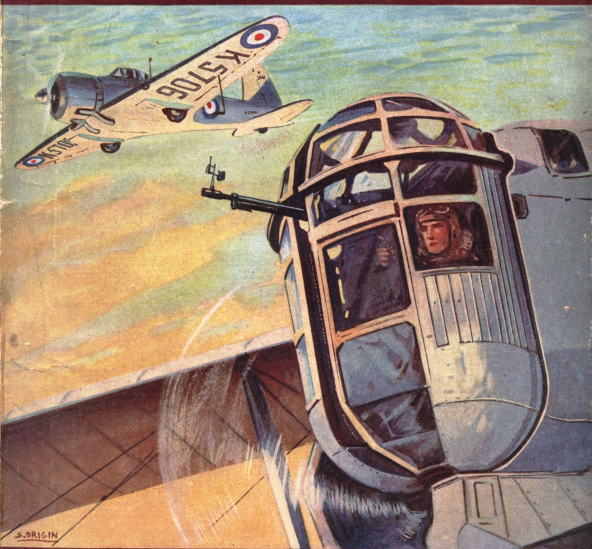


SECRET OF THE MONSTERS—By L.S. METFORD

# AIR STORIES

7<sup>D</sup>



**WANTED—ONE FOKKER**

DECEMBER

GREAT AIR-WAR ADVENTURE By CAPT. J. E. DOYLE, D.F.C.

**TERROR OF THE U-BOATS**

**FLAMING PUPS**

By JOHN C. HOOK

By MILFORD HYDE

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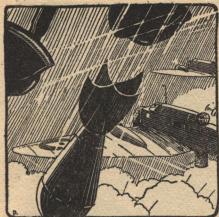
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FLYING THRILLS AND  
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DECEMBER 1937.

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Ashes before Major "Monty" had finished Ringing the Changes in a  
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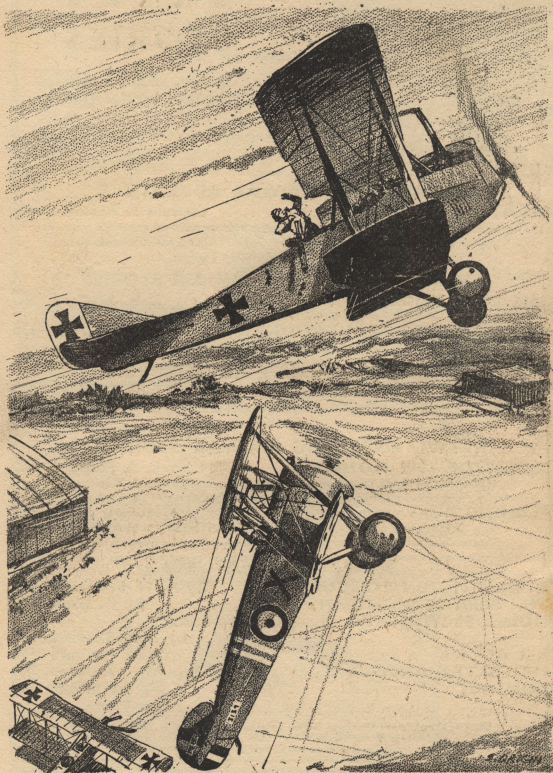
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# WANTED—ONE FOKKER



*Monty dipped sharply and came up beneath the fat belly of the two-seater. . . .*

Moonlight Kisses

# A Camel vanished without its Pilot and a Fokker rose up from its own Ashes before Major "Monty" Hardcastle, M.C., had finished Ringing the Changes in a Daring Game of Bluff Played with the Loaded Dice of Death

By CAPTAIN J. E. DOYLE, D.F.C.

## CHAPTER I

### Monty is Threatened

THAT regular rise and fall in pitch was unmistakable. The Huns might know just why it was that the two Mercedes engines in a Gotha night-bomber gave such tell-tale warning of their approach. Barry did not, though he had a vague idea that it was because the engines were not synchronised.

Anyway, the noise roused him, so that he raised his head from the table which carried the modest telephone switchboard and glanced at the aeroplane watch that hung from a nail on the wall.

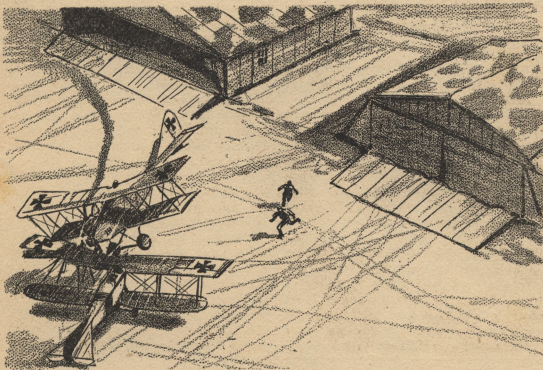
It was four o'clock.

"Hell!" he muttered, "won't this night ever end?"

The rhythmic hum grew steadily in volume until it seemed that the machine must pass right over the Squadron. Barry rose on legs stiff and cramped, switched off the already dimmed light, and left the hut. Here, at least, was a diversion, and since the Hun was homeward bound there was no cause for alarm.

The Gotha appeared fairly caught by three shafts of light which rose from the ground as slender white threads from widely distant points. The threads widened and paled as they rose, until the beams were hardly distinguishable against the sky, but where they converged the bomber stood out against the darkness like a moth transfixed in a car's head-light.

"Whouf, whouf, whouf," stuttered a remote gun, and three flashes marked



... while his previous victim crashed down upon a machine about to move away



the curtain of night, to be followed after an interval by three sharp reports and the whine of several odd fragments of shell-casing that scattered themselves indiscriminately among the Squadron tents.

With a complete absence of respect, one of these fragments ripped its way through the tent of no less a person than Major Montgomery de Courcy Montmorency Hardcastle, M.C., who was also a peer of Scotland, though he elected to be known in France simply as "The Major," and was usually referred to, even more simply, as "Monty."

The fragment buried itself in the floor-boards with a vicious smack which did no damage. It did not even wake Monty, who merely turned over restlessly in his camp-bed.

But when, several minutes later, a muffled bell tinkled at his side, he was alert on the instant. It was as though he had not really been asleep, but merely lying in wait for this call. For his hand shot out towards the telephone standing on the sugar-box at his side.

"Murray!" he hissed, as he grasped the receiver.

"Major Murray, sir," said Barry, now back at his post. "I'm sorry to call you so early, but he says it's most important."

"H'm!" came an expressive grunt from the bed. "Then hold the line for a moment, Barry."

Monty's eyeglass, which always hung from the 'phone at night, had slipped to the floor, and he felt quite unable to face the coming conversation until he had recovered it. In any case, the last man he wanted to talk to at this moment was Murray, and while he groped in the darkness he considered the position.

**T**HE Squadron had been suffering unusually heavy losses, which was saying a good deal, but only yesterday Monty had discovered the reason. As was his way, he had dealt with the situation promptly and in the only manner that seemed open to him.\*

\* See "Sky Code," by Captain J. E. Doyle (AIR STORIES: September).

On the same aerodrome was a French flight of Spads commanded, as Monty had suddenly discovered, by a German spy who was passing as Capitaine Jejeune and an ace of renown. Now, to bring a sufficiently strong charge against this man to ensure his court-martial was, unfortunately, out of the question, for as Monty alone knew of his guilt, the evidence would depend solely on his word. The result of any such attempt would merely have been to cause friction between the Allies, with all the inefficiency and loss that friction involved. Monty, therefore, had taken direct action. Which was where Murray came in.

Murray commanded an S.E. squadron further north, and an undamaged Fokker biplane had recently come into his possession. Knowing this, Monty had flown to Villers, where the S.E.'s were quartered, and by means of a certain pressure induced Murray to lend him the German machine for the plan he had in view.

This pressure concerned a Crossley car which had unlawfully come into Murray's possession when the War was young and he a very junior officer. That car had been a curse to the man ever since. He had found housing for it down at the coast, the rent for which he still paid weekly. He could neither sell it nor give it away, for its Government origin was easily recognisable.

In the meantime, responsibility had come to him. He now had a squadron of his own. His duty it was to see that those under him observed the regulations, and to punish such as did not.

A reference to this matter by Monty had, as has been said, sufficed to secure the loan of the Fokker. Monty had immediately flown off in it, and had encountered and shot down the spy over their joint aerodrome. Then Monty had himself been badly shot about by the rest of the French flight, as well as by some of his own pilots, who did not recognise him in his borrowed Fokker. He had come down in a nearby wood where the Fokker had been destroyed by fire.

So, for the moment, it was generally



understood that a renowned Frenchman had been killed in action over his own 'drome, and that the daring German concerned had escaped under cover of a wood. There was no reason for anyone to question this. The only danger was that when Murray did not get his Fokker back he might turn both curious and nasty. The pressure which had secured its loan might not suffice to cover its permanent loss.

Such were Monty's thoughts as he groped in the dark for his monocle. But when his fingers had closed over the piece of glass and had inserted it in his eye he felt more sure of himself. The hold he had over the fellow was a very strong one, he assured himself, and he would make use of it to the full. The well-being of his squadron demanded it.

"Hullo," said Monty to the 'phone.

"Good mornin', Murray."

"It's taken you a mighty long time to wake," was the aggrieved reply.

"The middle of the night is hardly a good time to ring anyone," said Monty affably. "But if it's important I'll overlook it this time."

"Important!" echoed Murray in a voice which had risen to a high squeak of indignation. "It's immensely important. D'you think I'd bother to 'phone you at such an hour for my own amusement?"

Monty smiled grimly in the darkness. "I don't flatter myself to that extent. But what's it all about?"

"My Fokker, as you know very well. You borrowed it yesterday for a short flight, as I understood, and . . ."

"Of course, of course. Stupid of me to have forgotten. But you're making a mountain out of a molehill, Murray. What's a Fokker more or less? I'd have brought it back last night if I could. As it is . . ."

He had been about to add that it was impossible for him ever to return the confounded machine, but was glad a moment later that he had been prevented. For Murray broke in, insistently.

"Look here, Hardcastle," he said, "it's no use wasting time. I've got to have that machine back at once. Hang

it all, man, the thing isn't my toy! It's about the first undamaged sample of the type to fall into our hands. It has to go to the Depôt this afternoon to be packed for despatch to England. Farnborough and Martlesham both want it for experiment. If you don't bring it as soon as it's light I'll come over myself and fetch it."

Monty's fingers tightened on the telephone. This was worse than he had feared; much worse. "I shouldn't do that," he said quickly, "I'll bring it over as soon as I can."

"That won't do! I'm coming over."

"You can't, it isn't here."

"What! Have you lent it to someone else? You'll be telling me it is crashed next!"

Monty's thoughts flashed to the charred remains of that Fokker. "Nothing can harm it," he said. "If I could bring it over at once I would."

"Why can't you?" Murray demanded.

This was getting more and more awkward. "That's a leadin' question," Monty prevaricated. "We're a very busy squadron, but . . . I'll try to be with you by mid-day."

"Not good enough!" snapped Murray. "Will nothing make you take this matter seriously? I'll have to report it to Wing."

"How's that car goin', Murray?" Monty inquired, playing his last card.

A snort of indignation came over the wires.

"You can't intimidate me any longer that way," stormed Murray. "I'll report that matter to the Colonel at the same time."

"Wouldn't that be a pity?" asked Monty. "It couldn't do any good. Leave things till mid-day, as I say." He hung up the receiver.

Then he rang for MacPherson, his batman, and gave orders for Sykes, the Recording Officer, to be called.

## CHAPTER II

### A Camel on the Warpath

WHEN Monty, shaved and dressed, and having breakfasted in solitary

state at the end of the long table in the mess, went into the squadron office, Sykes was already there.

"Good morning, sir," he said as Monty entered.

"Mornin', Sykes. I've a busy day ahead."

"Yes, sir," agreed the R.O., relieved to learn that some urgent matters, neglected yesterday, would now be cleared up. "I'll get the papers out right away."

"Can't deal with 'em now, Sykes ; can't deal with anythin' to-day."

Sykes looked up in amazement. Why then, in Heaven's name, had he been called so early ?

"They are . . . er, urgent, some of them, sir," he pointed out. "There was a German pilot right over us yesterday, when you were out, sir. Captain Jejeune attacked him but got shot down. Captain Jejeune, the great ace ! It was awful . . . !"

"What's an ace ; and who says I was out ?" questioned Monty abruptly. "Did you try my tent ?"

"No, sir, but . . . but you had gone off in your Camel."

"Ah yes, to be sure. But I came back, didn't I ? You should have looked for me."

"Yes, sir. But, anyway, the German was brought down in the end, though he escaped, as I expect you know. The Colonel wants a full report immediately. He seems to think it a scandal that a German pilot should be able to get right down to the aerodrome of what was once a famous squadron. That was how he put it, sir, though how he thinks we can stop such things I can't for the life of me imagine." Sykes sounded on the brink of tears.

"Insolence !" snapped Monty. "'Once a famous squadron' indeed ! Were those his words ?"

"Yes, sir ; as near as I can recall. Of course, we're not the squadron we used to be. It's not to be expected," blurted Sykes, quite oblivious of the fact that at that moment he came as near to sudden death as it is possible for an R.O. to come.

**E**VEN to suggest to Monty that there might exist a better squadron than his own, or that his own was not at any given time at the very peak of fighting efficiency, was like a red rag to a bull. The man had scarcely a thought but for his squadron. Literally he lived for it, just as he had come within an ace of death a dozen times on its behalf.

"Just why ?" Monty asked in a voice that was little more than a whisper, but with a glint in his eye that no ordinary observer could fail to notice. "Is it my fault ?"

"Oh no, sir," floundered Sykes. "I never meant that. Majors are not allowed to fight now. I'm glad of that, really, but it does make a difference. Now when Major Gilbert commanded he was out with the squadron most days, and he'd go up by himself between times. We had a tremendous reputation then, but he got killed in the end and so . . ." Sykes hesitated.

"Then I came ?" prompted Monty.

"Yes, sir, but I didn't mean it like that because the rule about Majors not fighting came at the same time. A very good thing too."

"Oh," said Monty. "Why ?"

Sykes gave obvious signs of acute discomfort and flushed nervously. "The fighting is much harder nowadays, I believe, sir, and . . . and . . ." His voice tailed off.

"And majors are not what they were, eh ?" prompted Monty, a sudden twinkle replacing the glint in his eye. He did not mind reflections involving himself alone.

"Is that it ?" he pressed.

"Oh no, sir, I didn't mean that," faltered Sykes, his confusion giving a flat denial to his protestations. "You don't get any practice and . . ."

"Well I'm goin' to now," said Monty in tones suddenly sharp. "I'll get some flyin' practice in, anyway, so that if that order is changed I'll be ready."

"Indeed, I hope it won't be changed," said the earnest Sykes. "You wouldn't have a chance——" He bit his lip in sudden alarm. He had spoken without thinking.

## WANTED—ONE FOKKER

"Well," snapped Monty. "We can't stand here arguin' till bedtime. I'm off. You take charge of orders from Wing."

"But about that report, sir! It's wanted at once."

"Let it wait, laddie. The Colonel won't be up for hours and hours. Or draft one out yourself if it'll ease your mind. Yes, draft it out, it will be interestin' to see your account when I come down."

THE twinkle in Monty's eye faded as he closed the door behind him. The first, pale, reflected light of dawn illumined the eastern sky. Day was at hand; a day that promised unpleasant things. He should not have wasted so much valuable time foolin' with Sykes, he told himself—but the fellah was so simple and earnest it was a positive tonic to talk with him. It was impossible to imagine the Squadron without him. Pilots came and pilots went, but Sykes' tongue flowed on for ever.

A single hangar was illumined, and in the rectangle of light before its opening stood a Camel. On its fuselage were two parallel bars, the squadron mark, and the distinguishing letter "X." Monty's own machine was marked with a "Z."

"I ordered *my* bus," he said irritably to Flight-sergeant Hancock. "Is she in dock?"

"No, sir, you took Z out yesterday, if you remember, and returned . . . well, sir, I don't know exactly how you returned. Just let me know where she is, sir, and I'll send out and bring her in. A bit of trouble, perhaps?"

"Nothin' to speak of," said Monty hurriedly. "No, most certainly nothin' to speak about. No need to send. I'll fetch her myself later."

He got into the Camel and began to fasten the belt, somewhat perturbed. He was becoming forgetful. So much had happened yesterday, and he had since been so preoccupied with the problem of the Fokker that he had entirely forgotten he had left his own Camel up at Villers. Nor could he recover it until . . .

"Switch off, sir! Suck in!" called Hancock.

Monty repeated the words mechanically, still considering this fresh complication. Oh well, what did it matter? Camels were plentiful enough.

"Contact, sir?"

"Contact."

At the third swing the rotary fired, and Hancock stood to one side grasping the chock ropes and waiting for the signal. It came, and he watched the Camel trickle forward a few yards with the engine blipping quietly, then suddenly lift its tail and roar out of that lighted square into the westward gloom. Faintly he saw it rise in a climbing turn above the trees, to come charging back across the hangars in a crash of sound which faded quickly. He thrust hands in pockets and turned to follow its course. For a full five minutes he held it in view, a fast diminishing speck against the eastern sky.

"Strike me pink!" he ejaculated at last, and strolled, head down in thought, towards the hangar. He would have something of more than ordinary interest to discuss with the sergeants' mess at breakfast.

"THUNDERIN' bothah!" muttered Monty as his Camel bore him upwards to meet the sun. To get possession of an undamaged Fokker was a most urgent necessity, and one that seemed no nearer solution now that he was in the air. But at least flying was better than being inactive on the ground. He flew due east.

Ahead, a few searchlights still stabbed the waning night as though reluctant to admit they were no longer of use. By now the last of the night-flying Huns must have gained the safety of its own lines. One by one the lights snapped out. The stars faded as the sky brightened.

Crossing the lines at thirteen thousand feet, Monty shut down his engine to a mere whiff of throttle so that his presence might not be detected, and began to lose height. To shut off entirely would be to risk oiled plugs and a prison camp—



an eventuality he did not care to contemplate.

A plan was now forming in his mind, though it was still painfully vague and incomplete. He would attack two-seaters; those artillery 'buses which would even now be preparing to leave the ground. He would make a pest of himself to these folk, so that the scouts would hunt him. Perhaps a Fokker or two would chase him across the lines and give him the opportunity he sought. But that was as far as the plan went. It did not deal with the problem of obtaining an undamaged machine. However, any plan was better than no plan at all, and there was just a chance that events would furnish the occasion.

Slowly the ground, still gloomy and indistinct, rose to meet him. The valleys were shrouded in misty vapour which would soon be dissipated; the hills were half in deep purple shadow while half reflected the pale light of dawn. But a closer acquaintance revealed the landscape in more detail. The dark mass of woods began to stand out clear and sharp against the greens and browns of farmland with their clusters of buildings scattered about the countryside. Most easily picked out, however, were the straight roads which gave a sense of order to the patchwork quilt.

There was a big wood immediately below, skirted on its far side by a road. Monty held his course, skimmed the tree-tops and then swung north to follow the road. He gave his engine just sufficient throttle to keep him afloat. Why tear away on full throttle just because a chappie was over the lines?

He was below the topmost branches of the trees on his left, and low over the deserted road. The road looked smooth and inviting, and he touched it lightly with his wheels, and bounced. It was a foul road, and he kept it at a distance of three feet.

There was a cross-road ahead, and when he had cleared the wood he saw a lorry column approaching from the west. Those lorries would reach the crossing first; unless, of course, they stopped. No, they were coming on; the first of

them passed it by. He could catch the second or the third. The third it would be. He clung to the road, maintaining a height of three feet. The driver was not going to give way, it seemed. He was leaning out of his cab and grinning broadly as the 'plane rushed at him, and he waved as it jumped his lorry with inches to spare.

But, looking back, Monty saw that the vehicle lay on its side in the ditch. The poor chap, he thought, would get into a spot of a bothah over that. But there, he should have kept his eyes on the road.

Dismissing the matter, Monty swung round in the direction from which the lorries had come, so that he was flying west. Unless his bump of locality was very much at fault this main road led eventually to Albert. Yes, he knew the road. Before long it would bring him to Bouvais, where there was an aerodrome.

It was amusin' that those lorry drivers had not recognised him for an enemy, he reflected, amusin' yet hardly surprisin'. Had they recognised the British markings—which they could not have done until the Camel had passed them by—they would most likely regard the machine as a captured one, since it was so low and so far over. It seemed to Monty there was no end to the bluff a chap could pull if he only did what was least expected of him. Possibly the folk at Bouvais 'drome would be under a similar delusion. Monty smiled a grim smile. If so, it would not be for long.

### CHAPTER III

#### A Game of Bluff

**B**y the time Monty came within sight of Bouvais the sun was up and its golden rays were lighting the country ahead, except where the Camel's shadow raced along the road twenty yards in advance.

A church spire came in view, and Monty left the road to circle the village. Rising to some trees, he found himself on the boundary of an aerodrome. On the far side stood three hangars in a row



## WANTED—ONE FOKKER

and an assortment of huts. In front of the hangars five aircraft were lined up. Mechanics walked unconcernedly about the 'planes. Now one of them stopped to look round, putting up a hand to shade his eyes. Others stopped, and then all were on the move again as though at an order. Monty chuckled. This was becoming amusin'.

He was throttled down and skimming low over the grass, as though about to land. Temptation seized him; why not land? Smooth turf was a thing he had ever found hard to resist. Besides, if he stopped for a moment it would give him an opportunity to take stock of the place, and there was ample room for the take-off. He debated the matter, and all the while his hands worked mechanically, drawing the stick back and his tail down as speed fell away. He touched. It was a beautiful surface and the machine rolled smoothly to a standstill.

Monty chuckled, and set throttle and fine adjustment with care so that the machine would neither move nor the engine stop. He slipped the catch of his belt and stood up. His spine tingled with excitement. Obviously, those men at the hangars no more suspected his nationality than had the lorry drivers. True that a group of what appeared to be pilots stood gazing out at the Camel, but they were still, and only betrayed the interest that any squadron might show in a stranger. The mechanics were carrying on with their work. Then the group scattered and went towards the machines. The machines were D.F.W. two-seaters, Monty now saw. And at that point he got a nasty shock.

For his Le Rhône spat. His heart seemed to miss a beat as he dived for the levers. This was rather more excitement than even he liked. The worst of rotaries was that they could not be relied upon to idle for long. Throttle and fine adjustment had to be so carefully balanced that even a pound difference in the tank pressure threw the whole thing out.

So, to be on the safe side, he advanced both levers a bit and checked the engine

on the thumb-switch surmounting the stick.

"Blip . . . blip." That was better. In any case, he need not stay many more seconds, since he only wanted to take stock of the place.

There would be a complete *staffel* here, Monty judged, and half of them might already be up. But no, a more searching glance indicated that there were a number of machines within one of the hangars.

Then, quite suddenly, Monty dropped down into his seat, as though his legs had been shot from under him.

For his engine had cut clean out!

"Hell!" he gasped, and began frantically to struggle with the thumb-switch, which had stuck. It freed itself instantly, and the engine fired again. Not crisply, now, however, but with the smoky sullenness that spoke of a rich mixture and failed to give acceleration. He flicked the fine adjustment back and waited, tense with apprehension. For he could do nothing else but wait during those few interminable seconds which would decide the issue. And while he waited, powerless to avert catastrophe, the thing happened.

The prop. jerked to a standstill!

**H**ALF numbed by this new shock, Monty tried to consider his position. No longer was he a squadron commander, but just a prisoner of war. For the possibility of restarting the engine was one that he did not consider. Without chocks, two men were needed to do that; one at the prop. and one in the cockpit. Even with chocks the Camel would be inclined to nose over when the engine fired, and there was not so much as a small stone with which to obstruct a wheel.

He got up and out of the machine, and looked towards the hangars. So far, he might have been invisible for all the notice that was being taken of him. Across the wide aerodrome, mechanics were busy swinging reluctant engines. Now one had started up.

Deeply depressed, Monty drew the Colt automatic from its clip. He would puncture the petrol-tank and throw in

a match. He turned to look behind. The fence over which he had landed was a hundred and fifty yards back, and a further hundred yards the wood began. Unfortunately, it was a very small wood to aid an escape. He supposed he had better make the attempt, though he could think of nothin' more unpleasant than runnin' and dodgin' about the countryside, hidin' and gettin' covered with filth. He hoped prison camps included decent bathrooms. He faced round again.

Two men were walking out on to the 'drome. Monty levelled his Colt at the tank. It went to his heart to destroy his only possible means of escape, but it was inevitable. And what was more there was no time to waste. He squeezed the trigger and there was a dull click.

The weapon had failed him.

Or was it that Fate had intervened? Those men were walking deliberately and without hurry, and they reminded Monty of a couple of opening batsmen coming out to the wicket. Their manner certainly did not suggest that they were coming out to take a prisoner.

Monty's eyes sparkled as a thought came to him—a wild, entrancing thought. It was the casual demeanour of the men that had inspired the thought. His own men would surely have run out in such a case. Now he would make these do the same.

He moved out from the fuselage, clear of the wing, and thought for an instant. *Schnell* was German for *quick*, *make schnell* meant *make haste*. He raised an arm and beckoned with a vigorous, impatient gesture.

"*Donnerwetter!*" he roared with all the power of his lungs and in what he judged to be the best Teutonic manner. "*Make schnell!*"

The response was immediate, for the men, after exchanging a word and a glance, broke into a jog trot. They continued to talk, apparently, as they ran, and with each sentence their pace increased. It was as though conviction grew on them that they had kept waiting an officer of high rank.

Now, when the Camel had first been

sighted from the hangars it had been coming in low over the trees from the east. Viewed thus, head-on, it was impossible to mistake the type. Nevertheless, it caused no sensation for it was not the first time a pilot had visited them in a Camel. Indeed, the neighbouring scout squadron was rather addicted to such tricks, by which its pilots advertised their skill.

"Damned swank!" growled Hauptmann Leitner, commanding the D.F.W.'s. But then Leitner was not in a good humour to-day. Everything had gone wrong. Already the machines were late in leaving the ground—an unforgivable fault. He had no time for idlers who had nothing better to do than to fly around in captured aircraft, and he was, in truth, jealous of all scout pilots who, in his opinion, got far more than their fair share of the glories of war.

Angrily he ordered his mechanics, who had paused to gaze at the new arrival, to get on with their work. Nor would he at first release any men to go to the visitor's assistance when his engine stopped. It was young Gronigen out there, he guessed, and it would do young Gronigen good to be taken down a peg or two.

But when, after a calculated interval, the Hauptmann despatched two men, he was surprised to see that distant pilot gesticulating impatiently at them, and faintly to hear his angry shouts. Gronigen, to give him his due, was an easy-going lad. In fact, it was his very quietness that somehow conveyed his sense of superiority over the officers of the two-seater squadron. Could it possibly be then, wondered Leitner, temporarily alarmed, that the Herr General had chosen a Camel to convey him on a surprise visit to this unit of his command?

It was just the kind of thing the General might do.

MEANWHILE, Monty, watching the two men running towards him, had decided to maintain his fierce attitude at all costs. A two-seater was taxying out now, and when it came abreast of the Camel it swung slowly round till it faced

the hangars. The two machines were separated by scarcely fifty paces, and Monty was aware that the German crew were eyeing him with interest. He turned a cold glance towards them and then looked away again.

The men arrived, and halted in obvious surprise when they saw that the Camel still bore the British colours.

"*Donnerwetter!*" repeated Monty in thunderous tones. "*Mache schnell!*"

One of the men hurried to the propeller and raised his arms. But he lowered them again as his companion, a surly-looking fellow, and obviously suspicious, called out some words that Monty could not hear. For the D.F.W. pilot had opened up his engine.

Monty began to despair. These men still shrank from open defiance, but equally obviously they were suspicious and were playing for time.

Another D.F.W. was passing close, and began to turn. Monty sprang to his feet and shook a fist furiously at the man by the prop. Nor was he altogether acting, for, most decidedly, he was in a hurry and not anxious to be delayed.

"*Schweinhund!*" he bellowed again and again, until, overcome by the effort of trying to swear efficiently in an unfamiliar tongue, he suddenly relapsed into English.

"Don't stand there like a couple of paralysed prawns in aspic!" he yelled. "Jump to it, you . . ."

The Mercedes engine near by was kicking up a good deal of noise as it swung the D.F.W. round, and it may be that Monty's words did not reach the two men. Also, it may be that his fluency in his own language was more effective than his limited German. The fact remains that the man by the prop. gave his companion an anxious glance and reached up for the blade.

He shouted something, which Monty repeated, and gave a swing. Nothing happened. There was more shouting and counter-shouting, and a second swing. This time there came a single feeble explosion. The engine was clearing itself and would soon fire, but in the meantime anything might happen.

THE D.F.W., having now turned, stood motionless. Its crew were watching the Camel with growing interest. The gunner had gone so far as to swing his machine-gun across to bear on it. Clearly they were suspicious, and with good reason. It was strictly forbidden to fly captured machines until the black cross had been substituted for the red, white and blue target. Equally clearly, however, they were still uncertain whether their suspicions had any sure ground, and there was always the chance, however slender, that a high officer sat in the Camel cockpit. Generals were sometimes a law unto themselves, their own General in particular. Besides, the British were not in the habit of landing on that aerodrome at dawn . . . and yet—Lieutenant Dreisel, the pilot of the D.F.W., wished that he did not have to take-off at once.

He caught the eye of Strauss, the burly mechanic, and beckoned him.

"Who is he?" he asked, and the gunner leaned forward from the rear cockpit to catch the reply.

"We'll soon find out, Herr Leutnant," said Strauss with feeling. "When we get to the hangars. . . ."

The Camel's engine, leaping into life, interrupted him and he hurried towards it to grab a strut. Adolph, his companion, was already moving out to the other wing, but before he could catch hold, the Camel, its engine revving fast, was upon him, bowling him over backwards. Out-distancing the now running Strauss, the Camel accelerated quickly towards the hangars. At once, Dreisel opened out to take-off, while his gunner steadied himself to take aim. It seemed a sitter.

Certainly the bullets cracked unpleasantly close to Monty. Yet he hardly heard them. His ears were only for the joyful song of a willing engine. His wings would soon be air-borne, and then. . . .

He lifted his wheels and dipped a wing towards the two-seater. There was an anxious moment when his windscreen shattered, and then he was out of range behind the D.F.W.'s tail. He whipped



round and let off a burst before the bumpy slipstream from the other machine upset his aim and lost him some height. The hangars loomed up at him, but a quick bank steered him away, and he continued the circle, to see the D.F.W. apparently poised, hanging on its prop. some fifty feet above the tarmac. Then, as though acquiring a final spasm of energy, it flicked round and, a few seconds later, had crashed down upon another machine waiting to move away.

Meanwhile, more bullets were cracking past Monty, and he saw they came from the first D.F.W. to take-off, which had by now just completed a leisurely circuit. So he dipped sharply and came up beneath its fat belly before the pilot had time to throw on bank and so again expose the Camel. Even while it heeled over, Monty closed to point-blank range. He could see the muzzle of the rear gun hanging ready over the cockpit's side. Then he let drive a short burst with both Vickers, and turned off on a wing-tip.

But his eyes never left the D.F.W., which held its bank and started to slip inwards. It had full top rudder on. The manoeuvre was a perfect example of a sideslip, in that height was quickly lost without fall of nose and consequent increase of forward speed. Monty watched fascinated as the machine sank towards the middle of the aerodrome, and almost expected it to straighten out at the last moment for the landing. But the D.F.W. continued its crab-like progress until its lower wing crumpled on contact with the turf, and the machine collapsed on its back.

In a few seconds the whole position had been reversed. Already, three D.F.W.'s were wrecked, and Monty clearly had the upper hand. But his fierce joy at his amazing escape was suddenly damped by swift reaction. Somehow he still had to get a Fokker, and his recent exploits, stimulating though they had been, had not brought him any nearer fulfilment of his main purpose. But at least they had advertised his presence, and might well lead to retaliations by a scout squadron. Meanwhile he must get back.

As he turned, machine-gun bullets cracked near him, and he discovered they came from the rear cockpit of one of the two machines still on the ground. He dived at once, and the gunner jumped and ran towards the hangar and out of the picture framed by his Aldis sight. Monty held his dive while the picture grew . . . he fired . . . and flattened out in the nick of time.

As he zoomed, he saw flames leap from the machine, and he turned to dive again. The remaining D.F.W. had also been abandoned by its crew, though its engine was still running. Again Monty fired. This time there were no flames. But the D.F.W.'s propeller stopped suddenly, and with the knowledge that its engine had been well damaged, Monty headed for the lines.

### CHAPTER IV

#### Mystery of the Missing "Z"

**M**ONTY was not in a good temper when he came in to land, and his condition was in no way improved when the Camel dropped a wing to the grass, swerved, went hard over on the other wing, and finished up on its back.

The undercarriage had collapsed though the landing had been perfect, and doubtless the cause was damage by a bullet. Monty realised this, but it did nothing to appease his annoyance. Those seconds of helplessness, followed by a violent shaking and an unpleasant bump on the head against a Vickers gun, had made his temper worse.

Now, to add insult to injury, he could not release his belt as he hung fly-like from the cockpit. At last he succeeded, only to collapse in an inverted heap on the grass. He got to his feet to find a tender alongside.

"O.K. sir, I hope?" inquired Sergeant Hancock, a little fatuously.

"Everythin' is O.K.," replied Monty acidly. "Just practisin' inverted landin's! It's a bit wearin' on the kites, it seems," he added, pulling off his helmet, inserting his monocle in his eye, and glaring furiously at the wreck of what had recently been a perfectly good



Camel. "... So you'd better get another out right away."

Declining a lift in the tender, he strode off to the office, the problem of the Fokker again uppermost in his mind.

Tutt, the Assistant Equipment Officer, was in the hut with Sykes. Exceptionally tall was the A.E.O., so that in spite of a pronounced stoop he easily topped everyone in the Squadron. To see him now, towering, lantern-jawed and cadaverous, over the diminutive and mild-eyed Sykes almost brought a smile to Monty's face.

The Equipment Officer swung round slowly at the Major's entry. "About that missing machine, sir," he began in his sepulchral voice.

Monty bristled. "What the blazes d'you know about it?" he snapped, thinking of the Fokker.

"I . . . er believe Z is missing, sir," faltered Tutt.

"Ah!" said Monty, relieved, "is that all?"

"Yes, sir, but I have to send in the return of aircraft to Wing. It should have gone yesterday."

"Then why didn't it?"

"Because of Z, sir. But if you'll let me know the position, I'll complete the return right away. We're under strength as it is, and we can't get replacements until this is done."

"Z's missin'," said Monty. "Tell 'em so. And X is a write-off—don't forget that."

"Yes, sir, it's quite simple about X, but it is not permitted in the regulations that machines be missing . . . er, unless the pilot is also missing."

"Tutt-tut, Tutt," snapped Monty irritably. "I mean rats, Tutt. You make a mountain out of a molehill. Report it missing and let there be an end of the matter!"

