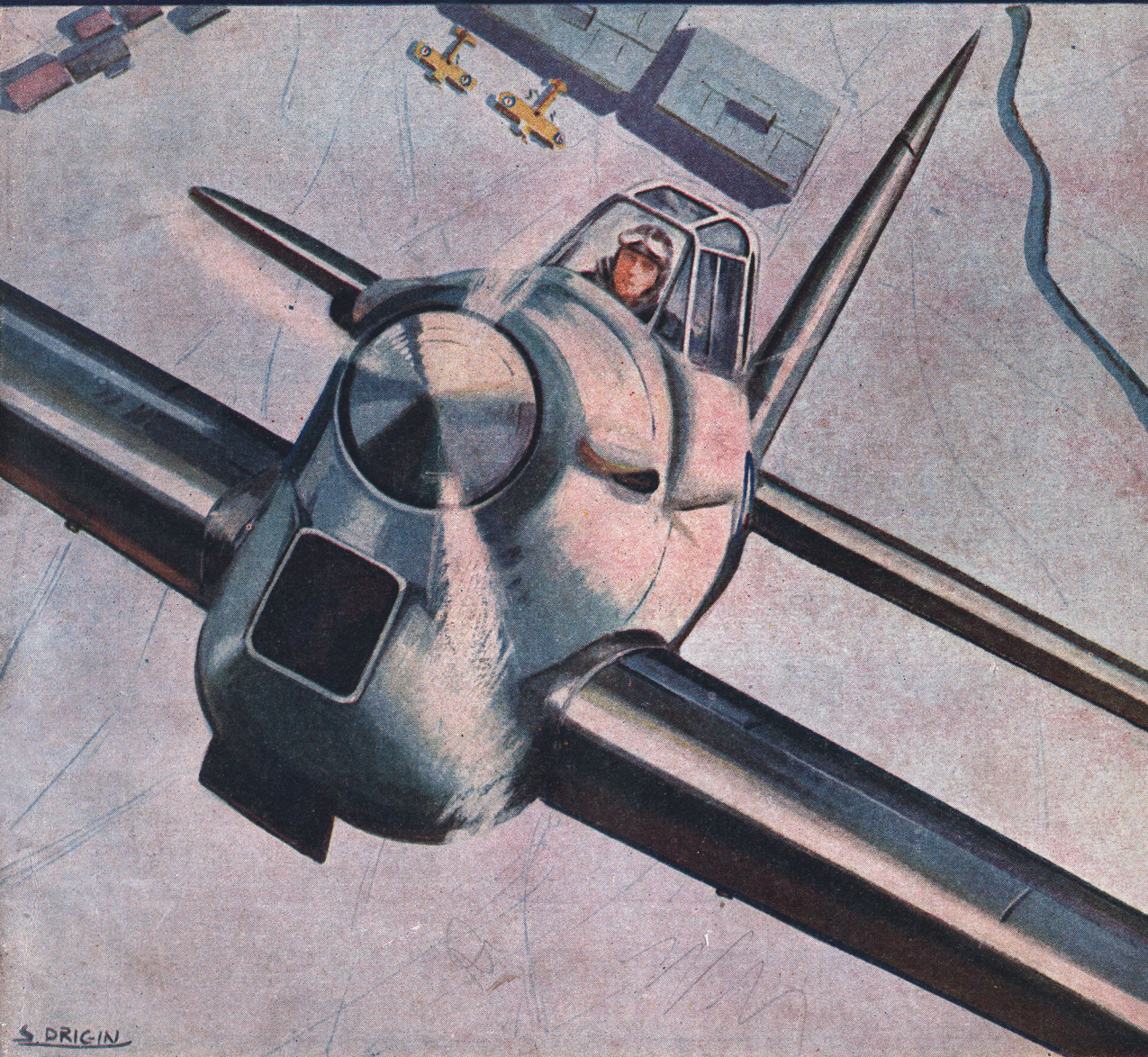


Great Long "Coffin Crew" Adventure: TRAITOR'S TUNE

AIR STORIES

7^D



SECRET OF KALUNDA

JANUARY

THRILLING NAVAL FLYING ADVENTURE BY CAPT. J.E. DOYLE, D.F.C.

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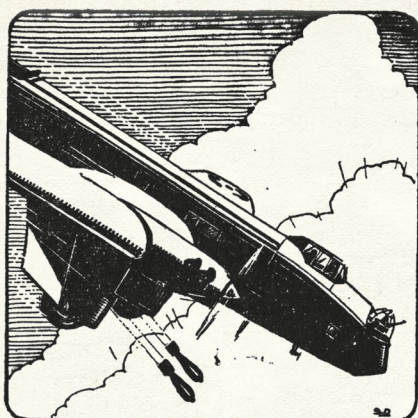
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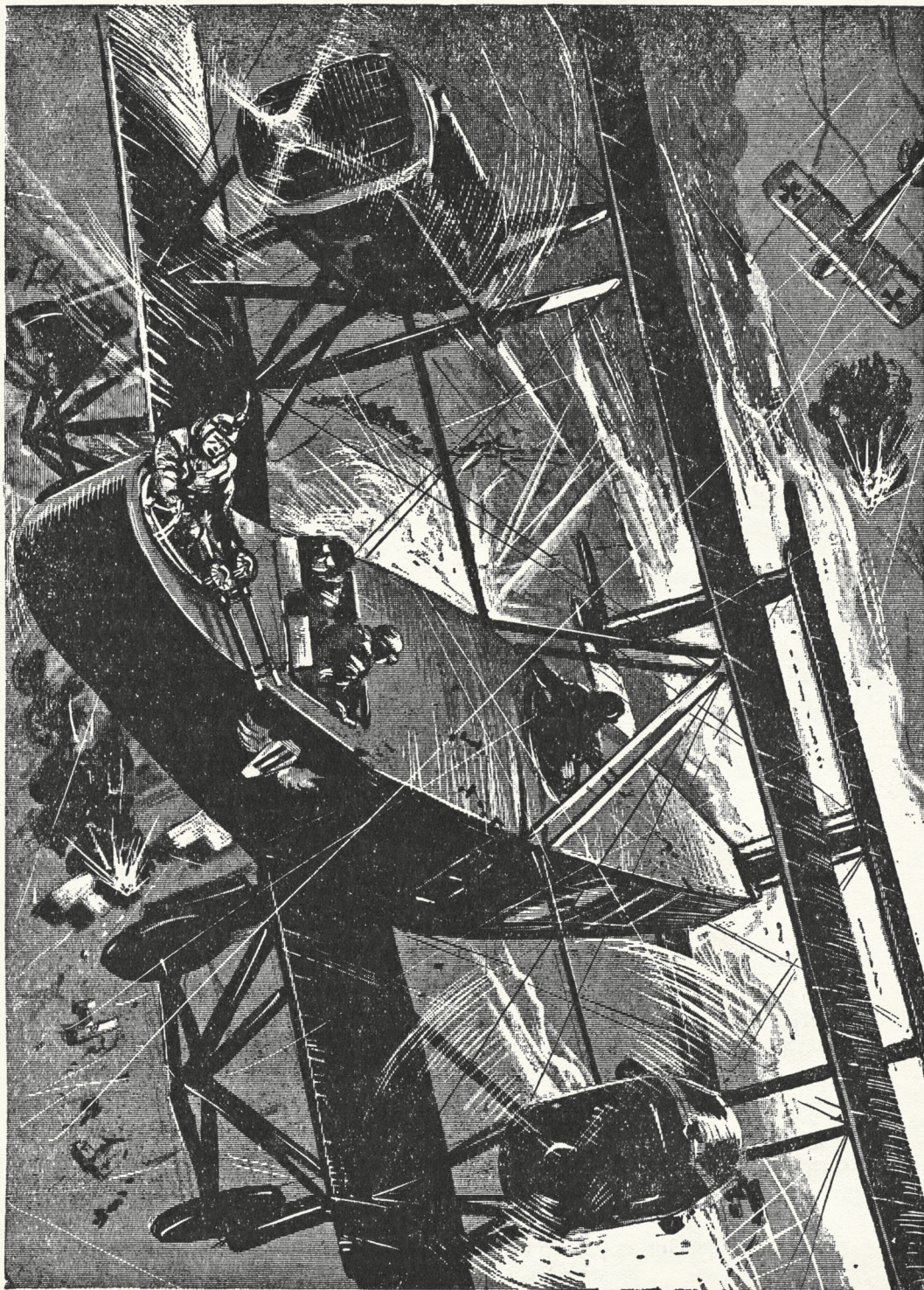
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TRAITOR'S TUNE



Old No. 11 suddenly dipped a wing and pivoted in almost a vertical bank . . .

