fountains of water.

"Badly in need of a bath, Bo'sun mine ! " he gasped.

Belton laughed.

"Just the same old Ware ! " he said. "Might have known you'd come up alive and kicking. All the same, that was about the closest shave *you've* ever had, my lad ! "

Captain Ware grinned wryly.

"Nothing to the close shave I'm going to have in a minute, Bo'sun ! " he said, and fingered his bristling chin with a contented sigh.

" . . . Monty dipped sharply and came up beneath the fat belly of the D.F.W. before its pilot had time to throw on bank and expose the Camel. Even while it heeled over, Monty closed to point-blank range, let drive a short rattle with both Vickers, and turned off on a wing-tip. . . . The D.F.W., still holding its bank, started to slip inwards. Monty, fascinated, watched the D.F.W. continue its crab-like progress towards the middle of the aerodrome until its lower wing crumpled on contact with the turf and the machine, whirling over, collapsed on its back . . . "

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BY THE EDITOR



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IN a recent issue we recorded that the "victim" of the last decisive air combat of Manfred von Richthofen was still very much alive in the person of Mr. D. G. Lewis, Assistant Native Commissioner of Bulawayo. Shot down in flames by the Red Baron on the evening of April 20th, 1918, a few moments after his C.O., Major Raymond Barker, M.C., had met a similar fate, Mr. Lewis crashed in German territory and on emerging, practically unscathed, from the burning wreckage of his Camel, he was at once taken prisoner.

Now comes an interesting sequel from a reader in Holland, Mr. H. Van Breen, of The Hague, who sends us the following copy of Mr. Lewis' "death certificate," a translation of von Richthofen's own report of the combat as it appears in the official records of Richthofen's Squadron:

"80th victory, this side:
20-4-1918.

"6.43 p.m.: Sopwith Camel—British: N.E. Villers-Bretonneux. (Fokker Dr 1. 425/17)

"Three minutes after having shot down the first one in flames, I attacked another Camel of the same squadron. The enemy at once went into a spin, but recovered shortly afterwards. He repeated this manoeuvre frequently until I came within point-blank range and shot him in flames with 50 rounds. The fuselage burned out in mid-air; the rest fell down N.E. of Villers-Bretonneux.

"(Signed) v. R.

Rittmeister und Geschwaderkommandante."

The above extract, our correspondent informs us, is from a German book entitled "*Jagd in Flanderns Himmel*" ("Hunting in Flanders' Sky") which

contains the official log of the Richthofen "circus" from hour to hour, and also numerous facsimile copies of combat reports.

It is curious that Richthofen's report of his fight with Lewis should contain no mention of the latter having been taken prisoner, and probably Richthofen met his death the following day at the guns of Captain Roy Brown without ever knowing that his last "victim" had survived his landing in flames.

Mr. Van Breen also tells us of another important air-war book of whose existence we were unaware. This is "*Mes Combats*," a book of War-time reminiscences, published in Paris, by René Fonck, France's leading air ace with a victory score of seventy-five.

Where is Peter Mohune?

A READER who prefaces his criticism with the remark that it is his first complaint in two and a half years' regular reading of AIR STORIES, makes his complaint look so much like a compliment that it is almost with pride we publish the following "grouse" from Mr. D. B. Bailey, of Coventry:

"Although I have been a reader of AIR STORIES from its first issue," he writes, "this is the first occasion I have ever felt it necessary to offer a criticism. But now, although the quality of the magazine is far higher than that of any other magazine of air fact and fiction, and the stories extremely well-written, I do think there is hardly enough variety in the various issues. The main themes seem to be divided between war

AIR STORIES

flying and the adventures of young R.A.F. officers in the East. Why not a few stories about the modern R.A.F. at home stations for a change? After all, your very able contributors have plenty of material from which to draw their plots; e.g., espionage at Cranwell, any F.T.S. or R.A.F. station; foul play at air exercises, etc.

"And where is Flt. Lt. Peter Mohune? Surely he is too young to have retired!"

So many readers prefer war-flying adventures—and complain bitterly if the percentage drops—that it is difficult regularly to find space for some of the many other kinds of air stories that we do include from time to time. However, "Phantoms Fly by Night," in this issue, will serve to show that we are doing our best to meet all tastes.

Meanwhile, Flight Lieutenant Peter Mohune (pronounced "Moon")—whose absence has been due to injuries incurred while endeavouring to land on a too-successfully camouflaged bomber—has happily recovered and, disguised as an increase of pay, has been despatched on a tour of home stations in quest of spies, foul players and other suitable subjects for future stories!

Reminiscences from the P.B.I.