Lieutenant Tutt sighed. "Very well, sir." He saluted awkwardly and crouched out of the door.

"Anythin' else?" Monty demanded of Sykes.

"Yes, sir, one or two things." He handed over a paper. "I made out that report about the shooting of Captain Jejeune."

"Ah, yes, of course." Monty began to read, and a slight twinkle creased his unmonocled eye. He read to the end, then tossed the paper down. "Quite a fair account of the show, I should say."

"I'll send it, sir?"

"Why not?"

"It is very awkward that the German escaped, sir."

"Is it? Why?" snapped Monty.

"Well, sir, we might all be murdered in our beds."

"H'm," said Monty. "I hadn't thought of that. And now I'm going to take the air."

"Again, sir?"

"Yes, I need all the practice I can get after your remarks, and there's plenty of time before breakfast."

Monty left the hut, and through the window Sykes watched him wander out to where another Camel stood ready.

A MOMENT after Monty had left, Tutt re-entered the hut, and having assured himself that the Major had indeed departed he turned to Sykes with a troubled frown.

"Look here, Bill," he rumbled. "What am I to do about Z? His Lordship won't say where it is, and I can't get replacements until it is accounted for."

Sykes gazed up at him with an expression of sympathy.

"I wish I could help, old chap," he said, "but I've got trouble enough of my own. Why not ring up Wing and ask for advice? You won't have to get on to the Colonel."

Captain Strong was equipment officer to the 10th Wing and considered himself a very busy man. All the same he was far from pleased when his batman informed him that he was wanted on the 'phone by Lieutenant Tutt. For he was in the middle of a shave. Impatiently, he sponged the soap from his face, and ran down the stairs of the *chateau* in which he was quartered to his office, and grabbed the 'phone.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded curtly.

"Good morning," boomed Tutt.

## AIR STORIES

"Look here, we are in urgent need of replacements ; we're five machines under strength."

"No need to ring me to say that," came the reply. "You know as well as I that you can be made up to strength as soon as I get your return."

"Yes," wailed Tutt, "and I'd have sent it in yesterday but one of our Camels is missing."

Strong snorted at the telephone.

"No difficulty about that !" he snapped. "If it is missing we just write it off."

Tutt sighed at the difficulty of this explanation.

"It would be all right if the pilot was missing as well," he said, "but, unfortunately, he is not."

"The 'bus flew off by itself, I suppose !" was Strong's sarcastic comment. "You'll be claiming it shot down some Huns next."

"It's not that." Tutt's voice sank to a ghost of a rumble. "Quite between ourselves the Major went off in it yesterday and returned without it. No one saw him come back, and he won't say anything about it."

Strong let out a quiet whistle. "Your Major, eh ? You say you asked him about it ?"

"Yes, and he tells me to report it missing. Won't say another thing. But we must have replacements soon or we'll be out of action."

Strong considered the matter in silence for a while. After all it was up to him to back up his juniors in a matter like this. These executive officers were all too fond of treating the equipment branch without the respect that was its due, and in past friction had invariably come off best. But there had never been a case like this. Here was a chance to show that E.O.'s were not to be trifled with.

"Send in that report right away," he said at last.

"And include Z as missing ?" inquired the other.

"Yes," agreed the Wing E.O. "Good-bye."

He returned to his shave and to a consideration of the position. The more

he thought about it the more he liked it.

MAJOR BANKS resided at the Aircraft Supply Dépôt at Candas, and was a person of some importance. For all aircraft that arrived from England passed through his hands for distribution. He was, in fact, the Deputy Assistant Director of Equipment. Without his services the war in the air would come to a standstill—so he often assured himself and others. To-day business called him even as he went down to breakfast.

"Could you speak to the 10th Wing Equipment Officer, sir ?" inquired an orderly.

The Major altered course for the telephone.

"Good morning, sir, Strong here," came a distant voice. "I am sorry to disturb you at such an early hour but I have a matter on which I feel your advice is necessary."

"Don't apologise," said the D.A.D.E. "I'm here to help."

"Thank you, sir. It is just that 99 Squadron report a Camel missing, and I don't quite know what to do about it. You see the pilot in this case is the O.C., and he is not missing."

"I see," said the D.A.D.E. "Yes, the circumstances are certainly unusual, and you did right to ring me. Make out the appropriate form in triplicate and send it along."

"But, sir, there's no form for such a case as this ; that's just the trouble."

"There must be, Strong. There's a form for everything."

"There's nothing to cover a machine going missing by itself, sir, nor anything in Army Regulations to deal with such a contingency."

"No, Strong, no. I see your point. I admit that at first I had not grasped the full gravity of the case. Leave the matter with me and I'll see what is best to do."

During breakfast, Major Banks came to the conclusion that he must seek higher authority in this matter, and

WANTED—ONE FOKKER



He brushed the tree-tops with his wheels . . . he was going too fast . . . a crash was certain



after the meal he went at once to his office.

"Put a call through to the Assistant Director of Equipment in London," he told his clerk.

"Very good, sir. Er . . . the lines will be very busy just now, I expect."

"Then make it a first priority call. It is most urgent."

A little later in the day an open Rolls-Royce might have been seen gliding down Pall Mall. It passed smoothly across Trafalgar Square where, in obedience to expert police control, the many lines of traffic made way for it as if by magic. For it was obvious that an officer of high rank occupied the rear seat, and it was war-time.

Brigadier-General Fitz-Fortescue, C.B., the occupant of the favoured Rolls, was well pleased that the day was fine, and the promise of heat did not disturb him. For he had planned to go to Brighton, and, being Director of Equipment to the R.F.C., there was none to say him nay. Nor did he anticipate any duty which could not safely be left to a subordinate.

The Rolls-Royce went swiftly down the Strand and swept majestically into the courtyard of the Hotel Cecil. The D.E. alighted quickly for the stout little man he was, and hurried to his office—a large room on the first floor, overlooking the Thames. In ten minutes he had allocated the work of the day among his subordinates, and was on the point of departure when Colonel Sampson, the A.D.E., came in.

"Ah, Sampson, nothing else, I trust?" queried the General.

"Why yes, sir, there is. I've just had a call from France. There's a Camel missing."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the General, startled. In his mind the years fell away, and he was once again a junior officer on service in Egypt. Of all the unpleasant animals he thought the Camel, whether of the single or twin hump variety, took the biscuit. It made his back ache simply to recall those long rides across the desert. But—his mind flicked back to the present—there was

happily no need to dwell on such things to-day.

"The camel should never have been sent to France in the first place," he pronounced emphatically. "Climate's not suitable. Anyway, it's no concern of mine, and you should know that Camel Corps headquarters is the . . ."

"I refer to an aeroplane, sir, a Sopwith Camel," interrupted Sampson, who seemed quite taken aback.

"Then you should have said so at first," retorted the General angrily. "Hang it all, man, I haven't the entire day to waste on so trivial a matter. Aircraft are missing daily, but there's no need to refer it to me."

"Exactly, sir, but this case is exceptional. For the pilot who last flew the machine is back in his squadron alive and well. All that he will say is that the Camel is missing. I need hardly point out that if this sort of thing is allowed to pass unheeded a very dangerous precedent will have been established."

"Agreed, agreed," the General pronounced after thought. "The disease would spread. What is the usual procedure in such cases?"

"It has never happened before, sir, so far as I know, and the only course open to us seems to be to order a court of inquiry to be held on the spot."

"Do that then," said the Director of Equipment. "And make it urgent. Now I must be off. I hope that on my return you will be in possession of the findings of the court."

## CHAPTER V

### Challenge to Combat

THERE was a certain excitement in Monty's squadron. Life was not proceeding in its usual ordered manner. In the first place there had been no dawn patrol that morning. According to Sykes, the Major had not ordered one, and no special instructions had come in from Wing. By contrast, Monty himself had shown the most extraordinary activity. He had taken off before dawn, so rumour had it, had crashed on landing



and had immediately set out again in another machine.

It was true that he flew occasionally, but not to this extent, and following so closely on the disappearance of his own machine it called forth much comment. By general agreement, it was already a more absorbing topic even than the shooting of Captain Jejeune. It monopolised the conversation of the mess at breakfast.

Rodney, as a flight-commander, and a conscientious one at that, felt it was up to him to make light of the matter.

"I agree," he said, "that it is a bit strange; but it is no concern of ours."

"A bit strange!" echoed Grant sarcastically. "Be careful not to exaggerate, Roddy. But seriously, chaps, where can Monty have hidden the blessed thing?"

"Let's narrow it down," said Fry, who fancied his powers of deduction. "Is it east or west of the lines?"

"West!" came the reply in chorus.

"I think that's obvious," Fry agreed. "If only because His Lordship returned to France."

"He's never crossed the lines, anyway," put in Kirk, who had not been out in France very long.

"Be fair," admonished Rodney. "He's not allowed to."

"Item two," continued Fry. "Will it be north or south of this point?"

"He flew north," announced Nixon, of "C" Flight. "I saw him go."

"North-east," corrected Carruthers.

"Same thing," summed up Fry. "North or north-east is north of this point."

"Are north, you mean," corrected Grant, who rather fancied himself as a grammarian.

"Shut up! We are agreed, then, that Z was taken north yesterday, but not east of the lines. Now what happened to it? Did it crash, was it burnt, or is it still intact?"

"Missing, believed killed," Nixon said solemnly.

"Don't be more funny than you can help."

"It was crashed," guessed Carruthers.

"But whether it was subsequently burnt..."

"Is immaterial," interrupted Fry. "Let's assume it was crashed. Why then doesn't Monty wish to give its position?"

"Because he does not want us to know where he went," suggested someone farther down the table.

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," quoted Fry. "That's a probability and a most likely one. See how an intelligent process of deduction narrows the issue. Assuming we are on the right track, can anyone suggest a place that would fit in?"

The pause which followed this question was taken up with some hard thinking. And then:

"Lucille's!" exclaimed Grant.

Just that one word he uttered, almost in a whisper, but his manner suggested that he had tumbled accidentally upon some great and blinding truth.

IT should here be explained that Lucille Matthiew was the daughter of a farmer whose farm lay some twenty miles to the north of the aerodrome. She was a young lady of charm and accomplishment; and of much business acumen. Furthermore, it was generally admitted, even by Frenchmen, that as a creator of pastries Lucille was unexcelled. The outcome was a foregone conclusion.

The Matthiew's farm enjoyed a wide and profitable notoriety, particularly amongst those who flew, for its big fields afforded good landing. Many were the pilots—and observers too—who landed there, and departed the poorer in pocket but with their stomachs full of richness. But only for a time did this happy state of affairs continue.

A crash or two brought the farm all too wide a notoriety, so that it had recently been put out of bounds to all pilots of the 10th Wing. Monty issued the injunction to the Squadron and straightway forgot the matter, but there remained a sense of grievance among the pilots.

"I think Grant has hit the nail,"

ruled Fry, when an orderly who had been hovering round the mess, withdrew.

A murmur indicated general agreement. "The greedy brute!" said Nixon, by way of clinching the matter. "Wanting the whole of Lucille's output for himself, he puts the place out of bounds."

"You overlook the fact that the place is banned to the whole Wing," Rodney put in coldly. "Your deductions would disgrace a baby's class of the Stone Age. If you can't do better, drop the subject."

WHILE telephone conversations on the subject of his missing Camel were flashing between Candass and London, Monty crossed the lines for the second time that day. With each succeeding minute, his depression increased, and the task of capturing a Fokker intact appeared the more impossible.

The fact that on this occasion "Archie" was paying him the compliment of his undivided attention did nothing to improve matters. Almost he began to regret that he had made the morning's effort to escape, for captivity might have offered possibilities not now available. He was even tempted to fly a straight course so that his Camel and one of those bursting shells might meet in oblivion. But he had not quite come to that, and he turned and twisted in anticipation of each salvo, losing height as he went, so that a few cuts in the fabric of his wings were the only result of several hundred pounds' worth of expenditure on the part of the enemy. Then at last he was out of range.

Instinctively, he headed again for Bouvais aerodrome, which he now found deserted. Not a single machine was to be seen on the tarmac, nor was a man in sight. But a crackle of bullets from a hidden gun told him he was being watched.

He dived, streaked across the grass and fired a reply into the open mouths of the hangars. Then he climbed again and surveyed the sky. To the north was a cluster against the blue, composed of four or five machines. Single-seaters,

Monty judged. They were coming south, and he climbed westward in leisurely manner.

Closer and closer came that formation as the lines drew near, and a faint hope stirred in Monty. The hope was instantly dashed, however, when a careful scrutiny revealed them as Albatros Scouts.

"About as much good as a sick headache!" he groaned.

They were weak-hearted folk, too, he decided when he heard them open long-range fire. Evidently, they did not like such a close approach to the lines. Yet they still pursued.

Now they had actually crossed the trenches.

"Infernal bothah!" Monty muttered, deep in consideration of this waste of good opportunity. If only they had been Fokkers!

The Albatros Scouts, however, apparently content to have driven off the Camel, now turned east, and Monty drifted around for a while, aimless and despondent. After a while, it occurred to him that to fly twice before breakfast was hardly giving his business a fair chance. He had not allowed Jerry time enough to get going. He would alter that at once.

He throttled back, and pulling out a notebook, began to write—with some difficulty, for a Camel is not the best of desks. He was just behind the British front line, with which he kept parallel while he used up what height he had.

"Will return at two o'clock," he wrote. "Hope you will be about."

He signed it, "*The Major*," fished in a pocket for a knife and tied up the lot in his scarf. Then he opened up, zoomed almost out of a shell-hole, and paid some attention to his surroundings.

A nearby trench was lined with Tommies who waved excitedly as he flashed over them to dart here and there, snipelike, across No-Man's-Land.

Heads bobbed over the parapet to watch this diversion. "Blimey!" said a Cockney soldier. "The Mad blinking Major!"

"Keep down, Bill, you — fool!" roared a sergeant, and Private Bill Smith

of the Royal Fusiliers kept down. There was a neat hole in his temple.

Back to Bouvais aerodrome went Monty, keeping to the low route. He zoomed up over the hangars and took the occupants by surprise. For now there was a D.F.W. on the tarmac, and several men were dotted about. Monty threw his message overboard and doubled back by the way he had come.

## CHAPTER VI

### "Majors may Fight"

ARRIVING back at his aerodrome late for breakfast, Monty was able to consume it in a solitude which suited his mood. Having decided to fly no more until lunch-time he would have plenty of time to clear up any arrears of office work and to attend to the ordinary squadron routine. But that prospect did not please him. He had staked everything on that afternoon appointment, and would be consumed with impatience while the hours passed. Furthermore, the time fixed was later than the latest time he had undertaken to return the Fokker. Meanwhile, Murray might decide to make a pest of himself.

No sooner had Monty finished breakfast and settled down at his desk than the trouble began. The 'phone rang and Sykes answered it.

"Major Murray, of Villers," he announced. "Will you speak to him, sir?"

"Yes," said Monty with a sigh, and a docility which astonished his R.O. "Hullo," he said to the instrument, "yes, speakin' . . . No, old boy, I'm very sorry but I can't possibly return it yet. Frightfully busy here! Tell you what; leave it till four o'clock. . . . Come now, that's bein' unreasonable. . . . What's that? Report it to Wing? Look here, Murray, if there's any more of that talk you'll never see it again. . . . That's better. Yes, four o'clock at latest. Good-bye."

Sykes could make nothing of the conversation; but there was work to do and he got on with it.

For a while the two men sat in a silence which was but emphasised by the *tick-tock* of the office clock and the scratching of Sykes' pen. Then came again the discordant ringing of the 'phone, distracting Monty's attention from the papers on the table so that he fiddled nervously with his monocle while fixing his R.O. with an unwinking stare.

"Wing!" whispered Sykes.

"Answer it," ordered Monty.

"Speaking," said Sykes. "Yes . . . yes . . . no, not yet. . . . What! Court of. . . Whose orders? . . . Oh! Good-bye." He hung up, now looking every bit as worried as Monty, and scared as well. His face had drained of colour. He picked up his pen but apparently could not write.

"Well?" inquired Monty.

Sykes squirmed, hesitated and then, abandoning a hopeless resistance, burst into a torrent of words.

"There's to be a Court of Inquiry about the missing 'plane, sir," he blurted out. "That was just an unofficial message, but detailed instructions will follow. Ordered by the Director of Equipment himself. I'm very sorry, sir."

"Meddlin' old fool!" thundered Monty, from whose face the worried look had now fled. It was as though now the blow had fallen there was nothing left to fear, and he was ready for the fray.

"Unregenerate and consummate ass!" he remarked acidly. "Get me through to him."

"Who, sir?" gasped Sykes, scared and perplexed.

"Murray! Who else?"

"B . . . b . . . but it was Strong, the Wing E.O. About the missing Camel."

"Camel!" Monty repeated with vague emphasis. "What are you talking about?"

"Your Camel, sir—Z."

The care fell from Monty's face as an inkling of the truth flashed across his mind. This new situation so appealed to him as a relief from his other worries that he almost smiled.



"My Camel!" he exclaimed. "Of course, laddie. I'd forgotten all about it. Ha, so they'd hold a court of inquiry, would they? I'll give 'em inquiry! I leave my Camel where I choose."

"Naturally, sir," said Sykes, momentarily relieved, but more perplexed than ever. He scented trouble ahead.

**H**ALF an hour later there came a third ring on the telephone.

"Wing, sir," breathed Sykes, hot and bothered again all in an instant.

"Answer it," growled Monty, in his now familiar formula.

"The . . . the Colonel, sir."

"Answer it."

"He insists on talking to you."

Monty hesitated ever so slightly, and then reached out for the instrument.

"Mornin', sir," he cooed. But his mouth was set in a grim line.

Just like a warship, thought Sykes. Everything quiet, but with the decks cleared for action. A shiver ran down his spine.

"Toppin', sir, thanks, and you?" Monty was saying. He felt ready for anything now.

"Look here," said the Colonel, "about crossing the lines."

Monty's hand tightened on the instrument. This was a line for which he had not been prepared.

"What about it, sir?" he cooed, eyes half closed.

"I know you've always wanted to," the Colonel went on affably. "It's very understandable that you should, and if I have always refused I should like you to know that the responsibility has not been mine. The order applies to all squadron commanders and was merely passed on by me."

"Quite, sir," said Monty tersely, feeling more and more at sea over this extraordinary conversation. In spite of the Colonel's friendliness he felt sure he had a sting in his tail. He was not left long in doubt.

"And so," said the 'phone, "it gives me pleasure to be able to say that the order is temporarily rescinded. To-day

you will cross the lines at 1.50 p.m. at the head of your squadron."

"B . . . b . . ." said Monty.

"No, don't thank me. Since I was not responsible for the order I can't in fairness take credit for its reversal."

"Then I won't," said Monty, who felt anything but grateful. "But I've got a date at 2 o'clock." He bit his lip, conscious that he was making a mess of things. "I mean I'd rather be excused to-day, if it's all the same to you, sir. Slight head and that sort of thing, don't you know. . . ." He hesitated and heard the Colonel's sharp intake of breath.

"You will cross the lines at 1.50," ordered the Wing Commander, in tones now cold and businesslike. "Enemy aircraft are to be kept at a distance of five miles from the lines between 2.0 and 3.0 to cover certain troop movements. All squadrons are co-operating. Your section will be Bapaume—Villers-Brette-neau. That's all."

"Dante's Inferno!" muttered Monty, hanging up the receiver and mopping his brow. "That's torn the copybook into tiny pieces. Decent old boy, actually. Don't sit there gapin' like a hyena, Sykes! Order lunch for 12.30. Find out how many machines are serviceable to leave the ground at 1.30, and then get all pilots in here."

Sykes fled.

"They'll be along in a minute, sir," he said on returning. "And there are thirteen serviceable machines."

"Should be eighteen, or thereabouts," thundered Monty. "What's happened?"

"Pilot missing yesterday, and two machines crashed, sir."

"Three," said Monty.

"Then there's your own, sir."

"And?"

"You crashed one before breakfast, sir, and it seems the other you took off had a bullet through the longeron. It's a write-off. The rigger says he was sure the bullet wasn't there when you left the ground, but of course he must have overlooked it."

"What about replacements?" Monty inquired.

## WANTED—ONE FOKKER

Sykes coughed nervously. "A small technical detail connected with Z, sir."

Monty flushed angrily and became calm, all in the space of a second or two. "So be it, Sykes," he said. "Is thirteen lucky or unlucky?"

"Lucky, sir," said Sykes promptly. He had a feeling he would himself be unlucky if he said otherwise.

THE door opened to admit a number of young men. Sykes coughed; Monty adjusted his monocle.

"Led by myself, the Squadron will take off at 1.30," he announced, without preamble. "We keep the Jerry five miles clear of line Bapaume—Villers-Brettonneau. Thirteen machines are available, so the least experienced will be left behind. We will fly in three flights of four. Rodney will take "A" Flight, Fry "B," on the left, and Grant "C," on the right. If broken up, each will rally on his leader, Grant and Fry will rally on Rodney; Rodney you will connect with me where possible.

"One word more," he concluded. "We will make all the height possible, but should I dive without warning, Rodney, don't follow. Follow only when I sign by the usual rocking. Keep your eyes skinned, fight like hell and . . . oh, run along and play."

There was a scramble for the door, but outside the show of haste was not maintained, for the pilots grouped themselves together in an excited bunch which moved slowly towards the mess.

Fry gave a long, low whistle as the first expression of pent-up feelings.

"Can you beat that?" he inquired. "'Keep your eyes skinned'—'fight like hell!' He's telling US!"

"Anyway, you've got your wish," Grant commented. "Didn't you say you'd give a month's pay to see Monty in action?"

"That's right," agreed Nixon. "A cheque'll do if you're short of the ready."

"Quit rotting, you chaps," Kirk broke in. "We were discussing this patrol. It's the queerest thing that's ever happened."

"It's not happened yet," said one,

Roy Smith, in an ominous voice.

"That's just the trouble."

"Don't be trivial. You know what I mean. He's had no experience at all, yet he's going to lead us. What if we meet trouble?"

"Exactly!"

"The worst danger is that he is overconfident," Fry summed up. "If he'd get off his high horse and ask our advice it would be more encouraging. Ordering us about as if the Hunnish sky were a barrack square!"

"Blasted nuisance!" Rodney muttered almost under his breath. "Yet, I can't help feeling sorry for him. I don't know why, but the thought of the poor old chap being shot down in cold blood, eyeglass and all, quite fails to thrill me."

"Sufficient for the day," quoted Fry. "What about a wet? I'll stand one round."

They vanished into the marquee.

## CHAPTER VII

### Free-lance Fighter

HANDS in pockets, Sergeant Hancock gazed skywards. The Squadron had gone—every blinking machine. They made a good sight against the blue, and a good sound, too. Funny that the noise of a lot of engines came back in little ripples, with a big wave every now and then. He looked at his watch.

They'd got off dead on time. Smart ground work, that was. Pilots did not always realise what they owed to the chaps who did the donkey work and had the messy jobs. Still, he was glad to have one foot on the ground.

Monty, too, would have liked to have been on the ground at that moment. Never had he felt so little confidence. Against his will, he was leading his squadron, that was the trouble. Alone it would have given him much pleasure to keep that appointment, but he did not know how these chaps would shape if the Huns accepted his challenge and were waiting in force.

He would soon know. Already they were over the lines and being loudly

greeted by "Archie." They were keeping excellent formation, which was something; in three diamond groups, led by Fry and Grant on the flanks, and by Rodney, just above and behind. But they could not fight in formation.

Dead ahead there was a smudge on the sky. Monty swept a semi-circle of horizon with a slow, searching gaze. There was another smudge to the north, and yet another to southward. No doubt they were formations of the enemy come in answer to his invitation.

At five miles over, he turned north. He became restless. To sit like this until attacked was just courting trouble. He decided to leave the Squadron to Rodney's care.

He dived without warning, curved away astern and began to climb, setting his engine for maximum power. Not satisfied, he looked into an ammunition-box where a glance at the belt told him there were three hundred rounds in position. He broke the belt by extracting a cartridge, and dumped two hundred overboard, then he treated the other belt in similar manner.

Relieved of the dead weight of four hundred rounds, the Camel showed new life and, hugging the sun, Monty followed his squadron on an ever higher level.

**R**ODNEY headed for Bapaume. He was disappointed that Monty had gone so soon, although in a way he was relieved. He did not fancy having to accept responsibility for his safety in the fighting that lay ahead. In front, not far away now, were eight Fokker biplanes on a rather higher level. He thought there were more behind, and wanted to get going before these could join in.

The Fokkers thought otherwise, however, for they put their noses to Hunland and then swung south. Further north was a squadron of S.E.'s, with nothing to do. All the Huns seemed to be south of Bapaume. Pity the S.E.'s did not come down where their help was so badly needed, Rodney thought. Then, having reached the northern limit of his allotted sector, he turned for the south.

The Fokkers were edging closer now,

and another formation converged from the south-east. Rodney raised a hand to the sun and peeped between gloved fingers. Ugh! There were six of them up there waiting to pounce. He rocked his machine in warning and held a pointing arm above his head. This was a bit too hot. One needed eyes everywhere—and guns, too—for a job like this.

Rodney had an uncomfortable feeling that this was to be his last fight, and wished that someone more experienced than he might be in charge. He was outnumbered in an attack which was developing from three different points. He was five miles over, and at a disadvantage in the matter of height. Nor could he ease matters by turning west, since orders had been so explicit. There was, then, nothing to be done but wait until the enemy should choose the moment most favourable for attack. While he was debating these things he kept a watch on the machines up in the sun, for they were the most immediate danger.

This was not too easy on account of the glare. He could only see five of them now—ah, there was the sixth, straggling a little way behind what was otherwise an excellent formation. They must be about to dive for they were well positioned. Yes, here they came. Their silhouettes had suddenly changed form so that now they showed their wings as two narrow bars, with slender fuselages amidships.

Rodney banked into a slow turn which would not disorganise his formation, but which might disturb the Huns' aim. His manœuvres brought the enemy out of line with the sun so that he could see them more plainly. They were diving very steeply and would soon be in range. They were Albatros Scouts, he thought, and took his eyes from them for a last survey of the general position. What he saw caused a wave of sudden fear to possess him. He was not frightened for himself alone, but also for every man in the patrol he led. It seemed indeed that he had brought them into a trap from which there was no escape.



## WANTED—ONE FOKKER

For, with a perfection of timing which spoke of long practice, the two lower formations were closing to strike at the very moment that the Squadron was braced to meet the threat from above. And it would only be a matter of seconds before those Albatros Scouts were within range—seconds which to Rodney, tense with apprehension, seemed stretched to incalculable periods of time. In spite of the bitter wind sweat broke out on his face. The collar of his Sidcot suit felt suddenly tight about his neck, but before he could raise a hand to the buckle there came a short burst of fire.

The fight was on.

**W**HILE Rodney still watched those swooping outlines, faintly surprised at that premature burst of fire, the incredible thing happened. A trail of smoke belched from the leading Albatros, which rolled slowly over whilst the others of the flight scattered and climbed as at a signal. Their carefully-planned attack was suddenly abandoned.

Just why it had happened Rodney neither knew nor, for the moment, bothered to guess. He was otherwise occupied. Depression and fear had left him in that fraction of time, and he turned to force his attack on a now hesitant patrol of Fokkers. The initiative was with him at last.

Then, of a sudden, a sleepy sky seemed to awake. Peace turned to pandemonium. Aircraft flashed in and out of the circle of Rodney's Aldis, while some passed so close that he could not help seeing them over the barrel of the sight in spite of his concentration. For he was concentrating intensely on a single Fokker which, vertically banked, strove to escape his unwelcome attention.

He was convinced that the only way to win this battle was to stick it out with one man at a time. That meant that one had but a hazy idea of how the fight was going, and one risked a collision each second. Also, one had to leave one's own tail to look after itself, but this could not be helped. And the very tightness of his turn was some safeguard.

So it was that, as the criss-crossed

blue lines of smoke left by the crackling tracer rushed at Rodney and disappeared astern, only to be followed up by more in unending supply, he had but glimpses of how the others were faring. He saw a Camel burst into flames, and then another go tumbling in a slow spin, but he stuck the closer to his man. He was clearly getting the better of this encounter, and slowly coming into position.

His thumbs took up the slack in the triggers but, before he could fire, a bullet smashed into his Aldis and the picture went black. His engine began to vibrate. Instantly he transferred his eye to the ring and bead sight and rapped out a short burst. It was enough at such close range, and he saw the Hun's black helmet jerk forward on to the instrument-board.

A Fokker flashed across his path so close that he tumbled over on his back in its slipstream and came out in a dive. He righted himself and took stock of the sky. The dogfight had now opened out so that it covered a wide area with machines in twos and threes circling for mastery. He was himself considerably below the general height, and not, for the moment, threatened. The S.E.'s were coming down from the north to join in.

But what caught and held his attention was a little bunch of machines high overhead. They were the Albatros Scouts, he supposed, but could not imagine what they were fighting. For surely no Camel could have attained that altitude in the time. Yet there was a Camel up there! It was darting this way and that like a terrier worrying sheep. Now an Albatros was doing a slow falling leaf . . . another fell smoking, and the third dived for the lower machines. But the Camel was close on top of this third Albatros, which had not gone far before it rolled over and dived like an arrow, to be followed more sedately by little fluttering objects which had once been its wings.

The rest of the fight seemed to be turning away from the advancing S.E.'s, so that the Camels had some advantage. Three 'planes were tumbling out of it

at different levels, and their bulging ailerons proclaimed them to be Fokkers. The S.E.'s would put a different complexion on the whole thing when they came within range. But they were not there yet, and meanwhile the Huns predominated.

**T**HAT was all Rodney saw of the fight, for just then two Fokkers detached themselves from the *mêlée* and swooped upon him. He was, at the time, trying to regain his lost height, but with little success for his still-vibrating engine had dropped a hundred revs. He was badly placed to meet this new attack, and could only go into a gentle turn, which was of no great help to him.

With a shattering crash, bullets ploughed through his Camel, and its engine screeched to a standstill with a sudden jerk that threatened to tear the frame to pieces. The Camel spun and Rodney struggled to right it. The controls were slack, but it went into a dive and slowly flattened. He looked back. Three Fokkers were diving at him. Or . . . was the third a Camel?

*IT WAS!*

A short crisp burst reached his ears and a Fokker suddenly lit up. The other swerved away, but was followed in its every movement by the relentless Camel.

Rodney watched, fascinated. It seemed to him the Hun had no chance—he was too close-pressed—and so he was not surprised when the stricken craft made a sudden lurch earthwards. His only surprise was at the extraordinary skill of the pilot who had so dramatically intervened. There was no one in the Squadron who could handle a Camel like that, or who fought in so masterly a fashion; of that he was convinced. And he ought to know; he had been with the Squadron longer than any except the Major himself.

But these thoughts were mere subconscious flashes in Rodney's brain, which was fully occupied with more urgent things. To prevent his machine from spinning again was of vital importance if he was to survive. For the ground was close. The horror of fire, too, was

something he could not dispel, for petrol was pouring from a punctured tank and black, choking fumes filled the cockpit. At any instant his Camel might become a mass of flame. There was nothing to prevent it, nothing he could do.

Below was rough country, uncultivated land, copses and gorse bushes; but there was also a clear space where at least he could put down somehow.

He brushed tree-tops with his wheels, banked a little and flattened. He was going too fast, couldn't get his tail down . . . now he was stalled, sinking. He hit the ground with a thud and snap that told of a broken undercarriage, and staggered into the air. A crash was certain. The right wing dropped and touched, and the whole machine cartwheeled over to finish up on its back.

Rodney loosened his belt and sank into petrol-soaked grass. Gently, he crawled clear and stood up, trembling uncontrollably. He ought, he supposed, to fire the machine since mercifully it had failed to catch alight in the air and he was now well inside enemy territory. Then he looked round suddenly at the sound of a Le Rhône engine.

Another Camel was coming in to land, turning easily in and out of clumps of trees. Now it touched down as gently as though on a perfectly-surfaced aerodrome, ran a little way and stopped. Rodney stared, fascinated. Here must be the pilot who had saved his life with such apparent ease, but who, it seemed, had yet not managed to save himself. He ran towards the newcomer. Then he stopped dead.

He was face to face with Monty.

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Decoy of Death

**M**ONTY was standing on his seat and clutching the stick devotedly as he thumbed the switch which gave the even impetus to the engine.

"You've won a great battle, laddie," he smiled. "I doubt if there's ever been a more decisive victory than today's. I saw it all. Now get into this 'bus and off you go."

Rodney looked dumbfounded, as well as thoroughly frightened. "Y . . . you did it, sir. I . . . I hardly did anything. You saved my life—I saw you. And I saw you before that, saw what you were doing. I did nothing . . . nothing, I tell you. I can't fight! I'll never fly again."

His self-control suddenly broke and his body was shaken with sobs.

"RODNEY!"

That one word, spoken not loudly but with a deliberate emphasis that nobody in the Squadron ever ignored, had a strange effect on Rodney. Immediately he became calmer, and took Monty's place in the machine.

"Steer a little to the north," said Monty, as he grabbed a strut and guided the Camel back across the ground, "and you're not likely to meet trouble. Oh, and don't go wastin' ammunition for there's not much left."

He stood back and watched his flight-commander take-off, and when the machine had shrunk to a speck in the west a wave of loneliness came over him. Then he shrugged his shoulders, burrowed in his Sidcot for the monocle and plugged it fiercely in his eye. He strode off to where a crashed Fokker lay a little distance away. He had noticed it on coming down to land, and decided to investigate.

TO his surprise, Monty found a motionless figure in the cockpit, and with some difficulty got the man out and to the ground. Beyond all doubt, the fellow was dead, and no sooner had Monty assured himself of this than the hum of an aeroplane reached him.

He looked up, to see a Fokker circling like an eagle over carrion.

"Regular landin'-ground, this," he told himself, and wondered whether yet another machine would try the tricky approach. He looked again at the corpse, and then again at the sky. The Hun was going to land he decided, not a doubt of it. Simultaneously an idea took shape in his mind, and Monty actually smiled a grim smile.

He picked up the corpse so that it was

in the attitude of standing and, hugging it round the waist, struggled with it in the direction of a dense copse close by. It was not easy work, and several times Monty stumbled with his grim companion. Viewed from any distance they had the appearance of two men grappling desperately with each other—which was just how Monty wanted it to look. For, as he heard the thud of wheels on turf and the metallic click of tail-skid against stones, he raised one arm as though to strike.

When the Fokker dashed past, Monty and his burden were at the edge of the copse, and he hurriedly deposited the dead German out of sight in the undergrowth. Then he ran towards the Fokker, stopping midway just as the pilot jumped out.

"*Verdompte Englander! Schnell!*" he shouted at the top of his voice, and doubled back to the copse.

But once in that leafy shelter he crouched behind a gorse bush, only to dart out again as soon as he heard the German plunge, shouting, into the bushes. A moment later he was in the Fokker's cockpit, and he had but to swing the machine round to get the full take-off run.

It was child's play for a pilot of Monty's calibre. He cleared the trees with plenty to spare and banked for the lines.