It was a Strange Clue that First Linked a Lonely Graveyard behind the Enemy's Lines with the Mysterious Disappearance of Britain's Greatest Air Fighters, and Led that Crazy Band of Night Bombers, the Coffin Crew, upon the Most Desperate Adventure of their Madcap Fighting Career

By ARCH. WHITEHOUSE

Late of No. 22 Squadron, R.F.C.

CHAPTER I

The Flaming Fokker

"**A**N' thot's fra Major Mackenzie," grunted Andy McGregor as he leaned over his double Lewis bracket and released a stream of cupronickel. "Take thot fra Major Mackenzie!"

The old Handley Page night-bomber, No. 11, jerked and danced to the blasts and bellows of war. McGregor clenched his teeth, but the martial strains of "*Ruiag Ghlinn Fraoine*," the rallying call of his clan, wheezed through his great nostrils and his double Lewis added a fitting discord as the big bomber plunged down upon the sheds at Audenarde.

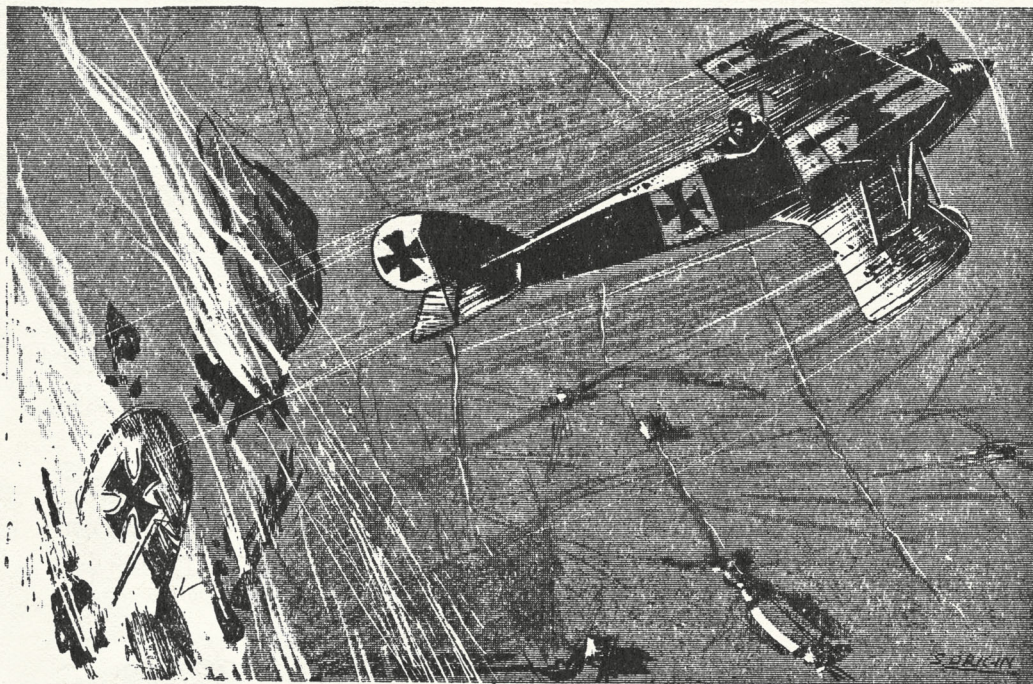
McGregor's aim was true, as ever, and

his leaden flail sent a cartwheel gun-mounting spinning. Three indistinct figures in colourless grey were slashed into a heap beneath the wreckage, and their bronze-snouted Maxim tilted forward with a belt of ammunition still drooping from its silenced feed-block.

"And thot's fra Major Mackenzie!" roared the exulting Scotsman.

No. 11 came up in a smooth zoom and then shuddered violently to two tremendous blows. Two of her 112-pound bombs had fanged into the sheds below and burst with flame-splintered fury. A broadside of earth, splinters, timber and debris mushroomed up, caught the lower wings of No. 11 and sent her staggering away in a low turn to port.

"McGregor, despite them, shall



... while the flaming wreckage of a Pfalz swept beneath her with only inches to spare

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flourish for ever ! ” chanted Andy, and whipped round to snap at a hangar mouth a burst that spat a sheen of golden sparks off the tarmac.

Farther back in the fuselage of the great bomber, Lieutenant Phil Armitage bent over his birdcage bomb-sight and checked the seconds on the stop-watch that was pronged into one of the perches.

“ One, two—three ! ” he muttered, and jerked his arm down.

Sergeant Mike Ryan, bracing himself down in the companionway between the two big petrol tanks, watched the Canadian bomber officer intently. He caught the signal and slapped Private Alfred Tate, the toggle-man, on the back. Tate spluttered, yanked frantically at two more toggles, and then held on grimly as the 'plane jerked under the release of the heavy missiles.

BONG ! BONG !

No. 11 screamed over a row of saw-toothed huts, and Corporal Arthur Marks, the Australian gunner in the back cockpit, waited until No. 11 zoomed, and then poured a double spray of Lewis lead into the huts. He could hear the wild screaming of McGregor away up front as the Handley Page came around again.

In the pilot's seat of the bomber, Lieutenant Graham Townsend threw a glance across his cockpit towards Armitage, who had stiffened up suddenly, and was now peering ahead at the kilted Scot in the front turret.

“ One of his nights, eh ? ” Armitage shouted, making the exaggerated lip movements that were necessary to establish communication above the din of two roaring Rolls-Royce Eagles.

“ Yes, and he's got it pretty badly, ” replied Townsend. “ How about it ? ”

“ Just two more, ” said the bomber-officer. “ Make for that low shed over there . . . the petrol stores. ”

The Englishman nodded and switched back across the fields again to approach the burning buildings from the far corner. He roared in upon the target with both engines full on, and McGregor, wailing his Highland war-cry, turned swiftly on something that came hurtling

down on them from above. It came on wings of lightning, but Andy McGregor was even swifter. His guns swung true, his trigger finger constricted, and a black Pfalz flew straight into a lane of leaden death. With its propeller splintered, the engine roared to a crescendo, flames leapt from the fuselage, and the burning mass came charging on towards the bomber. Desperately now, McGregor gave it another burst, then whirled to yell a warning to Townsend.

But Graham Townsend had already seen the danger and was sitting tense, timing his move to the second. As the tangle of iron, spruce and fabric came plunging towards them, old No. 11 suddenly dipped a wing, and as she pivoted in almost a vertical bank the flaming wreckage of the Pfalz swept below and behind her with but inches to spare.

Then, steadying her on a new course, Townsend sent the great bomber nosing down at the petrol dump. Armitage, who had merely glanced up for an instant at the flaming Pfalz, was now engrossed with his bomb-sight, and as they tore through a flaming curtain of smoke and Spandau lead, his arm slashed down twice in quick succession.

As the two great bombs left the guides with barely a pause between them, Townsend whipped the Handley hard over, arms and legs braced on the controls against the coming eruption. There was a muffled roar . . . two roars . . . and then a blinding sheet of yellow-ochre flame stood up suddenly from the ground like a glittering curtain. Swiftly the burning fuel spread, leaping and darting across the ground in weird rivers of flame, all radiating from the blazing inferno of the devastated petrol store.

“ God ! ” yelled Townsend suddenly, peering down into the red chaos beneath. “ Look at that ! ”

ARMITAGE stood stupefied for a moment, and it was McGregor who first leapt into action to meet this new menace. His guns crackled and spat into the centre of that rising curtain of

TRAITOR'S TUNE

flame, and even as they watched, they saw the tell-tale lines of tracer smash with a spatter of silver sequins against the coffin-nose of a Fokker!

"Holy smoke!" gasped Armitage. "Where did he come from?"

Straight out of the flaming barrier through which it had taken-off came the Fokker, its wing-tips festooned with flame, and hurtled headlong at the Handley Page. With chattering guns, McGregor strove to hold it off, and from the rear turret the Australian's gun joined in the mad chorus. But nothing could stop the Fokker. Its pilot was a god of vengeance leaping from his hangar of flame.

Armitage, helpless in his seat, threw an arm over his face, while beside him Townsend sat, grim of face, waiting for the collision that seemed inevitable.

Up in the nose of the Handley, McGregor stood his ground, because he knew he had to.