THE following reminiscences of the War in the air as it was seen from the unenviable vantage point of the infantryman come to us from Mr. A. Bonnet Petch, of Bournemouth, who also sets a "poser" for our ex-R.F.C. readers:

"I was only a Lewis machine-gunner in the P.B.I.," our correspondent writes, "so do not know a great deal about the flying side of the War, though during my three years' service in France and Flanders, I saw, of course, a great number of air fights, crashes and balloons brought down. Once in the spring of 1916 some of us gave a hand with the guide ropes of one of our observation balloons that was being hauled down in front of Merville. One of the observers was a smart, bearded man in naval uniform, and I have often wondered if he was Commander Samson, who was, I believe, in France at that time.

"On another occasion, in July, 1916, when we were doing our turn on the Somme, Jerry tried hard to get a balloon up somewhere near High Wood, but every time it got a few hundred feet up our guns got on to it and it had to be hauled down again. This went on for some time until Jerry got fed up and abandoned the effort. Again, on August 28th, on the same front near the Carnoy Valley, one of our balloons broke adrift, the two observers jumping by parachute just before it crossed the German lines. Next day, two of our balloons burst into flames for no apparent reason. We put it down to a thunderstorm that broke just about then, but I wonder if any of your readers know what was really the cause?"

"I should also much appreciate their help in identifying part of an aeroplane propeller which I have kept as a souvenir ever since the War. It was a piece from one a comrade brought into our hut one night and which he said had come from a crashed machine nearby. I am enclosing a sketch of it and perhaps the markings may enable an R.F.C. man at least to identify its nationality."

The sketch is of an airscrew boss with a green-painted ring around it, on the outer circumference of which are spaced eight bolt holes. On the inner circumference there are eight small black painted circles. The right-hand arm bears the markings "G 330" and on the left there are two small panels containing, inside, "A 2" and "A1 21," and, outside, the letter A above an arrowhead. Do these hieroglyphics, we wonder, strike a familiar chord in the memory of any former "ack emma" among our readers?

An Abandoned Aerodrome

FROM Mr. A. J. MacNeill, of Croydon, Surrey, we have received the following request for information:

"Driving in Scotland recently," he writes, "we passed a derelict aerodrome called Fenton, or Fenton Barn, about 12 miles east of Edinburgh. I was unable to obtain any local information about it and wonder if any reader of AIR STORIES can tell me when and by which squadrons it was occupied during the War?"

There is no mention made of this aerodrome in the official history of the war in the air, though there were, of course, a number of temporary aerodromes laid down in Scotland, principally for training purposes, between 1916-1918. Perhaps one of our Scottish readers can satisfy his fellow-countryman's interest?

A "Monty" Story Next Month

AN outstanding attraction of next month's issue will be a long complete war-flying adventure featuring that popular character, Major Montgomery de Courcy Montmorency Hardcastle, M.C., better known to his squadron and to readers of AIR STORIES as plain "Monty." "Wanted—One Fokker" is the title of this latest and most exciting exploit of the dashing Major, while another grand story in the same issue will be "Secret of the Monsters," by Major L. S. Metford.



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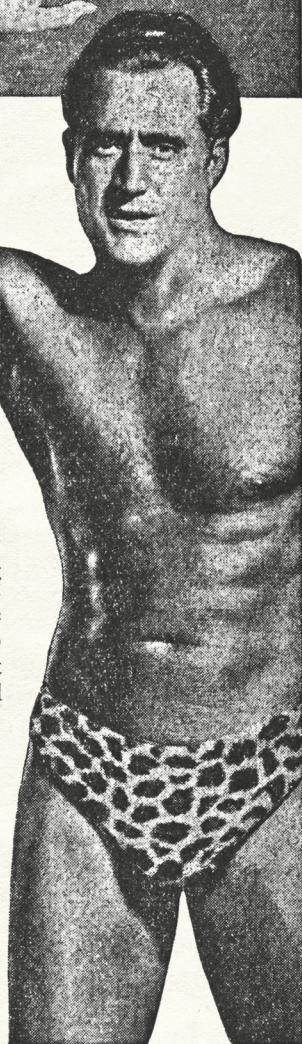
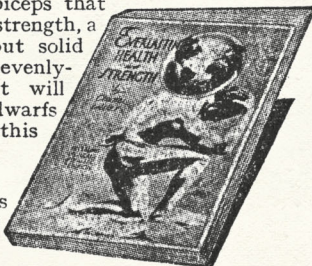
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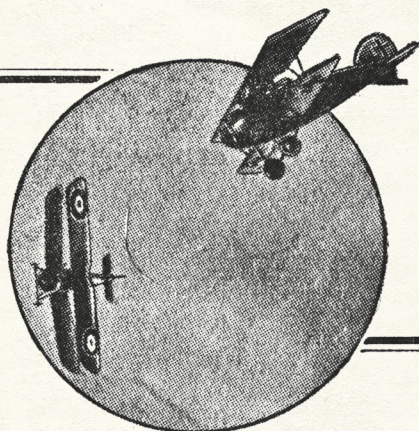
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