He was thankful to find the sky clear beyond the trenches, and promptly headed for Villers. As he flew, he chuckled. After all his efforts, and all the seeming hopelessness of his task, this 'bus had fallen straight out of the sky into his lap.

Then the engine spat.

"Bothah!" ejaculated Monty, who guessed the petrol had run out.

The engine coughed to a standstill, and Monty picked out his landing-place even as he pushed the Fokker into a glide. It was a better landing-ground than many a war-time aerodrome, and Monty so judged matters that he came to rest but a stone's throw from a farmhouse. Here there might be a telephone.

As he clambered out of the cockpit a girl came running out into the open.

"*Bon-jour, Mademoiselle,*" Monty



greeted her as she came up to him.  
*"Avez-vous le telephone?"*

*"Mais certainement, Monsieur Tommie,* but first you buy some of my cakes, *n'est ce pas?* Why have you all keep away so long?"

Truly, thought Monty, the wench was good to look upon. Aloud he said: "First, I telephone. After that I will buy your cakes and anything else you like, Madeleine."

"Lucille is my name," corrected the lady as, delightedly, she slipped her arm in Monty's and led him away.

**A** FEW miles away from the Matthew farmhouse the Squadron was in a state of considerable excitement and tension. So far, but three pilots had returned from a fight that was long to be remembered, and they had had much to tell a delighted Sykes in the office. Never had there been such a battle or such a victory. They had only suffered three casualties, but at least ten Huns had been shot down. Unfortunately, poor Rodney had gone down in flames.

But the most interesting point about the whole affair was that Monty had turned tail the very moment Huns had been sighted.

To Sykes, however, this seemed the worst news of all. How unlike the old days, he thought, days when the C.O. had invariably been in the thick of the fighting. But, of course, things were bound to be different nowadays. Majors had no chance now.

There was also talk of an unknown pilot who had shot Huns off other people's tails for a pastime. But there was rather a mystery about that and soon the conversation returned to Monty.

"Wonder where he is?" Smith remarked.

Just then, Sergeant Hancock rapped on the window that overlooked the 'drome.

"Major's coming in now," he announced. "And several others. He's flying X. She's over there." He stretched an arm to the sky.

Then, even before an interested group

had got to the window, the 'phone bell rang. Sykes answered it.

"Who's that? . . ." he asked. "Who? . . . Oh yes, sir . . . very good, sir . . . yes, sir, immediately." He hung up, looking half-dazed.

"What's bitten you, Bill?" inquired Roy Smith. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I . . . I've been talking to one," said Sykes, and then corrected himself. "At least I've been talking to the Major. That was no ghost. The ghost must be out there flying X. The Major's down at the Matthews' farm."

"What!" came in chorus.

"Lucille!" said Roy. "The sly old dog!"

"He wants a tender sent out at once with petrol and coloured dopes. I must see to it." He got up and left.

The pilots trooped out to the 'drome, all except Tutt who was too busy wrestling with the intricacies of a court of inquiry to bother about other details.

"Poor Sykes has gone balmy," announced Roy. "There's Monty coming in now."

"I'm not so sure of that," Fry mused. "What d'you suppose dope's wanted for at Lucille's if not to change identification marks on a certain Camel? Remember we've proved that the missing Z was there. I'm beginning to get the hang of it all."

But Fry's deductions were sadly upset when Rodney emerged from the mysterious X and, back in the squadron-office with the rest of the patrol, told his story.

It was a story far too incredible to be accepted by everyone, especially since Rodney had obviously been through a rough time and was still badly shaken. Speculation, in fact, was still going on some considerable time later when the door opened to admit Monty himself.

He seemed in the best of humours, and his monocle shone with carefully-polished brilliance.

"Run along and play, laddies," he said, and the amateur detectives quietly withdrew.

"I think I'm beginning to see day-

light," said Fry outside, and then changed the subject. "What a fight!"

"Ah," agreed the others. "What a fight!"

Inside the office, meanwhile, Tutt roused himself.

"About this court of inquiry, sir," he began.

"Yes," encouraged Monty affably.

"What about it?"

"In regard to the missing Z, sir."

"Which is standin' just outside the window," said Monty.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Tutt.

"But what am I to do?"

"Refer the matter back for fresh instructions, and don't bothah me with any more trifles. Now then, Sykes, laddie, we'll get some of that work you've been talking about off our chests."

"Yessir," said Sykes eagerly.

## 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*

**SEA FOX** (L. H. R. Weston, Auckland, N.Z.). The Sea Fox is a light reconnaissance twin-float two-seater seaplane which has just been produced by the Fairey Aviation Company. It is fitted with a Napier Rapiere engine, but no other details have yet been released.

**NEW EQUIPMENT** (B. Iredale, Pickering, Yorks.). The Fairey Battle, Armstrong-Whitworth Whitley and Bristol Blenheim are all now in service with the R.A.F., but it is no longer considered desirable by the authorities that the squadrons so equipped should be detailed for public information.

**R.A.F. STRENGTH, 1918** (J. J. Dunne, Wivenhoe, Essex). The total number of aircraft on charge for the whole of the R.A.F. in November, 1918, was 22,647 aeroplanes and seaplanes, and 103 airships.

**THE LATEST D.H.** (J. M. Hale, St. Albans, Herts.). (1) The latest De Havilland product of which information is available is the D.H. 94. This is a two-seater, low-wing monoplane fitted with the new 75 h.p. Gipsy Minor engine. It is an experimental type for carrying-out full-scale tests of certain new constructional features. (2) There were numerous named Gloster aircraft previous to the four you mention, and the following is a more or less chronological list of your omissions: Bamel, Mars, Sparrowhawk, Grebe, Grouse, Gannet, Gloster, Gamecock, Gorcock, Goldfinch, Gambet, Guan, Goral, Goring, and Gnatsnapper.

**WAR SERVICE** (I. G. Bartlett, Nottingham). No. 104 (Bomber) Squadron arrived in France for the first time on May 19th, 1918, and used D.H.9's until the end of the war. No 98 (Bomber) Squadron, also equipped with D.H.9's, arrived on April 3rd, 1918.

**B.E.2c** (K. Talbot, Sheffield 5). The B.E.2c and 2e were both two-seater biplanes fitted with the 90 h.p. Raf.1.a engine, but dimensions were different. The 2c had a span of 37 ft., length 27 ft. 9 ins. and height 11 ft. 4 ins. Corresponding dimensions for the 2e were 40 ft. 9 ins., 27 ft. 3 ins. and 12 ft.

**A BLACKBURN FIGHTER** (K. A. Taylor, London, S.W. 2). The Blackburn F.7/30 was an experimental single-seater fighter built to an Air Ministry specification several years ago, but not subsequently adopted. It was a biplane in which the pilot was located above the top wing. A Rolls-Royce Goshawk engine was fitted, but no performance figures were divulged.

**AUSTRIAN ACES** (A. K. Bingley, London, W.C.1). (1) The leading airmen of the Austrian Air Force during the war were Brunowsky, 34 victories; Crawford, 27; Arrigi, 26; and Fiala, 23. (2) Lord Rothermere was Secretary of State for Air for a short period during 1918. The first Secretary of State for Air in a Labour Government was the late Lord Thomson of Cardington, who lost his life in the R.101 disaster.

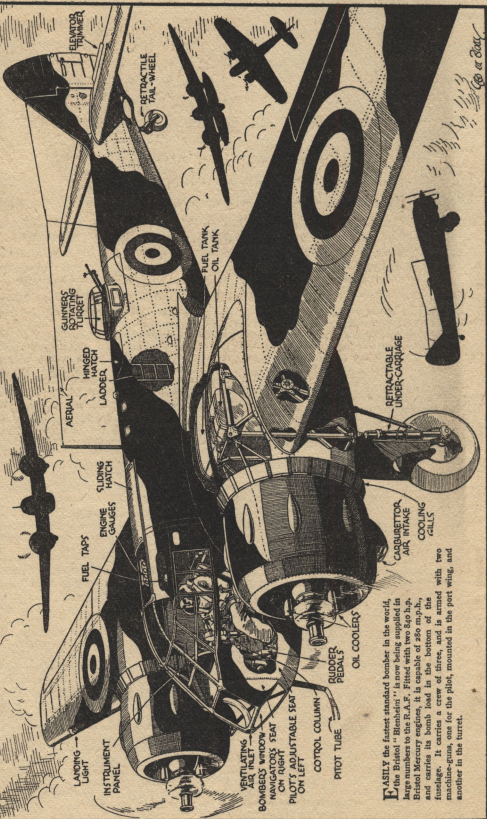
**SIEMENS-SCHUCKERT** (H. Hellawell, Todmorden, Lancs.). We do not know where you could obtain plans of the War-time Siemens-Schuckert D.3 and D.4 types. The makers' aircraft interests have since been taken over by the Brandenburgische Motorenwerke G.m.b.h., Berlin-Spandau, Berliner Chaussee, to whom you might apply.

**EMPIRE BOATS** (B. S. Peckover, Johannesburg, South Africa). The names given by Imperial Airways to their fleet of Short Empire-class flying-boats, in the order of their launching to date, are: Canopus, Caledonia, Centurion, Cavalier, Castor, Cambria, Casopia, Capella, Cynos, Capricornus, Corsia, Corpia, Challenger, Centurian, Corielanus, Calpurnia.

**C. P. AIRSCREW** (J. H. Lines, Esher, Surrey). The Rotol is a new type of British controllable-pitch airscrew, sponsored jointly by the Bristol and Rolls-Royce companies. The pitch of a Rotol airscrew's blades can be moved within a range of 30 degrees, and the change of pitch, corresponding to infinitely variable gear change on a car, is operated by a combined oil pump and a governor unit mounted on and driven by the engine. Blades are of forged magnesium and a Rotol airscrew for a 1,500 h.p. engine weighs only 400 lb.

(More Replies to Readers on p. 544.)

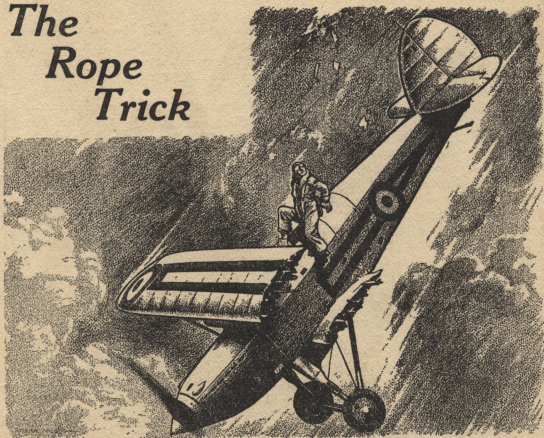
# The BRISTOL "BLENHEIM" BOMBER



EASILY the fastest standard bomber in the world, the Bristol "Blenheim" is now being supplied in large numbers to the R.A.F. Fitted with two 840 h.p. Bristol Mercury engines, it is capable of 280 m.p.h., and carries its bomb load in the bottom of the fuselage. It carries a crew of three, and is armed with two machine-guns, one for the pilot, mounted in the port wing, and another in the turret.



# The Rope Trick



He sat on the cockpit coaming watching the drifting wings. . . .

## A Vivid Short Story of Unusual Interest

By J. H. STAFFORD

**I**T was just bad luck the way Flight Lieutenant Collins was killed.

That's what everybody is saying, for it was an unusual sort of accident.

True, in the short time he had been in Quetta he had managed to make himself decidedly unpopular with the men. Nevertheless, his death has caused something of a shock here.

Air Headquarters, India Command, have dismissed the matter with the usual :

*"Killed in the execution of his duties. Buried with military honours in Quetta Cemetery. Inform next of kin. Casualty form to follow."*

As far as they are concerned it was an accident—perhaps they're right.

Old Symes, stores officer in 938 Squadron, is equally convinced that Collins's death was anything but accidental. Symes has been out here a long time. He's studying native life and customs—writing a book on it, I believe. He ought to know a bit about the place—perhaps he's right.

You may not have heard of Collins and have probably never seen him, and it's practically certain that you've never heard of Ali Khan, the fakir, and you wouldn't want to see him—not twice, anyway.

He lives in a small, smelly cave over in the foot of the hills, with a few wild dogs and ibex and burrhell and bears for neighbours.

He has quite a reputation locally as a professional fakir. Not the sort of cunning rogue that hangs round the bazaars persuading simple coolies to part with property in this life in exchange for a promise in the next, but a genuine Hindu mendicant, with the whole of his mortal life dedicated to solitude and meditation.

He is old, incredibly old, his dark skin, dried and withered, clinging hideously to his naked black frame, his expressionless face resembling nothing so much as the features of an ancient, living black mummy. Yet the eyes are something you could never forget.

This, then, was the ghastly apparition that Symes and Collins suddenly barged into yesterday. They'd been out after ibex with the usual results.

Symes had suggested the trip, and Collins, like most people fresh to the hills, thought it was merely a matter of taking out a gun and shooting them. He hadn't expected to leave the tender on the plain and scramble through narrow, dusty gorges for ten miles in a blazing sun without seeing anything but several million flies.

They were on their way back late in the afternoon when Symes clutched Collins's arm and pointed.

Collins stared for a moment in silence, then he ran a swift eye round the boulders and gripped his gun.

And being startled like that on top of the disappointment of the trip didn't improve Collins's temper. He was disgusted.

On the other hand, Symes was staring in open-mouthed amazement. Here in the heart of this gorgeous desolation was the soul of India. The India he had searched for ; India without its Western skin.

**C**OLLINS was the first to recover. He advanced with slow, cautious steps.

"You're a pretty looking mess," said Collins at last. "D'you 'bollo' Hindustani?"

"I say," Symes interrupted, "don't speak like that. Some of these chaps

understand English. He's all right, a bit dirty, but I'd like to talk to him."

As the fakir's glance swung slowly round until it rested on him, Symes realised with a horrible shock that the man was listening intently to every word.

"Your friend is right," said the fakir, speaking at rather than to Symes. "Judged by your standards, I am dirty. I humbly apologise if my appearance offends him."

"Oh, so you speak English," Collins broke in. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"I live here with my friends."

"Friends?" said Collins, and again his glance flashed round the boulders and his grip tightened on his gun.

"The bears and the birds and the insects," said the fakir. "They are my friends. But do not fear ; they will not harm you."

"Fear!" Collins exclaimed. It was a fatal word to use to such a man. "You gibbering black monkey, do you think I'm afraid of your pet menagerie?"

"Here, take it steady, man," Symes muttered, but Collins had stepped close to the fakir and stood glaring down, a living jeer.

"I see that you are not afraid," said the fakir. "I see that you are a very brave man——"

"All right," snapped Collins, "cut that out."

"But Collins, my dear fellow," said Symes. "It isn't necessary to be aggressive, surely. The man is——"

"Man!" said Collins, sharply. "This isn't a man. He's—he's an insult to man and beast and devil."

"Look here, Collins"—Symes tried to speak with authority—"you can't treat natives like this. It's indecent. The man isn't doing any harm."

"Do you call that decent?" Collins asked, nodding down at the native. "Look at that filth all over him. Why, I've seen water rats cleaner than that. This sort of thing—sitting round like a savage, pretending to dabble in black magic—it's inhuman."

"But my dear man," said Symes,

## THE ROPE TRICK

"you're gravely misjudging the whole by your personal experience of the few. Some of these people possess powers that are beyond our understanding, powers that I would hesitate to challenge."

"Yes, I know," Collins replied, and the scorn in his voice cut like an icy blast across frozen wastes. "I've seen them doing their mental telepathy and their fire-walking and their disappearing tricks, yet when you put them before a camera it all falls to bits. Here, mighty one," he said suddenly, pulling from his pocket a coil of silk parachute cord, "let's see you do the rope trick. That's beaten every one of your kind as yet."

The fakir took the cord, gazed at it a moment, and offered it back. "I am not a conjurer," he said, "neither do I tell fortunes."

"You mean you can't do it?" Collins jeered.

"I can do it," the fakir said, very quietly.

"Well, I'm telling you to do it," Collins commanded.

"Collins," said Symes sharply, "don't be so stupid, man. You're asking for trouble."

"I want to see him do that trick," Collins declared obstinately. "He said he could do it."

The fakir carefully placed the cord on the ground before him, and with his eyes fixed on it, said: "It is your wish, not mine. It shall be done."

Symes frankly admits that in that moment he felt afraid. "Come on," he said. "Let's get on. It'll be dark in half an hour, and we shan't find the tender."

"All right," Collins agreed. "But I'm coming back here to-morrow. D'you hear that, you. I'm coming back to see that trick and I'll bring some soap and water and wash that muck off."

"You will not do that," said the fakir, and there was something very definite about the way he said it.

"What's that?" Collins said, swinging round. "What do you mean—I wouldn't do that?"

"I said—'you will not do that,'" the fakir repeated.

Collins's self-control evaporated in the fiery heat of his temper. He took two quick strides, and before Symes could grasp the raised hand, he had cuffed the fakir on the side of the head.

"You utter fool!" Symes exclaimed.

Collins stared at him in amazement. "Well—you, an English officer, snivelling to scum like that——." He turned abruptly and strode away.

Symes paused long enough to apologise to the native and drop a ten-rupee note on the ground before him. The fakir acknowledged neither the apology nor the note, but sat staring like an ebony image at the peaks of the distant hills.

**N**EITHER Collins nor Symes mentioned the incident of the fakir in the mess last night. They were a bit distant with each other, but we expected that. When two men like Symes and Collins go out after ibex there's either a celebration over the trophy or a silence over the trip.

It was not until we'd buried Collins that Symes told me about it and asked me to go with him to see the fakir.

It was shortly after colour hoisting parade this morning that Collins was ordered by the C.O. to take the Hawker Fury up on test. The Fury was the first to be issued to us, and everybody was bobbing round hoping for a flip in her.

Collins, being an ex-test pilot and undoubtedly the finest in the Squadron, was chosen. His orders were the same as any other test pilot's orders—"Break her if you can."

We all crowded out on the tarmac to watch, for when a man like Collins goes up with orders like that you can be sure of a first-class demonstration of aerobatics.

Collins evidently meant to take the C.O. at his word, for he went over every detail with particular care, turning out everything that was loose from the cockpit, running a swift, practised eye over the controls, lacing himself tightly in a test corset, and finally inspecting his parachute harness with unusual thoroughness.

News of the flight had spread round



## AIR STORIES

the camp, and by now practically the whole population of the station, including most of married quarters, were gathered round the hangars.

There was nothing spectacular in the take-off. Collins taxied down to the far end of the airfield and turned his nose into the slight breeze. He lifted his tail and bumped off easily and quietly, and the disappointed expressions of the watchers showed that they had expected something quite different. At a thousand feet he wagged his wings as though to say, "She's O.K. Now watch."

The tail of the Fury went up, and the machine dropped like a stone completely vertical for five hundred feet, then it pulled out and swept under in a huge arc that carried it within fifty feet of the earth.

Not satisfied with this, Collins executed two sudden flick rolls as he zoomed up over the hangars. I wasn't particularly startled. I'd expected something sensational, but crazy flying at five thousand feet and crazy flying at five hundred are two different things.

I've seen a bit of air madness both here and in England, but I've never seen anything to equal the stunts that Collins pulled off during the next ten minutes.

He flew inverted across the airfield with his top plane not twenty feet from the ground, flicked over, and as he passed a group from the married quarters he dipped one wing until it swept the dust up at their feet as he roared past. I heard afterwards that one of them fainted. He certainly gave them their money's worth.

He dived, rolled, stalled: swung round in flat turns that side-slipped half a mile, and hurled the machine clean at us in breath-taking power dives.

Once he soared up to four thousand feet, performed a perfect loop, and carried on in an inverted loop to complete the "spectacles," a stunt that few pilots have seen and fewer still tried.

At eight thousand, he stood her on her tail, let her fall into a spin, and came whirling down like a sycamore seed. We watched him down to two thousand—one thousand—five hundred, and in that

moment I thought he had left it a split second too late. Falling at that speed, no parachute could have saved him in the distance.

On the last turn of the spin he came out of it, screamed across the airfield a foot from the ground, and shot up like a rocket over the hangars. By every known law of aerodynamics the Fury should have broken her back.

So it went on, Collins screeching down on us and zooming vertically to the sky, then throttling back and sitting there calmly waiting to fall into a spin, and we ordinary people standing below, thrilled, fascinated and a little horrified, for it wasn't flying, it was torture—madness supreme—a terrifying, magnificent exhibition of masterly skill and ice-cold courage that brought the sweat to your eyes one moment and froze your blood the next.

It couldn't last, no machine built could stand being thrown about the sky in that manner for long. Collins's orders were to break it, and he meant to do it.

**I** WAS watching him at ten thousand feet, through the binoculars; it was the highest he went, and that, as any test pilot will tell you, is merely peeping over the grass. He tailed up vertically and I wondered if he meant to try a terminal velocity dive from that height.

He hadn't dropped three thousand feet when I saw what appeared to be a huge mouth open on the camber of the top port wing. I guessed the pressure had been too much for it and the fabric-covered metal had burst under the terrific strain.

The machine veered round in an alarming turn and the whole upper and lower port wings tore away from the fuselage and floated off, while the machine itself dropped like a stone, swinging round and round in an ever-narrowing circle.

Somebody screamed and I felt thankful that Collins had inspected his 'chute before taking off. He was safe enough, of course, and he evidently knew it, for I could distinctly see him climbing out of the cockpit, unconcerned, unhurried.

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Then I had another glimpse of the amazing coolness of the man. He sat on the edge of the cockpit coaming watching the drifting wings and measuring his distance to the gyrating earth. Then he jumped.

He dropped nearly a thousand feet before he pulled the rip cord, and an audible sigh went up as the great dome of silk opened and checked his fall. He waved cheerily to us and pointed away to where the Fury was plunging down in her last mad rush.

I saw him swing himself round to watch it; I saw the 'chute dip as he heaved on the cords; and then I saw something else. I believe I shouted—I know somebody did.

"The wings! The wings, man!" Was it I who was yelling like that? As though he could hear, four thousand feet above us.

Collins had seen them now. Like the grim, awful outline of a vulture they dropped a hundred feet, paused as they turned over, and dropped again, each time nearer to that white dome from which dangled a man's life.

Collins was working like a madman, tugging on the cords, slipping one side of the 'chute, drifting it with every trick he knew, and still those wings, like a giant bird of prey, swept ever nearer. They were directly above him, if they dropped now—.

And they dropped, clean on to the silken dome. Man, wings, and parachute mingled and began falling with ever-increasing speed.

**A**N unearthly silence held the crowd. The suddenness of the tragedy appalled us. Then, even as I stared in numbed horror, a tremendous, deafening cheer shattered the silence.

By some amazing fluke the wings had separated from the silk. The parachute again bellied out and the deadly fall became a steady, drifting descent. I could see Collins kicking furiously, evidently some of the 'chute cords had fouled his harness. Unable to free them he was content to wait, thankful enough that his luck had held.

He landed on the far side of the airfield and before the 'chute had settled we were tearing across to congratulate him on his miraculous escape.

I was among the first to drag him from the tangle. Even at that moment I did not realise. He was injured, of course, otherwise he would have been struggling out himself.

At last he was free and the little knot of us stared aghast, at his wide, unseeing eyes; at the grotesque angle of his head; at the silken cords of the parachute that had twined round his neck and broken it.

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## "WE HAVEN'T GOT A HOPE IN THE MORNING"

*The War-time Song of No. 54 Squadron, R.F.C.,  
sung to the tune of "D'ye Ken John Peel"*

WHEN you soar into the air on a Sopwith Scout,  
And you're scrapping with a Hun and your gun  
cuts out,  
Well, you stuff down your nose till your plugs fall  
out,  
'Cos you haven't got a hope in the morning.

*Chorus—*

For a batman woke me from my bed;  
I'd had a thick night and a very sore head,  
And I said to myself, to myself I said,  
"Oh, we haven't got a hope in the morning!"

So I went to the sheds and examined my gun,  
Then my engine I tried to run;  
And the revs. that it gave were a thousand and one,  
'Cos it hadn't got a hope in the morning.

*Chorus—*

For a batman, etc.

We were escorting Twenty-two,  
Hadn't a notion what to do,  
So we shot down a Hun and an F.E. too,  
'Cos they hadn't got a hope in the morning.

*Chorus—*

For a batman, etc.

We went to Cambrai, all in vain;  
The F.E.'s said, "We must explain;  
Our cameras broke—we must do it again;  
Oh, we haven't got a hope in the morning!"

*Chorus—*

For a batman, etc.

# SECRET OF THE MONSTERS

Upon the Ruthless Daring of Two British Airmen, Deep  
Within the Enemy's Territory, depended the Preservation  
of the Greatest Secret of the War

By MAJOR L. S. METFORD

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

## CHAPTER I

### Things to Come

STRANGELY enough perhaps, it was Air Mechanic Muggs who first brought the strange tidings. Muggs was Lieutenant Sanders' batman and the tough little Yorkshire "tyke" also "did for" Sanders and Lovelace, who dwelt in a cubicle of sorts, cunningly constructed out of ex-aero fabric and bits of wood, in a corner of the barn opposite the farmhouse at Froiselles.

Muggs, who could almost have qualified for the "Bantams," was short, bandy, stockily-built and the possessor of one of those wall-eyed faces which goes with a pugilist's cauliflower ear. Of these he had two; both honestly come by in pre-War days. He had just returned from a spot of leave—also very honestly come by, since he had been in France for eighteen months, practically without a break.

He had brought back with him much gossip, largely concerning profiteers, "conchie," and food-tickets; gossip gathered at first-hand from assorted relations and friends.

All this was doubtless very interesting to Muggs, but scarcely illuminating to his joint "orificers." But he insisted upon regaling them with these domestic titbits as they glowered at him from their respective cots whilst imbibing early and scalding cups of mahogany-coloured tea.

"All right, Muggs," interrupted Sanders with intense boredom, when he could stand it no longer. "Stow it, there's a good chap. We know all about those blighters who are winning the War at Home. What about my field-boots? Have you dubbed 'em yet?"

"A'most, sir. I'll get reet on wi' 'em, sir, but——" and here Muggs' rough-hewn face grimaced itself into something intended for a conciliatory smile—"but you ain't heard the best part yet, sir."

"Never mind," grunted Lovelace, fishing under his pillow for cigarettes, "you can let us have the next instalment to-morrow, or, even later—much later. Chuck over the matches. They're on the table."

Muggs, completely unabashed, held a light to Lovelace's cigarette, shielding the match solicitously from the draught from the broken window which had been mended indifferently with a piece of sacking.

"You jest lissen, sir," he grinned, throwing the match on the floor and stamping on it with cheerful abandon. "My kid brother, sir, he's a mechanic an' a good 'un. He come home for the week-end while I was there. He's pulling down fourteen quid a week building—naow, what would you think, sir?" And Muggs glanced proudly from one to the other as might he who had just propounded a weighty question.

"Mouth-organs?" suggested Sanders solemnly, and Muggs looked away with an expression as closely allied to contempt as he dared to permit himself.

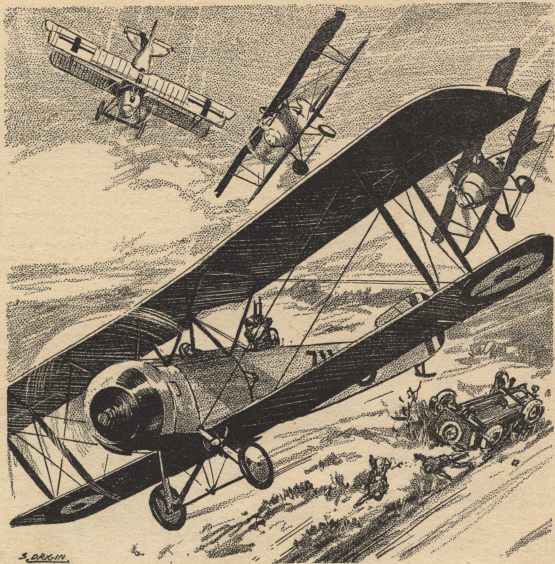
"Watcher think, sir?" he asked Lovelace anxiously.

"Oh, I dunno, Muggs. Methinks something between mouse-traps and grand pianos. One gathers the munitioneers are going in for pianos on a grand scale. Grand scale's good, eh, Sanders, old bean?"

"No, sir. Neither of you gentlemen ain't nowheres near it," chortled Muggs,



## A Thrilling Story of Counter-Espionage in the R.F.C.



Even as the car capsized into a ditch, three Rolands came hurtling down upon them

rubbing his hands together gleefully.  
"It's forts!"

"Forts?" they chorused. "Thought you said he was an industrious mechanic," added Lovelace accusingly.

"Yes, sir. He is. He ain't supposed to say anything about it; not to no one, but these here forts is movable ones. Runs abaht on wheels like."

"Sort of peripatetic pill-boxes, eh?" suggested Sanders. "What do they run on—rails?"

"No, sir; leastways they carry their

own tracks about wi' 'em an' put 'em down in front of 'em an' then pick 'em up again. That's what Fred says, but I ain't never seed one myself. Nobody ain't allowed to see 'em at all. There's a big high fence round the factory wi' sentries an' all. They don't even let the fellers who are working on 'em write letters or go outside to see their friends. They all live at the works."

"Um. Seems quite a hush-hush affair," commented Sanders, becoming vaguely interested. "But how about

your brother? He appears to have got out."

"Oh, 'im," grinned Muggs with manifest pride in the family achievements. "Fred's dif'runt. He'd slip out of a 'Un prison camp if he'd a mind to. There ain't no flies on Fred, sir."

"What else?" enquired Lovelace, also intrigued and leaning on his elbow with a British Warm thrown over his pyjamaed shoulders. "What are Brother Fred's gentle playmates for? Coastal defence?"

"Lor' blimey, no, sir. They're sendin' 'em over 'ere as soon as they can. This month, they do say. 'S wunnerful what they'll be able to do. They got li'l cannons and machine-guns on board and Fred says as 'ow they're armour-plated and can crawl all over trenches an' up walls and push trees over. Reckon he means li'l ones, sir," he added as a kind of afterthought.

"Oh, I dunno," drawled Sanders reflectively. "Last leave I pushed over quite a sizable one with my old Vauxhall—and without half trying, either. Road wet. With a 'bus properly designed for the job like your brother's little toys, one might put up quite a show. By Jove!" he interrupted himself, glancing at his wrist-watch hanging on a nail driven into the wall nearby. "D'you see the time? Ye gods and little fishes! Shaving water, Muggs, *ek dum*, and another cup of tea."

And that was how the Tanks came to No. 92 Squadron R.F.C., via Air Mechanic Muggs and his brother, Fred.

Of course the squadron had heard rumours about the coming Juggernauts on caterpillar tracks before this; even as they had heard vague rumours of the impending Somme offensive. Now, however, with Muggs' tidings, which seemed to substantiate in some measure what they had heard before, they began to couple the two together, so that the one seemed complementary to the other and it appeared likely that the long-promised advance would take place only with the advent of these much debated monsters.

In the meantime, it was "business as usual"; and the business of No. 92 at

the moment was to pilot their Sopwith One-and-a-Half-Strutters above and in the wake of the cumbersome bombers which were paying close attention to Peronne, Nesle, Achiet-le-Grand, Bapaume and Ham—those five plague-spots where "Archies" of the most virulent kind lived, moved not and had their being.

## CHAPTER II

### Introducing Alphonse

ABOUT a fortnight or so after Air Mechanic Muggs' revelations the squadron was assembled in the presence of a red be-tabbed and much be-ribboned Staff officer of a very superior vintage.

This gentleman seemed to be a particular friend of the C.O., for he was overheard to call him "Mike" when, later, he accompanied Major Sharpness to the anteroom for a couple of quick ones before taking his departure. But, previously, he had told the assembled pilots and observers of No. 92 more about the coming offensive in ten minutes of short, incisive wordage than rumour had circulated in the whole of the preceding ten days.

And No. 92 stood around, pop-eyed, and fairly lapped it up.

It appeared that the Tanks—which the War House had designated the new weapons for reasons of secrecy—were by no means a figment of the overwrought imaginations of Muggs and his brother, Fred. Far from it indeed. It seemed that about fifty of these monsters were actually in France and were to lead the advance along a front running approximately from Courcellette to Morval. The infantry were to advance with and behind them, after the tanks had smashed through the barbed wire entanglements and silenced the German machine-gun nests.

This in itself was News with a capital "N," but where the R.F.C. in general, and No. 92 in particular, were to come in was in preventing any possibility of advance information either of the proposed attack or the existence of these new war machines being carried back by enemy aircraft.

## SECRET OF THE MONSTERS

"And if, peradventure, one does happen to slip through, sir?" asked Lieutenant Lovelace, when the General paused to ask if all was clear.

"I'll leave your C.O. to deal with the pilot of the 'plane which lets him through," replied the General severely, glancing at Sharpness with meaning. "He will know what to do with him—peradventure," and he smiled bleakly.

A few minutes later the meeting broke up and Sanders clapped his friend on the shoulder.

"Come on, you silly ass," he suggested with a grin. "Let's go and have one before we go up. What did you want to go and ask a damfool question like that for?"

"Apart from the fact that in the best circles it is considered distinctly bad form to conclude a sentence with a preposition," retorted Lovelace calmly, "my considered opinion is that when one desires specific information on a certain subject, one should always ask."

"Well, you know now," interrupted Sanders rudely, as they overtook Lieutenant Gaspard Leroux, the interpreter. "Come on, *mon cher Alphonse*. Join us in quaffing deeply of the cup that cheers and . . ."

"... And oft inebriates—thank Heavens," concluded Lovelace, landing on the little Alsatian's kepi with a none too gentle hand. "Come on, Alphonse. Let's drink to the offensive."

**W**HY No. 92 was honoured by the presence of an interpreter needs, perhaps, some explanation. Situated as they were on the Amiens-Doullens road, their aerodrome seemed to provide a kind of focal point and home-from-home for itinerant pilots of the French Air Service.

Strangely enough, although more than one member of the squadron was markedly proficient in the German language, none had a really practical working knowledge of French. Thus it was that when these assorted *pilotes-aviateurs* of our Allies dropped in for "*un bidon d'essence*" or some slight "*reparation sommaire*" there were few

who knew what was required. In fact, it was mostly guesswork.

There had been, for instance, the matter of le Capitaine Séjourné who had arrived one day in disreputable overalls, politely desiring that two of his "*bougies*" be "*nettoyées bien vite*," and who was taken off to the men's quarters for dinner during the process of cleaning his spark-plugs.

Also there was the resplendent Felix Renaud who turned up one afternoon in a decrepit Voisin, nattily attired in *bleu d'horizon* and red, and requiring "*huile de ricin*" amongst other unknown desiderata.

He stayed four days—apparently none knowing his whereabouts nor greatly caring—being welcomed in the officers' mess, wherein he proved himself a veritable wizard both on the ancient piano and in the matter of "*petits verres*," which chased each other down his capacious gullet in a young tidal wave.