Brat-at-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

His guns spoke, and two Spandaus answered. Still the flaming Fokker came on, firing point-blank into the Handley. The big bomber vibrated under the thudding blows, and a chunk of the port propeller flew off to tear a great rent in the side of the bomber's fuselage.

Then McGregor, his Black Watch kilt fluttering over the edge of the gun-mounting, drew a last desperate bead on the winged nemesis—and his aim held true.

The Fokker seemed to check suddenly in full flight as though it had collided with an invisible barrier. A black-helmeted figure jerked forward against the dash, and the biplane nosed down, just missing the Handley's wheels as it hurtled down out of control.

Not a man among the bomber's crew spoke as Townsend wrenched the throttle back and eased down a runaway engine. They swerved around on one prop. until the pilot could set a new adjustment on the vertical fins.

"Well, that's that," said Armitage at length, sitting back and folding his arms. "There went a brave man, Graham."

"Yes, I'd like to meet that lad some day," was Townsend's reply, when he had succeeded in getting the Handley to hold some sort of a true course. "I hope he got away with it."

"Same here," Armitage agreed soberly. "But if we meet him again we may both be sorry he did."

CHAPTER II

Madness of McGregor

OLD No. 11 was just about all-in.

Townsend tried his best to gain a little altitude, but the port engine, with its much damaged airscrew, was vibrating badly even at quarter throttle. They were about thirty miles from Ypres, so far as he could make out, and he checked his calculations again as they floundered along at less than six hundred feet above the traffic-clogged road that ran between Audenarde and Courtrai. The starboard engine was putting up a game fight, but it was too much to hope that it could last out under the extra strain of its full-power revs. Quickly, Townsend made his decision.

"Everything overboard!" he yelled. "Everything—and as fast as you can make it!"

Up in front, McGregor heard the order, and heaved his spare-parts case overboard. He unbolted one of his guns and hurled that clear. Then, selecting one drum of ammunition, he rammed it on the remaining gun, and tossed the rest away.

Armitage dived down the companionway and almost collided with Sergeant Ryan standing against the toggle-board with his short black clay pipe upside down between his browned tusks. Nearby, Alfred Tate was leaning against the empty bomb-racks, scratching his head.

"Everything over!" Armitage shouted. "Get a move on!"

Leaping into action, Ryan ripped a first-aid kit off a bracket, made as if to hurl it out through the companionway, and then stopped suddenly. Bending down, he wrenched it open and, with an apologetic grin on his face, extracted a flat brandy bottle which he handed to

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Armitage. Without hesitation the Canadian took a hefty swig at it, and handed the bottle back. Ryan wiped a grimy hand across his mouth, swallowed gustily, and, after peering surprisedly at the bottle, handed it on to Tate. The little Cockney looked at it, then started up the catwalk to the control pit and made his way up to Townsend.

"Mister Armitage's compliments, sir," he said. "And will you join us?"

Townsend grinned, took the bottle and sucked heartily. Then he hammered the bottle on the top of the cowl, but McGregor turned only long enough to shake his head, and was back at his task of tearing out every movable fitment from his turret.

"First time I've ever knowed the Jock to turn down a nip," remarked Tate in surprise. "Well, Arthur and me'll manage to finish it."

Armitage and Ryan were hacking away at the bomb-racks and throwing the parts out through a great gash one of them had torn in the side of the fuselage. Tate stopped to take his own swig in the companionway and then clambered past them and tugged at Marks' legs, which appeared on the platform under the rear gun.

"Finish this, Arthur, and chuck the bottle away," Tate bellowed, and went back to rip out the toggle-board.

They jettisoned everything possible, even their heavy Sidcot suits. Tate even suggested that he be allowed to clamber out on the wing and attempt to chop away the landing gear, but Armitage told him they were awarding no V.C.'s on this trip.

"Our only chance is to get as close to the line as possible and hope to be able to glide over when our engines pack up," he said. "We're not done yet, by a long chalk—but damn that fellow in that Fokker, all the same!"

WHEN Armitage got back to his seat in the cockpit, he found that they were losing height rapidly, and were now staggering along less than four hundred feet above the ground. Small towns and villages filtered past below,

and, here and there, an occasional light blinked. From time to time a few desultory bursts of machine-gun fire spurted up at them, and it was only with difficulty that McGregor, remembering his one and only remaining drum of ammunition, restrained himself from answering their fire.

They skirted Courtrai and headed for Alluin, letting the Lys slip past under their starboard wing-tip. Foot by foot their altitude dropped, and very soon it was apparent that they could never make the lines. They would have to land at any moment now.

"Stretch it as far as you can. We still have a few hours of darkness," Armitage encouraged. "McGregor's sure to know a way through their lines."

"I'm getting every yard I can out of her," Townsend replied. "We'll never get much farther than Alluin. Lucky to get that far. Listen, she's spluttering now."

The port engine faltered, spluttered wearily, and then caught again.

"We're losing fuel fast and——" Armitage began, and then stopped suddenly, a hand tensed on the cockpit rim.

The port engine had cut completely.

Townsend juggled the throttle quickly, and it caught again, but they had lost precious height. The engine picked up slowly and they sat there holding their breaths. More gunfire spattered up, and bullets starred the fabric of the Handley's broad black wings. Townsend, his heart in his mouth, eased the bomber into a gentle turn and they slipped clear of a silver beam that had slashed up into the sky from beyond Menin.

"No use," Townsend said, shaking his head. "Get 'em all well aft in the cabin. We'll be going down any minute now."

They signalled to McGregor and ordered him back. The Scot unhooked his gun and dropped down in his turret with it. A moment later his head came out between their knees and Armitage stood up to let him through. But McGregor had other plans for the moment. Cradling the gun over one arm, he pointed the muzzle over the side and, before either

TRAITOR'S TUNE

Armitage or Townsend could remonstrate, he had pulled the trigger and was spraying the ninety-seven rounds in the full drum all over the enemy landscape.

"What the . . . ?" Armitage bellowed.

Calmly McGregor finished the drum out, and then, raising the Lewis above his head with both hands, he flung it clear.

"Thot's fra Major Mackenzie!" he roared, and stalked down the companion-way to the bomb chamber.

Armitage remained standing, staring in astonishment at the vanishing Scot, until Townsend abruptly pulled him down into his seat again.

"He's been like that ever since we got the news this afternoon that Mackenzie was missing," Townsend explained.

"Mackenzie missing? . . . What, that Mad Major chap there's been so much talk about . . . ? I never heard. . . ."

"Yes. It came through while you were in St. Omer. He went out this afternoon . . . and didn't come back. No trace of him anywhere."

"Whew! That's bad. And he only got his V.C. a few days ago, didn't he?" asked Armitage, momentarily forgetful of their own predicament.

Townsend was too busy to answer, and Armitage sat back and pondered on the news of Mackenzie's disastrous loss—youthful Major Mackenzie, the colourful British ace of Scottish ancestry, who had captured the imagination of every soldier in the British trenches. They had dubbed him "The Mad Major" because of his amazingly daring exploits in "ground strafing" German trenches, performances which they considered he put on for their special benefit.

Hawker, Ball, Rhys-Davids, McCudden, Mannock—and now Mackenzie. Who would be the next to go?

Then suddenly Armitage realised that, in all probability it would be the Coffin Crew. The over-heated and bullet-battered Rolls-Royce had choked into its last gasp. The four-bladed wooden prop. jerked back like some drunken semaphore signaller, and was still.

"Over there! Over there!" Armi-

tage yelled, pointing to an open space beyond a small Belgian church, "you can get her in along that wooded copse. Run her up as close as you can—it'll give us a chance to get clear."

CHAPTER III

"The March of the Priests"

WITH a low hum of flying wires, the Handley glided down, cleared a low hedge and floated across a white-patched cemetery to drop with a rattle and thud into the field indicated by Armitage. Townsend had timed his approach perfectly, and after the bomber had trundled along heavily for a few yards, he was able to edge her gently round so that she ran into the heavy shadows cast by a large clump of willows.

One by one the Coffin Crew clambered down the metal ladder through the throat-hatch and dropped to the turf. Instinctively they grouped themselves round Armitage, but the bomber-officer knew that it was Andy McGregor who would have to be the leader now.

"Know where you are, McGregor?" he asked.

"Aye, sor," was the confident reply. "Ah was through Alluin in September, '14. . . . Yon is Coffin Corner. The Black Watch held four Prussian Guard regiments there. Ye canna beat the Black Watch, sor."

"All right. All right, McGregor," Armitage said hurriedly, "but none of your 'Ard Choille' war-cries just now, please. We don't want the whole German Army down on us."

"Ard Choille wouldn'a do naw, sir. It ud ha' tae be *Tulach Ard*."

"All right, have it your own way, McGregor," said Armitage resignedly. "But what I want to know is, can you find your way out of here? And is there any chance of our being able to get through the lines before dawn?"

"Aye, sor, that there is," rejoined the Scot. "Ye take yon tur-rning oot o' Coffin Corner and cross that field until ye coom tae Birdcage Walk. Thot wull lead ye tae the Lys locks sooth-west o' Wervick. We can follow the bank of the

AIR STORIES

river tae the junction of the canal and the river in front of Armentieres. . . ."

Corporal Arthur Marks nudged the gaunt Scotsman.

"Will that Mamoselle be there, Mac?" he whispered, with a grin.

"Aye, and plenty more, Arthur," was the reply. "But they'll a' be livin' in the cellars an' ye can thank ye lucky stars thim cellars are there."

"Why?" demanded Marks.

"Ye'll see," grinned McGregor, "ye'll see."

"Come on," said Armitage. "Let's get moving."

But just then something caught their ears. The sound came from a little creeper-clad church across the field near the cemetery.

McGregor stiffened, and his face paled.

"The same tune, sor!" he exclaimed.

"The vurry same tune!"

"What are you talking about, man?" Armitage demanded. "The same tune as what?"

"Just a minute, sor. . . . Just a minute," urged McGregor, motioning them to silence.

They listened again.

"Why, that's the 'March of the Priests,'" whispered Townsend. "But who the . . .?"

"What d'ye call it, sor?" McGregor interrupted urgently.

"The 'March of the Priests,' McGregor; it's a famous organ classic."

Armitage, impatient to be moving, could stand it no longer.

"Hi, what the blazes is all this about?" he demanded angrily. "Are we taking a course of classical music or are we on the wrong side of the lines and liable to be shot at any moment? Come on, McGregor, snap out of it and lead the way!"

"Just a minute, sor," the Scotsman pleaded. "Just a minute." And, before Armitage could reply, he had dashed off in the direction of the church and was lost to sight in the darkness.

"What a night!" moaned Arthur Marks. "Here we drop into a churchyard near Coffin Corner, and now that crazy Jock wants to study organ music

in the Jerry lines. Let's light a fire and roast some chestnuts."

"Silence, there," snapped Armitage. "We must get that madman back. Follow me—we'll make for the graveyard."

IN single file they crept through the shadows towards the church, with Sergeant Ryan clutching a revolver big enough to justify a pair of wheels. He kept one eye over his shoulder and the other on the dim light that came from a window over the chancel of the little church.

They waited in the shadow of a wall for a time and then crawled over and huddled against a white tombstone that had been erected to the memory of one Emil Beaussart, who had died in 1904.

"I don't know why we 'ang about 'ere waiting for that blighter," Alfred Tate complained in a whisper to Sergeant Ryan.

"I'll tell ye, in two words," Ryan hissed back. "Coffin Crew—now do ye understand, me bhoy?"

"Oh, ah . . . the Coffin Crew," Tate mumbled. "You're right, Sarge!"

"Sure I'm right, laddie, and never you forget it. If there's nothing else in your life you can be proud of—and I don't suppose there is—you can always be proud that you were one of the Coffin Crew. Not that you're ever much use to it, ye lazy spalpeen!" he added as an afterthought.

They could hear the strains of the "March of the Priests" sifting through the open windows of the battered church. It came in staccato bursts of sound, and then simmered down to a gentle nocturne. Certain notes were thumped out in anger or misjudged enthusiasm until the piece lost much of its intended beauty. The little group of men listened intently, fascinated against their wills by the strangeness of the music heard in the grim setting of the deserted churchyard. Townsend was the first to break the silence.

"What the devil is that confounded Jock doing?" he demanded angrily.

TRAITOR'S TUNE

"He always does it," came Marks' muttered comment.

"Always does it? What do you mean?" Armitage demanded.

"Well, sir. I mean he does it back on the other side, outside Cassel. That old church there."

"You mean he dashes off in the middle of the night to listen to church organs?"

"Yes, sir, when they play that there," Marks replied.

"Play what where?" Townsend broke in. "Is everybody crazy round here?"

"I mean that tune, sir," Marks explained. "The same one that's playing now."

"The 'March of the Priests'!" exclaimed Armitage. "Why, what's it got to do with Andy McGregor?"

"I don't know, sir. All we know is that he goes out every night, just before we shove off on patrol, and listens to that monk feller back there playing the organ."

"And he always listens to the same tune?"

"That's right, sir," said Marks, and then added reflectively. "I s'pose its the only tune these Frog organists know."

"If I hear much more of this conversation, I'll go crazy, too," remarked Townsend, and lapsed into silence as the last thunderous bass notes of the March made the air tremble around them.

The quiet that ensued was broken by a sudden rustle close at hand, and next moment McGregor had returned. He was still pale and panting, but offered no explanation of his action.

"We've got tae get back," was all he said.

"What was the idea, McGregor?" Armitage asked, as they filed out through the churchyard. "What did you see over in the church there?"

"Ah wouldn'a ken, sor," was the Scot's enigmatic reply. "But Ah wouldn'a be altogether sure that yon edifice could be considered a house of God, sor."

"And what about that organ we heard, McGregor?"

"Ah dinna ken, yet, sor. It may be

the organ, it may be the music . . . an' it may be the organist—but Major Mackenzie went west ta'day, sor."

"What the devil's that got to do with it?" Armitage demanded.

"Too mony British airmen hae gone west near Alluin Church, sor."

FURTHER conversation became impossible, for McGregor was now leading the way across the cemetery, past Coffin Corner and then in short spurts across an open field to a sunken road. Back in 1914, the Old Contemptibles had christened it "Birdcage Walk" because of the litter of household equipment left by the Belgian refugees. Now it was shell-pitted and deserted, and the little party moved forward carefully in McGregor's wake until they came to another open field that led them to the Lys.

From this point on they moved more boldly through the darkness, led by the kilted gunner who knew every inch of the ground. They gave a wide berth to several small encampments and added to the excitement of the night by setting fire to a large haystack, with the object of diverting as much attention as possible away from themselves. The ruse worked well and at length they came out near the locks where the canal and River Lys join, north-east of Armentieres.

"What now?" demanded Armitage.

"Ye'll all please step softly as a moose, sir—and dinna gie a peep if ye value yer life!" McGregor whispered.

McGregor paused for a moment, listening carefully, then, apparently satisfied, led the way forward along the shadows of the lock wall. From the other side, as they stole cautiously along, they could distinctly hear the stolid tramp, tramp, of a sentry.

The line was not very far away now. They could see the searching star-shells climbing up into the sky, while, at intervals, a few "Minnies," fat black little pigs with sparkling tails, crumped into the sky, stayed poised at the top of their trajectories for a few seconds, and then began their slow fall to earth.

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Suddenly McGregor halted and held up a warning hand.

"Wait here, sor," he whispered to Armitage. "And you'd best lie flat until I'm back."

"Another organ, somewhere?" Marks enquired, hopefully.

"Ye're right, Arthur Marks," said McGregor grimly, drawing a gleaming dirk from his hose-top. "An' this is what I'll be cutting it out with!"

He crawled away into the darkness towards the flight of stone steps that led down to the canal. They saw him slide over, his bare thighs two spots of white in the darkness, and then he was gone.

Armitage, crouching close to the ground, turned to Townsend.

"What's he up to now?" he said.

"Just on the prowl again. God help someone."

"Wonder what the old devil meant by saying that too many British airmen have gone west near Alluin church?" Armitage continued.

"Yes, funny that, wasn't it? And there may be something in it. Ball was last seen flying over Alluin, you know, and Rhys-Davids went down somewhere near there. Collishaw, too, lost a couple of men near Alluin. S'truth, when you come to think of it, quite a lot of our fellows went down in that section."

"Maybe, but what the devil has an organ got to do with it?" Armitage objected. "They don't bring 'em down with top notes, do they?"

Before Townsend could reply, he was violently nudged by Marks.

"There he is, sir," the Australian whispered excitedly. "He's calling us."

Now they could see McGregor's kilted form over the edge of the lock wall, and he was beckoning them towards him. One by one they darted across the open space and hurried down the steps. McGregor led the way, and at the bottom they came suddenly upon the still quivering body of a sentry in field-grey.

"Ah had tae do ut," the Scot said, almost apologetically, as he stepped over his victim. "An there'll be anither at the other end."