Finally, vowing eternal devotion to his "*gallants camarades anglaises*," he disappeared in a cloud of assorted fumes in which, according to Lovelace, castrol and cognac predominated, some ten minutes before a signal message arrived enquiring urgently about one, Corporal Felix Renaud.

These and other incidents having been placed before the Powers-that-Were, resulted in the arrival of Lieutenant Gaspard Leroux—promptly nicknamed "Alphonse" to his surprise and indignation—whose English was vile but apparently sufficient, and a sudden decrease in the number of visiting Allied pilots.

### CHAPTER III Shot Down

**S**OME few days after the General's visit, Sanders, with his friend, Lovelace, in the rear cockpit of a One-and-a-Half-Strutter, nosed up through the ground-mist in the wake of "B" Flight. As they climbed higher, the mist thinned and finally rolled away in little wisps and eddies until, at twelve thousand, the air was clear.



From his position in the rear of the V formation, Sanders could see the streamers on Captain Hawkins' inter-plane struts flicking backwards in the rush of air. Far below, he could make out the Ancres sparkling in the clear morning light, for already the grey dawn was turning to translucent pink and thence to the pale blue of a September day.

The countryside was a quilt of sombre patches, stitched with an uncertain hand on an undulating background, whilst the woodland, variegated in all the shades of green and russet of an autumnal artistry, made irregular splotches and designs with no apparent rhyme or reason.

From directly beneath the fleeting 'plane, meandering amongst the chaotic ruins of what once had been fair and prosperous hamlets, the maze of the actual battle-front twisted and turned, looking for all the world like the writhings of giant snakes across a sandy desert, whilst over all, shot through with innumerable flashes of gun-fire, hung a heavy pall of smoke.

**N**EARING Bapaume, Sanders squirmed half round in his seat, wrinkled his cheerful face into a grin and pointed downwards. Lovelace winked back and instinctively laid his hand on the edge of the Scarff mounting to steady himself for what was to come.

They had not long to wait. So familiar were the pilots and observers of No. 92 Squadron with the sector over which they flew, that they knew almost to a quarter of a mile when to expect certain things to happen. Thus it was that not half a minute later, the sky about them was filled with blossoming fluff-balls as "Archie" got their range.

Sanders, with half-shut eyes squinting through his goggles at Hawkins' 'plane, saw him skid off to the left and immediately followed suit, as did the other three. Diving off at a tangent to put the gunners off their aim, they zigzagged back and forth and finally passed beyond their range.

Then something happened so quickly

that they were almost taken off guard, skilled and alert pilots though they were. Lovelace, in the rear cockpit, staring about him for possible E.A., as if his head was mounted on a universal joint instead of a neck, saw them first.

"Huns, Bill!" he shouted down the speaking-tube. "Just above and behind!"

He turned in his seat and pulled back the cocking handle of the after-Lewis, whilst Sanders fired a warning burst of five rounds from his Vickers over the top of Captain Hawkins' Sopwith.

The latter glanced over his shoulder, swore at his observer for not keeping a better look-out and flipped into a climbing turn, the rest of the Flight hard on his tail. The combatants, now speeding towards each other at a combined speed of something like two hundred and fifty miles an hour, must have appeared to a terrestrial onlooker as if they were bound to collide head-on. But the Halberstadt pilots, after firing a long burst, zoomed suddenly upwards, poised themselves for an instant to let the British 'planes go by, and then swooped down again.

Sanders kept station, watching critically the way the others kept in formation, then, following Hawkins' movements closely, nosed up and fired a burst at a green Halberstadt dropping upon him. He could see the orange flickers at the Spandau muzzles as he kept pressure on the trip. Then the German 'plane seemed to stagger in the air and Sanders pulled up steeply to avoid a collision with the stricken aircraft which rolled over and over beneath him.

Another Halberstadt was dropping on the Sopwith to his left front. He pushed the nose down and poured in a couple of quick bursts and the German pilot leaned back with the stick to bring his guns to bear on this new adversary. Sanders, still firing, swerved aside, when suddenly the roar of his 110-Clerget changed to a high-pitched whine, crescendoing to a shriek as the over-revving crankshaft, deprived of the resistance of a propeller, tried to tear itself free from its bearers.

"Damn and blast 'em!" he swore

## SECRET OF THE MONSTERS

as he cut the switch. "There goes my ruddy prop! That's torn it properly!"

He pushed the nose down and looked anxiously about him. The Halberstadt pilot, seeing that the Sopwith was now incapable of inflicting any further damage on him or his comrades, waved an ironical hand and sheered off to rejoin the fight still being waged furiously above them.

If, but for one single instant of time, that Halberstadt pilot had been permitted a glimpse into the future and had seen the part his two "victims" were destined to play in the fortunes of his Fatherland, neither of them would ever have been allowed to reach the ground alive. As it was, however, the German left them, reflecting somewhat contemptuously the while on his own forbearance.

"WHAT about it, old bean?" shouted Lovelace from the rear cockpit. "We'll never make the lines from here—not with this wind blowing."

"I know," answered Sanders. "We've got about enough height to reach the German supports—with luck."

"Nothing doing," urged Lovelace. "Our best bet is to put the old tub down well inside their territory; as far away from the troops as possible. I yearn not to consort with their ribald soldiery. What think ye?"

Sanders nodded his head vigorously but did not reply. As a matter of fact the same idea had occurred to him and he was already busily engaged in trying to pick out a likely emergency landing-ground. Lovelace, with nothing to do for the moment, twisted round in his seat and transferred the emergency rations, consisting of cigarettes and chocolate bars and a flask of brandy which the two always carried with them in their locker, into the capacious pockets of his flying-coat.

A little later, the aircraft came to rest in a stubble field from which the sheaves of corn had been but lately removed, in the lee of a narrow belt of woodland. In their descent, they passed over roads and lanes crowded with troops and transport and artillery—all moving to-

wards the front. By now, however, the highways were comparatively empty, for they had travelled a considerable distance from the lines and as Sanders jumped out and struck a match to set fire to the 'plane, the two companions noticed that the sound of gunfire came to their ears very faintly—far more faintly indeed than on their aerodrome at Froiselles, despite the direction of the prevailing wind.

Suddenly Lovelace gave a shout and clutched Sander's arm.

"Look!" he urged, pointing upwards. "There's another of our 'buses with a Hun after him!"

"What the Hades!" grunted Sanders, following the direction of the outstretched arm, then: "Damn!" he spluttered as the match burned down. "Why doesn't the blighter shoot back?" he mumbled, sucking his fingers.

"Gun's probably jammed," suggested Lovelace as the other lit another match, turned on the pet-cock from the tank and stepped back hastily from the leaping flames. "Oh, my God!" he groaned. "They've snaffled him, poor bloke."

The Sopwith, which had been flying almost directly towards them and very low, had swerved, then wavered uncertainly, whilst the watchers on the ground could hear distinctly the rattle of the Spandaus of the pursuing Roland. Even as they looked, the Sopwith turned completely over and floated downwards like a leaf in a gentle wind.

"Their number's up," remarked Sanders soberly. "Poor devils. Wonder what squadron they're from! They may be two of our fellows."

"They must have crashed in the woods," decided Lovelace. "Come on. We'll have a look-see. We've nothing better to do and we may be able to do something for 'em."

Together they crossed the little space between them and the trees, and after searching for a while, found a wood-cutter's path and followed it, for, as Lovelace had truly remarked: they had "nothing better to do." Shortly, they were almost certain to be picked up by enemy troops, but in the meantime they

would do what they could for their brother unfortunates.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour they walked, looking about them for any sign of the 'plane; listening carefully for the sound of voices to guide them. Then the trees thinned and they saw open ground beyond, and at the same instant they heard footsteps approaching.

"There they are," exclaimed Lovelace in a tone of relief. "They're still alive. Let's give 'em a hail to buck 'em up, poor laddies."

He opened his mouth to yell, but Sanders' hand hurriedly clamped upon it, changing the anticipated hail to a strangled gurgle.

"Shut up, you ass," the pilot hissed in his ear as he dragged him down into the undergrowth clear of the path. "How d'you know it's them?" he demanded ungrammatically.

"True, oh Chief. My mistake," muttered Lovelace, somewhat abashed. "It might be Kaiser Bill in person, accompanied by Hindy,\* Ludy,\* and what have you. Let's squat and perceive unperceived."

Crouching low, they saw two men approach round a curve in the pathway. The taller was in flying kit. As they drew nearer the faces of the hidden Englishmen changed startlingly. Surprise and incredulity appeared intermingled; then as the truth became evident with the sound of the men's voices, the faces of the watchers grew dark with anger.

### CHAPTER IV

#### "Crash Coming"

"WELL I'm damned!" exploded Sanders when the pair, laughing and apparently uninjured, passed out of sight. "Did you see what I saw?"

"Thank Gawd for those few kind words of comfort," returned Lovelace seriously. "I was on the point of entering myself as a candidate for Colney Hatch. The little pig-dog!"

"Couldn't have been anyone else,

could it?" demanded Sanders, sitting up and looking down the trail along which they had passed.

"Gosh, no! It's our *cher* Alphonse all right. Who'd have thought it of him—the swine. Alphonse jabbering German nineteen to the dozen with a Hun. How the blazes did they get here?"

"By air, I gather."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Come on, Don't waste time. We've got to find out for certain. My God, Lovelace; this is a hell of a business! What'll we do; go and hare after Alphonse, or see what happened to their 'plane?"

"Both—the 'bus first," replied Lovelace promptly. "It was a Sop. all right and my guess is that it was a stolen one, and when one of the Huns fired on it by mistake, they pulled the falling leaf stunt and landed safely on the far side of the wood. Quick, sweetheart; let's spring to the edge and have a 'dekkko,' then beat it all out after Alphonse."

A few minutes later they were back-tracking the renegade interpreter and his companion.

"You hit the right nail on the head this time—for a wonder," breathed Sanders gustily as they hurried along encumbered with their flying coats. "The 'bus isn't damaged in the least as far as I could see. There's really nothing to prevent our getting back in it right away."

"Except for one small matter," amended Lovelace drily. "You may remember what the Big Shot said to the Little Shot when I asked what would happen to anybody who let an E.A. get through. Well, these blighters have got through—somehow. It may not be our fault, but it's up to us to snaffle 'em by hook or by jolly old crook."

"Exactly," agreed his companion. "Once that little swine or his pilot manages to spill what they know, any chance of the attack being a surprise packet will be all washed up. We've darned well got to nab 'em both."

But, hurry as they might, Leroux and his pilot reached the edge of the strip

\* Hindy and Ludy; Hindenberg and Ludendorff.



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of woodland before them. As the Englishmen arrived at the margin of the trees, they saw their quarry running fast across the stubble field in which the remains of the Sopwith was still smouldering.

"What'll we do now?" gasped Sanders breathlessly, tugging at his automatic. "Think we can wing 'em before they reach the road?"

"Not a dog's earthly," puffed Lovelace. "They're out of range already. Look! Oh, Lordy—what cursed luck!"

And Sanders, replacing the pistol reluctantly, swore heartily as a big, grey touring-car squealed to a standstill at sight of the running, gesticulating figures. The two men clambered in and, a moment later, the car was off again at a high speed.

"Well, that's torn it, good and proper," groaned Sanders. "There's only one thing to do now, and that's get back to their 'bus as fast as we can and report to old Sharpness. There'll be the very devil to pay, but I don't see it's anybody's fault. We've done all we can."

"Don't you believe it, old fruit," grinned Lovelace cheerfully, recovering his breath. "We haven't even started yet. Listen to your avuncular relative. We'll snaffle those two lads yet. Come on and don't waste time arguin'. I've got it all doped out."

AS the two trotted back along the woodland path, Lovelace explained what he had in mind to do—provided, always, as he was careful to point out—that the engine of the Sopwith in the glade would function and, what was more important still, continue to function.

Fortunately, it started at once. Even so, they were only just in time for as they taxied down the field for the take-off, a detachment of grey-clad German infantry came through the gate at the double, dropped prone, and opened rapid but futile fire at them.

In the air and out of rifle range, the temptation for the two men to cross the lines and return to their aerodrome was almost overpowering. With any ordinary

luck, they could reach home safely, make their report and in all probability be commended for their action. In fact, as Lovelace would have put it, the odds were a little better than evens, which was all anybody could have asked. Whereas, on the other hand, the odds in what the two friends had planned to do were probably a good fifty-to-one against a safe return—or even any return at all until after the War, whenever that might be. But there was no hesitancy in the manner in which Sanders swung the One-and-a-Half-Strutter into a climbing turn, nor did his companion cast a single glance towards the west as, clipping a drum to his Lewis, he searched the ground below him.

Suddenly he shouted into the speaking-tube, leaning forward and pointing excitedly with his right hand:

"There they are—the blighters!" he yelled. "See 'em? Yoicks! Tallyho! Just on the right fork of the road. About a couple of miles ahead. Step on it, old bean! Step on it and we've got 'em cold!"

Sanders nodded and opened the throttle wide, putting on a little right rudder. He could see it now—the big grey car—just to the right of his engine cowling, blurred a little by the whirling propeller disc.

Then, a minute later, he pushed the stick forward and dived, with Lovelace making what he considered to be appropriate and assorted hunting noises from the rear cockpit.

Squinting through the gun-sight, Sanders picked up the car, and followed it undeviatingly as it grew larger and larger in the ring. He grinned, tight-lipped, as he saw the occupants glance over their shoulders and one lean forward to speak to the driver. Lower and lower dropped the pursuing aircraft as the great car surged forward faster and faster.

At fifty yards, Sanders pressed the Vickers trip, throttling down to keep from overshooting his target.

*Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat!*

He was aiming full at the drawn white face of the spy, Leroux, plainly recog-

nisable as he crouched in the rear of the tonneau.

*Rat-tat-tat-tat !*

The car gave a sudden swerve ; skidded across the road and Sanders, zooming upwards as he passed over it, lost sight of what then occurred. Lovelace, from the rear, saw it plunge into a roadside ditch, turn over and over, and then stand poised apparently on its radiator for one sickening second, then fall slowly on to its back with wheels spinning in the air.

"Good hunting, Bill," he shouted gleefully into the tube. "They've crashed ! S'pose we do one or two circuits while we see if any of 'em are still alive ? Oh, my Gawd !" he broke off suddenly. "Look who's here !"

Sanders screwed his head round and turned back hurriedly. The three Rolands bearing down upon them had not entered into their calculations. He grabbed for height as fast as the engine would turn over, whilst Lovelace crouched behind the Lewis sights and prepared to fight off the coming attack.

**T**HEY had scarcely reached a thousand feet when the enemy 'planes opened fire. They were fast and well handled. Lovelace waited coolly until the lowermost was well within range, then fired three quick bursts. Whether they landed on the target or not, he could not tell, but the pilot sheered off, whilst another dropped into his place.

Then, banking on a wing-tip, Sanders swore beneath his breath as he saw, directly beneath him, a little muddy figure crawl from under the wrecked car and weave drunkenly about the road.

Without reckoning the consequences, he dropped upon him in a power dive, the wind shrieking in his ears, while Lovelace, thrown off balance by the sudden change in direction, clutched the side of the Scarff mounting with one hand and hung on to the Lewis with the other.

The Roland pilots, apparently divining their intention, converged upon their tail and fired burst after burst while Lovelace, who had recovered his balance, squeezed lead as never before.

If the two had made a straight fight

of it, there is just a possibility they might have got away in safety, for they were a wonderful team in the air. But, in the staggering figure beneath, Sanders had recognised Leroux. That he was either seriously wounded or injured in the crash was obvious, but the fact that he was a spy and in possession of information of the greatest value to the enemy precluded all possibility of treating him as a wounded adversary who was immune from further attack. Therefore, leaving Lovelace to do the best he could with the Lewis, Sanders dived full upon the spy with no compunction whatever.

With a fortunate burst, Lovelace sent one of the Rolands down in a straight glide, its petrol pipe cut through with a nicked slug and a whitish vapour spuming out behind it. But the other two machines seemed attached to them by invisible wires, one on either side of the Sopwith's elevator flaps, and to shake them off was more than even Lovelace's brilliant gunnery could achieve.

Sanders dived straight down, deviating neither to right nor left. The man in the road, now tying a bandage about his head, seemed suddenly to realise that he was the object of attack, for he began to stagger hesitatingly across the road, apparently with the idea of taking shelter in the opposite ditch.

But he never reached it ; at least, not under his own power.

With Vickers flaming, Sanders dropped upon him. So close was he that he could see the surface of the road leap up in little spurts about the shambling figure. Then, suddenly, the Vickers stopped dead.

The Sopwith was below the tops of the poplars by this time and Sanders had no choice but to climb again while he cleared the stoppage.

He pulled on the stick—and it wagged loosely in his grip. He lugged it all the way back but there was no response.

"Damn !" he gasped. "The blasted controls have been shot to blazes ! Look out !" he shouted. "Crash coming !"

And, cutting the engine-switch, he braced his hands against the crash pad.

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### CHAPTER V

#### Discovery of a General

THE Sopwith landed fairly in the middle of the road with space and to spare on either side. The tyres burst with the shock, the undercarriage crumpled up, and the 'plane surged forward along the smooth surface on the bottom of its fuselage. Its momentum carried it straight ahead, until the left lower wing, scraping along the road, met with an obstruction—an obstruction which shrieked aloud in mortal terror. Then the whole aircraft slewed to the left and collapsed between a couple of poplars.

The two occupants sat and stared grimly at each other for perhaps five seconds.

"Damaged?" demanded Lovelace at length, moving his arms and legs tentatively.

Sanders, similarly occupied, grinned back at him.

"Not a scratch," he replied thankfully. "Dam' lucky."

With one mind they looked aloft apprehensively, but the two remaining Rolands were already disappearing into the distance.

They climbed out and ran back a little way. The force of the impact had carried Leroux into the ditch for which he had been making, and together they lifted him out. He was unconscious, but groaning, and his face was cut and bleeding.

"Give him a swig from the flask," suggested Sanders. "It may buck the poor devil up a bit."

Lovelace did so, and the poor wretch coughed with the potency of the cognac forced down his throat. Presently, he opened his eyes.

They were still kneeling beside him with a cushion from the pilot's cockpit tucked under his head when the raucous wailing of a Klaxon smote upon their ears. They looked up, startled, for so engrossed had they been in watching Alphonse that they had quite overlooked the fact that they were on a public highway.

Next moment a car had slowed down

a few yards away, and a tall man in a tight-waisted grey overcoat was swaggering towards them.

"What do you mean by obstructing the road with your confounded aircraft?" he demanded in German, covering them with his Luger.

"Sorry, old thing," replied Lovelace in the same language and with almost equal fluency, "but it was breakfast time, so we landed for coffee and bacon."

The new arrival stared at him in speechless amazement for a moment, evidently undecided as to whether to be angry or to laugh. In the end, he laughed, doubtless mollified at being addressed in his own tongue.

"Do you fellows always land like that?" he enquired. "Rather expensive, isn't it? You surrender, of course?" he added more sternly.

"Can you suggest an alternative?" grinned Lovelace. "As a matter of fact," he prevaricated glibly, "we saw that 'bus"—he pointed down the road—"crash in the ditch and came down to lend a helping hand. I'm afraid they must have taken a frightful toss. We haven't had time to look yet as one of our passengers got damaged in landing."

"Ach," nodded the German understandingly. "Three of you in a two-place machine. It is no wonder you crashed. Is he badly injured?"

He bent to look at Leroux.

WHETHER it was the effect of the stimulant or the sound of the German language, or both, will never be known, but the fact remains that at that moment Gaspard Leroux opened his eyes very wide.

"*Nom d'un nom d'un nom de dix milles diables de fer blanc!*" he croaked hoarsely. Which voluble mouthful, being interpreted, means roughly: "Name of a name of a name of ten thousand tin devils!" Then he continued in German: "The attack! It is to-day! The tanks! The . . ."

Whereupon Sanders, with great presence of mind, clapped his hand over his mouth.

Lovelace tapped his head significantly.



"Poor fellow," he explained to the German who was listening intently. "Poor fellow. His head, you know. He was our French interpreter. He went batty the other day—too much absinthe—and we were returning him to his unit when we were attac . . . er, when we landed, as it were."

"But he speaks German," protested the other, with a suspicious glance at the two Englishmen.

"So do I," smiled Lovelace disarmingly. "Quite a popular pastime, *nicht war?* Besides, the lad's an Alsatian, you know, and all those blokes are bi-lingual."

"What does he mean by the attack?" persisted the German. "And tanks—what tanks?"

"Simplicity itself, old warrior," rejoined Lovelace, but with some inward trepidation at their captor's persistence. "He's just expressing thanks—tanks, he calls it—for his lucky escape. Perfectly simple and—er—simply perfect. Now shall we see who's under the car?" he added brightly. "We seem to be overlooking your poor countrymen. A pity, after all the trouble we've been put to on their behalf."

"Yes, yes," agreed the German, looking from one to the other thoughtfully. "Permit me," and he ran his left hand carefully but thoroughly over their flying-coats. "The usage of war, you know. *Ach!* thank you. No!" he rasped sharply as Sanders' hand went towards his pocket. "I prefer to take it myself, in case of accidents, you know," and he pocketed the pilot's automatic, together with Lovelace's.

"Now we shall proceed," he announced.

"Splendid. I will accompany you, good sir," offered Lovelace, "whilst my friend, whose knowledge of your so beautiful language is limited to cuss words, remains with the casualty."

Together, the two men hurried down the road, and were joined by a burly soldier-chauffeur, at whom the German officer rapped a curt command.

"Into the ditch, Schneider," he ordered as they reached the crumpled wreckage

of the car. "It is wet and muddy down there," he added to Lovelace, as if the fact were explanation enough of his inactivity. "See if there's anyone alive."

The chauffeur jumped down with a splash and peered beneath the overturned tonneau. Presently his head reappeared and he spoke huskily, his face white and fearful.

"Four bodies there are, Herr Kapitan, and one of them is—*Ach, Du lieber Gott!* It is the Herr General himself!"

"*Dummkopf!*" screamed the German captain. "*Dummkopf!* What do you say? It is impossible! It cannot be!"

The driver shook his head:

"Excuse, Herr Kapitan," he maintained stolidly, as if the catastrophe were his own fault.

"A thousand devils!" stormed the officer, clambering down the slippery side of the ditch. "I'll have you flayed alive if you're wrong—and I pray to Gott you are," he added more gently.

AS the German bent to peer under the wreck, Lovelace glanced swiftly down the road towards the 'plane.

As he had more than half anticipated, neither Sanders nor Leroux were any longer where he had left them.

"Allah be praised!" he muttered, tiptoeing gently along the grass by the roadside. Beyond the tail of the Sopwith, he had spotted Sanders' shoulders as he crouched at the starting-handle of the German's car. Then he started running. He had once done the hundred yards in ten and four-fifths, which he had considered pretty useful work. Afterwards, he swore that on this occasion he had bettered his previous performance by several seconds. Which, again, he admitted modestly, was not so dusty.

By the time he reached the car, Sanders had the engine running quietly and was turning it in the direction from which it had come. Halfway round, they heard furious shouts from the wrecked car, followed by a fusillade of pistol shots. But the car was round by now, and although one bullet shattered the windscreen between them and another

## SECRET OF THE MONSTERS

ricochetted off a mudguard, they succeeded in getting under way without being hit.

### CHAPTER VI

#### Desperate Measures

AS they thundered along the road, Lovelace glanced behind him and saw Leroux huddled in the rear seat. His eyes were staring fixedly into his own and his right hand was moving—plucking restlessly at his breast pocket. Lovelace swore under his breath and straddled the back of the seat. Leaning over, he was just in time to snatch an automatic from the spy's fingers and transfer it to his own pocket.

"Naughty-naughty," he admonished with wagging forefinger. "Little children mustn't play with firearms."

"Where to now, sweetheart?" he demanded of Sanders as he leaned back in his seat.

"Lord only knows," answered Sanders gloomily. "Any idea where we are?"

"A pretty vague one," answered Lovelace, after a few moments' hesitation. "But, very approximately, I should say we're within hostile—very hostile territory and about a thousand miles from brekker. Apart from that, however. . . . Hold on. Wait a jiffy."

He searched in the side-pocket of the big Daimler touring car and shortly, with the air of a conjuror producing a rabbit from a hat, displayed a large-scale map, heavily pencilled.

"Good egg!" he exclaimed, as he unfolded it. "Now we're talking."

"Cross-roads ahead," called Sanders behind the wheel. "May be a signpost."

"Not a chance! They've taken 'em all down so they won't be any help to some poor blighter of a prisoner who manages to escape. Just another little example of German thoroughness. Blast 'em!"

However, when they did reach the cross-roads, there was a signpost and, to their great joy, they extracted some very useful information from it.

"Okay, Bill. Turn right," ordered Lovelace cheerfully when he had con-

sulted the map in the light of this fresh knowledge. "Fast as you like. Tell you more when I've got it doped out."

Some time later, he called to his companion to slow down.

"There's a wood over the next rise—or should be," he announced. "We'll take the first trail to the left leading off the road. I find the excessive interest the passing traffic takes in our movements a shade embarrassing."

Embarrassing, was possibly an understatement. For soon after leaving the scene of the double crash, they had found themselves overtaking convoys of lorries and batteries of artillery with their ammunition columns, all very spick and span as if they had just arrived from parks in the hinterland—as indeed they had. Battalions of grey-clad infantry were drawn up by the roadside here and there to make room for the faster-moving vehicles, and as they drove even further towards the west, they came upon bivouacs in the fields bordering the road.

Many eyes looked at them as they passed by: some of them with an interest which only their speed of travel, slow though it had perforce to be at times, prevented from becoming changed to swift suspicion. Probably their flying-kit saved them from being actually challenged and halted, for there was little, if any, difference between the external appearance of a British and a German pilot. The presence of a wounded man in the rear seat also served to excite some little interest; though the fact that his hands were bound behind him—a precaution taken during a few brief moments when the road had been clear of traffic—seemingly passed unnoticed.

SEVERAL miles farther along the road, the Daimler breasted a rise and the expected woodland appeared beyond it. A few minutes later Sanders had slowed down until the rearguard of an ammunition column should have passed a narrow lane bearing off to the left. Down this they sped as soon as the coast was clear, as fast as the rutty and uneven surface would permit. Presently they

came to a little clearing and Sanders jammed on the brakes.

"What do we do now?" he demanded, turning to his companion.

Lovelace, munching a bar of chocolate, handed another to him.

"Brekker," he mumbled, "while we think up something really good. What about the blighter in the back seat?"

"Dam' spy. Ought to be shot," replied Sanders in a low tone. "Besides, he's cramping our style."

"Shot is right. Care to take it on?"

"Who? Me? Not by a long chalk," replied Sanders indignantly. "What about you?"

"*Nicht in diesen Beinkleider*" (Not in these trousers), answered Lovelace decidedly. "I say, that rifle fire seems pretty close, doesn't it?" he added, sitting up and listening intently. "Must be getting near the lines. Lemme see," and he referred to the map again. "We're just about here," and he jabbed with a forefinger and left a sticky smudge of chocolate in the middle of the woods. "That red ink mess is presumably the German lines: those blue ones are doubtless ours. There's Courcelette and there's Flers."

"If we carry on along this trail," put in Sanders, studying the map intently, "then bear off to the right, we'll run into Flers and . . ."

". . . And *beaucoup* trouble," supplemented his friend. "Have some more choc. What is allegedly working in that massive brain of yours, old dear?"

"With this swish Staff car, I believe we could get right into the place without being challenged. Once there, we might have a chance of lying doggo till night-fall. Then, in the darkness, we could make our way forward and try to get across the lines."

LOVELACE was silent for a while, and his friend studied his expression with something of anxiety. Finally he nodded slowly.

"Speaking roughly, I suppose we have about one chance in a hundred of getting through — alone. With this — er — incubus," and he jerked his thumb over

his shoulder, "it would probably be about one in a million. Nothing doing, old smelt. The odds are too dam' long for this laddie. Think again, sweet-heart; and think up something really good this time. Whoa, Emma," he cried excitedly. "Hold your hosses! How'd this do? We drive boldly into what's left of Flers, park Bucephalus—though I must say I'd like to take the old 'bus home with me; she fairly stinks of power—proceed equally boldly up the High Street or what have you, marching the battered remains of our *cher* Alphonse—the cause of all our troubles—before us."

"What the hell for?" demanded Sanders blankly.

"Gently, old son, gently. Only half has yet been unfolded. My German is pretty fair and yours'll pass muster if you keep your mouth shut most of the time, so I'll be spokesman and enquire the way to G.H.Q. of the first available military bobby, casually mentioning we've captured a wounded French prisoner."

"But, good Lord, man," remonstrated Sanders hotly; "the fat'll be properly in the fire then. What we've got to do is keep Alphonse just as far away from the Intelligence blokes as we can."

"Truly said, old thing," his companion agreed, "and that's just what I intend doing. Keep him as far away as possible, but what you don't savvy is how are we going to avoid their jolly old H.Q. unless we find out where it is? Nobody—'specially a Hun—you know what rotten psychologists they are—will imagine for an instant that we are a brace of perfectly good Englishmen handing over one of their pet spies to them on a silver platter. Even with the place crawling with troops, I'll wager you a level fiver we'll find a hidey-hole where we can lie up till after the attack is over. After that, it won't matter so much what happens to the little blighter."

Sanders turned the argument over in his mind for a full minute before speaking.

"I must say I don't care for the idea of letting the swine off scot-free," he protested, "but I'm hanged if I see what else we can do. We can't stay here



## SECRET OF THE MONSTERS

indefinitely, that's a certainty. If we had any guts, of course, we'd shoot him out of hand."

"Exactly. My sentiments precisely. But we haven't. Not that kind, anyway. We'll leave that sort of thing to the rude barbarian."

### CHAPTER VII

#### March of the Monsters

NOT long afterwards the Daimler left the shelter of the woods and took the crowded road towards Flers. They entered the town without arousing suspicion, being duly directed to the German G.H.Q. ; in fact the military policeman they consulted offered to conduct them personally, and was only discouraged from doing so with some difficulty.

With amazing good luck, they found a small and dank cellar, into which they urged the unwilling Leroux. It was dark, filthy and, as they subsequently discovered, crawling with vermin, but it was a case of any port in a storm. Therefore, they crouched in the noisome darkness, smoked cigarettes and congratulated themselves on their discovery.

Later, above the noise of the shell-fire, they heard hurried steps descending the stairs and an electric torch was flashed into their faces.

"Here they are," exclaimed a guttural voice triumphantly from the darkness behind the torch. "All three of them. Get up, you swine—and drop that pistol," he added sternly, for Lovelace had drawn the automatic he had taken from the spy, "or I shall shoot you instantly."

The two Englishmen glanced at each other and Sanders shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Thought there was a catch in it somewhere," he muttered. "It was too easy. All right, gentlemen ; we surrender."

"Ganz gut. We will go."

"Ah, the attack !" screamed Leroux. "Take me to the General at once," he implored. "The tanks ! They lead the attack. I have information of the most important ! To the General. Ah, quick ! I beseech you !"

"It is to Excellenz that you go in

any case," returned their captor icily, "and at once. Now be quick. We waste time. Lead on, Sergeant."

As the bearer of the torch stood aside to allow the trio to precede him, they noticed the shelling had ceased as if by magic, and in its place they heard the sharp crackle of rifle and machine-gun fire. Wondering what it could mean, they climbed the rickety stairs down which they had crept so thankfully earlier in the day.

As they reached the broken doorway, they saw grey-clad infantry stumbling past them, glancing fearfully behind them as they dodged from one door to another, fired a hasty shot and took cover again.

"My God !" whispered Sanders to his companion. "They're retreating. What's up ? Surely we can't have . . ."

"Halt, there !" commanded their captor whom they recognised as the young officer whose car they had "borrowed" earlier in the day. His voice was strained and he seemed puzzled.

"Guard them, Sergeant," he ordered, "while I go and see what's happening outside."

He stepped into the street. As he did so, there came a burst of machine-gun fire, and he fell flat on his face. For a few moments his knees jerked convulsively, then he lay still.

"Mein Gott !" breathed the sergeant, gustily. "He is dead."

Lovelace, stooping quickly, picked up a heavy piece of wood which was lying in the entrance and hit the N.C.O. savagely on the head. He spun round with a dazed look on his face and Sanders snatched at his revolver. It was attached by a lanyard round the man's neck, but the pilot fired from the hip and the *unteroffizier* dropped with scarcely a groan.

They stood back in the shadows and waited to see what would happen next. By this time, the German infantrymen had ceased passing, but the rifle fire still continued, accompanied by a rumbling clatter which neither of the two could place. It grew louder and louder in volume, until finally Lovelace poked his head round the lintel to see what it

could be.

"Hi!" he shouted, turning to Sanders. "Have a look, old bean. This must be one of those jolly old tanks friend Muggs was talking about. Gosh! Or is it a ruddy nightmare?"

Down the street came a greyish-brown monster, covered with mud and slime. From its sides, the squat muzzles of machine-guns jetted out hot death whenever a fleeing figure showed itself.

"Come on!" shouted Lovelace. "Let's go out and give 'em three rousing British cheers!"

"And collect three rousing British bullets," added Sanders scathingly, laying a quick hand on his friend's arm. "Don't be a ruddy fool. They'll think we're Huns and pot us. Hi!" he shouted, clutching at a little figure which darted from behind him and out of the door. "Come back, you damned idiot!"

But Gaspard Leroux, seeing a chance of escape, eluded him and vanished round the angle of the door. There came a sharp rattle of machine-gun fire from the vitals of the lumbering monster whose snout had almost reached the doorway, followed by a shriek of agony.

"Down, man—quick!" warned Sanders, and the two dropped prone on the floor, their faces hidden in their arms.

"My God," muttered Lovelace as the tank lumbered by, "that was a close call. Think they got Alphonse?"

And Sanders, the sound of the shriek still echoing in his ears, nodded soberly.

**B**Y daybreak, they were both back with their squadron. Footsore and dog-tired, for they had marched all night with never a lift, dirty, hungry and thirsty, they reported to Captain Hawkins immediately on their return. That officer, about to take-off on the dawn reconnaissance, stayed long enough to accompany them to the mess where Major Sharpness was having breakfast, then vanished upon his lawful occasions.

"Well, I'll be damned," the little man welcomed them, his mouth full of sausage and bacon. "How the crimson Hades did you blokes get back?"

He motioned to chairs.

"Eat while you talk," he invited. "Orderly!"

But before they told him, they put the question which had been uppermost in their minds ever since they had encountered Gaspard Leroux in the woodland.

"How the blazes do you know anything about Alphonse's disappearance?" demanded the little squadron-commander in surprise.

"We saw a Sopwith come down, chased by a Roland. We'd just landed with a burst prop. and went over to help. Leroux and a German pilot were in the Sop," related Sanders succinctly.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Sharpness again. "So that's what happened. Some time after you fellows took-off yesterday morning, a Sopwith landed down by the hedge at the end of the aerodrome and taxied towards the hangars. Leroux went out to meet it. Nothing particularly suspicious about that; he got in and then the beggar flipped round and buzzed off again. Thought it was one of Number 96's 'buses, and rang up their C.O. to find out what the blazes he meant by pinching my interpreter without even a by-your-leave. Major Struthers knew sweet damn-all about it, so I rang up the Wing and reported it. Nobody knew a dam' thing about it there either. Brigade went into a flat spin and wanted the number. Nobody had spotted it."