"What is this place, McGregor?"

Townsend asked, a few moments later. "I seem to remember it, somehow."

"Ut's the overflow tunnel between the upper lock and the river on the other side o' the line, sor."

"You mean it goes right under the line?"

"Aye, sor . . . through tae the river just this side o' Armentieres."

CAUTIOUSLY they made their way through the dank tunnel, littered with stores and ammunition, until, coming to a section where the tunnel widened, they were brought to a sudden halt by McGregor's warning hand. Again the gunner went forward and reconnoitred. He disappeared round a bend in the tunnel, and as the little party waited with bated breath, there came the sounds of a short sharp scuffle. A minute later McGregor was back, wiping his dirk between thumb and forefinger. He stuffed it back in his hose-top, and there was a grim look on his gaunt face as he said briefly.

"It'll be all right the noo, sor."

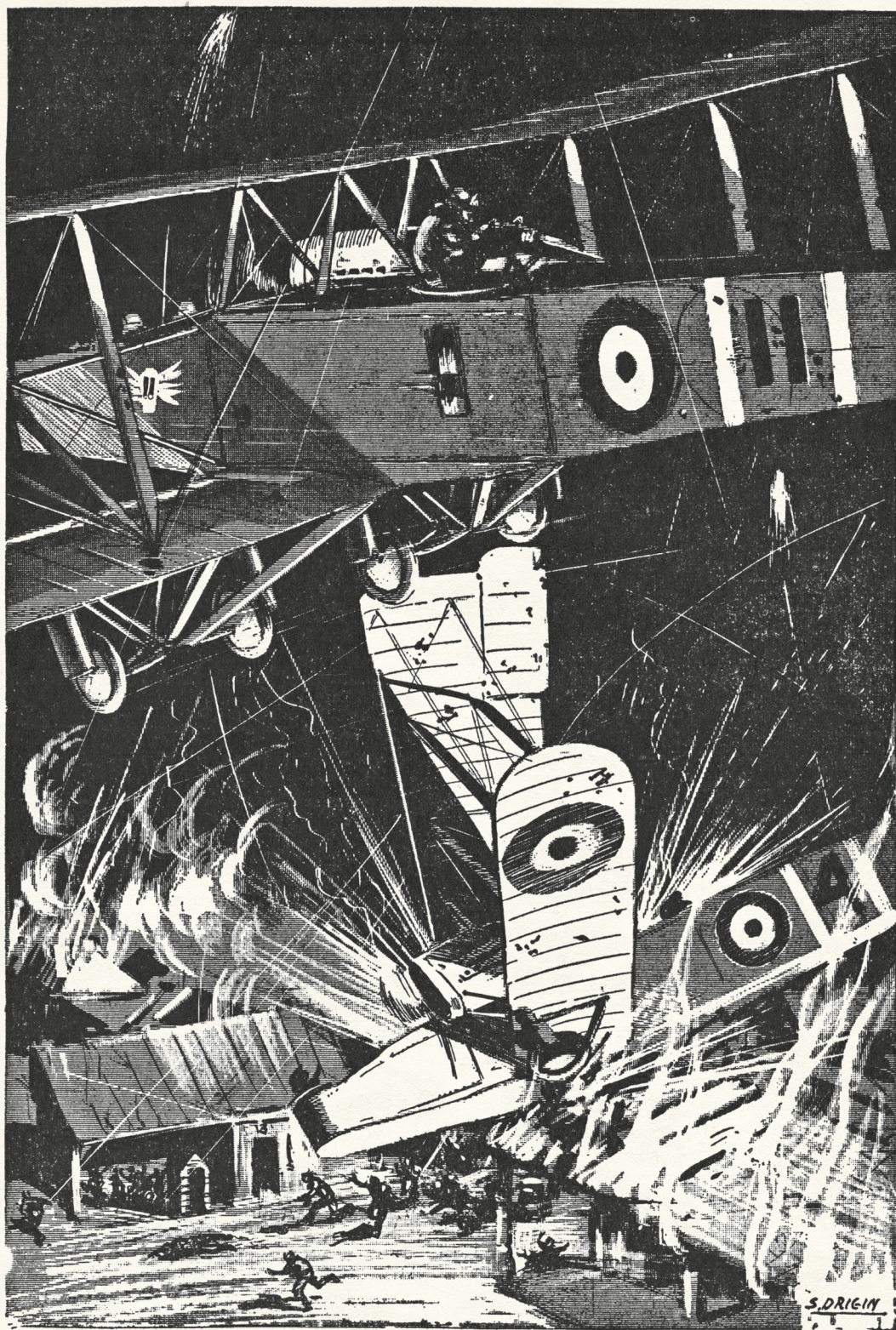
They made their way through a barricade of crates and boxes and soon came upon the still and silent victim of McGregor's deadly skill with the dirk. The sentry lay flat on his face with one leg twisted under him. He might almost have been asleep—but for his grotesque attitude and the growing pool of blood that seeped out from beneath his head.

"We'll have to be vurry careful noo, sor," whispered McGregor. "The Jarmins are easy, but we'll be running into our own boys any minute now."

"I don't understand all this," Armitage said softly. "If this tunnel connects the two fronts as you say, why hasn't someone blown it up before?"

"One's afraid, and the other daren't," McGregor explained. "You see, sor, they can both use it, in a pinch, and as this wee piece o' front is always changing hands they both hang tight on to the tunnel an' put their own guard at each end."

Cautiously they advanced another hundred yards, and then, as the opening of the tunnel loomed dimly ahead, McGregor



Crashing headlong into a line of warehouses, a Handley blossomed into a billow of smoke and flame . . .

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again halted and beckoned Arthur Marks towards him. The puzzled expression on the Australian's face vanished as McGregor whispered urgently to him, and next instant the silence of the tunnel was shattered by a piercing yell.

"Co-o-o-o-oe-e-e-e-eee!"

Marks' call wailed through the dank tunnel, and before it had died away there came an answering shout.

"Co-o-o-o-oe-e-e-e-eeee!"

"What the devil . . . ?" Armitage spluttered.

A sudden light seemed to dawn upon Townsend as he looked at the Australian gunner's excited face.

"Come on," he said. "We're all right now. That was an Australian bush call. McGregor must have known the Aussies were in the line at this point—that's why he got Marks to do his stuff!"

"Heavens! What a night!" breathed Armitage. "I thought the man had gone stark, staring mad."

They hurried along the tunnel and came up to a barricade. A gaunt Australian challenged them, and made them identify themselves. Satisfied at last, he pulled a section of the barricade away and they scrambled over, just as a fusillade of shots poured in on them from the other end of the tunnel.

Once safely within their own lines, reaction set in upon the nerve-racked members of the Coffin Crew. A guard of Australians came up and guided them out of the line, completely done up and exhausted. A lorry appeared from somewhere and ran them into Armentieres, where they flopped thankfully on to wire-netting beds in the dug-outs under the *GaredeVille*. Before he collapsed, Townsend managed to get a message through to Cassel, and almost fell asleep at the telephone.

Only McGregor stayed awake, and long before daybreak he was out again, haunting the streets of Armentieres, and trudging in and out of what went for shops in that war-scarred area. He even tried his luck at the cathedral and, finally, about ten o'clock, he found what he was seeking.

It was a copy of the musical score of the "March of the Priests."

CHAPTER IV

Mystery of the Mad Major

BY noon the Coffin Crew were back at Cassel, still weary and worn, and Armitage handed in the routine report he had prepared that morning.

"Well, that's one way to get rid of a 'bus," grinned Major McKelvie as he read it. "But we'll have another for you by to-morrow . . . don't worry."

The little party saluted and broke up. Sergeant Ryan led his gunners and toggle-man across to their Nissen hut, while Armitage and Townsend went over to the jumble of boards and elephant iron that served as an officers' mess. They ordered double Scotches and dropped off to sleep in their wicker chairs without even removing their boots.

In the gunners' hut it was much the same. Tate threw himself on his pile of boards and blankets and sucked at the fag end of a cigarette. Marks found a magazine and tried to read. Mike Ryan packed his dirty clay pipe and applied a match, while he watched Andy McGregor fumbling with the roll of music he had brought from Armentieres.

"What's the idea, Andy?" Marks enquired, moving over to sit on a corner of McGregor's bed. "Still learning to play the organ?"

McGregor shook his head: "Ut's Muster Mackenzie," he said moodily.

"Mister Mackenzie," the Australian repeated, "who the hell's he?"

"He means the Mad Major bloke wot went west yesterday," Tate interjected.

"Muster Mackenzie no went west," Andy retorted. "He were tricked . . . aye, tricked, Ah say."

Marks blinked, and turned to the little Cockney for enlightenment.

"Don't look at me," Tate muttered. "I don't know what he's talking about, neither. First he goes crawling through graveyards to listen to an organ. Then he goes balmy because someone shot old Mackenzie down. Now I s'pose 'e's going to give us all a music lesson."

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'Orace, pass the conductor 'is wand and step off smartly with the right foot.

*"Ark the 'erald h'angels sing!
Beecham's pills are just the thing!"*

Mike Ryan threw a flying boot at the singer, and Tate collapsed backwards on to his bed.

"Ye wouldn'a understond," McGregor said, forking a short length of pencil out of his sporran pocket and sucking it meditatively.

"Honest, now, Mac, tell us what you reckon to do with that there music," pleaded Arthur Marks.

"Ye sound like a mon of some sense," McGregor replied. "D'ye ken anything about music?"

"Was second cornet in the Sydney Silver Temperance Band, back home," said Marks proudly.

"Temperance is noo the thing to make a band out of, to my way of thinking," Andy remarked, "but still, maybe ye'll do."

"I couldn't play that piece, if that's what you want," Marks announced firmly.

"Ah wouldn'a let ye. All ye ha' tae to is to mark the notes of the top line here, so that I know what they are. Ye ken . . . the letters the notes mean?"

"Sure . . . but what for?"

"Ah'll show ye to-night, if ye'd like tae take a wee walk," McGregor said quietly. "Ye do those notes first, though."

Marks started laboriously to pencil in the notes on the score. Then suddenly he looked up.

"But what the hell does all this have to do with this Mackenzie guy you're so upset about?" he demanded.

"Thot's what Ah want tae find out," said McGregor, and stalked out of the hut without another word.

THAT night, the sole topic of conversation in the Squadron was the probable fate of Major Mackenzie, V.C., who had now been missing for about twenty-four hours. No news of any kind had come through about him. Pilots of his squadron had flown over the lines

early that morning and had dropped notes of enquiry. Later that afternoon red, white and black message streamers had been picked up behind Poperinghe, Estaires and Merville. The messages they contained seemed genuine enough, but none held any news. No Major Mackenzie had been reported as a prisoner, and no trace of a wrecked or burned S.E. 5 had been found. To add to the mystery, one message said that no German pilot had reported a combat between the times mentioned in the British messages as covering the Major's disappearance.

What then had happened to the Mad Major? asked the squadron messes. Was this to be yet another Ball or Guynemer mystery? He had last been seen patrolling a narrow beat back and forth between Courtrai and Tournai by British balloon observers. One or two had even seen him go down for his usual trench "strafe" around Alluin, but had lost sight of him in the low-hanging smoke of a wire-cutting barrage.

That was all anyone knew.

Another topic of conversation was the arrival of another Handley Page for the Coffin Crew. It had been flown in from Marquise at noon that day, and was a typical Coffin Crew machine in appearance, made up of the discoloured wings from one 'bus, a much-patched fuselage from another and a tail assembly from yet a third. It was promptly given No. 11's old number, and the Coffin Crew insignia was crudely daubed on it by Alfred Tate who, when complimented on his handiwork, coyly admitted he had always "bin good at drorin'."

By late afternoon the new No. 11 was ready, her racks tested and her toggles checked under Sergeant Ryan's critical eye. Just before teatime, Townsend took a rollicking bunch of mechanics up in her while he tested out the new Rolls-Royce engines. The mechanics hung over the gun-rings, out of the open windows, and enjoyed themselves like schoolboys. They returned to earth, breathless and excited, declaring that "Leftenant" Townsend was the greatest pilot on the Front.

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"Joy-riders!" observed Alfred Tate scathingly as he inspected his now somewhat blurred insignia. "They'd talk a bit different if they was up there with Jerry having a smack at 'em. They wouldn't larf then."

After mess that night the Coffin Crew received their orders for another raid. It was to start at eleven o'clock, and their objective was the railroad sidings at Renaix, a point about fifty miles from their Cassel base. Townsend and Armistage wandered off to the Recording Office to draw up their compass courses and to plan the raid. There were aerial photographs to be studied from which they could choose the best approaches and select the most important sections of the sidings for their targets.

Sergeant Ryan supervised the loading and fuse-setting of the bombs. Tate assisted him, and McGregor and Marks should have been on the job as well, but they had both disappeared a short time after mess that night.

CHAPTER V

The Bell of Death

AS soon as darkness fell, McGregor, with his sheets of music stowed away in his tunic pocket, and trailed by the puzzled but highly interested Australian ex-cavalryman, hurried across the fields, through what had once been an orchard, and dropped into a sunken road that ran due east and west. They exchanged no conversation of any sort until they were well on their way towards the canal that ran down to Hazebrouck. They were heading west, and a square tower a mile or so ahead was their goal.

The road came out on a clearing along the canal, and they turned north a few hundred yards and crept across a lush stretch of grass. They entered a churchyard and made their way carefully past weather-stained slabs of sandstone and marble. Behind one of these they lay for nearly half an hour exchanging not more than half a dozen whispered words throughout their vigil.

"Here he comes," whispered McGregor at last.

The Australian followed the direction of his companion's pointing hand and saw a tall, broad-shouldered man in clerical garments hurry out of a small cottage on one side of the graveyard. He carried a spluttering lantern and chose his steps carefully as he made his way through the graveyard and entered the main door of the little church. The lantern threw his silhouette against the brown wall for a second as he stopped and peered about.

"Come on," said McGregor, when the man had disappeared. "Keep close tae me."

Together they hurried through the tombstones and made their way in the shadows to the doorway. Carefully McGregor drew it open, and peered through. There was another vestry door to pass and after waiting a few minutes Andy cautiously eased it open. Now they could see the cleric striding down the aisle towards the chancel, his swinging lantern casting a weird silhouette of himself along the left-hand wall.

They watched him pass the nave and then turn in towards the short row of choir stalls. He set his lantern down and seemed to disappear for a minute behind a panel of carved oak.

"Now then," McGregor whispered, and they slid into a row of seats at the back. "Get down on the floor wi' ye light and mark the notes as he plays them."

"Mark 'em down?" repeated Marks in a puzzled tone.

"Aye! Ah mean them notes he bangs and holds down. Ye can easy tell when he's no playing it reet."

Marks blinked and nodded. From somewhere up in front came the wheezy treadle of organ pedals, followed by the throb of air entering the bellows and the creak of weary mechanism. There was a fingered trill of a skilled musician and then . . . the opening bars of "March of the Priests."

Almost immediately Marks understood. The player was not accenting the notes as they were written. Compared with the skill of the opening trill and scale, the rest of the music sounded like something picked out by a heavy-handed

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amateur. It was slow and painful, and Marks found it easy enough to jot down check marks over the notes the strange monk was accentuating.

The music stopped after a few bars and started over again from the beginning. Again Marks followed the notes on his music score with the aid of the small flashlamp they were shielding with Mac's kilt. But no pencilling was needed this time, for the repetition followed the previous tune, note for note.

The music stopped, and they heard the monk lower the lid of the organ and descend from the stall. He picked up his lantern again and started down the aisle.

"We'll be locked in," Marks whispered. "We'll never get back in time."

"Dinna worry. We'll get back. Ye'll see some real fun noo!"

They switched off their light and waited until the monk, all unsuspecting, had passed them. He opened the vestry door and closed it gently. Then they heard his footsteps going up some stairs.

"Ah knew ut!" McGregor exclaimed. "He's going up tae the belfry."

"What for?"

"Tae listen tae the other burkie . . . at Alluin," said McGregor.

"Alluin? . . . Alluin?" Marks repeated. "Why, that's the dump we were at last night."

"Aye, an' didn'a he play the same toon?"

"Maybe he did, but I still don't get the idea," said Marks, shaking his head.

Moving quietly, McGregor stepped into the vestry and stood listening for the footsteps of the giant monk. Then, with a nod to Marks and a quick movement towards his stocking-top, he led the way up the circular staircase.

Carefully they ascended, giving a wide berth to loose treads that might betray them. They reached the trapdoor and peered over. The belfry was in semi-darkness, but they could discern the monk leaning over a small table. There was a curiously-shaped black box in front of him and he was twirling two large brass knobs. He turned slightly, and then they saw that he was wearing a set of

earphones which were connected to the black box. They saw him reach high and twist another knob fitted to a black rod that led up into the darkness above.