"Twenty-seven-forty-three, sir," said Sanders wearily, "but I don't expect it matters much now."

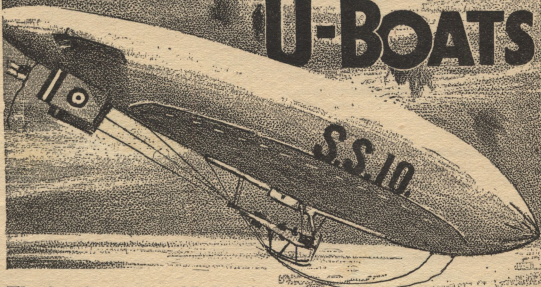
"Doesn't matter?" barked Sharpness, who had sprung to his feet. "Doesn't matter? I'll say it does! I'll bet it's one of our 'buses which landed behind the lines and the Huns patched up."

"Not really, sir," broke in Lovelace placidly. "She's crashed again, and a tank snaffled Alphonse. Jerry never had a chance to get a thing out of him."

A smile spread slowly over the rugged face of the hard-bitten little Major.

"For Heaven's sake, eat fast," he grinned as he made for the door. "Then come down to the office. I smell a yarn worth hearing."

# TERROR of the U-BOATS

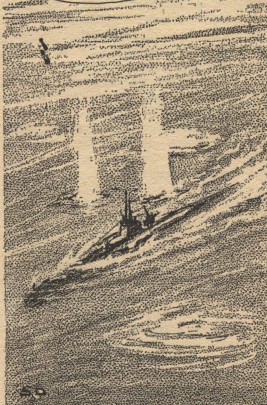


## *The Stirring Story of Britain's War-time Airships*

By  
JOHN C. HOOK

TO say that the German U-Boat was the deciding factor in the formation of Britain's War-time Airship Service may seem at first sight to be an exaggeration ; yet history proves this to have been the case.

It was on February 4th, 1915, that Germany issued her warning that the waters in and around the British Isles, and including the Channel, were a war zone, and that all Allied ships found in those areas would be sunk on sight. Three weeks later, two high officers of the Royal Flying Corps, after a long conference with Lord Fisher, First Lord of the Admiralty, took their leave with urgent orders to have designed and constructed a fleet of small non-rigid airships suitable for anti-submarine patrol work. And it was the Sea Scout type of airship arising from these first experimental trials that later became one of



*A Sea Scout airship launches an attack on a prowling U-Boat*



the most successful non-rigid airships of the War and laid the foundations of Britain's War-time Airship Service.

Britain had had, of course, some non-rigid ships prior to that date. Actually, there were about six, and at the outbreak of the War we even had a Zeppelin on order from Germany. Needless, perhaps, to add, it was never delivered.

Britain's small airship fleet, however, had never been considered of much importance, nor taken very seriously. The Admiralty openly professed to have little use for airships, and naval officers were so unfamiliar with them that when one of our non-rigids flew over three British destroyers during the second week of the War, the Admiral in the flagship ordered decks to be cleared and ammunition to be got out, under the impression that it was a Zeppelin.

In August, 1914, Britain, having been building two warships to every one of Germany's, felt fairly secure from sea attack. But when, in September, 1914, a German submarine sank the three cruisers "Cressy," "Aboukir" and "Hogue" within an hour, the Admiralty realised with something of a shock that, against submarines, warships were extremely vulnerable. It was the sinking of these warships, in fact, that first set the authorities to seeking an effective method of combating this new menace, though it was not until early in 1915 that the Sea Scout type of airship proved itself ideally suited to this purpose.

### The Sea Scouts

**T**HE first Sea Scout was an ingenious compromise between lighter- and heavier-than-air craft. The envelope, which was one hundred and forty-six feet long, was that of an airship which had already been used for some time for training purposes, and beneath this was slung the wingless fuselage of a B.E. aeroplane. The power unit was a 70 h.p. Renault engine which gave the Scout a speed of about 45 m.p.h. She carried a crew of three, pilot, engineer and wireless operator, and was armed with a Lewis gun. She also carried a small cargo of

bombs hung beneath and on either side of the fuselage.\*

Contrasted with the five-hundred-foot-long Zeppelins of that day, these Sea Scouts were insignificant in size, but with their range—which was soon improved considerably—their speed, and their ability to hover in mid-air, they were ideally suited for anti-submarine work.

They suffered, however, one disadvantage—the unreliability of their Renault engines, and the early ships were so often victims of engine trouble that their crews soon became expert in changing and cleaning plugs in flight. Later, as the men became even more proficient, a pilot would deliberately stop his engine in mid-air to allow it to cool, a more daring action than it sounds, since to restart the engine meant that a man had to stand up in a small open gondola, grip a strut with one hand and swing the prop with the other, all the while looking down on the sea several thousands of feet below.

The first Sea Scout was commissioned on March 6th, 1915, and was stationed near Folkestone, at Capel, Britain's first War-time airship station. Operating from this base, she did invaluable work for some months, and then disaster overtook her. Flying at nearly fifty miles an hour, she crashed into telegraph wires on the Dover-Folkestone road, caught fire, and was completely destroyed. Luckily, no lives were lost, as her crew of two managed to jump out from a height of fifteen feet and escaped with bruises and burns.

Meanwhile, more Sea Scouts were rapidly being built and rushed into service above Home waters on anti-submarine patrol. The new service quickly expanded, and by June, 1915, another type of non-rigid airship had been designed and constructed. It was aptly termed the "Coastal" or "C" type airship, and was slightly larger than

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\* These airships were generally known as "Blimps," and one distinguished R.N.A.S. officer, on being asked the reason for the nickname, is said to have replied, "Well, what else *could* you call the d——d things?"—EDITOR'S NOTE.

## TERROR OF THE U-BOATS

the Sea Scout. Its envelope was trilobed, and the car which was slung beneath the first ship consisted of the fuselages of two Avro aeroplanes joined end to end.

A month or two later, a modified version of the Coastal type was produced. This carried a crew of five and her power units were a 100 h.p. Berliet forward and a 260 h.p. Fiat aft. These engines each drove a four-bladed propeller and gave the ship a speed of over fifty miles an hour.

In August, three Sea Scouts were sent out to Gallipoli to patrol the sea approaches but, owing to the difficulty of housing airships, only one was ever actually used. Her temporary hangar was repeatedly bombed by the Germans, but she managed to survive, and in October was sent to Mudros, where she did much to help keep the sea safe for British shipping.

### Airships as Decoys

**B**ACK in Europe, the U-Boats were reaping a rich harvest. Germany had now been in occupation of much of the Belgian coast for more than six months and her submarines were operating from Zeebrugge. This fact was not at first realised by the British authorities as the submarines were being sent overland in sections and assembled at Zeebrugge. To add to our troubles, our mines—of which we had a stock of about 20,000—were proving none too satisfactory, and the fields that we did lay were quickly spotted by scouting Zeppelins and channels cut through the fields to allow the U-Boats to come and go in safety.

Our own non-rigid airships, however, were equally successful in this work of mine spotting and many German mines were sighted and destroyed before they could do harm to Allied shipping. In the case of single mines, they were usually destroyed by machine-gun fire, but when a whole field was sighted, the airship would summon a surface craft by wireless to sweep for the mines.

About this time, too, a decoy method of aerial warfare was evolved by a British airship squadron in the Mediterranean. It was the usual practice of a U-Boat

commander to communicate by radio with his nearest base before venturing near an enemy airship, and his message would invariably bring out a German 'plane to deal with the airship. Accordingly, we arranged that our airships should be accompanied by a fast scout 'plane which would fly at some two thousand feet above the "blimp." Then, as the enemy 'plane circled round the British airship, down would come the protecting scout from a thousand feet above, and down would go the attacker in flames. This plan worked well on many occasions, and it is surprising that it was never extended to Home waters.

Meanwhile, numerous airship stations were being erected along the British coast, one being commissioned at Pembroke in January, 1916. Others quickly followed, and by June there was a chain of such stations running from the west coast of Scotland down through the Irish Sea and English Channel and up the North Sea to the Orkney Islands.

A favourite hunting-ground for German submarines was the waters off the Devon and Cornish coasts and, consequently, several airship stations were centred around that area, probably the most famous being the one at Mullion, near the Lizard. Unfortunately, the first Coastal airship sent to Mullion was lost in the Channel and all but one of the crew were drowned. But soon, two more Coastals arrived and began a career of continuous service.

Typical of the anti-submarine work being done by our airships at this time was the adventure that befell the Coastal ship, C. 10, on September 19th, 1916. Scouting some ten miles off the Lizard, she sighted two burning ships about three miles away and immediately altered course for the scene. When still about half a mile away, her crew saw a submarine just sinking beneath the surface and although the airship pilot quickly altered course and brought his craft over the spot where the submarine had disappeared, no sign could be seen of the U-Boat. Meanwhile, the cruiser "Foyle," summoned to the scene by the C. 10's wireless, was picking up the members

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of the crew of the two burning ships, which proved to be French. Apparently the C. 10 had surprised the U-Boat as she was transferring provisions from the French boats to her own decks and she had been in such a hurry to escape that she had made a "crash-dive," leaving most of the supplies still on her deck.

This incident, typical of many experienced by the airship crews, also well illustrates their value as scouts. Not only did the C. 10 drive off the German U-Boat, but she was also instrumental in saving the lives of the crews of the burning ships. Aeroplanes, it is true, would have been much faster than airships, but they could not boast the airship's long range, nor could they bomb submarines with such accuracy.

A few days after the C. 10's adventure, the Airship Service suffered a severe blow by the death of two of its pioneers, Wing Commander Osborne and Lieutenant-Commander Ireland, killed in a disastrous accident. Commander Osborne, always to the fore with new ideas, had evolved a scheme for attaching a complete B.E. aeroplane to a Sea Scout envelope and of launching the 'plane in mid-air. The test, watched by a large crowd, was carried out at Kingsnorth. At four thousand feet, the watchers below saw the B.E. become detached from the envelope, but to their horror the 'plane suddenly capsized, threw one of the occupants out, and then dived headlong into the ground. Commander Osborne was found still strapped in his seat, dead, while Lieutenant-Commander Ireland's body was later recovered from the river into which it had fallen.

Steadily the Airship Service continued to develop, encouraged now with the full approval of the Admiralty. Its personnel had risen from one hundred and ninety men in 1914 to over two thousand by the middle of 1916, whilst new and improved stations were in process of erection all along the coastline. But the stiffest task of the young Service was yet to come.

### Towing Trials with Airships

**E**XPERIMENTS in towing airships by surface craft were the next important

development in the technique of anti-submarine defence. As far back as November, 1914, an early British airship had been successfully towed by a surface craft at a speed of twenty-one knots, but nothing had subsequently been done in that direction.

On May 12th, however, the Sea Scout, C. 1, was towed at Harwich by the cruiser "Carysfoot" at a speed of twenty knots with complete success, and a few months later, while in the tow of the light cruiser "Canterbury," the same airship was hauled down on the quarter-deck and the crew replaced. Later, sixty gallons of petrol were pumped from the cruiser's deck into the tanks of the C. 1, moored a hundred feet above the cruiser.

Although these trials were satisfactory, they also made apparent the need for an airship with a more streamlined car, and, very soon afterwards, a modified version of the Sea Scout appeared with a boat-shaped, streamlined gondola. Named the S.S. "Zero," the new type was destined to prove one of the best designs of the War and more than seventy were constructed before the close of hostilities. Not the least remarkable feature about the Zero class was their range, which was normally seventeen hours, although one airship, with special tankage, actually set up a record with a flight of more than fifty hours' duration.

In February, 1917, Germany announced her policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, and two months later her fleet of U-Boats, which now totalled 127, had sunk no less than 700,000 tons of shipping. That April was, perhaps, the blackest month of the whole War for the Allies and it became all too clear that unless something could be done to check the U-Boats, the War would be lost to the Allied cause within three months. As a first step, Great Britain decided to increase the range of her anti-submarine patrols and build more airships. Among these was a highly successful new type of Sea Scout, named the "Mullion Twin," after the station which designed and built her. She was powered with two 75 h.p. Rolls-Royce engines and carried a crew of five.



## TERROR OF THE U-BOATS

Effective though our airships were proving in their anti-submarine work, however, they did not by any means have everything their own way. At Zeebrugge, for example, the Germans had several staffels of fast fighter seaplanes which took a special interest in our airships, and it was to one of these that the C. 17 fell a victim on April 21st while cruising off the North Foreland. German submarine commanders, too, who were constantly being menaced by these little non-rigids, lost no opportunity of reporting their whereabouts to their nearest base, usually bringing a fleet of fighters out in quest of the elusive "blimp."

On one occasion the airship C. 9 had been detailed to escort eight Dutch steamers from Falmouth as far as the Scilly Isles. Her task completed, and no sign of an enemy submarine to be seen, the C. 9 turned her nose homewards, leaving her charges to continue their journey alone. No sooner was the airship out of sight than the grey shape of the U. 21 rose above the surface and proceeded to sink five of the Dutch ships. Hersing, her commander, would probably have sunk the lot, had he not been disturbed by the sight of a distant warship, and thought it more advisable to submerge while he could still do so in safety.

### Seagulls and Submarines

**C**OMMANDERS of coastal airships were by this time expert in the spotting of submarines. In calm water, this task was often easy, for if the U-Boat was running with her periscope above the surface, the wake created could be seen several miles away on a fine day. If submerged, however, the submarine would be much more difficult to spot, for, unlike those of the Mediterranean, the waters of the Channel and Irish Sea were not clear, and U-Boats could not be detected if they were running more than twenty feet deep. One useful tip the airship crews did learn, however, was the fact that, especially in the Irish Sea, seagulls would follow for hours in the wake of a periscope. Thereafter, whenever a flock of such

birds was sighted the airship would always drop down to investigate. Oil, too, would often give away the presence of a U-Boat for, although a submarine's exhaust automatically seals itself on submerging, it is almost inevitable that a certain amount of oil from the fins and from the deck will rise to the surface and leave a tell-tale trail.

One of the most successful airship commanders in the U-Boat campaign was Flight-Commander Struthers of the Coastal ship, C. 9, already mentioned, and some of his adventures are well worth recording. Once, sighting a cap-sized steamer near the Eddystone Light-house, he dropped down to investigate. The ship proved to be the 2,800-ton "Claverley," of Newcastle, torpedoed by a U-Boat, and a wireless call from the C. 9 soon brought several armed trawlers on the scene to take off the crew and to remove by gunfire a wreck which was a danger to shipping.

A few days later, the same airship sighted a U-Boat which did a "crash dive" as the C. 9's first bomb exploded near her. Two 100-lb. bombs were then dropped on the spot where the submarine had disappeared, and quantities of oil at once appeared on the surface, no doubt marking the grave of yet another under-sea raider. On another occasion, at five o'clock in the morning off the Lizard, the C. 9 sighted a torpedoed steamer, the "Rouang," and immediately wirelessed for assistance. Several hours later, Commander Struthers spotted a submarine about five miles to starboard and at once turned his airship to attack. Over the now rapidly submerging U-Boat, he let go two 100-lb. bombs, both of which exploded in the final swirl of the periscope. Great patches of oil now appeared on the surface of the sea, which was also broken at regular intervals by huge bubbles. Soon a destroyer appeared on the scene and, after dropping four depth-charges over the spot where the oil was thickest, began to sweep the area. An obstruction was quickly encountered and after about half an hour's work a sheet of metal came up in the sweep but, unfortunately, fell back into

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the sea before it could be got on board. But it was obvious that a submarine had been destroyed, and the C. 9 returned in triumph to her base.

Eight days later, Struthers and his C. 9 were again successful in attacking a U-Boat, and for this feat, as well as for his previous good work, he was awarded the D.S.C.

### Airship v. Flying-Boat

**C**ONTINUING their attempts to "improve the breed," our airship designers next produced another non-rigid dirigible, the North Sea type, of which six were constructed in 1917. These were considerably larger than the S. S. class, being 262 feet long, and carrying a streamlined car thirty-five feet in length. The North Sea type was powered with two 250 h.p. Rolls-Royce engines, and her petrol-tanks, unlike those of her predecessors, were housed inside the gas envelope. But, although the North Sea airships did well on their trials, the type never quite fulfilled expectations, and the S. S. and Coastal airships continued to bear the brunt of the anti-submarine work. And just how effective that work was proving is evidenced by the fact that the amount of tonnage sunk by the German U-Boats dropped month by month from 700,000 tons in April, 1917, to 160,000 tons in April, 1918. Not a little of the credit for this improvement was due to the ceaseless activity of the Airship Service.

On December 12th, the Coastal airship, C. 27, failed to return to her base, and later it was learnt that she had fallen under the guns of a flying-boat piloted by Captain Christiansen, commander of a staffel on the Flanders coast, who, incidentally, is still playing an active part in German aviation to-day. Christiansen had sighted the C. 27 off Lowestoft at about six hundred feet, and immediately dived down to attack. From fifty yards' range his observer sent a burst of incendiary ammunition into the C. 27's envelope and at once the little non-rigid burst into flames and fell headlong into the icy waters. "To the last," wrote Christiansen later, "the number

C. 27 was to be seen on the stricken airship before the waters of the North Sea closed over her."

### A Submarine's Ambush

**D**URING the first six months of 1918, our non-rigid airships, thanks to improved equipment and more reliable engines, put in no less than 28,000 patrol hours, 18,000 hours of which were undertaken by the "Zero" Sea Scouts.

During the War most navigation lights on the British coast were extinguished, but a few were kept going. One of these was the lighthouse on St. Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight, which flashed its warning to shipping for fifteen minutes of every hour. An astute U-Boat commander was not long in noticing this, and lying in wait off the Point, succeeded in torpedoing several ships revealed by the flashing light. An airship was then sent out to patrol this area, and from the date of its arrival no sign of the submarine was seen.

Elsewhere, our non-rigids were continuing their attacks on enemy submarines with increasing success. On May 2nd, the S.S. Z. 29 sighted a U-Boat in the Straits of Dover, and at once attacked. The submarine promptly "crash-dived" and fled for safety—right into the mine barrage across the Straits. U.-B. 31 was thereupon written off as "missing."

Further proof of the excellent work now being done by the airships was the fact that U-Boats were now seeking their prey five hundred miles out in the Atlantic, far from the airship-patrolled areas, and very few submarines were to be found in the Channel. In April, however, the S.S. Z. 30 sighted a U-Boat only seven miles from Brighton. Quickly, Lieutenant Heady, its pilot, brought his ship over the spot where oil and mud were slowly rising and, coming low down, he let go his bombs. When the waters had calmed again a great patch of oil appeared on the surface, followed by bubbles—the last that was seen of another raider and its crew.

During this same month, the North Sea airship No. 3 had an unusual adven-

## TERROR OF THE U-BOATS

ture while escorting a convoy. She had sighted an oil track and bombed the spot before even the escorting destroyers could reach the scene. When they arrived, they at once dropped depth-charges and, very soon, oil and wreckage came up to the surface. But the wreckage proved to consist of British uniforms, a kit-bag and a £1 note. The depth-charges had disturbed the wreck of a British ship.

### Britain's Rigid Airships

NO mention has here been made of Britain's rigid airships, as only seven of these were commissioned during the latter part of the War, and they had neither the time nor the opportunity to prove their worth. It is interesting to recall, however, that when our first rigid ship, the R. 9, underwent her first trials at the end of 1916 and was found to have insufficient lift, a single 250 h.p. engine salvaged from the wreck of the Zeppelin R. 33, which had forced-landed at Little Wigborough the previous September, was installed in place of the twin engines previously carried, and proved a perfect solution.

The R. 9 was not actually commissioned until the spring of 1917, and like the other rigid ships which went into service at an even later date, was used more for training purposes than for coastal patrol work. One of these air-

ships, however, was instrumental in the sinking of a U-Boat when, on September 29th, only a few weeks before the Armistice, the R. 29 sighted oil patches off the Northumbrian coast and immediately wirelessed surface craft to hurry to the scene. Depth-charges were dropped and, later, wreckage which came to the surface identified the sunken submarine as the U.-B. 115. Only a week or two earlier the non-rigid S.S. Z. 1 had bombed and sunk the U.-B. 103 in the Straits of Dover.

As the War drew to a close, our airship fleet was growing daily, and by October it numbered no less than two hundred ships of all types, but mostly Zeros and Sea Scout twins. This fleet had done 50,000 hours of patrol work during 1918 alone, and had covered more than two million miles since 1915. The Service had lost but forty-eight officers and men, whilst of the forty-nine German submarines sighted, the airships had sunk twenty-seven. They had also sighted one hundred and thirty-four mines and destroyed seventy-three of them since June, 1917.

Whatever may be said against the airship to-day—and the toll of recent disasters has not failed to evoke much adverse criticism—it cannot be denied that the record of Britain's airships during the Great War was one of brilliant and valuable service.

*Another True and Stirring Story of War-time Adventure*

## NAVAL ONE

The Amazing Exploits of No. 1 Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service (later No. 201 Squadron, R.A.F.) which, for four years, made Air History on the Belgian Coast, the Western Front and in the Defence of London, and Numbered Two V.C.'s, Flt. Sub-Lt. R. A. J. Warneford and Major W. G. Barker, among its Gallant Company

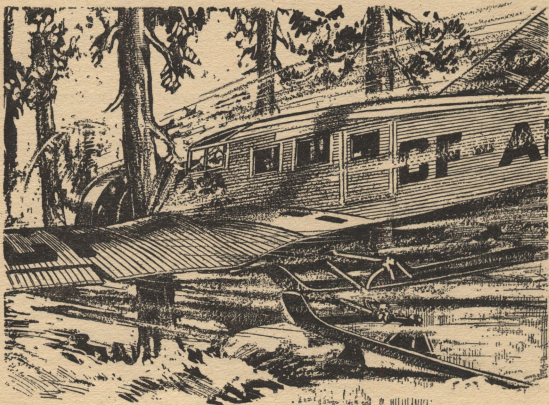
By "RECORDING OFFICER"

*In Next Month's*

## AIR STORIES



# According to Regulations



*The Junkers hit with a terrific crash, its skis torn bodily off*

## A Dramatic Story of Aerial Adventure in the Canadian Arctic

By EDWARD GREEN

### CHAPTER I Man-Hunt

**B**ACK in the dim days of his cadetship, Ted Batten had sat agape at a willowy instructor who, in dulcet tones, had expounded the motto of the R.A.F. It had sounded fine at that time, but now——. Ted spat at the red-hot stove before him.

"Per Ardua ad—Hell," was his caustic comment to no one in particular.

And, to tell the truth, one could not help sympathising with him. For ten years he had flown the Arctic and never had a stain on his log. Then, two months ago, while flying supplies to a crew

fighting a forest fire, he had twice overloaded his 'plane. Not that it mattered a great deal; Ted knew exactly how much overload his old Junkers could safely carry, but on the first occasion a nosey Mounty had made him unload and weigh every package and the tally had shown him to be about a hundred pounds over the limit as set by a very prudent Air Board. Ted didn't much mind the Air Board's rulings, but for a Mounty to come butting in on the flying game—well, that seemed to him to be going altogether too far.

Two days later the same Mounty had again made him unload and again caught him overweight. Ted had an excuse this

## ACCORDING TO REGULATIONS

time. Supplies were desperately needed to fight a fire that had broken out farther back in the big timber. The fire pump was the unit causing the overload, and the Mounty ordered him to leave it behind. Ted had calmly put it aboard and thumbed his nose at the officer.

Now he was "grounded" and threatened with the loss of his licence.

"A hell of a fine thing," Ted snorted, as he sat by his cabin on the far reaches of Crow Lake. "Here am I labouring to the stars, and now I'm grounded for doing it. One of these days those Mounties'll need me, and I wish 'em a lot of luck."

Ted Batten, in brief, was both annoyed and perturbed. He had withdrawn from civilisation and gone back to his cabin to, as he put it, "lick his wounds." He would, in time, be reinstated to his old position with the Polar Skyways Ltd., but that would not erase the blot on his log-book. And that was what really rankled.

In due course the glorious autumn weather passed and winter clamped its icy fingers on all things north of "53," Mr. Batten included. He had had a lengthy rest, and though his sense of injustice was still strong, he was feeling rather less at loggerheads with the world in general when, one day, a 'plane alighted on the ice and its sole occupant, "Shag" Morrissey, informed him that his presence was required at Headquarters forthwith.

"And a fine charter you're going on, too, Pieface," Morrissey told him. "Seems as though the Mounties want an Indian up in the Chill River country, and you're to take Constable Pelly along with you to pick him up."

Ted Batten rose like a rocket. His bronzed face was contorted and, for a moment, Morrissey thought he was going to have apoplexy.

"Pelly, Pelly?" Ted roared. "I'm to take that slab-sided son of a one-eyed Eskimo? Why did they pick on me?"

"Search me," Morrissey grinned. "Unless it's because he's a special friend of yours who doesn't want to see you peeling a wing off with an overload."

"I'd like to peel his ears off with a— with anything," was Batten's blood-thirsty reply.

But the prospect of a return to the flying game he loved so well was too much for him to resist. Morrissey helped him pack, and a few minutes later they were speeding through the frost-charged air on their way out to the Polar Skyways' base at Fort Barrow.

**D**IXON, the superintendent at Barrow, laughed when Ted expostulated about the charter.

"Pelly's a nice guy," he said. "He has his job to do, same as the rest of us. You shouldn't be sore at him. He can be nice and sociable when he likes."

"Not with me, he won't," Ted promised. "I'll take him there and back, but I won't help him out. I don't care what happens, he needn't expect any help from me."

Dixon grinned.

"You're not sore because he had you grounded, are you?"

"Who, me?" was Ted's indignant reply. "I should say not. It's just that I'm mad because he busted a pet idea of mine."

"A pet idea——?"

"Yeh, when I was a cadet we had an instructor we used to call 'Maudy,' and he used to take up half the lecture period telling us about 'Per Ardua ad Astra.' He told us that under no circumstances were we ever to forget that motto. And now, when I really try to live up to the 'Ardua' part, I'm grounded by a Mounty! Bah, to hell with him! He can get his man alone, and bad luck to him."

Dixon laughed heartily. He knew that Batten's pique was very largely a pose, but all the same, he was glad he was not in Pelly's moccasins. Batten was not going to be the ideal companion for a long flight in his present mood, and Dixon realised that the Mounty could expect no help from his pilot.

But Constable Pelly apparently thought that the whole matter had long since blown over and been forgotten. He came down to the 'plane and waved a cheery

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greeting to Batten, who returned it with a frown. He was about to crawl up into the front seat when Ted waved him back.

"Into the cabin, you!" he snapped. "You're a passenger. Air Regulations say that all passengers must ride on the seats provided for them."

"But there aren't any seats in your old tin can," Pelly protested, visibly taken aback at his reception.

"That's your hard luck," was Ted's curt reply. "Air Regulations haven't anything to say about that. I'll write the Inspector about it at some future date. Meantime, I'll file your complaint with the others I have on file."

He assumed a solemn look and produced a copy of the official Air Regulations. After scanning the pages for a few moments he turned to the bewildered Pelly.

"Can't see anything here about a chartered pilot being under the orders of the charter party. It says he must use his own judgment under all conditions. I'm a stickler for regulations now, Pelly, or perhaps I should say Constable Pelly—it says here that all passengers should be addressed with the respect due to their rank."

Pelly snorted.

"How much longer are you going to keep up this tomfoolery?" he demanded.

"Tomfoolery!" Ted exclaimed, in feigned amazement. "Did I understand you to describe these excellent Regulations as tomfoolery? Just a moment—I must see what they say about treasonable remarks from disgruntled customers."

Once more Ted thumbed the pages of his book, shaking his head dolefully as he did so.

"There's another point I'll have to take up with the Inspector when I get around to it. Now, are you ready to go?"

Constable Pelly was more than ready. He was eager to get there and back, if only to be rid of this infuriating idiot who had been inflicted upon him in the person of Edward Batten and his newfound respect for the letter of Air Regulations.

The constable flung his baggage aboard and climbed into the chilly interior of the Junkers monoplane. There were no seats in the cabin, nothing save the cold metal walls and floor. The constable found himself wishing he had not been quite such a stickler for regulations himself, for he knew now that Ted would hold him to every rule in the book.

"How about some heat in the cabin?" he yelled as the engine stormed into life.

"I'd see what the Regs. have to say about it but I haven't time just now," Ted grinned cheerfully. "And don't forget, a pilot isn't allowed to converse with passengers while in flight."

"But we ain't in flight," protested the wrathful Mounty.

"We *weren't*," Ted corrected, pushing the throttle open.

## CHAPTER II

### "Thunderbird No Good"

IF Constable Pelly was disgruntled, Mr. Edward Batten was hugely delighted. He had never dreamt that an opportunity like this would come to him, yet here was his enemy actually delivered into his tender care. He opened a slot in the bulkhead behind him in the cockpit.

"Where did you say we were going, Constable Pelly, Ar Cee Em Pee?"\* he yelled.

"To the Paqui Reserve on Chill River—and may the hounds of hell chase you over the hills of perdition. I'm freezing," came the prompt reply.

"That's bad," observed Batten solicitously. "I'll see what the Regs. say about that."

"Never mind that damned book. Turn on the heat."

"Heat? Oh yes, the Regs. say the customers must be kept warm—hot, if possible."

The constable snorted. He knew the futility of arguing with his companion. He had tried it once before and this was the result. He was in a cold and draughty cabin instead of being in the cockpit

\* R.C.M.P. : Royal Canadian Mounted Police.



beside Ted, with a nice exhaust heater blowing warm air across his lap. Constable Pelly's thoughts turned vengefully to the opinions he would express about Northern pilots in general and Mr. Edward Batten in particular, on his return to Barrow.

Meanwhile, the Junkers droned on over the forested country like some huge bird. Far below could be seen the flat expanses of lakes and rivers, dotted here and there by islands. The spruce showed up black against the snow. It would be no joke to have to make a landing anywhere in the locality, yet sometimes it was necessary. Northern storms rose quickly, and a pilot had little time to look around for a landing-place. He had to "set her down" as soon as possible.

But Ted, up in front, was not worrying about storms. He was wondering what lay ahead for the MOUNTY and himself.

CONSTABLE PELLY said little on the ninety-mile flight to the Paqui Reserve. There was little to say, and as Ted Batten felt much the same way, what conversations there were, were brief and to the point.

On landing at the Reserve, the MOUNTY strode up to the Chief's house and demanded the body of the Indian, Sicamous Wayagmack, known to all as "Sicky." The Chief listened gravely as Constable Pelly read the charges: "Theft of raw pelts, with malice aforethought, and causing great bodily harm to one Augustus Schreckle, a German trapper, by striking the said Schreckle with great force with a felonious weapon, to wit, a Hudson's Bay trade musket."

The Chief nodded, then grunted.

"No catchum Sicky. Him gone, *shimagami*."

"Where?" demanded the MOUNTY.

"Oh, oh, catchum Sicky mebbe Dog Falls, mebbe Weepi River, mebbe never."

"Nuts!" Batten cut in. "A MOUNTY always gets his man—and somebody else's girl."

Constable Pelly was annoyed. He glared ferociously at Ted.

"You heard what he said, Pieface,"

he snarled. "Dog Falls is our next stop. Get going!"

And to Dog Falls they duly laid their course, but by the time they neared it the weather, which had been steadily deteriorating as they flew, had become suddenly worse. Sudden gusts of wind now carried snow on their fleeting wings, and Ted soon found himself fully occupied in keeping his course. In the cabin behind him Pelly was equally busily engaged in cursing the bumps and trying to keep warm.

"Looks like we're going to have a time catching up on that guy," the MOUNTY finally observed through the slot.

"Yeh," came the terse reply. "I'm going to land soon and make camp."

"Land!" the constable exclaimed. "What d'ye mean, land?"

"Just what I said. Air Regulations say a pilot must use his own discretion in choosing weather when he is out of reach of radio stations."

"But you've got a radio," Pelly pointed out.

"It's busted, and besides, who the hell's running this show?"

"You are, for the moment," his passenger groaned.

"I was before when you butted in."

"I had to."

"Nuts! Here's Dog Falls, and here's where we camp."

Ted was grinning as he cut his engine and came in for a landing on the river at the Falls. Constable Pelly was not grinning. He was gnashing his teeth and praying for revenge.

But the pair had little time to exchange pleasantries on landing, for when the constable walked around to whip his blood into circulation he chanced to round a bend in the river. And there, in full view, was none other than the redoubtable Sicky.

THE Indian was whipping up his dogs when Pelly called on him to stop. He flung a frightened glance over his shoulder and held up both hands, then sheepishly turned towards the constable.

"You want me, no?" he enquired.

"I want you, yes," Constable Pelly

returned severely. "Why are you running away?"

Sicky shrugged, and his beady eyes narrowed as he glanced to where Batten was busy making camp.

Ted never knew just what transpired in the next moment. All he heard was a gasp, and he turned to see Pelly plunge to the ice with Sicky standing over him and brandishing a small hatchet.

Before Ted had had time to reach for his carbine, the Indian had leaped to his sleigh and withdrawn an antique rifle. He carried it at the ready and approached Ted with a wicked glitter in his eye. His hatchet was thrust in his belt.

On the instant, Ted divined the Indian's intentions. He stepped forward, but was waved back by the menacing barrel of the rifle.

"Don't move, or I kill," Sicky snarled.

Ted stood still. He saw the Indian pull his hatchet from his belt and aim several vicious blows at the big Wasp engine on the Junkers. Rocker-arms and push-rods bent beneath the impact of the hatchet. Sparking-plug wires were hacked and torn away. Then, the Indian grinned maliciously, and pushed his hatchet back into his belt.

"Thunderbird no good now. Me go."

Furiously, Ted Batten advanced towards him.

"You won't be a hell of a lot of good either when I get my hands on you, Sicky," he promised, and was instantly sorry he had spoken.

The Indian's dark face clouded. Hate flashed in his eyes. He was a renegade, long a thorn in the side of his tribe, but they were all afraid of him. He threw his gun up and aimed straight at the airman's breast.

"You no follow either," he growled.

Ted's mind worked like lightning. He spotted the ancient weapon the Indian held, and decided to gamble on its inefficiency. As Sicky's finger closed on the trigger, he flung himself forward. The Indian gave an ear-piercing yell and jerked the trigger. The hammer wheezed down to a harmless stop.

Next moment, Ted was upon the Indian.

His fist shot out and cracked against Sicky's jaw. The Indian staggered. Ted hit him again and as he reeled backwards the airman, measuring him in a split second, landed a powerful punch flush on his jaw. Sicky sprawled to the ice.

Without stopping to see what damage he had done to his victim, Ted rushed across to where Pelly lay. A ragged, angry-looking gash scarred the Mounty's scalp. Evidently Sicky had struck him with the hatchet while the Mounty, not expecting further resistance from his prisoner, had had his back turned.