"I've seen that bloke before," whispered Marks. "He's been around our place several times."

"Aye . . . too many times, Alfred . . . and too many aerodromes," was the Scot's cryptic reply.

"Let's nail him," Marks whispered. "We've got to move fast if we're going to be back in time."

"Not too fast. . . . Let's see what he's up tae."

"Pretty clear to me," said Marks. "That's some sort of a micro . . ."

"Aye, Ah ken thot. But what's he gettin'?"

"Oh, the message. Yes, let's wait a bit. . . ."

Now the monk was leaning over his box, adjusting the two brass knobs again. Then he huddled down lower and began jotting something down on a sheet of paper. The two airmen waited impatiently, conscious of the minutes that were speeding by and bringing their zero hour ever closer.

They crept carefully nearer, crouching tense and silent near the wide trapdoor. Above them were the great bells and from them hung the heavy ropes that went through smooth, well-worn holes in the floor to the vestry below.

Then suddenly the silence of the church was shattered and pandemonium broke loose.

THE giant monk had turned and caught sight of the two intruders. He wheeled quickly, jerking the headphones off and grunting a loud oath.

McGregor was upon him in an instant, his dirk gleaming in the light of the lantern. Marks, leaping forward, slipped on the smooth belfry floor and when he recovered his balance he saw McGregor caught in the vice-like grip of his huge opponent. His arm had been trapped in a wrestler's hold and the monk was steadily forcing it back until the Scot let out a scream of agony.

With a quick jerk the monk hurled his

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opponent away and the Scot hit the angled wall with a sickening thud. Marks took one awed look and knew that his friend was "out"; then he dug his hobnails in and awaited the onslaught. The monk stood breathing hard for a moment and then came on. The Australian stood his ground and the monk dived at him with a wild bellow.

McGregor stirred in his corner.

"Hold him, Arthur!" he cried, and started to crawl towards the small table near the lantern.

Marks stood his ground and as the monk hurled himself forward he let his knees sag. The monk landed full on his shoulders, and with a knack gained on Australian cattle ranches Marks heaved up into a flying mare and sent his attacker sprawling. They heard a low guttural scream as the monk went flying across the room—straight for the open trapdoor.

Marks turned sharply, poised ready to renew the attack, but there was no need. Arms and legs outspread, the monk hit the floor and disappeared headlong through the trapdoor. The belfry ropes above swayed wildly for an instant and then one jerked taut. There came a low gurgling cry, followed an instant later by an ominous crack.

The one taut bell-rope swung gently to and fro in the narrow width of the flooring.

Still crawling across the floor on his hands and knees, McGregor gained the small table at which the monk had been sitting and, reaching up for a sheet of paper, stuffed it into the breast-pocket of his tunic. Marks pulled him to his feet and held the lantern up to his face.

"You all right?" he asked.

"Aye. . . . Get me ma dirk, Arthur," McGregor replied, steadying himself against the table.

The Australian found the gleaming knife, and McGregor stuck it in his hose-top. Then he let Marks help him to the top of the steps.

"What happened tae him?" he enquired, gesturing towards the trap-door.

"Dunno," Marks answered. "But we'll soon find out."

Marks went first, lending the still-groggy Scotsman a helping hand. Half-way down they found out what had happened to the monk. In the dim light of the lantern which the Australian still carried they saw him swaying gently among the bell ropes. One rope had caught under an arm and had somehow wound itself round the throat of the monk. His mouth was wide open, the head forced back in a grotesque position.

"He got caught up in the ropes, Arthur," McGregor whispered.

"Yes. Fell head first through and tried to grab one," Marks said, watching the dangling figure twist slowly. "I must have caught him under the chin."

"Well, it was him or us," McGregor said reflectively, and stared in fascination at the slowly revolving figure until Marks had to pull him away.

"Thot's fra Major Mackenzie," said McGregor finally as he started down the steps.

CHAPTER VI

The Bombers Get Through

MARKS said little on the way back to the aerodrome, except to encourage his companion to hurry. They scrambled along sunken roads, across fields, and finally reached the orchard. Staggering on, weary and breathless after their efforts, they gained the aerodrome and saw several machines lined up on the tarmac with their engines running.

"Cripes, Mac!" gasped Marks. "We've got to move. They're all ready."

The Scot nodded and broke into a shambling run in Marks' wake.

They found six Bristol Fighters and two other Handleys, besides No. 11, waiting on the line. Sergeant Ryan, clad in oily leather and with a stub pipe between his thumb and forefinger, bellowed at Marks the instant he saw him.

"Here's your gear. Jump into it. The Major's just about roarin' for you two spalpeens."

"Where the devil . . . ?" began Armitage, appearing from under the

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bomber's nose, and then passed on with a curt "I'll see you both later."

McGregor said nothing, but shoved his arms into another short leather flying coat. He pulled his helmet down tighter and peered up at his guns, which someone had already locked on for him. Beside him, Arthur Marks threw off his shoes and dragged on long-legged fleece-lined flying boots, a leather flying coat and a shapeless helmet.

"Where you bin?" demanded Ryan. "We thought you'd missed it."

"Tell you later, Sarge," Marks promised, and McGregor nodded agreement.

Engines were revving up now and officers in trim khaki were bustling about and counting their crews. Townsend came out of the shadows, expressed a brief but biting opinion of the two late-comers, and climbed aboard No. 11.

At last the two were ready and, mounting the throat ladder, crawled along to their positions. McGregor, still silent and morose, checked his guns and then sat down well below the gun-ring and produced the sheet of paper he had taken from the table in the belfry.

He still had his small flashlight with him, and with its aid he now tried to make out the writing on the paper. There were letters quickly blocked in, but no group seemed to make any sense until he discovered that the letters used were limited to the letter-notes of the music scale, A, B, C, D, E, F and G.

Even that discovery, however, was of little help, for he could not see how seven letters alone could be used to fill out a twenty-six-letter alphabet. Nevertheless, he continued to puzzle away at the code while the three Handley Pages rumbled away and took-off. He changed over from the paper he had taken and worked on the sheet of music, poring over the letters Arthur Marks had checked.

Still it made no sense.

The Bristol Fighters came up after them and sat high above them in a wide V-formation, their trailing exhaust flashes plainly visible. The other two Handley Pages were in position off their wing-tips, and in loose formation the aerial cavalcade set out for Renaix.

No sooner had they crossed the line than they were struck by an unusual absence of trouble. There was no familiar "Archie" greeting. The searchlights simply swished slowly back and forth, making no apparent effort to pick them out. Once the Bristols were caught dead in a glare, but the beam was suddenly switched off and swung to another area.

Townsend drew his brows together and then looked across at Armitage.

The bomber-officer was up on one knee staring about him, as if he already scented trouble.

Then it came.

A Bristol Fighter fluttered down from the darkness above, a winged ball of flame that missed a wing-tip of No. 11 by inches.

Simultaneously, Marks' guns began chattering madly at a black Pfalz that came diving through the Bristol formation. The two-seater gunners were giving as good as they were getting, but the sky suddenly seemed full of black single-seaters. In less than three minutes the Bristol escort was broken up and scattered and the three lumbering bombers were flying on, alone, into the enemy territory.

Behind them the sky was lit by the flare of a blazing Fighter as the battle still raged, and the Handley Page crews knew they were in for it. This was to be no ordinary night. Never before had they been trapped so close to the front line.

THE Handleys closed in together now and as they forged on through the darkness it occurred suddenly to Armitage that McGregor had taken no part in the excitement they had just left behind them. Never once had he even made a move to get up and use his guns.

Armitage leaned over and thumped the top of the cowl. The gunner stirred slowly and peered over towards the control pit.

"Get up, man! Get up!" the bomber-officer yelled, jerking his hand up to illustrate his meaning. "You're not hit, are you?"

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McGregor shook his head, but showed no sign of having heard the order. Armitage took a deep breath and was about to bawl out a final order when suddenly the "Archies" began their battering again, and once more the searchlights slashed their blades through the thin veils of cloud. Out of the darkness, four of the Bristols reappeared and joined the bombers. The noise of their arrival made McGregor look up, and he saw that two were missing.

"Four oot o' six," he muttered. "Four oot o' six. . . . Four . . ." he went on mumbling, and then the figure four became mixed up in his mind with the figure seven. There were seven letters to the scale of notes he had been studying.