Batten turned the injured man over and lifted him to his shoulder. He carried him back to the plane, where he spread a bed-roll and made the Mounty as comfortable as he could. In a few minutes he had a firepot going and was melting some snow.

### CHAPTER III

#### A Pilot of the North

PELLEY'S wound was not serious, and soon after Ted had finished bathing it, he heard the Mounty moan. A few moments later he had opened his eyes, and was struggling to sit up.

"Where's that damned Indian?" he demanded.

"Just lie there a minute, or he's liable to let go with his tomahawk again," Ted advised him. "A fine guy you are to let an Indian get away with tomahawking you. You're out-of-date. You should read——"

"Shut up," snapped Pelly, struggling to his feet. "To hell with the weather. We've got to catch that bird. Which way did he go?"

"Straight down," Ted nodded towards where Sicky lay. "I put him there, and by the looks of him, he's liable to stay there for some time."

The constable started in surprise when he saw the fallen Indian.

"Good enough," he said grudgingly. "And now get that coffee-pot of yours going, and let's get out of here."

But when he saw the damage caused by the Indian's hatchet he realised there

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was little hope of getting away for some time to come—unless Ted was both a first-rate mechanic and wizard in one. He rubbed his aching head and turned to the pilot.

"Now what?" he enquired despondently.

"Just this," Ted retorted jauntily. "Tie that wildcat up so he can't get loose and I'll go to work."

"But you can't fix that wreck," Pelly protested.

"Air Regulations say that a pilot must use his mechanical abilities when in a tight place."

"To hell with Air Regulations!" Pelly roared. "I'm sick of hearing about them."

"So am I," Ted agreed, "and have been ever since you sent in that report of yours."

"Oh, forget it," Pelly snapped. "What are you going to do now?"

"I've told you. Fix this engine and get away."

Before Pelly had a chance to reply, Ted began stripping the bent members from his engine. Luckily, Sickly had not used his brains and hacked the control surfaces or Ted could never have made repairs. Even as things were, his task was difficult enough. Each push-rod had to be heated over the firepot and straightened very carefully.

"I'm only hoping that damned lunatic didn't bend a valve stem," he reflected, and prayed that his makeshift job would stand up under the strain of flying.

"If he did I'll bend a gun barrel over his head," threatened the Mounty. "I'm still owing him one for that crack on the head."

"Just touch him once and see what you'll get," Ted grinned. "The Manual of the Mounties says——"

"Never mind what it says," Pelly barked. "I know all about it. I know I'm not supposed to use force on a prisoner except as a last resort; go on, tell me that!"

"Far be it from me to tell another fellow anything about his job," jibed Ted. "I only wish a lot of other people exercised the same restraint!"

Pelly sighed.

"Are you going to keep that up for ever?" he enquired plaintively.

But Ted Batten did not answer. He was busy fitting another push-rod in place, the last one.

IT was bitterly cold, and the Indian lay where he had fallen. Pelly had not handcuffed him, but had merely slipped two babice thongs about his wrists and passed a long loop through them which he had then tied to the Indian's ankles.

Ted wondered if his tappet clearances would be right, or if the bending had affected them. He had no feeler-gauges with him and had to do the best he could with a piece of brass shimstock.

"Won't hurt a hell of a lot—so long as the rods don't bend," he decided, and then noticed, for the first time, the heavily overcast sky and the snow which had begun to fall thickly.

Pelly was watching every move the airman made.

"Think we can go soon, Ted?" he ventured at length.

"We can—when an air engineer licensed by the Air Board has inspected this repair job," was the reply. "You see, Air Regu——"

The long-suffering Pelly fairly exploded. Despite his anger with Batten, he really liked him, and had he known him better he would never have turned in the report about his overload. In any case he would never have turned in such a report on any pilot had he not been afraid that one of the Forestry Branch men would otherwise report him for slackness of duty.

"Damn you and your triple-distilled double-barrelled Air Regulations," he raged. "Do you realise I've a prisoner here, and the only place for him is in gaol? There's three or four more charges against him now and unless——"

"Well, stick around a while and we might find a few more," Ted laughed. "Meanwhile, grab that crank and we'll see if this egg-beater'll turn over."

The "egg-beater" did turn over; very nicely, Ted thought, but there would be no chance of starting it until it was



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heated. He tossed his canvas hood over the engine and put the firepots in position.

As he worked, Pelly got busy loading his prisoner and his dogs into the Junkers cabin. The Indian had recovered consciousness and was trying to rub a much-swollen jaw. His dark eyes were burning with hate and fright.

There were a few sparking-plug wires to repair while the engine was warming up, and while Ted worked on these he kept Pelly in a constant state of repressed fury with little digs about Air Regs. and their relation to emergencies. Meanwhile, the day was rapidly nearing its close.

"Well, I guess that'll be all," Ted decided at last. "Just grab that crank and twist her tail again, and we'll see if this engine understands——"

"Air Regulations—I suppose you're going to say," Pelly cut in.

"Right again," Ted remarked, climbing to the cockpit. "Now wind her up."

The high-pitched whine of the starter sang through the air. Ted jerked his starter clutch, the gears sang and the prop. turned jerkily for a moment, and then spun swiftly.

"We'll let her idle a while and see what's going to burst first," Ted observed, listening intently to the engine note.

And as he sat there, he thought of the responsibility placed on a Northern pilot. Once clear of his operating base, he was his own boss and his own mechanic. There had been a time when engineers were carried on every trip, but to-day, payloads were the god and the extra weight had to be taken into consideration. A recent ruling had given the Royal Canadian Mounted Police authority to make a pilot unload and weigh every package aboard. The Powers-that-Be were taking no chances on zealous operators causing accidents by overloads, and that put the responsibility on the pilot. He was also supposed to make his own repairs and judge as to whether they would hold up until he got back to a base where they would be subjected to the critical inspection of a certified air engineer.

Ted's doleful ruminations were

suddenly interrupted by the Mounty.

"Well, are you going to sit there all night?" he enquired.

"Do you insist on hopping off in this muck?" Ted demanded, casting a glance at the darkening sky.

"We've only got eighty miles to go. Let's start."

"Okay, but we're taking chances, especially with this patched-up engine. One more tilt with the Air Board and I'll be in real hot water."

"Can't help that," Pelly replied. "I've got to see this prisoner in. I don't like having him around."

Shrugging his shoulders in resignation, Ted Batten settled himself in his seat and pushed his throttle open. The Wasp bellowed and the 'plane moved slowly forward.

"I hope the damned mill doesn't conk out just as we're getting off," was his silent prayer as the monoplane gathered speed.

But the "mill" didn't conk out. It kept its steady beat and lifted the 'plane into the air. Ted, glancing about, saw that the heaviest fringe of the storm was off to the northwest, and headed southwards at three-quarters throttle.

For sixty miles the makeshift repair job held good, but, instead of clearing the storm area, Ted found himself in the heart of it as they neared Cache Lake. Vicious gusts of wind hammered the drumming control surfaces of the 'plane and threw it around like a toy balloon. Ted's knuckles grew white under the strain of gripping the wheel.

"The fellow who said 'Per Ardua ad Astra' knew his stuff all right," he ruminated. "Must have been a Junkers pilot in this part of the world."

## CHAPTER IV

### Forced Down

IT was while crossing Cache Lake that Ted Batten received the first warning that his repair job was not too good. The engine skipped a beat or two then commenced to vibrate. He listened, but could not detect a complete "miss."

## ACCORDING TO REGULATIONS

It was as though one cylinder were firing, but not delivering full power.

"A sticky valve, or else one of those rods are bending and she isn't getting her full charge or exhausting cleanly," he decided. "I hope she holds up."

But his hopes were to be rudely shattered for next minute a cloud of black smoke belched from the Junkers' exhausts, while the engine set up a clamour like hammers striking a mass of loose steel. The propeller slowed, jerked, then shuddered to a stop. The nose of the Junkers dropped earthward, the 'plane tossed and buffeted by the wind.

For the first time in his long career, Ted Batten felt a twinge of real anxiety. He knew the danger of a forced landing on an unknown lake with a dead engine, especially when he could hardly see the lake for the blinding smother of snow. He tapped the window behind him and Pelly promptly appeared.

"Better hang on," Ted shouted. "I don't know what we're heading into, but it may be bad!"

Straining his eyes ahead, Ted caught sight of a long line of spruce along the shoreline. He felt the violent surges of updraughts that were swiftly transformed into downdraughts by the rocks and trees, and a wing dipped sickeningly, caught by a sudden gust that momentarily overcame the correcting aileron. He kicked his rudder and swung away from the shore.

There was no hope of banking and turning into the wind. He would have to land downwind, yet the Junkers was travelling at eighty miles an hour as she neared the ice. Ted glanced ahead, and his grip on the stick tightened suddenly. His 'plane was charging straight for a lone island, studded by rocks and trees.

There was no time to rudder over. Any attempt to change course would have ended in a flat spin. The skis were almost on the ice and Ted had time only to yell a warning to Pelly before flinging the windscreen back and covering his face with his arms.

The Junkers hit with a terrific crash. Its skis were torn off bodily and the

'plane bounded madly into the air, to smash down with terrific force against the sturdy trunks of heavy spruce. Its single wing ripped clear with a nerve-shattering screech of rending metal, and the fuselage plummeted on to pile up, a shattered wreck, against a farther line of trees.

IT was dark when Ted came to his senses. He was laying in deep snow about forty yards away from the smashed 'plane. He tried to move, and sharp stabs of pain tore at his left leg. He felt the bone, but it did not seem to be broken. But the leg was badly swollen and his ankle seemed on fire.

Struggling to his elbow, he glanced to where the battered fuselage lay. Drifting snow was piling around it, and there was no sign of life from its cabin. He wondered if Pelly and his prisoner had been killed outright. He must find out at once.

It was torture to rise to his feet, but he managed it. He found his left leg would bear no weight at all and he was compelled to half hop, half crawl, towards the 'plane, every move sending lacerating shafts of agony tearing through his battered body.

Pelly and the Indian lay, motionless, against the crushed bulkhead in the fuselage. Ted's fingers explored their pulses, and, with a great relief, he detected signs of life. But he must get heat for them soon or they would surely freeze.

Somehow or other, he managed to drag a firepot from the wreck. He also found his Arctic sleeping-bag and Pelly's kit. In a few minutes—minutes which seemed like hours, with every move an ordeal of pain—he had erected his own silk tent and spread the sleeping-bags on a few spruce boughs he had pulled from the trees close by.

His next task was Herculean, but, forcing himself to ignore his own desperate hurts, he succeeded, at last, in half lifting and half dragging the two men from the 'plane and into the tent. Then he set about making some strong soup.

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Pain wracked and tore at his body, but he finally got a firepot going and soon had a steaming pannikin of desiccated vegetable soup on the fire. He set it aside for a moment, while he made a closer examination of the injured men.

Pelly's left leg and right arm were broken. He also had several cuts and lacerations of the face and body, and Ted dressed these as well as he was able before turning to the Indian.

There was little he could do for Sick. He had bled inwardly, and it was only a matter of time before he joined the Great Spirit in the Happy Hunting Grounds. Ted felt no animosity against the Indian. He was a savage at heart, and he had but acted according to his nature.

For the next half-hour Ted attended to his own injuries. Pelly still lay unconscious, breathing heavily, and Ted realised that unless he was able to get help soon there would be two dead men in the tent.

But where was he to get help? He knew he was on Cache Lake, but that was twenty hell-packed miles from Fort Barrow. It was possible there were trappers' cabins somewhere between Cache Lake and the Fort, but Ted did not know of any. His only course would be to make for the Fort.

Pelly stirred. Ted turned to him as he opened his eyes and groaned.

"Hurt much, old man?" he asked.

Pelly moaned again.

"My back and legs," he groaned weakly. "I can't feel anything in them. What happened?"

In a few words Ted told the injured constable of their crash.

"You couldn't help it," Pelly managed to reply, then twisted a brave smile. "What do Air Regulations say about this?"

Ted's face broke into a grin. He tried to move, and winced.

"You hurt, too, eh?" said the Mounty.

"Not much," Ted lied. "Air Regulations say I have to take care of my passengers. Now, do you know of any cabins along this lake? We're at Cache Lake."

Pelly thought for a moment.

"No, I don't know of anyone on Cache Lake. There might be an Indian winter fishing-camp along here, but I don't know of any regular trappers."

"Neither do I, so that means we'll have to try and get out of here."

"Sicky, what about him?" Pelly asked.

Ted glanced at the Indian's quiet face. It was waxen. He felt for a pulse that was no longer there.

"I guess we won't have to worry about him any more. He's gone."

Pelly said nothing. He stared at the roof of the tent. When Death strikes friend or foe in the North all personal differences are forgotten.

Ted's next move was to try to force some soup down Pelly's throat, but the Mounty seemed unable to swallow. His face twisted with pain when he attempted to move.

As he drank his own share of the soup, Ted concentrated on their position. He knew there would be no search 'planes sent out to look for them for at least two days. The base would take the storm into consideration and assume that he had landed and made camp. Yet they could not wait two days and live. If he and Pelly were to survive this crash they would have to do so by their own efforts.

Pelly could not move; he was helpless. There seemed to Ted only one thing to do. He must either carry his companion or fashion a sleigh and drag him until they reached help of some kind.

Ted studied the possibility. His own hurts were so bad that it was agony merely to stand on his two feet. But he *could* stand, he argued to himself, whereas Pelly was powerless. Ted thought of his old motto and grinned.

## CHAPTER V

### "Per Ardua ad—"

**W**ORKING on his hands and knees, Ted salvaged pieces of duralumin from the wreckage of the Junkers and hammered them into the shape of a toboggan.

His task at last completed, he then carried Pelly to the makeshift conveyance



## ACCORDING TO REGULATIONS

and deposited him, sleeping-bag and all, on its irregular bottom. Tins of food were then stowed and with a harness made from tent ropes, Ted commenced his desperate journey.

Each step was like a knife that cut and slashed and tore through his body. Beads of perspiration gathered on his brow. The toboggan dragged heavily, and there were rocks along the shoreline that must be avoided. Trees, blown down by the wind, thrust their lengths out into the ice and he had to skirt these. The snow was deep, and with his injured leg it was as much as he could do to make headway on his snowshoes.

The wind whipped spirals of snow into the air, blinding and cutting. Far out across a spruce swamp, great trees, penetrated by frost, burst with reverberating booms that rolled back like the drumming of cannon. Gamely, Ted Batten struggled on, each step harder than the last one.

Soon he had lost all sense of time and distance—an automaton staggering forward, driven by a power outside itself. He did not know how far he had travelled. But, at least, Cache Lake was behind him and he was now making his tortuous way down Woman Creek. He knew Fort Barrow was somewhere ahead, fifteen, perhaps twenty miles—he could not think very clearly. The trees and brush were beginning to swim before his eyes, and his breath was coming in short, stabbing gasps. His leg, its twisted tendons protesting each move, was sending warning spears of agony through his body.

At last he could go no farther. He came to a stop and his lips set in a grim smile.

"I wonder what Maudy would have said about this? 'Per Ardua ad Infinitum,'" he half whispered.

"What did you say, Ted?" came a weak voice from the toboggan.

Ted sagged back against a tree stump, a weary smile on his drawn face.

"Nothing. I was just thinking aloud. How do you feel?"

"Hellish," Pelly muttered. "I'm just beginning to feel my back and legs."

"Great," Ted breathed. "We'll push on again now."

But, bravely as he spoke, he knew he had almost reached the limit of his endurance. If Sicky's dogs had only survived the crash he might have had a chance, but they had been killed outright. It was their soft bodies that had saved Pelly and Sicky from sudden death. They had been between the men and the metal bulkhead.

Hours later a bright moon rose high in the sky. It was partially obscured by storm clouds, but when they broke clear it threw a cold light down on the figure of Ted Batten, stumbling, tugging, but ever moving onward. He was mumbling incoherently now, staggering a few paces, then falling, rising and staggering on once more. On the toboggan, Pelly, the broken ends of his bones rubbing with each move, moaned encouragement.

The dimming horizon swam before Ted's eyes. He reeled, and knew the end had come. He could not go on. His leg had ceased to pain. He could feel nothing in his exhausted body. He swayed like a drunken man and clutched at the toboggan for support.

Suddenly he stiffened. From somewhere ahead he heard a snarl, sharp and clear. It sounded again, then broke into a bark.

"Dogs," Ted mumbled, "dogs! There's a cabin somewhere close."

New strength flowed into his veins. He gripped his harness and bent to his task. There was help ahead, someone to aid him in getting medical help for Pelly. He gathered every bit of his remaining strength together and fought on.

He rounded a bend in the creek. On a rocky point he saw a light. He stopped and called. Through closing eyes, he saw a door in the cabin open, then, with a tired sigh, he plunged face down on the snow, utterly spent.

WHEN Ted Batten awoke he was in a bunk. A bearded man stood by him with a smile on his face, and when he saw Ted try to speak he motioned him to silence.

## AIR STORIES

"Just be quiet, pal. Your partner's in the bunk over your head. He'll be all right in a little while, too. I've set his broken arm and leg and there'll be a doctor along soon. My boy left for Fort Barrow about two hours ago with his dogs."

"Thanks," Ted managed to say, and lapsed again into sleep.

A few hours later he was aroused by the roar of an aeroplane engine. He called to Pelly in the bunk above.

"Listen to that, Mouny," he called. "We'll soon be on our way again 'Per Ardua ad Astra'—that's our motto."

Pelly's voice was soft, friendly, as he replied.

"I guess it's as good as any," he

said. "I ain't forgetting what you did for me. What did you say that motto meant?"

"I didn't say," Ted replied with a smile, "but it means 'by labour to the stars.'"

"Stars, eh?" said Pelly. "Well, I guess I saw plenty when we hit those trees—and you've sure had the labour in dragging me along here."

His voice dropped to a lower note. "It was great work, Ted, and when we get back I'll report——"

"I know, I know," came a weary voice from the lower bunk. "You'll report that that darned sledge was overloaded to hell, according to any regulations—and this time I'll agree with you!"

### THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER:

#### SECRETS OF THE R.A.F.'S GUN-TURRETS

##### R.A.F. Bombers are Now Fitted with Remarkable Mechanically-Operated Gun Turrets which Ensure Effortless Accuracy

A CLOSE-UP view of the front gun turret of the Boulton Paul Overstrand medium-bomber is the chief centre of interest in this month's attractive cover painting by S. R. Drigin.

The Overstrand is not, of course, of particularly recent design, nor comparable in performance to the R.A.F.'s latest medium bombers, such as the Battle or Blenheim. Nevertheless, it is the equipment of several R.A.F. squadrons and of particular interest as the first aircraft in service in the R.A.F. ever to be fitted with a mechanically-operated gun-turret. This turret, since fitted to several of the new heavy bomber types, consists of a metal cylinder with domed ends, largely covered with transparent material, and held in place by roller-bearing brackets at top and bottom, much as an egg might be held between finger and thumb.

#### Wide Field of Fire

WITHIN the turret is a pivoted gun arm, carrying a Lewis whose barrel projects through a vertical slot which extends the full depth of the turret and allows the gun to be elevated over the whole range from vertically up to vertically down. The gunner sits inside the turret on a seat supported by an hydraulic ram which is connected to a pair of smaller rams coupled to the elevating gun arm. The two sets of rams are so arranged that the gunner's weight just balances that of the gun arm, the seat and gun moving in opposite directions; thus with the gun at maximum elevation the gunner's seat is at its lowest, giving him a comfortable view up along the sights.

A reversible pneumatic motor, geared to the turret, provides power to rotate the turret bodily on its bearings, thereby training the gun in response to pressure exerted on the handle by the gunner

as he follows his target through the gun-sights. In this way, rapid movement of the gun vertically and horizontally follows upon exertion by the gunner of the small muscular efforts applied in the normal process of training his weapon on a target. Power for operating the turret is provided by an engine-driven six-cylinder air compressor which keeps a set of compressed-air bottles charged to 200 lb./sq. in. pressure. The rate of rotation normally possible is about 12 r.p.m.

#### Central Heating for Gunners

THE surprisingly small amount of draught caused by the open gun slot, some 3 to 4 in. wide, in the turret may be excluded, when the gun is not in use, by stowing the gun at the top of the turret and closing the slot with a canvas strip held together by a lightning fastener. The turret interior is also warmed by hot air drawn from a heater muff on the engine exhaust pipes. In addition to being a gun station, the Overstrand's turret serves also as a bomb-aimer's station, and for this purpose the two lower left-hand transparent panels (shown closed in the cover drawing) are made openable. Telephones provide the means of communication between the front gunner and other members of the crew.

The Overstrand itself is a twin-engined high-performance medium bomber, notable for a remarkable take-off and climb, and for its high degree of manoeuvrability. It is powered with two Bristol Pegasus engines, carries 360 gallons of fuel, and can do 153 m.p.h. at 6,000 ft. Service ceiling is 22,500 ft. and initial rate of climb 1,100 ft./min.

The other aircraft depicted on the cover will be recognised as the new and unnamed Gloster monoplane fighter which was described and illustrated in the October issue.

# An Ace of Richthofen's "Circus"

Struck by a Shell in Mid-air and  
Twice Wounded in Action, Erich  
Loewenhardt of the Richthofen  
Squadron Survived to Score  
54 Victories before Meeting a  
Terrible Fate

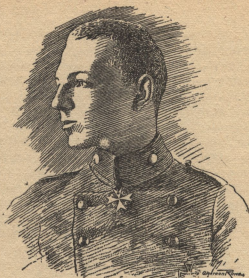
By

A. H. PRITCHARD

**M**ANY and varied are the stories that have been written about the famous Richthofen "Circus," Geschwader One, and one and all have dealt chiefly with the deeds of the "Red Baron." Names of other great "Circus" pilots have been mentioned briefly, but who has ever read a biography of Loewenhardt, Voss, Wuesthoff, Kirchstein, Reinhardt, and the many other great "Circus" pilots?

Future articles in this series will describe the records of a number of these gallant war-birds who have for so long been overshadowed by the greater glamour of their Leader, and first on the list comes Oberleutnant Erich Loewenhardt, Knight of the *Ordre Pour le Mérite* and conqueror of fifty-four Allied aircraft.

Born in Breslau on April 7th, 1897, Loewenhardt was a member of the Lichtfelder Cadet School when war was declared, and the general mobilisation saw him posted to Groudez as standard-bearer to the 141st Regiment of Infantry. His regiment was sent to the Eastern Front, and Loewenhardt was slightly wounded near Lodz before the war was three weeks old. The wound was only a scratch, however, and he fought at the Battle of Tannenberg, and for his gallantry during that engagement was promoted to Leutnant.



Erich Loewenhardt—a sketch from a war-time photograph

October, 1914, saw him placed in command of a company of the famous *Schneeschuhtroops*, or "ski-troops," that were to perform so gallantly in the Carpathian struggle, and in January, 1915, he was awarded the Iron Cross, First Class, for "remarkable gallantry and inspired leadership." In June, 1915, he was transferred to the Austro-German Alpine Corps, for service in the Dolomites, and later took part in the advance through Siberia.

During this latter campaign, however, Loewenhardt contracted fever and was invalidated home as unfit for service. The nineteen-year-old Leutnant, however, refused to be left out of the "fun" through a mere bout of fever, and after five months' rest he joined the Imperial Air Service. He passed through the schools in record time, and proved so skilful a pilot that, in July, 1917, he was posted to Jagdstaffel 10, of the newly formed Richthofen Geschwader One.

## Hit by a Shell in Mid-Air

**T**HE German archives carry no details of Loewenhardt's initial victory, but on August 14th he attacked an R.E.8 and sent it crashing down near Zillebeke. On September 5th Staffel 10 engaged a flight of Sopwith Camels near St. Julien, and Loewenhardt destroyed one, to follow



this success with an observation balloon over Wolveringham four days later.

On the morning of September 20th a daring Camel pilot made a single-handed attack on the aerodrome of Staffel 4, and inflicted severe casualties on men and machines. The whole "Circus" took off, thirsting for revenge, and during an engagement with a Camel squadron over Roulers, Loewenhardt was caught by five machines, and was slightly wounded in the left shoulder. Luckily the wound was not serious, and on the following morning he destroyed a balloon in flames for his fifth victory.

The first week in November saw Loewenhardt very near to death, for while flying over St. Eloi on the 6th he came in for a terrific "strafing" from a pair of mobile anti-aircraft guns. One shell, which fortunately failed to explode, tore off his left wing-tip and the machine fell in an uncontrolled spin. Less than fifty feet from the ground, Loewenhardt managed to regain some semblance of control, but it was too late. The machine hit the ground, turned two complete somersaults, and eventually finished up in a hedge—a complete wreck. To the amazement of a party of soldiers who had seen the crash, a man in a tattered flying suit rose up out of the wreckage—Loewenhardt, badly shaken, but otherwise unhurt. On the 30th, a Camel went down to make his score eight and close his account for 1917. Bad weather curtailed all flying, and although he took part in several patrols, Loewenhardt failed to meet any enemy machines.

He opened his scoring for 1918 with a balloon in flames on January 5th, and a Bristol Fighter on the 18th, the latter giving him a particularly hot five minutes before a bullet put the pilot out of action. Although he was now a "Kanone" or "Ace," with ten victories to his credit, Loewenhardt was scoring very slowly, and was by no means showing signs of becoming a great fighter pilot. True, he was a skillful pilot and a very fine marksman, but, somehow, he did not seem to fit in with the routine patrols of Geschwader One. Strangely enough, after Richthofen went down on April 21st,

Loewenhardt began to score very rapidly, and this seems to prove a point that is put forward by many air-war writers. This is that many of the great German pilots did not fit in with the well-laid plans of the "Red Knight," and their effectiveness as individual fighters was hampered by the restrictions placed upon them by their leader. Udet and Loewenhardt are two of many such examples, for both were unable to score with any rapidity until Richthofen passed on.

### The Balloon "Strafers"

ALMOST two months went by before Loewenhardt obtained his eleventh victory, a balloon on March 12th, but two more balloons, a Breguet two-seater and a D.H.6, fell to his guns before the month ended. Early on the morning of the 21st, a front-line observer telephoned that a pair of British balloons were up over Rialcourt, and Loewenhardt and Lieutenant Friedrichs took off at once; but before they could cross the lines a heavy mist came up and they were forced to turn back. At 1 p.m. the mist cleared and both pilots took off again. Ten minutes later Loewenhardt's victim went down in flames. Before Friedrichs could attack, a Camel patrol appeared and the Germans were forced to withdraw into a cloudbank. The moment the enemy scouts had passed out of range, Friedrichs went down on his helpless victim and it soon followed its companion to a flaming end. This little affray brought Loewenhardt his fourteenth success, and Friedrichs the second victory towards the twenty-one he was to obtain before his death on July 15th.

A Sopwith Camel on the 12th and a Bristol Fighter on the 23rd were Loewenhardt's only offerings to the War gods during April, but seven machines fell to him in May, and his first victory for that month was an interesting one. On the 2nd he shot down a machine which was credited to him as an S.E.5, but he reported that his victim was much speedier and better armed than any S.E.5 previously encountered. Just what type of machine this was must remain a mystery, for, although it was

## AN ACE OF RICHTHOFEN'S "CIRCUS"

examined by the German technical experts, no records are available which might identify it. The following extract from the official examination report, however, may be of interest :

*"The machine is made from much better quality material than our own and can easily surpass the best performance of our Triplanes . . . it will no doubt replace the out-dated Sopwith Camels in the English squadrons, and any pilot who encounters a machine similar to the enclosed silhouette, should report the matter at once."*

The machine was, in all probability, a hotted-up S.E.5A, or a Camel with the new B.R.2 engine.

On the morning of the 9th, Loewenhardt led five machines of Staffel 10—to the command of which he had succeeded Klein, who was killed on April 19th—against eight S.E.5's, and managed to destroy one. He followed this up with a D.H.9 next day, and by the end of the month his score stood at twenty-four. Then the "Circus" was transferred to the French Front, and Loewenhardt reaped a rich harvest at the expense of the Spad Escadrilles. Between June 1st and 8th, no less than forty French machines fell to the pilots of Geschwader One, and Loewenhardt became the "Ace" of surviving German "Aces."

### Two Victories in Five Minutes

ON June 2nd, 1918, it was announced that Loewenhardt had been awarded the *Pour le Mérite*, and he showed his appreciation of the honour by destroying a Spad on the 3rd and another two days later. July, however, was easily the best month of his career, no less than sixteen enemy aircraft going down before the fury of his guns during that period.

The early morning patrol of July 2nd saw Loewenhardt destroy a Nieuport in flames, and within five minutes another lay alongside the still blazing wreckage of his first victim. Two weeks went by before he scored again, then, on the 14th, he destroyed a Breguet, a Camel on the 15th, a Spad on the 16th, two Spads on the 18th, and followed this run with five

### LOEWENHARDT'S VICTORY LOG

1 Type unknown	2 D.H. 9's
7 Balloons	3 Bristol Fighters
2 Sopwith Pups	3 Breguets
12 Sopwith Camels	2 Nieuports
1 R.E. 8	16 Spads
1 D.H. 5	1 F.E. 2D
1 S.E. 5	1 No details

Spads and four Sopwith Camels within the next ten days.

August came and defeat waited for Germany. The Allies were breaking through all along the line, and the Imperial Air Service was powerless to stem the tide. Petrol and ammunition were at a premium and patrols had to be cut down. On August 8th, for example, supplies were so low that Loewenhardt suggested that only the best pilots should be allowed to engage the enemy, for this would not only serve to avoid unnecessary losses, but would also conserve their slender supplies. Shortly after mid-day the picked formation took off and soon ran into hostile machines. British scouts and bombers were everywhere, and the patrol had to fight for their lives. Loewenhardt managed to destroy a Camel, but it was an isolated victory, and the patrol had to land on the aerodrome of a reconnaissance section in order to refuel. Almost as soon as they had landed, six Bristol Fighters appeared and proceeded to shoot up the grounded Fokkers. Much patching was needed before the machines could make another patrol, and it was five o'clock before they took off. Once again enemy machines swarmed down upon them, but this time they put up a stout fight and accounted for twelve enemy machines, Loewenhardt accounting for two—both Sopwith Camels.

Two more Camels went down next day, one in the morning and one on the evening patrol, and the German war-birds began to wager whether Loewenhardt would pass the score of their dead leader. Alas, for the debates of men ! Within twenty-four hours Loewenhardt had gone to join Richthofen in the air-men's Valhalla.

## Loewenhardt's Last Flight

**S**HORTLY before mid-day on August 10th, Staffel 10 joined up with a patrol from Staffel 4, and very soon the formation encountered a large number of S.E.5's over the town of Chaulnes. Loewenhardt gave the signal to attack, and so signed his own death warrant. Several machines from Staffel 11 had now joined the German group, and, seeing Loewenhardt signal, came down to give a hand. One of them, piloted by Leutnant Wentz, dived for an S.E.5 at the very moment that Loewenhardt turned to bring his guns to bear upon the same machine. The left wheel of Wentz's Fokker D.7 tore through the left wing of Loewenhardt's right wing, and for a few breathless seconds the machines hung locked together. Then

the Fokker's wheel tore loose, both machines began to fall, and both pilots took to their parachutes. By a strange freak, Wentz, the unknown, landed safely, while Loewenhardt, famous "ace," fell like a stone to earth, his unopened parachute trailing behind.

So died Erich Loewenhardt, the victim of an accident almost identical with that which cost the Imperial Air Service the life of Oswald Boelcke. To a sorrowing mother the Kaiser sent the following telegram in tribute to her gallant son :

*"To my great grief I have to report the death of your oldest son, the brave leader of Jasta 10; of the Richthofen Geschwader. A smart and gallant flying officer who has performed so prominently. God comfort you in your great pain.—Wilhelm."*

## HERE'S THE ANSWER

More Replies to Readers' Enquiries

**NEW DIVE BOMBER** (R. Messenger, Ashted, Kent). The new single-engined Blackburn dive-bomber has been given the official name of Skua 1. It is now being produced in quantity for the Fleet Air Arm and is powered with a Bristol Perseus sleeve-valved air-cooled radial.

**FLYING-BOATS** (George Barr, Cawnpore, India). R.A.F. flying-boat units are now officially styled "general reconnaissance squadrons." Similarly, the Air Ministry has recently abolished the sub-classifications of light, medium and heavy bombers. All bomber units, irrespective of their flying equipment, are now just plain bomber squadrons. Former distinction is now considered obsolete as, owing to greatly improved performance, modern medium bombers now carry greater military loads than yesterday's heavy bombers, and future craft will carry yet more load.

**IRISH WARPLANES** (D. McDonaugh, Belfast). Rumour is quite correct. New aircraft factory now building in Belfast and planned for large-scale production is for Short and Harland Ltd., new company which associates Short Bros., famous flying-boat constructors, with Harland and Wolff, renowned ship-builders. Factory will build Bristol Bombay heavy transports and a version of the Handley Page Hampden high-performance "fighter bomber."

**FLYING CLUBS** (T. H. Myers, Aintree, Liverpool). Yes, Government's subsidy to light aeroplane clubs has recently been increased. Maximum amount any one club may receive is raised from £1,500 to £2,000 p.a. and payment at 20s. an hour up to maximum of 20 hours per pilot is now made in respect of flying by licensed club members. Old arrangement, under which Air Ministry pays

£25 for every member qualifying for his "A" licence, and £10 for every licence renewed, still stands.

**MILES-KESTREL** (John Kennedy, London, S.W.2). The Miles-Kestrel is a Rolls-Royce Kestrel-engined cabin monoplane designed by Mr. F. G. Miles of Phillips and Powis Ltd. It is primarily intended for advanced military training, but may readily be adapted for use as a two-seater fighter or multi-gun single-seater. Weighing 2½ tons fully loaded, it does 295 m.p.h. at 16,500 ft., cruises at 254 m.p.h., lands at 60 m.p.h., and has a service ceiling of 30,000 ft.

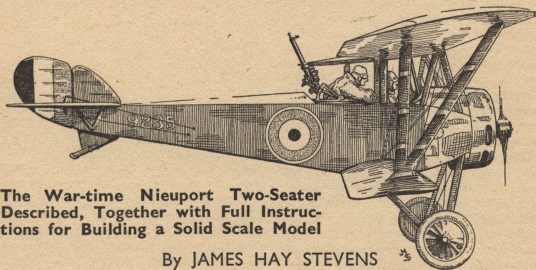
**WELLESLEY BOMB-RACKS** (R. G. Langford, Coulsdon, Surrey; R. T. Bowring, and others). Sorry we slipped up in saying that the torpedo-like objects beneath a Wellesley's wings were extra fuel tanks. Fuel tanks have been so fitted on certain Wellesleys for long-range experiments, but normally, as you state, these streamlined casings are bomb-carriers, which, owing to the geodetic construction of the Wellesley, cannot conveniently be carried internally. The casings have two doors which open downwards under hydraulic pressure, allowing bombs to fall clear. Many thanks for putting us right.

**BLACKBURN BLACKBIRD** (P. W. Brooks, Laindon, Essex). (1) Blackbird was a "freak" experimental type of torpedo-carrying ship 'plane which, before it could release its "mouldie," had to drop its wheels and axle. It then landed on skids. Machine was subsequently re-designed and became the Blackburn Dart. (2) The series number of the De Havilland Derby bomber of 1924 was D.H.27.

**BEAUCHAMP-PROCTOR, V.C.** (A. Hopper, Worthing, Sussex). Captain A. W. Beauchamp-Proctor, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., D.F.C., was a South African and the last but one British airman to win the V.C. during the Great War. His total victory score was 54, comprising 38 'planes and 16 balloons. He lost his life in an air accident in 1921.



# A Famous French Warbird



**The War-time Nieuport Two-Seater Described, Together with Full Instructions for Building a Solid Scale Model**

By JAMES HAY STEVENS

**A**MONG the names of Wartime aeroplane constructors which will be handed down to aeronautical history, that of the Nieuport Company should hold a high place. Although principally famed for its single-seater fighters—to the present day, there have always been Nieuport aeroplanes in the fighter equipment of the French Air Service—the Company also brought out a number of two-seaters during the War, and it is with one of the most famous of these that this article deals. As an introduction, a brief résumé of the activities of the Nieuport Company prior to the production of the two-seater may be of interest.

The late Edouard de Niéport formed a company in 1910 for the manufacture of racing and sporting aeroplanes. Somehow or other, the aeroplanes came to be known by the name of Nieuport, and, when the company was re-constituted shortly before the outbreak of the War, the name Nieuport was retained and formally adopted.

In those years before the War, sporting flying was in a flourishing state; machines were reasonably cheap, horsepower was low, with consequent cheapness in running costs, performances for power were surprisingly good, and, even

if the engines were not always reliable, the people who flew were real enthusiasts and accustomed to overcoming difficulties. Under these conditions, the various Nieuports gained an excellent reputation at numerous flying meetings on the Continent and in England. It was, however, with the little sesquiplane single-seater that the name was really made, and it was with the successively modified and higher-powered versions of this design that the Nieuport Company's reputation was maintained.

## A Pronounced Sweep-back

**T**HE two-seater Nieuport of the Great War, and the subject of this article, was very like its ancestors in general outline and, because of its small overall dimensions, was difficult to distinguish from the single-seater version when seen at any distance. Structurally, this likeness was even more accentuated. The upper main plane was in two halves attached to a fixed centre-section. There was no dihedral, but a pronounced sweep-back. Large ailerons were fitted to the upper planes only, and the gap between the ailerons and the wing was faired by a celluloid strip—an unusual refinement for those days, probably necessitated by the controls being heavy

## AIR STORIES

in the air. The upper planes had normal two-spar structures, while the lower ones were built on single spars. The wooden "vee" interplane struts were characteristically Nieuport in appearance. The inverted "vee" front centre-section struts were cross-braced by streamline wires, but the rear ones were rigidly fixed by the hooplike struts shown in the General Arrangement Drawing. All interplane bracing was by streamline wires, the landing wires being single and the flying wires double.

The fuselage was extremely conventional—flat-sided with a rounded top decking. The crew were accommodated in one long open cockpit, the pilot in front and the observer behind. In an earlier version, the pilot sat behind, and the unfortunate observer had to stand up and work a gun mounted in an opening in the centre-section. This was not only draughty for the observer, but it also cut off the pilot's forward view and upset the air flow over the tail, making the machine difficult to control.

The engine was either the 110 h.p., or, later, the 130 h.p. nine cylinder rotary Clerg t. Various types of Lorraine-Dietrich and Hispano-Suiza water-cooled engines were also fitted experimentally, and a number of Nieuports with water-cooled engines saw service with the French Air Arm. Reliable details of performance with the different power units are not available, but the model here described had a top speed of about 100 miles per hour.

The undercarriage had fixed cable-braced "vees" and an axle sprung by rubber cord. The faired ash tail-skid was a common feature on Nieuport aero-

planes, and the tail unit was of very simple construction, with a self-supporting fin and strut-braced tail-plane.

### Used for Training

**O**WING to its good all-round flying qualities the Nieuport was widely used by the French, Belgian and British Air Services. Although of early 1916 vintage, a few Nieuports were temporarily in use with 45 Squadron, R.F.C., on active service in April, 1917. When the first American units arrived in France, the French Government handed over a quantity of obsolete fighting aeroplanes for the U.S. pilots to complete their training. These aeroplanes were mainly Nieuport single and two-seater fighters. So it was that after an active life on reconnaissance and fighting work, the two-seater Nieuport spent the twilight of its life training the new idea—a fitting end for a worthy aeroplane.

Although reliable weights and performance figures are not obtainable, the following official rigging dimensions should prove useful to modellers. Of special interest is the wash-in of incidence on the port lower plane, introduced in order to set-off engine torque.

### Principal Dimensions

Span, top . . . . .	29 ft. 7½ in.
Span, bottom . . . . .	26 ft.
Chord, top . . . . .	6 ft.
Chord, bottom . . . . .	3 ft.
Incidence, top . . . . .	3½°
Incidence, starboard bottom . . . . .	4°
Incidence, port bottom, at root . . . . .	4°
Incidence, port bottom, at wing tip . . . . .	5°
Dihedral, top . . . . .	nil
Dihedral, bottom . . . . .	2°
Sweepback . . . . .	2° 45'
Length overall . . . . .	23 ft. 11¼ in.

## HOW TO BUILD THE SCALE MODEL

### Full Instructions for Carving, Assembly and Painting

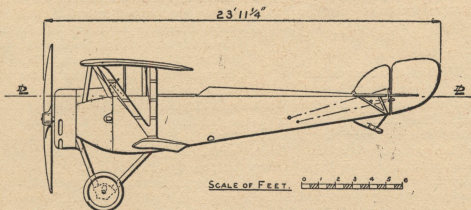
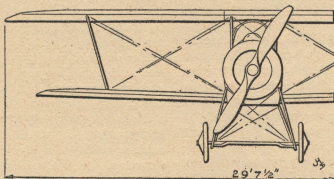
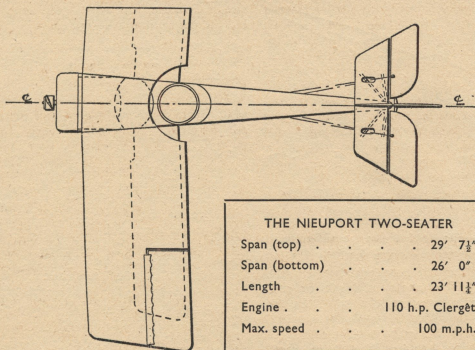
**T**HE General Arrangement Drawing on the opposite page has been reproduced to a scale of  $\frac{1}{72}$ nd, the practice followed with the drawings of all other aeroplanes in this series. For the convenience of the modeller wishing to use a different scale, a scale of feet has been included in the Drawing. Anyone making

the model to another scale will find it best to draw afresh the machine's side elevation, at least, to his chosen size.

### Materials and Tools

IF the  $\frac{1}{72}$ nd scale is to be used, the following materials will be found necessary: a block of beech or whitewood

# A FAMOUS FRENCH WARBIRO



A General Arrangement Drawing of the Nieuport Two-seater Fighter



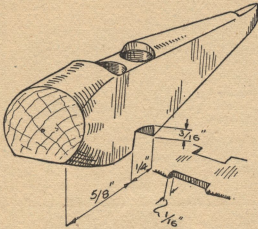


Fig. 1.—The finished fuselage without engine and showing fitting of lower plane

$3\frac{1}{4} \times \frac{3}{4} \times \frac{5}{8}$  in. from which to carve the fuselage; a sheet of birch or satin-walnut fretwood  $5 \times 2 \times \frac{3}{32}$  in. from which to make the main planes; the tail unit will require a piece of red fibre  $6 \times 6 \times \frac{1}{12}$ th in. The struts may be made from some 18 in. of brass 20-gauge wire. Bracing wires will require some ordinary fine florists' wire. Back numbers of AIR STORIES will describe methods of making wheels, engine, guns and airscrew (all of which accessories have been described many times in previous articles) or they can be purchased in cast form from any model dealer.

The following tools will be found essential: a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. chisel; small plane; penknife; oilstone; fretsaw; small half-round ward file;  $\frac{1}{16}$ th-in. bradawl; archimedean drill; small long-nosed pliers; tube of cellulose glue; a penny ruler measuring in  $\frac{1}{10}$ ths,  $\frac{1}{12}$ ths,  $\frac{1}{16}$ ths of an inch.

## Method of Construction

THE instructions should be read carefully and well understood before work is begun. The first step then is to assemble all the necessary materials and tools within convenient reach. There is nothing more annoying than having to stop in the middle of a model owing to some part having been mislaid or forgotten—and to find that all the shops are shut!

Then trace the side elevation of the

fuselage from the G. A. Drawing, omitting the engine cowlings, but including the special cut-out for the lower plane which is shown in Fig. 1. Place the tracing upon the fuselage block, pin-prick its outline and line-in with a pencil. The surplus wood is now removed with plane and chisel.

Next, a centre-line is drawn on both top and bottom faces of the block, and, in addition, the plan of the fuselage is drawn on the top surface. Again, the chisel and plane are brought into use for the removal of the waste wood. Now round the top decking of the fuselage and a short section of the front part of the sides—that portion covered by the metal cowlings side panel on the actual machine. Then hollow the cockpits and make the holes for the centre-section struts and front undercarriage legs. The making of the engine and cowlings has been described so frequently (it was last dealt with in the October AIR STORIES in the Sopwith Pup article) that it is now left to the reader to refer to back numbers, or else to buy a ready-made cowlings from a model shop.

The outlines of upper and lower planes are drawn on the piece of thin fretwood and are then cut out with a fretsaw. Cambering is done with a small plane, a file and some glasspaper. The concave undersurface is obtained by carefully rubbing with glasspaper in a transverse direction, i.e., along the span. The outlines of the ailerons on the upper planes can be well represented by scoring with a bradawl and ruler. At this stage, holes should be made in the planes for the interplane and centre-section struts.

The tail surfaces are made from fibre in much the same manner as the wings were made from wood. The tail-plane and elevator are made in one unit, the upper fin and rudder form another, while the tail-skid and lower fin make a third piece. Fig. 2 shows the parts of the tail unit ready for assembly.

Interplane struts, centre-section struts and undercarriage "vees" are made from brass wire. The centre-section struts are simple enough, being made from plain lengths of wire, but the

## A FAMOUS FRENCH WARBIRO

undercarriage "vees" and the interplane "vee" struts have to be bent to shape, as shown in Fig. 3.

The main parts of the model are now ready for assembly, the final details being built up and added during the process of erection. The wheels and airscrew are purchased from a model shop.

### Method of Assembly

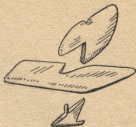
ON this model only the lower plane has any dihedral angle, which must be given to it by gently bending between finger and thumb, after first warming in the flame of a candle. Fit the plane into the cut-out in the bottom of the fuselage, align it correctly and fix it with glue. When the glue has set, the gap in the fuselage beneath the plane is filled by a piece of waste wood.

Next, fit the centre-section and interplane struts, then the upper plane—all without glue. Adjust the gap, stagger and alignment of the upper plane, and when these are satisfactory, dismantle the parts and re-assemble them with glue. Remember, too, that when making the centre-section struts the hoop-shaped struts which cross-brace the rear pair are glued in place after the fitting of the others.

Holes are now made in the fuselage beneath the lower plane for the rear legs of the undercarriage, and the two "vees" are fitted experimentally. After the "vees" have been correctly tracked, their length checked and properly aligned, they can be fixed with glue. The axle is threaded in the loops of the "vees," the wheels threaded on the axle, and its ends burred to retain the wheels.

The tail unit is next glued to the fuselage, particular care being taken here to see that it is properly lined up with the wings. The tail struts are glued in place

Fig. 2. — Component parts of the tail-unit, prior to assembly on the fuselage



after the other parts have set firmly. Now glue the engine cowling to the front of the fuselage, fit the airscrew on a pin, and the assembly of the model is complete.

If wires are to be fitted, the following method will be found the best. Cut each wire to the desired length, smooth all the kinks out of it, put a small spot of glue on the ends, and hold it in place with tweezers or pliers until the glue becomes tacky—a matter of only a few minutes with cellulose glues. The kingposts for the tail control cables are made from fine pins, the ends of the cables being glued to them.

### Painting and Finishing

MATERIALS for painting consist of 3d. pots of good quality enamel and one or two No. 5 sable paint brushes. The national insignia, the tricolour cockades, can be purchased as transfers.

In the field, the British Nieuports were painted dark green with cream undersurfaces. The British red, white and blue stripes were painted on the rudder and cockades were carried on the sides of the fuselage, on top of the upper plane and beneath both planes.

French aeroplanes on active service were usually camouflaged green and buff (somewhat like our own new "shadow shading") with cream undersurfaces. The rudder stripes were like our own, but the blue was lighter. The cockades were the reverse to our own (red on the outsides with a blue centre) and were borne on the wings only.

For all machines, the wooden struts were varnished, giving them a yellowish colour. The airscrew blades were painted grey, while engine cowlings were almost invariably silver-coloured.

(NEXT MONTH—The Fairey Seafox)

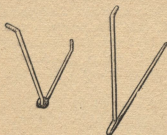
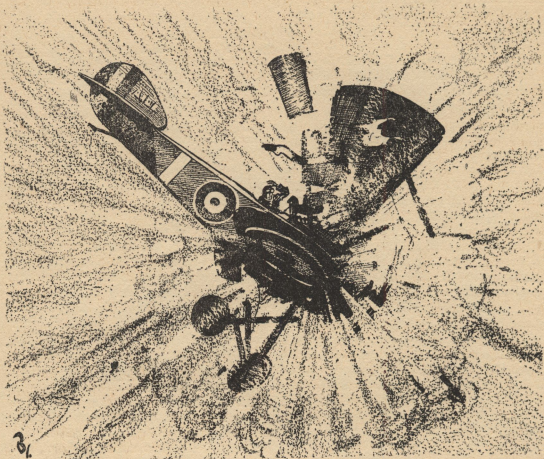


Fig. 3.—Brass wire bent to form (right) an interplane strut and (left) an undercarriage "vee"



*The whole of the front part of Norder's Pup disintegrated in flame . . .*

# FLAMING PUPS

*A Thrilling Story of War-time Adventure in an R.F.C. Scout Squadron on the Western Front*

## CHAPTER I

### Pups on Patrol

SECOND LIEUTENANT KEITH SHOLMFIRTH-GURNING (known as "Keep the home fires burning," or more briefly as "Home-fires") yawned, shivered slightly, glanced at the two-streamered Sopwith Pup flying on his starboard bow, adjusted his throttle half a millimetre, glanced over his shoulder at the other members of the formation and finally peered down at Belgium and the

North Sea, nineteen thousand feet below.

His eye swept up the coast, noting Middlekerk where the breakwaters looked like lines of infantry drilling on the beach, Ostend with the lake that glowed like a tiny ruby in the rising sun, Zeebrugge with its absurd little rifle-trigger stuck on one side—its famous Mole always conjured up this simile in his mind—then beyond, dim, visionary, a blur that was Holland.

Holland! How easy to fly there and land and be out of this mess that men



# One After Another, the Leaders of "A" Flight fell Victims to a Strange Hoodoo that Struck without Warning from a Clear Sky, Hurling Men and Machines to Blazing Destruction

By MILFORD HYDE

called war. Sometimes, when the horror of it all came to him with particularly personal appeal and he felt that he was going mad, he was tempted to fly east into that neutral haven and find peace in an internment camp. But always his code of honour had come to his rescue, and that land of dykes and windmills which lay ill-defined, like a slice of raw lean mutton in the red sunrise, stood for him as a kind of rainbow-foot, a place always to be desired but never to be attained.

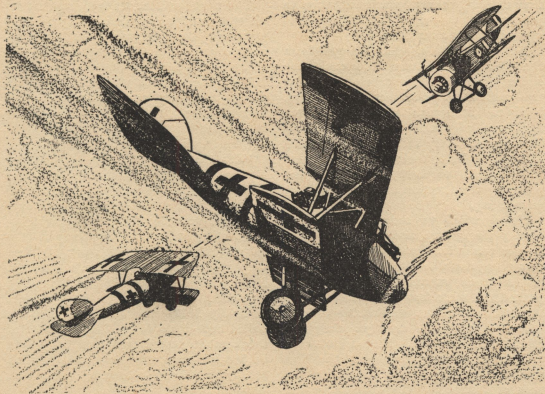
He wrenched his eyes away from it and, following his thoughts, turned them west across the sea to where England, sensed as a mere dim line on the horizon, lay unscathed by war's ruthless claws. He noted the smoke of two destroyers, Britain's watchdogs, and then his eyes strayed back to the earth below him,

flooded, shell-ripped, foul; earth in which men were wallowing, sweating, shivering, bleeding, cursing, perishing; and all without understanding why they must so live and so die.

Gurning's thoughts were brought back from earth to air again by the *pop-pop* of a Vickers. It was only Norder testing his gun, firing a round or two out to sea to prevent the mechanism freezing. A good chap was Norder, the commander of "C" Flight, though apt to be a trifle over-cautious.

He began to think of the other fellows in the Flight.

There was Woolmer, flying on Norder's starboard side, who was just his opposite in temperament; reckless, hot-headed, but a man to be relied on in a scrap. Then Phillips, the deputy-leader. He



... a moment after he had got into position on the tail of a D.3

had got his streamer by virtue of long service in the squadron, but he was inclined to be timid and rarely pressed home an attack. Fourthly, there was Grimshot, the fellow with the far-away eyes and the flair for politics. Grimshot had had one narrow escape in a crash since he joined the Pups, and his nerve was shaken. Not that it showed itself much in the daytime, but at night he would rise from his bed and go prowling round the sleeping-quarters—a sleep-walker.

Gurning smiled as he remembered how he had run into Grimshot the other night clad in nothing but flying-boots and a pair of goggles and muttering "Contact—Switch off!" No, Grimshot was not of much use. He ought to be sent home.

The last member of the Flight was Hall, a newcomer, untried as yet, but eager.

**G**URNING'S musings were cut short by the sudden realisation that his leader's machine was dipping its planes, first to port, then to starboard, then to port again, the sign that Norder had spotted enemy aircraft.

He looked east, shading his eyes from the dawn's brightness, but could see nothing. Presently, far below, he saw two beetle-like two-seaters, camouflaged, hard to distinguish from the scarred landscape, only their black crosses showing clearly. They seemed to be moving at right angles to their axes, the illusion being caused partly by their drift and partly by the direction in which the Pups were flying.

He signalled to show that he had spotted the quarry, and a moment later Norder raised his arm as a sign that he was going down to attack. Gurning felt his stomach momentarily lift as he pushed the stick forward and heard the hum of the wires rise to a shrieking whine.

He knew his job exactly: they had rehearsed it so often. His business was to S-turn on the tail of one of the Hun machines, sharing with Woolmer the task of distracting the observer, while Norder took up his position under the

'plane's belly and peppered it from below its blind spot.

The dive to within effective range lasted perhaps eight seconds, and in that time a dozen thoughts flashed through Gurning's head. He wondered vaguely what the German pilot was thinking, and what German exclamation he would use when the first rattle of machine-guns crackled in his ears; whether the observer was a good shot; what it would feel like if a bullet went through his own shoulder, or lung, or bowels; why the Boche took the trouble to camouflage the top planes of their 'buses and yet left the staring black crosses on the white ground, a mark so easy to spot.

He glanced sideways a moment before firing and caught a glimpse of Phillips, the deputy-leader, getting into position under the other enemy's machine, while Grimshot and Hall prepared to harass the observer from above. Then he turned again to his own quarry, his eye went to the Aldis and his thumb on the gun-trip sent the dancing tracers on their deadly mission. "C" Flight was in action.

The next few seconds were marked by all the usual accompaniments of aerial warfare: lines of smoke darting criss-cross through the ether, the din of firing Vickers, the roar of engines rising and falling, the crackle of bullets, 'planes darting and wheeling. All these Gurning heard and saw, the while his hands and feet moved in unconscious accord, directing his Pup as occasion demanded.

With the detached sense of one who watches a play, he noted the observer of the machine he was attacking throw up his arms and fall sprawling half over the cockpit side, his arms swinging grotesquely with the motion of the 'plane. He saw the first spurt of flame peep coyly from the L.V.G.'s fuselage. He saw the nose of the machine drop and keep on dropping until it was vertically below the tail, and then he pulled out of his dive. The madness of the combat passed from his brain and he became once more a normal English lad flying a single-seater fighter on the Western Front.

Woolmer was pulling out likewise, a

## FLAMING PUPS

bare hundred yards ahead. He, with his accustomed ferocity, had pressed his attack long after the flames had betokened the L.V.G.'s doom. They joined up and attached themselves to Norder in their old places. Phillips and his two assistants were still chasing their quarry. Grimshot and Hall were taking it in turns to dive from above, zooming up after each burst. But their shooting was ineffective, or else it was that the German pilot was a particularly brave one ; at any rate he seemed to be splitting about the sky in a healthy way while his observer's gun was causing considerable embarrassment to the English pilots.

Gurning looked about for Phillips and saw him trying, without much success, to get under the L.V.G.'s tailplane : it was not the kind of scrap that gave much cause for congratulation.

The arrival of the other three 'planes put a speedy end to the conflict. The German pilot decided that he had done all that honour demanded and, shoving down his nose, he beetled eastward like a comet, leaving a trail of smoke from his exhausts behind him.

It seemed pretty hopeless for the Pups to follow. The L.V.G. could out-dive the Sopwiths with ease, yet Gurning saw with amazement that Woolmer was attempting the seemingly impossible. With full engine on he was hurtling earthward after the Hun, and in a few seconds he had dropped to a speck several thousand feet below.

"Damn fool !" muttered Gurning, glancing at his altimeter needle. "He'll be lucky if he gets home after that. I'll bet he catches it hot from Norder for leaving the formation on his own."

Norder collected the other four Pups around himself and, amid a smother of "Archie", they sped westward, noses well down, making for the lines. The time of the patrol was up.

### CHAPTER II

#### Death from the Blue

FIFTEEN minutes later the Flight landed on its aerodrome, and then the

fur began to fly.

Norder had always possessed a reputation for invective, and now he thoroughly let himself go. Phillips got the brunt of it for failing to down his L.V.G., but his two assistants, Grimshot and Hall, came in for their share as well. Gurning felt that his flight-commander was being unfair to Hall, who was new to the job, and ventured to say so. Norder turned round on him.

"Inexperienced ?" he barked. "Of course he's inexperienced. That's what I'm complaining of. Hell's bells ! Pilots get plenty of opportunity in training squadrons nowadays to learn the elements of scrapping. If they don't take the trouble to remember what's taught them there they've got no right to foist themselves on a scout squadron."

Norder's wrath was interrupted by the appearance of Woolmer's Pup flying low, its engine missing badly. It staggered in over the ditch at the east side of the aerodrome and collapsed drunkenly on the grass. Woolmer climbed out and came over towards the tarmac. There was an ominous silence as the truant pilot drew near. Woolmer spoke first.

"Cheer oh, everybody !" he remarked airily. "Damn good scrap, what ?"

"Come here, Woolmer." Norder spoke very much as a senior prefect might address a lower third fag.

Woolmer cast a curious glance at him but came, peeling off his helmet and gloves.

"Do you know what you've done, you blasted little weevil ?" Norder snapped. "You've broken one of the strictest laws of aerial fighting. You deserted the patrol."

"That be damned for an old woman's yarn," Woolmer snapped back. "You know perfectly well that you ought not to have called off the fight while there was a chance of shooting up that Hun. That's our job—to shoot hell out of every ruddy Hun in the sky ; and you know it."

"I was leading the patrol, and it was for me to decide what was to be done. Our job is not merely to down Huns : we've got to conserve men and machines.



A dead pilot is of no damned use to his country. No one but a madman would have gone after that L.V.G. as you did."

Woolmer sniffed. "'He who fights and runs away. . . .' Is that the principle you go on? Well, if that's good leadership, I congratulate you. You certainly are Britain's best at that game."

For a moment it appeared that Norder would strike his subordinate, but by an effort he controlled himself.

"When you went off by yourself on that damn silly chase," he said, "did you realise that there were ten Albatri coming up from their aerodrome? By leaving us as you did you weakened the patrol, endangering all our lives. You've done considerable damage to your machine; and what good have you done by it? Absolutely none." And Norder turned away as though to end the conversation.

But Woolmer was not done.

"That depends on what you call absolutely none," he said. "Personally I should imagine that a two-seater enemy plane crashed and an Albatros shot down with its wings off could hardly be called no result."

A derisive yell from his fellow pilots greeted these claims. Norder bit his lip. Woolmer looked pained. At last the flight-commander spoke.

"Are you seriously claiming to have shot down that two-seater *and* an Albatros, or are you merely trying to be funny?" he asked.

"You'd better tell us what happened after you left us," said Gurning encouragingly.

"That's soon told," Woolmer replied. "I followed the two-seater down to three thousand where it flattened out. I dived underneath, fired a burst, and then the thing went down in a flat spin. I saw it crash quite plainly. Then I turned west. Jerry was hurling everything he could at me from the ground and I had to dodge like an eel. Finally a bunch of Albatri dropped on me and I had the deuce of a time. I got one, and then played the old soldier and spun down to a hundred feet. I hedge-hopped home."

There was a dead silence when Woolmer finished his account. Then Phillips gave a sigh of pure ecstasy.

"Marvellous! I suppose you punctured your tyres on the spikes of the Huns' picklehaubers as you crossed the trenches. That was why your under-carriage collapsed. Don't miss that bit out."

Woolmer scowled at him but said nothing. Norder stopped biting his lip.

"Well, come along to the squadron office," he said. "We'll ring up the front-line people and see if they can back up your story. If they or the sausage blokes can corroborate your claim we'll believe you."

And Norder spun round on his heel and led the way to the orderly-room.

**G**URNING tried to make Woolmer see reason that night in the section of Nisson hut which they shared.

"You know, old bean," he said. "It would have been a darned sight better if you'd told Norder you were sorry and all that, instead of raking up that cock-and-bull story about shooting down two Huns. I mean, damn it, if you'd let it pass at one you might have been believed—but two!"

Woolmer sighed patiently with the air of a martyr.

"I know there's no corroboration, but that's because it was hazy, and because I was so far over the lines, and because we were low down. But I did think *you* would believe me, Home-fires."

Gurning humoured him.

"Of course I'll believe you since you say it, but the others won't. They think you invented it all to cover up your mistake in leaving the formation."

Woolmer bridled.

"Mistake be blowed! Norder's an old grandmother. He's afraid to go all out in a scrap. It's time we had a new skipper. He does all his fighting with kid gloves on."

"He's a jolly good sort," Gurning defended.

"Oh, I know. Thinks of his pilots and all that. But, hell, son, you'll never finish this war by those means."

## FLAMING PUPS

Woolmer's eyes blazed as he spoke, and he went on. "What we've got to do is to go all out and hustle every ruddy Hun out of the sky."

This was Woolmer's creed, repeated in season and out. It had earned him the soubriquet of "The Butcher," and it became the custom of the mess to amuse themselves and their guests by drawing Woolmer out to enlarge on his favourite topic. On the subject of ending the War he grew almost fanatical.

"You blighters don't want the War to end," he would say. "You're content to sit here and draw flying pay and drink yourselves silly. You thank your paltry little stars if a shower of rain cancels a patrol. And when you do take the air you take damn good care to keep out of harm's way."

This was an aspersion on the squadron's courage, but they knew their Woolmer by now and consequently they only laughed at him. They could afford to; they had as good a reputation as any scout squadron on the Western Front.

"You will have your little joke, Butcher," Phillips would say. "But you know jolly well we shall be as glad as you when the War's over. But there's no sense in chucking one's life away. Personally I want to be on this planet when peace is declared. That ought to be a day worth seeing."

"I bet Woolmer doesn't see it," commented Norder. "He'll be one of the first to go west."

**B**UT there Norder were wrong. On the contrary, it was he himself who went west most unpleasantly a week later. It happened thus:—

"C" Flight were out on offensive patrol one afternoon, well over the lines. They had climbed to the Pup's ceiling—about twenty thousand feet—and consequently were free from "Archie." They were almost over Ostend when they saw a formation of D.3's below them and, since they had the height and the sunward position, everything was in their favour, and Norder gave the signal to dive. Down they swept, a thousand, two thousand feet, and then the Ostend

anti-aircraft batteries opened on them, and big acrid yellow and grey bursts dotted the sky around them. On they dived, until Gurning's ear-drums felt as though they would crack, and as they came within striking distance of the Albatros formation "Archie" died away.

Gurning was at the rear of the formation, and from this spot he had a good view of all that happened. He saw Norder manœuvre his 'bus on to the tail of a D.3 and commence to fire. He could not have fired more than a dozen rounds when the thing happened. There was a sudden burst of black smoke from Norder's cowling, and the whole of the front part of his Pup disintegrated in flame and fragments. An assortment of wreckage fell blazing earthward and a couple of top planes floated down behind the rest.

That was all. The whole thing happened in a few seconds, and long before the smoke of the explosion had cleared away Gurning was engaged in a dogfight that needed his whole attention and left no part of his mind free to think of other things. Vaguely, he saw his friends hurling their machines around the sky, and here and there an incident fixed itself like a photograph on his mind, as when he caught a glimpse of Woolmer's expression for a brief moment as his machine flashed by on the tail of a Hun. Woolmer was glancing round the cowling side, and his lips were parted in a diabolical grin of triumph as he saw his quarry emit the tell-tale flicker of fire that spelt its doom.

Five minutes later, four Pups reassembled under Phillips' leadership and took their way back to the lines. Norder was gone, blown out of existence by some mysterious agency, and Hall had been shot down, his inexperience having led to his undoing. On the other hand, at least three Albatros had gone down to their end in the swamps and, as Gurning philosophically reflected, that was one up on the British side of the scoring sheet.

One had to look at it that way. It might sound callous to the armchair warriors across the Channel, but the men

who were on the job dare not allow sentiment to creep in. They would all be raving lunatics in a week if they did not harden their hearts to the deaths of their comrades. A passing sigh, a binge in the mess, and then the vacant place was filled and the War went on. As long as they could keep on top of the other side, that was all they need worry about. Of course it was rotten to lose fellows just as one got used to them, but after all war was war, and it might be one's own turn to-morrow.

PHILLIPS led them homeward at the close of their two hours, and over their combat reports they debated about the cause of Norder's death. Grimshot was positive that the flight-commander's Pup had received a direct hit with "Archie." Phillips disagreed.

"'Archie' had chucked firing by then. Besides, Norder's Pup went off in a cloud of *black* smoke. Ostend 'Archie' has a yellowy-grey burst, as you know."

"That's true," said Gurning. "But if it wasn't 'Archie' that got him, what the dickens was it?"

"I believe," said Phillips seriously, "that it is some new devilment of the Huns. Norder was on the tail of a D.3 when his 'bus went off. It seemed to me that the Huns must have some sort of gun firing a small shell out of the tail of their machines. I'd often thought of the idea myself and wondered we didn't try it. Jolly useful for a single-seater when an enemy aircraft gets on its tail."

"It sounds possible," opined Gurning. "But we've had no reports of any such gun being fitted. What do you think about it, Woolmer?"

Woolmer looked up from the combat report he was writing.

"What do I think about it? I haven't thought. Norder's dead, and that's all that concerns us. In any case I wasn't watching when it happened. I was doing my job—attacking Huns."

"You weren't the only one doing that. I got one, and so did Gurning. For heaven's sake pull yourself together and don't be such an unsociable ass. Try to

be a bit more human." So Phillips, but Woolmer scowled as he replied:

"Human! You can't be human in a war of this kind. This war'll go on as long as there's enough fools left to fight. What we've got to do is to wipe out the fools that like fighting and then we shall get peace."

Grimshot suddenly lifted his head and spoke.

"You're wrong, Woolmer. The fools in this war are the ones who let men drive them to death. The War will only end when, either on this side or the other, men rise up against their leaders and shake off the shackles of rule. The only reason that millions of men are fighting to-day is because they dare not do anything else. If they stopped fighting they'd be shot as cowards by their own side."

"I fight because every man killed is a death nearer the end of the War," snapped Woolmer. "We're five deaths nearer the end of the War as a result of this morning's work. When do we go up again?"

"Look on the notice-board and find out," snapped Grimshot, and he and Phillips turned away and left the other two alone.

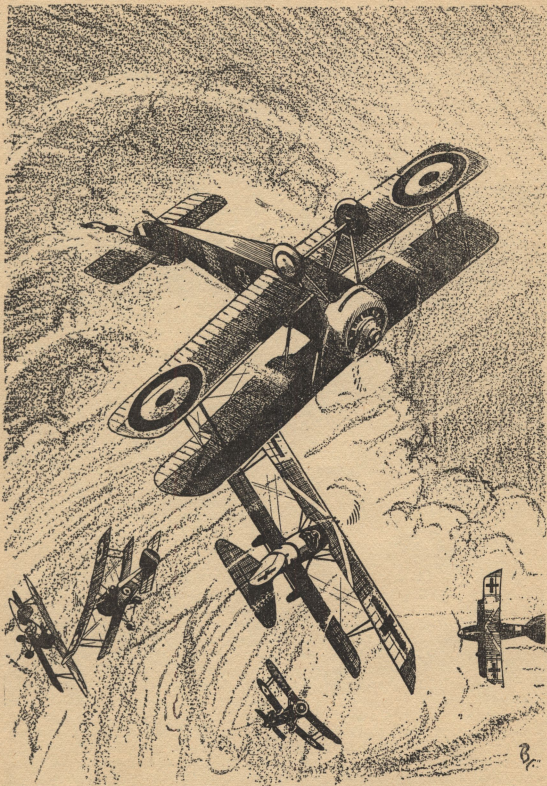
Gurning was perhaps the only man whom Woolmer really could call a friend, and as they walked across to their quarters the former tried to reason with his comrade.

"You talked just now as if one of our fellows getting shot down was as much a cause for congratulation as the death of a Hun."

"So it is," persisted Woolmer. "Every death, whether British or Boche, is a death nearer the end of the War. That's what some of these ruddy fools don't realise. Norder, for instance, was one of those blokes who always played for safety. Wouldn't attack unless everything was in his favour. Instead of that he ought to have gone bald-headed into every hell of a scrap that came his way. That's the only way. If I were a flight-commander I wouldn't care if I came home with two-thirds of my flight missing every day. I'd know I was doing my job then."



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As the Albatros turned to meet his attack, Gurning half-rolled and the Hun shot past below him

"Then thank God you aren't my flight-commander," said Gurning, devoutly.

"I suppose they'll give Phillips his third pip now," Woolmer continued. "Gosh! He hasn't the guts of a tadpole. One thing, he won't last long."

### CHAPTER III Hoodoo Flight

WOOLMER'S prophecy proved correct. Phillips got the command of "C" Flight and Gurning was made deputy-leader, but Phillips' period of authority lasted only a week before he followed Norder, and by the same mysterious means.

"C" Flight were attacking a lone two-seater which they encountered as they came round the corner of a bank of cumulus clouds. It was flying at the same height as themselves and therefore there was no opportunity for getting close by a dive. The two-seater turned and made off, nose down, but Phillips opened out to give chase, and began firing at fairly long range.

Whether the enemy observer replied or not was not clear, but at any rate all the patrol saw what happened to Phillips. There was a visible flash—for the dusk was falling—and the Pup seemed to stop dead in the air while a cloud of black smoke sprayed out from the cowl. The whole of the front of the machine twisted sideways, and the engine tore itself loose, dangled for a moment from some slender strip of metal, and fell away. Simultaneously the centre-section struts vanished and the top planes sprang apart and fluttered off one by one. What was left of the Pup went down like a sycamore seed, a mass of flames.

The rest of the Flight held a serious conference when they reached home, but came to no definite conclusion.

"It can't have been 'Archie,' at any rate," said Gurning, "because we weren't visible from the ground when it happened."

"Did anyone notice whether the

observer was firing? I couldn't remember," Grimshot asked.

"No one expected you would remember," said Woolmer rudely. "I bet you were flying in your sleep."

Grimshot flushed, and Gurning defended him.

"Chuck it, Woolmer. The chap can't help his sleep-walking. Poor devil, it must be pretty sickening." He turned to Grimshot. "Did you know you were out on the prowl last night? I caught you walking across the road from the aerodrome in your pyjamas and took you back to your bunk. . . . But about this business of the explosion, I guess it must be something the Hun did. It's not a pleasant thought that each time one gets on a Hun's tail one may stop a packet of that sort. Gives one a nasty feeling in the stomach."

Woolmer shrugged. "I wonder who our next flight-commander will be?" was all the comment he made.

"Well, it won't be me, I don't expect," said Gurning.

"I hope not, anyway," was Woolmer's unkind reply.

THE question of Phillips' successor was freely debated that night in the anteroom, the opinion holding sway that there would be little satisfaction to be gained from the honour of commanding "C" Flight.

"Now if it had been 'A' who needed a skipper, everyone would have been clamouring for the job," remarked the Recording Officer with a twinkle. "The last three flight-commanders of 'A' have all got squadrons. No one wants to be next on the list to be blown to glory, though."

Eventually a captain was imported from another squadron. His name matters not, for within four days he had gone the same way as Norder and Phillips. The only difference was that at the moment when his Pup disrupted into black smoke and ruin he was diving on a German kite-balloon instead of on an aeroplane.

This calamity gave tremendous impetus to the theory held by some of the Squa-

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dron that the deaths were due to direct hits by "Archie." The idea that a small gun had been mounted in the car of the balloon, a theory propounded by a few, received little support.

Only Gurning and Grimshot openly derided the "Archie" idea.

"We were there and we saw it happen each time, and it couldn't have been 'Archie,'" insisted Gurning.

But whatever theory people adopted concerning the cause of these three deaths, there was complete unanimity concerning the inadvisability of commanding "C" Flight.

"Wouldn't have the job for a million; there's a hoodoo on it," was how one pilot expressed it, and that seemed to be the general opinion.

The senior pilot in the Squadron next to the flight-commanders was one Brilling, the deputy-leader of "B," and he openly avowed that nothing on earth would induce him to leave "B" Flight at present. He was in the midst of making this declaration when an orderly arrived to inform him that he was wanted by the C.O. at the squadron office immediately. He returned in a quarter of an hour, white in the face, and stated that Major Kester had insisted on his taking over "C" Flight forthwith.

That night the newly-promoted Brilling got gloriously and excusably drunk, and next morning he led his first patrol, with Gurning flying the single tail-streamer that marked a deputy-leader, and Woolmer and the rest taking their usual positions.

They were flying at seventeen thousand feet when Gurning spotted a formation of enemy single-seaters eastward, making towards them. He stared at them with shaded eyes until he was quite sure they were not Spads, and being at length assured that they were really Albatros scouts he was about to give the "Hun sign" when he noticed Brilling's 'bus rocking with a fore-and-aft movement, the conventional signal by which a pilot notified his friends that his machine was out of order and that he must return to the aerodrome forthwith. Even as Gurning began to make the warning

sign, Brilling's machine was dropping away westward, going home.

Gurning opened out and slid his machine forward into the leader's place. His mind was troubled. Had Brilling seen the Huns and funk'd an encounter? That was the question which hammered itself round and round in his brain.

There was no means of answering it, however, and as the enemy was rapidly drawing nearer, Gurning began climbing at full throttle to get, if possible, the advantage of height.

Up and down the lines the two formations went, perhaps half a mile apart, each struggling to outclimb the other, each anxious to seize the initial advantage before joining battle.

At first the enemy machines gained, but as the height increased their rate of climb fell off, and the lighter Sopwiths began to mount steadily above their opponents. At nineteen thousand, the Germans were hanging on their props, and losing height at every turn, and the Pups, now five hundred feet above their foes, turned eastward to open the attack.

GURNING, nose down, picked out the Hun leader and made for him. There was no question of getting on the fellow's tail, for the Albatros was turning towards him to meet his attack. A few rounds from the Vickers, an answering burst from the Spandau, and then Gurning half-rolled as the Hun shot below him and attempted a climbing turn. Here the height handicapped the German. His machine flopped down a couple of hundred feet and almost went into a spin. Before he could recover, Gurning was round once more and in the coveted position behind and above the tail of his adversary.

Gurning's thumbs were on the control of his Vickers when he remembered the fate of Norder and Phillips. For a brief moment his inside turned to water and he felt sick. Then he saw the German's head in his Aldis and his thumbs went down.

So did the Hun—without its wings.

They came home in triumph, all five of them, put in their combat reports



claiming four Huns—Woolmer had got two, both well-confirmed this time, and one of the new men had broken his duck—and then they went in search of Brilling.

They found him in the anteroom drinking his sixth whisky, and he greeted them as men back from the grave.

"Damn glad to see you, Gurning, old bean. Expected you were gone west—blown to ruddy bits like Norder and Ph . . . Phillips an' . . . an' . . . whatsh-the-fellow's-name?"

Gurning looked at him with contempt.

"You took damn good care that you weren't blown to bits," he remarked.

"Ruddy little funk!" was Woolmer's contribution.

"Now, now, that isn't fair," Brilling protested. "Genuine case of engine trouble. Shtoppage in the petrol feed. Ashk my fitter."

"You'd better see your 'bus is all right for to-morrow then," was Woolmer's curt retort. "If you turn home with engine trouble again I'll follow you down and shoot the liver out of you." He turned abruptly and drew Gurning away out of the anteroom.

"Nice way to talk to one's flight-commander, I must say," he went on as soon as they were outside, "but 'strewth! the R.F.C. might as well turn itself into a conchies' union straight away as expect us to do our job with flight-commanders like that. Any way, Brilling won't last long. That's one consolation."

"How do you know he won't last long?" queried Grimshot, who had come up behind them and overheard the last remark.

"He's just the sort that might go on to the end without a scratch," Gurning added.

Woolmer shook his head. "I'll give him two more days. That's all."

Suddenly Grimshot began to laugh.

"Two more days! Ha, ha! That's damn funny. Two more days. Ha, ha!" and he turned and half ran in the direction of the hangars.

Woolmer shrugged his shoulders as they looked after him.

"Hell! But this war's responsible for

a damn sight more things than death," was all he said.

BRILLING, however, did not last anything like so long as the two days optimistically ascribed to him by Woolmer. Gurning was coming down from the sheds that evening when he met his new flight-commander, sobered now, going towards the aerodrome. Brilling stopped his deputy-leader.

"I say, Gurning, I don't know what you chaps must think of me. My engine was genuinely dud this morning, but I'll admit I had got an attack of nerves too. There's something queer about this exploding business: more in it than meets the eye, if you ask me."

"What do you mean?" asked Gurning sharply.

"I don't know what I do mean exactly, but I'm sure there's something fishy behind all these deaths."

"Rubbish! You've got the jumps, and I don't blame you. But how can there be anything fishy? I was leading the attack this morning after you went home, and I'm still alive."

"Yes, but you aren't the flight-commander yet. It's only flight-commanders that get it in the neck. I have a feeling that if I had not had engine trouble this morning the same thing would have happened to me as happened to the other three."

Gurning looked at his superior thoughtfully.

"Do you suspect anyone?" he asked.

Brilling nodded. "I have a pretty shrewd suspicion that a certain person would very much like promotion, and isn't stopping at murder to get it."

"You're crazy," Gurning snorted.

"There isn't a fellow in the Squadron who would do a thing like that. Besides, how could he do it?"

"That's what I'm going to find out. Now, I'm off to test my 'bus and see if she's O.K. for to-morrow. I want to have a round or two at the target as well."

He nodded to Gurning and strode on.

Gurning stood deep in thought for a few moments, then, with a shrug of his

broad shoulders, sauntered back to his quarters to change into slacks for mess. He was just buttoning on a clean collar when he heard the staccato rattle of Brilling's Vickers. Woolmer, who was stretched on his bed reading a novel, looked up.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Only Brilling testing his guns," replied Gurning indifferently.

Woolmer sniffed. "He . . ." he began, but the rest of his comment was lost, drowned by a shattering detonation followed by the scream and hiss of flying fragments and the dull thud of falling wreckage. They dashed out in time to see a few pieces of fabric floating earthward.

Brilling had gone the way of his three predecessors.

### CHAPTER IV

#### The Finding of the Court

A COURT of enquiry was held into Brilling's death. Major Cracknell, the officer commanding a neighbouring R.E.8 squadron, was president of the court, and two subalterns from his mess completed the cast.

They sat for a whole day, inspected the wreckage, or as much of it as was to be found, examined the rigger and fitter, the flight-sergeant, two or three witnesses of the explosion, and finally, being at their wits' end to account for the mystery, told the court orderly to summon some member of "C" Flight. The orderly returned with Gurning, who entered the room, saluted, and waited with polite interest for the interrogation to begin.

Major Cracknell twiddled his pen, laid it down, and cleared his throat. Then, as a bright thought struck him, he picked up the pen once more.

"Your name?" he asked sharply.

Gurning supplied the desired information, which the Major wrote down. That done, he looked at Gurning for a full twenty seconds without speaking. At last he made an effort.

"Look here, Mr. Gurning," he began, "We're up against a difficulty in this enquiry. We've had in all the usual

witnesses and we're no nearer a solution of this business. Now you were a member of Captain Brilling's flight, and therefore you may be able to tell us something which will throw light on this mystery."

"I don't think there's anything I can say . . ." began Gurning, but the president cut him short.

"I may as well tell you that we've had statements made in this room—ridiculous statements of which we have taken no record—hinting that some sort of ill-luck attended the post of commander of 'C' Flight. Now, of course, you and I know that that's all my eye. But it occurred to us that perhaps as a member of this unlucky . . . er . . . as a member of 'C' Flight, you could give us some idea as to the evidence on which this evil reputation was founded."

He leaned back and fingered one end of his moustache with an air of intelligent anticipation.

"Oh, that!" said Gurning, with obvious relief. "I can tell you how that tale arose. It's because the last four skippers of 'C' Flight have all gone west in the same way."

"Do you mean that all their machines blew up?"

"Yes, sir. Four of them in less than a fortnight."

"Pon my word. Extraordinary! Quite a coincidence, what!" And the major turned and regarded his colleagues with a look of pride at his own acumen in eliciting this information.

"Sounds a bit fishy," one of the subalterns ventured to remark.

"Fishy? Gad, yes. Deuced fishy."

Gurning ventured to relate his conversation with Brilling shortly before the latter's death. "His idea was that someone was seeking a short cut to promotion by getting rid of his seniors," he explained.

"Ah! H'm. A very plausible theory. Er, by the way, who succeeds Captain Brilling as flight-commander?"

Gurning paused. "It hasn't been announced yet, sir," he said at length.

"But you have some idea. Who is next on the list for promotion?"

Gurning looked uncomfortable.

"I believe I am, sir," he answered, trying to look unconcerned.

"Ah!" There was a wealth of meaning in that "Ah!", as though it signified the opening of floodgates of perception within the mind of the president of the court.

"Is there anything else you wish to know, sir?" Gurning enquired politely.

"Er, what's that? Oh, no. That'll be all from you, Mr. Gurning. You've enlightened us pretty considerably, I think. I begin to see a motive for Captain Brilling's death. It's obvious to me that there has been foul play going on in your squadron for some time. Yes, gentlemen," he continued turning to his assistants, "I am sure you will agree with me that the whole thing is most suspicious."

His subordinates nodded dutifully.

"The only thing we've now got to decide is how the explosions were caused." The president frowned and pursed his lips.

Gurning ventured to interrupt his reverie.

"Will you require me any longer, sir?" he asked.

"Eh? No. Oh, wait. What sort of engines have you in your machines?"

"Eighty horse-power Le Rhône, sir."

"Ah, yes. Rotaries, of course. Damned useless things. Always going wrong."

Gurning bridled. "Our Le Rhône's are most reliable. They very rarely let us down, sir."

"Bah! Don't argue, boy. I know rotaries. Flew a thing that had a fifty-horse Gnome in it once. Death traps! Used to catch fire if an inlet valve went. By Jove! That's it. Don't you see? Captain Brilling was diving, wasn't he, when his 'bus exploded?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were the others diving, too, when their machines went off?"

Gurning thought a moment.

"Two of them were," he said at last.

Major Cracknell smote the table triumphantly with his fist. "There you are! We've solved the mystery. It's the story of the old Gnomes over again. If you dived 'em an inlet valve went and they

caught fire." He turned to his colleagues. "You young fellows probably don't know that in a rotary engine there is an inflammable mixture in the crankcase. Damned unsafe. Give me our Raf engines any day."

Gurning diffidently coughed.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I think you're mistaken. Rotaries have improved since the days of the Gnome, sir. They're just as reliable as your tin-can Rafs."

Major Cracknell appeared for the moment to be on the verge of apoplexy, but controlled himself with an effort.

"That will do, young man. Our finding is clear. You may go, and I shall report your insolence to your commanding officer. Trying to tell me I don't know the elements of a rotary engine, eh? Confound you, you young ignoramus, I was flying rotaries when you were in your cradle." And with a snort of indignation he waved Gurning out of his august presence.

In due course, the finding of the court was sent in to the Wing. It stated that in the opinion of the said court the cause of the accident was solely due to the use of unsafe types of engines, and it recommended that all Pups should in future be fitted with stationary engines, preferably those made in the Royal Aircraft Factory.

## CHAPTER V

### The Connecting Link

GURNING, walking back to his quarters after leaving the court of enquiry, pondered upon sundry things. It had not occurred to him to try to discover a connecting link between the four deaths. Now he endeavoured to do so. Major Cracknell had tried to see a connection in the diving of the machines, but that did not hold in the case of Phillips. Phillips had been flying on an even keel when death met him.

Yet surely there must be a common factor in these four deaths. He racked his brain to try to think what it was. He was still trying to remember when he fell asleep that night.

He was at breakfast next morning



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when the C.O. sent for him. Some humorist began to whistle the Dead March as he walked to the mess door. He entered the orderly room, and Major Kester smiled at him and motioned him to a chair.

"Sit down, Gurning. You can guess why I've sent for you?"

"I expect it's to tick me off for cheeking Major Cracknell yesterday, sir. He said he was going to report me." Gurning's eyes twinkled at the recollection.

The C.O. laughed.

"Oh, that! The old fool. I remember him well in the early days at Brooklands. He once crashed an Antoinette, and has had a bee in his bonnet about the danger of rotaries ever since: thinks they're all made exactly like fifty-Gnômes. The Colonel will howl when he sees the finding of the court. But seriously, you know why I've sent for you. It's your turn for promotion. You're senior flying officer and you've been with us six months. Now I know all about this superstitious nonsense that's floating round. That's just silly mess gossip. It's some dirty work that's at the back of these deaths; I'm convinced of that."

"That's what Brilling thought, sir."

"The thing is this," went on the major. "I don't want you to feel that you are being ordered to certain death without any option, so I'm going to give you your choice. You may either stay with the Squadron as flight-commander of 'C,' or else I'll recommend you for transfer to Home Establishment as an instructor. In that case, of course, Woolmer would take on 'C' Flight."

Gurning flushed.

"Thank you, sir. It's good of you to give me the choice, but I'd rather stay with the old Squadron if you don't mind."

"I knew you'd say that, Gurning, and I'm jolly glad. Now about this other business. What's your candid opinion?" And the C.O. put his finger-tips together and eyed Gurning judicially.

"Well, sir, I'd rather not say just yet. I have a hunch. It came to me in the night, and I'd like to try it out first.

Give me twenty-four hours and I think I can solve the mystery."

"I'll do that with pleasure. But take care of yourself. Now you'd better be off. Your flight goes up in less than an hour," and the C.O. nodded a dismissal.

GURNING left the office and walked across the aerodrome. Grimshot was hanging about as if waiting to see him, and greeted him with a grin.

"Well? Have we got to congratulate you?" he asked.

"I don't know so much about congratulations, but the C.O.'s given me the Flight if that's what you mean."

"Ah! So you are no longer one of us, the downtrodden underlings, the sheep who are driven to the slaughter. You'll no longer sympathise with the *hoi polloi*: you'll be one of the oppressors, one of the tyrants who keep this war going by forcing their comrades to fight. I didn't think that you would be a traitor, Gurning."

"Traitor? What the deuce are you talking about?" demanded Gurning irritably.

"Everyone who accepts promotion is a traitor to peace," said Grimshot solemnly. "Haven't I told you before this war will end only when the oppressed rise up and destroy the leaders?"

Gurning sniffed scornfully. "You be ready to rise up in half an hour and destroy Huns, and talk less rubbish," he counselled and, shaking Grimshot off, he went over to the flight office and sought the sergeant.

"What happened to Mr. . . . er . . . Captain Brilling's machine?" he asked.

"It's still out where it fell, sir," the sergeant replied. "We had orders not to touch it till after the court of enquiry. I was going to get it in as soon as the patrol had left."

Gurning thanked the sergeant for the information and walked across to the wreckage. Wreckage it was indeed, for the whole engine was twisted and shattered by the impact with the ground as well as by the mysterious explosion. He poked and prodded among the remains of the machine until he found

the part he sought, then made a minute scrutiny of the *débris*. Presently, with a grunt of satisfaction, he stood up, holding in his hand a short length of wire. Attached to one end of it was a small piece of aluminium: to the other end was fixed a split-pin.

Frowning thoughtfully, he thrust his find into his pocket and returned to the tarmac. He gave an order in a low tone to the flight-sergeant, and in another few minutes was leading his flight into the air.

**G**URNING argued that whatever danger there was would not come to him that day. No one had known of his appointment until less than an hour before the patrol, and most of his fellow pilots had only learned of it as they donned their flying-kit. The real danger would come later; perhaps to-morrow, and by then he hoped to have solved the mystery.

Gurning's expectation proved correct, and "C" Flight returned at the expiration of their two hours, unscathed, and without having done more than chase down a solitary two-seater.

Woolmer, as usual, grouched about the business, complaining that Gurning had drawn the patrol off when there was still a chance of a scrap, but Gurning shook him off and went in search of the flight-sergeant. The latter greeted him eagerly.

"Yes, sir. You was right, sir. I did find something that I didn't expect. We put the whole wreckage through a sieve pretty nearly, but we found something in the end." And the sergeant laid a bow-shaped piece of metal about four inches long in Gurning's hand.

"I don't know what it may be, sir, but it ain't any part of a Pup: that I'll swear to."

"Thanks, Sergeant. That's splendid. I'm pretty sure I know what it is. It confirms my suspicions entirely."

Gurning took his two novelties along to the C.O.'s office, and remained closeted with the major for some time. He emerged at length whistling cheerily. The burden of responsibility had been transferred to shoulders well able to

bear it, but he had still a part to play in unravelling the mystery.

He played that part along with Major Kester and the flight-sergeant that same night in the deserted hangar which housed "C" Flight's machines. It was there that the three of them hid themselves at dark, armed with torches and two revolvers, and it was there that in the early hours of the morning they saw a figure enter the hangar and climb into the cockpit of Gurning's Pup. When he was well occupied with his task, they switched on their torches and enfolded the figure in the cockpit within the three beams.

It was Grimshot, the somnambulist, wide enough awake now.

"Put up your hands—quickly!" commanded the major sharply.

The sham sleep-walker threw up his arms, but one hand was clutching a black object resembling an elongated cricket ball, and before they had time to guess at his intentions he hurled it at them with a maniacal yell and simultaneously threw himself over the far side of the cockpit.

Gurning instinctively ducked as he saw the bomb coming, and it was the flight-sergeant, unencumbered by a revolver, who saved their lives. He caught the thing in his left hand—they found later that he had played cricket for a famous county—and with one continuous movement of his arm flung it through the open door of the hangar. It exploded as it struck the ground, and the full force of the detonation caught Grimshot as he was escaping by the same exit.

He was dead when they reached him.

**"B**UT how the deuce did you first tumble to it?" asked Woolmer next morning.

"I didn't tumble to it exactly," explained Gurning, "but it was that old R.E.8 major who gave me the idea of connecting the four deaths. He wanted to show that they had all occurred while the machines were diving. That wasn't so, but it made me ask what *was* the connecting link. It came to me in the

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middle of the night that all the deaths had occurred *when the gun was firing*. I argued that it was probable, therefore, that the gun had something to do with it. I examined the wreckage of Brilling's 'bus and found the Vickers. The belt was still attached, and one of the aluminium links had a piece of wire fastened to it. The other end of that wire was twisted in the eye of a split-pin."

"A split-pin? What the . . . ?"

"That doesn't tell you anything, eh? Well, you see, I was in the infantry once—battalion bombing officer—and I guessed what it was. It was the pin of a Mills bomb. I was certain when the flight-sergeant found the bomb-lever in the wreckage."

"The bomb-lever?" queried Woolmer.

"Yes. When you throw a Mills in the ordinary way you hold down the lever with the fingers of your right hand, pull out the pin with your left, and then chuck the thing. The lever falls off as it leaves your hand. That releases the striker and the bomb explodes five seconds afterwards."

"I see. And you think Grimshot fixed Mills bombs in our 'buses somehow?"

"Yes, don't you see? He wedged the bomb somewhere—probably between the cowling and the tank—and attached a wire from the split-pin that holds the lever to one of the links of the machine-gun belt, leaving sufficient slack wire to allow a few rounds to be fired before the wire was taut. When the poor chap

in the 'bus began to fire, the belt passed through the breech of the gun, gradually drawing the pin out of the bomb. As soon as the pin was out, the lever jerked off. Five seconds later the works went up."

"Phew! What a devilish plan. But wouldn't it have been simpler to fix the wire on to one of the controls—the joystick, for instance?"

Gurning shook his head. "The thing would have gone off too soon: probably in the shed or on the tarmac. The fellow wanted to make it pretty certain that the explosion would happen behind the Hun lines so that there would be no possibility of examining the machine. In that he showed the cunning of the madman."

"You think he was mad, then?" Woolmer asked.

"Not a doubt of it," said Gurning emphatically. "The C.O.'s been through his papers. They're full of revolutionary rubbish; you know, the stuff he used to spout about abolishing leaders to end the War. We used to laugh at it, but to him it was all dead serious. Then his scheme of pretending to be a sleep-walker, so that if he was caught coming away from the hangars in the night he would have a ready-made excuse: that shows a warped mind. Yes, there's no doubt he was off his rocker. His crash early on, I expect, did it."

Woolmer got up and stretched himself.

"Poor devil. Another victim of this blasted War. Let's go up and shoot down a couple of Huns and bring the rotten show a bit nearer its end."

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WITH the defence of the British Empire once again a matter of urgent and vital importance, it is more than fortunate that there should appear this interesting and well-informed book, setting out, for the first time, some of the problems of strategy and tactics in aerial warfare in a manner easily understood by the general reader.

The author is a distinguished officer of the Royal Air Force whose long association with the air arm, dating back to the early days of the Great War, has neither impaired his breadth of outlook nor lessened his regard for the perspective of history. In a series of essays—several of them R.A.F. Prize Essays—he sets out to assess the functions and strength of our air defences, and to show what they have been, are now, and should be in the future.

In his first essay, on the Independent Air Force, he is outspoken in criticism of the air policy pursued during the Great War and draws, for the future, conclusions to which effect is even now being given in Spain and in Japan. No less timely are his essays on "The Mediterranean To-day," showing how modern air power has affected our lines of communication in that sea, and on "Policing By Air," a convincing argument for the air control of undeveloped countries. Rather less important is the chapter on "Air Navigation," but more than compensated for by successive chapters dealing with air policy and strategy, morale and leadership, and the trend of design in military aircraft.

"Winged Warfare," in brief, is an essential course in the education of any student of public affairs.

## SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

*"Gran Chaco Adventure": By T. Weweg-Smith: Hutchinson's: 12s. 6d.*

SOME months ago there appeared in *AIR STORIES*, under the title of "I Flew for Bolivia," a remarkable account of an Englishman's adventures as a member of the Bolivian Air Force during the War between Bolivia and Paraguay. In "Gran Chaco Adventure" that Englishman, Mr. T. Weweg-Smith, now tells the full story of his experiences, and amply fulfils the exciting promise of his earlier, brief account.

The Gran Chaco War was not the author's first taste of adventure. In 1928, at the age of twenty, while still a member of No. 601 Squadron of the Auxiliary Air Force, he suddenly decided to join the French Foreign Legion, was lucky indeed in "wangling" his discharge after some nine months of hard living and unromantic training at Sidi-ben-Abbes, an outpost of the Legion in North Africa.

Back in England, and restored to the fold of 601 Squadron through the kindness of its C.O., the late Lord Edward Grosvenor, himself an ex-Legionaire, Weweg-Smith, for a time, com-

bined spare-time flying training with the management of a West End bootshop. Then a romance went wrong and the outbreak of the Chaco War provided an opportunity for the traditional gesture of strong men with broken hearts.

The author frankly admits that he "knew little and cared less" about the rights and wrongs of the desperate struggle between the two warring countries of Bolivia and Paraguay. "I wanted to get a job as a bomber," he says. "... I looked through some pages of 'Whitaker's Almanack' and came to the conclusion, rightly or wrongly, that Bolivia might be wealthier than Paraguay. I even felt in my pockets for a coin, thinking to leave the final decision to be decided by its spin."

In the circumstances, the subsequent tribute of a Bolivian officer to the author's "noble defence of a just cause in the cruel campaign of the Green Hell" is, presumably, quoted as evidence of a Bolivian sense of humour—or of the author's.

At all events it was to Bolivia that Weweg-Smith went in search of adventure, and certainly he found it in plenty. Given a lieutenant's commission in the Bolivian Air Force with pay at the rate of 750 pesos a month, he went straight to the front and for nearly a year flew and fought above the jungle swamps of the Gran Chaco with Bolivia's miscellaneous collection of thirty aircraft, which included a Vickers Vespa of 1929 vintage, a converted Junkers air-liner and various American fighters and two-seaters. The author was chiefly responsible for the formation of Bolivia's dreaded "Pointed Wing" squadron of bombers which played almost a decisive part in the air war. He was also one of the conspirators in the truly fantastic kidnapping of the President of Bolivia.

Well written in a high-spirited style, and with astonishing candour, this vivid story of the exploits of a modern soldier of fortune and one-time Air Caballero of Bolivia, is infinitely more exciting than most adventures of fiction.

## FROM BIRDS TO BIPLANES

*"The Airman and the Air": By A. B. Fielding: Pitmans: 5s.*

A NOVEL combination of natural history and flying lore, of exciting adventure and useful information on aeronautics, this book tells the story of the conquest of the air from the prehistoric days of giant winged reptiles down to the present era of man-made aircraft.

The author has made a special study of the flight of insects and birds and the results of his observations make most interesting reading, contrasted as they are with the stirring story of man's discovery of the secrets of the birds and his efforts to equal and surpass these natural denizens of the air in their powers of flight.

A wide range of subjects is covered, and there are separate chapters on the Design of Aeroplanes and Engines, on Airships, Kites and Parachutes, as well as Meteorological, Air Historical, and Natural History sections. Altogether an unusual, informative and, in many ways, fascinating book.

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# CONTACT

BY THE EDITOR



Editorial Offices: Tower House, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2

IT is not often that we print a correspondent's request for information on a subject connected with aerial warfare without eliciting an authoritative answer from one or more of our well-informed readers. Their helpfulness in this direction has already been the means of unravelling several minor "mysteries" and, occasionally, of adding important new facts to the still far from complete history of the Great War in the Air.

The past month has been particularly productive of useful information, and the following three letters, each dealing with a different controversy, have been selected for publication because of their importance and general interest.

The first concerns the often debated question of how many Richthofens there were in the German Air Service during the Great War. The records of the famous Baron Manfred and his younger brother Lothar are, of course, well-known, but the existence and War record of yet a third flying member of that famous family of air fighters—as evidenced in the following letter from Mr. L. H. Rogers of Nottingham—may be news to many British readers.

"The existence of three Richthofen air fighters is fully confirmed," writes our correspondent, "in the official history of the Richthofen Jagdschwader written by Oberleutnant Karl Bodenschatz and published in Germany under the title of *Jagd in Flanders Himmel*. The name of the third is Leutnant Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen (not 'Wilhelm' as your reader, Mr. D. S. McGowan thought). He was a cousin of the Red Baron and a former

gunner officer who joined Jagdstaffel 11 in April, 1918. His first taste of air combat was in the dogfight in which Manfred von Richthofen was killed, though his first air victory was not gained until June 4th, by which time the Richthofen 'circuit' was flying on the French Front. Wolfram was never an 'ace' according to the German standard, but scored a total of 8 victories. His victims were 2 Spads, 2 Camels, 2 S.E.5a's, and 2 D.H.9's, and he scored his last victory on November 5th while acting as second-in-command to Oberleutnant von Wedel, the leader of Jasta 11."

## How Little was Killed

THE second letter is from Mr. John Coltman, of Loughborough, Leicestershire, and is a reply to a recent request from Mr. A. H. Pritchard for details of the manner in which Captain R. A. Little met his death.

"I think I can add a little to your record of Captain R. A. Little," writes our correspondent, "for in a recent issue of an English aeronautical journal there appeared a photo of Captain Little, together with extracts from a letter written by Mr. A. Dearden, the husband of Little's niece. Mr. Dearden states that Captain Little 'was killed on Sunday night, May 26th, 1918, while intercepting Gothas which had raided London. I understand that he got on the tail of one machine which put a searchlight on him, and temporarily blinded him. He was then shot through the thigh and crashed. . . .'"

This largely confirms the version supported by Mr. Pritchard in his recent article on Captain R. A. Little, and also accords with the official report of his death, which merely states that he was "killed in a night combat." Captain R. A. Little was, of course, the famous Australian who scored 47 victories and who, though only twenty-two years old

## AIR STORIES

when he died, stands ninth on the list of British air "aces."

Another letter, from Mr. P. R. Langham of Birmingham, gives authoritative performance figures for the Sopwith Pup, about whose true abilities something of a mystery has grown up owing to the many contradictory reports of its speed that have become current.

Our correspondent now assures us that, with an 80 h.p. Le Rhône engine the Pup did 110 m.p.h. at ground level, 104½ m.p.h. at 10,000 feet and 94 m.p.h. at 15,000 feet. Its landing speed was 30 m.p.h., and it could climb to 10,000 feet in 15.4 minutes and to 15,000 feet in 30.1 minutes.

With the more powerful 100 h.p. Monosoupape Gnôme engine, the Pup's top speed was 112 m.p.h. at ground level and 100 m.p.h. at 15,000 feet. Landing speed was 30 m.p.h. and 15,000 feet could be reached in 23.4 minutes.

The same correspondent was also the first to draw our attention to the recent B.B.C. broadcast, as a radio play, of that brilliant story by Captain J. E. Gurdon, "The Peaslake Crash," which was published in this magazine last year. Judging by the volume of letters we have since received few readers of AIR STORIES in the British Isles can have missed hearing the broadcast, and many voted it easily one of the best radio plays of the year—a verdict which we fully endorse. "And now," as Mr. Langham remarks, "as we have had Gurdon on the radio, why not Tremellen on the screen?"

Why not, indeed?

### Relics of the War Days

SOME time ago we printed a letter from a reader whose ambition it was to become the owner of a Great War type of aeroplane—and rather damped his ardour by informing him that, in this country, Great War veterans had become so scarce as to be museum pieces and were correspondingly expensive.

Now comes an interesting sequel in the following letter from a reader in Holland, Mr. H. J. v. Overvest, of Soesterberg, who writes:

"Here, in Holland, Great War 'planes are far less rare and the Dutch Air Force, for example,

is still using the Fokker D.7 single-seater fighter and the Fokker C.I reconnaissance 2-seater for training purposes. Despite their age, both types are actually excellent training machines for they demand a higher standard of piloting skill, particularly in the matter of landing, than do the modern easily-mastered training 'planes.

"The Fokker C.I with a 200 h.p. B.M.W. water-cooled engine is no longer used in Holland owing to the absence of spare parts, and I know of one, last flown in 1936 and now unlicensed, but still in good flying condition, which could be bought for £50."

We had always understood that the Dutch Air Force had retained their war-time Fokkers principally because they were pleasant to fly, and so much easier to land than most modern advanced training types. And surely no air force would deliberately remain twenty years behind the times just to make learning to fly more difficult for its pupils!

### An R.N.A.S. Reunion

AN invitation to all former members of the Royal Naval Air Service is contained in the following letter to which we gladly extend the hospitality of "Contact's" columns. It is from Mr. C. Swingland, of 63 Dumbreck Road, Eltham, S.E. 9, who writes:

"As an N.C.O. at Dunkirk during the War, it was my privilege to meet many of the great airmen of those days. I met Nungesser, the Frenchman, Little, Brown (who brought down Richthofen) and many others, and am now glad of the opportunity of paying homage to their dash and high courage by acting as Secretary to the Royal Naval Air Service Old Comrades' Association, an organisation which I assisted in founding to help ex-airmen who, from age or infirmity, find themselves unable to continue actively to pursue their careers.

"We are holding a Reunion of the Amalgamated Units at the Stadium Club, 85 High Holborn, W.C., on Saturday, November 13th, at 6.30 p.m. Air Vice-Marshal Sir C. L. Lambe (late C.O., Dunkirk) is presiding, and if you would kindly give the event a brief notice in 'Contact' I believe it would meet the eye of many who might desire to meet some of their old comrades and assist in helping forward the objects of the Association."

### Coming—The Coffin Crew!

IN response to repeated requests, next month's issue will contain another long complete story of the Coffin Crew. Specially written for AIR STORIES by Arch. Whitehouse, a former member of 22 Squadron, R.F.C., "Traitor's Tune" tells of an adventure as enthralling as any that has yet befallen that crazy band of night bombers—the "Coffin Crew" of the Independent Air Force.

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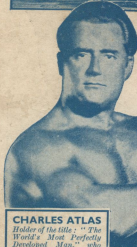
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