"Seven and four are eleven. . . . Noo. . . . Eleven won't do. . . . Seven less four is three. . . . Noo. . . . Seven times four is twenty-eight. . . . twenty-eight. . . . Two too mony. . . . Only twenty-six letters in th' alphabet. . . . But that brings it doon."

Quickly he scrawled a line of the alphabet across the top of the sheet of music and then under the letters he wrote a series of scale notes running from A to G.

"The fust seven notes will be all right," he muttered as a Bristol Fighter and a Pfalz fought a duel less than fifty feet above his head. He could hear Marks' guns trying to get at the Hun fighter. Yet all he did was to crouch closer to the floor of his cockpit and begin laboriously to work out the code and decipher the two messages.

He soon grasped the obvious fact that any letter between A and G had to mean one of any four letters with the exception of F and G which could only be repeated three times, as there were only twenty-six letters in the alphabet. Meanwhile he ignored both the frantic shouts from Armitage and the pandemonium of the action that was now raging all around him.

THE three Handleys had reached Renaix by cutting sharp across from Roubaix, and already they were in line for bombing.

Only three Bristols were left now, but those that were absent had not gone without company, and the course from Armentieres to Renaix was dotted with Bristol and Pfalz fuselages.

No. 11 took the lead and went down on the goods yard with throttle wide open. Two Pfalz tried to get into position beneath them, but the front gunner on the second bomber sent a burst clean into the leader's petrol tank and the machine exploded right in the path of the second machine. Mingling their debris, the two 'planes went down in a welter of fabric, spruce and flaming petrol.

When the first of No. 11's bombs hit with a reverberating roar, McGregor was sucking the end of his pencil. He leapt up like a Jack-in-the-box, but the sudden upward zoom of No. 11 jammed him quickly down again and he caught his chin on the gun-ring, opening up an old gash which trickled blood all over his hands. Wiping it away with his sleeve, he turned once more to his endless pencilling.

Armitage was on one knee, leaning over his bomb-sight. His arm came up again as they roared round, and down inside the fuselage Ryan and Tate stood ready to jerk the toggles. Marks was hammering away at everything in sight, but stopped suddenly to cry out in horror as he saw a Handley Page crash headlong into a long line of warehouses. The great bomber blossomed once with a billow of smoke and flame and then exploded, scattering men and machine into a thousand pieces.

Down in the front turret of No. 11, McGregor still worked away at his blood-spattered sheets. Finally, a word made sense and he leapt to his feet waving the sheet of music. Armitage turned as though a ghost had suddenly appeared before him.

"Major Mackenzie!" McGregor screamed, holding the sheet of paper aloft.

Armitage turned his back upon him and glued his eye to the bomb-sight. He drew a quick bead and jerked his arm up and down in quick succession.

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No. 11 leaped and bucked as Tate answered the signal and jerked the toggles of the 112's.

MCGREGOR crawled up his tunnel and his head came out somewhere near Townsend's knees.

"Back to Alluin, sor. . . . Back to Alluin," he pleaded, shoving the sheet of paper forward.

Armitage took it and stared at the scrawled words.

"Read it! . . . Read it, sor! . . . You ken the French," he begged.

Armitage helped the gunner out and dragged him down inside the bomb chamber. Drawing Armitage's sleeve back, McGregor stared at his watch, then burst into a hurried explanation of how he had intercepted the two messages and the way in which he had deciphered them.

Suppressed excitement in his eyes, Armitage glanced again at the message.

"*Bomber crew escaped and returned. Caution,*" he read.

"Thot's the message the priest at Cassel sent first," McGregor explained anxiously. "What does the other say about Major Mackenzie, sor?"

Armitage took the second sheet of paper and read:

"*Removing Mackenzie at midnight.*"

"Twenty minutes!" breathed McGregor. "Ye'll do ut, sor?"

"I don't quite grasp all this yet," Armitage objected.

"Don't ye see, sor? They must hae Major Mackenzie there at that auld kirk. They shot him doon there . . . somehow. They shot Captain Ball doon near there, too, and a lot more. They hae somethin' in thot belfry."

"But why should they keep Mackenzie there, and how do you know he's there?"

"Why, that's the place where they played the music, sor," McGregor said excitedly, "thot's where this message came from. They were workin' taegether . . . them twa fake priests. Thot's how they knew we were going to Renaix . . . yon burkie i' the belfry tells 'em on the organ."

"By Jove, you may be right!"

Armitage gasped, as the plot began to dawn on him. "Come on, McGregor. Up there at that gun!"

The Scot was back at his post in a moment and his guns were alive again as Armitage leaned over and explained the situation to Townsend. The Englishman's eyes opened wide, then he nodded and grinned as he saw McGregor try a long-range burst at a black Pfalz which had appeared from nowhere. From the rear turret Marks, too, joined in, and as No. 11 turned north-west over Mouscron and headed for Alluin, he celebrated by clipping the wings of a scarlet-and-green Fokker that was diving down on the lone Handley behind them.

They hurtled through the slashing blades of searchlights, dodged "Archie" and his sister "Kate" who threw the flaming onions, and then Townsend shot a Very-light signal towards the following Handley Page that sent it ruddering off to make the return journey to Cassel unaccompanied.

"I'll get her in and out," Townsend promised Armitage, as No. 11 flew on alone, "but as McGregor and Marks seem to be the only two here who really know what all this is about, I suggest we let them play the hand out when we land."

"Good idea," Armitage agreed. "They started this riot. We'll let 'em finish it."

"Don't worry," Townsend laughed, "they will!"

CHAPTER VII

The Secret of Alluin

NO. 11 circled wide over Alluin for a time, and then Townsend, satisfied of his bearings, throttled back and sent the bomber nosing down. With a skill born of long practice, he put down in the long field near the Alluin church while Armitage told McGregor and Marks what was expected of them, and gave them his and Townsend's automatics.

At the far end of the field the bomber came to rest, and McGregor, Marks, Armitage and Ryan all tumbled out and together hoisted the tail on their shoulders and swung the machine around ready

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for a quick take-off. Then Armitage and Ryan climbed back aboard, the bomber officer taking over McGregor's post in the front gun turret.

By the time he reached it, McGregor and Marks were out of sight. Crouching low as they hurried along, they cut through the graveyard, which was about four hundred yards from the field in which they had landed, and soon caught the light clatter of an idling motor-car engine. They climbed the churchyard wall and crawled towards the car, which stood without lights. There were two men standing near the hood, cupping their hands over cigarettes and talking quietly. The two airmen waited in the shadow of a low monument, tense and watchful.

A few moments passed and then the church door opened and three men emerged. One was a stocky priest with a hand resting in the waist-cord of his dusty cassock. The second was a tall, heavy-shouldered officer and the third a slim, slight youth in British khaki. He had one arm in a sling and a white bandage around his forehead.

"It's Major Mackenzie," breathed McGregor, gripping his companion's arm. "I'll gie him a signal. Wait for it, and then. . . ."

The priest and the German officer exchanged a few words and then there burst from McGregor's throat an ear-piercing yell that woke the echoes in the little churchyard.

"*Tulach Ard!*" roared McGregor.

For a second there was a breathless silence as the three men stood petrified with amazement, then Marks' gun spoke once and the German officer fell to the ground.

"*Tulach Ard!*" echoed the slim British officer and, spinning quickly on one foot, his fist caught the monk full in the stomach, toppling him over backwards.

The scuffle lasted only a few seconds, for McGregor and Marks had already leapt upon the two men by the car. With one swing of his dirk the Scot cut his opponent from throat to breastbone, and turned to see Marks go down with a thud, bowled over by the rifle the

second man had thrown at him. McGregor wheeled round and caught the German full on the mark to send him rolling in agony under the running-board of the car.

Mackenzie, who had dashed up to join in the struggle, jerked Marks to his feet, and together he and McGregor got him over the wall. From then on they practically dragged him along, for the blow from the rifle had caught him full across the shins and he was numb from the knees down.

Through the gravestones they staggered and over another low wall, then out in the open field that led down an easy slope. Shots rang out behind them and they knew that one of their opponents had picked up a gun and was following them.

Panting and dishevelled, they gained the bomber at last and hoisted Marks up the metal ladder to the throat-hatch where Sergeant Ryan lugged him through the companionway to the bomb chamber and set to work on him. Townsend opened up the engines, and No. 11 rolled away while Armitage and Tate spattered the graveyard and grounds with Lewis fire.

They roared up off the ground, and Townsend, levelling out, turned over a railway embankment and headed west.

Half an hour later No. 11 crossed the lines again and headed for home in company with a chance-met flight of night-flying Camels which insisted upon escorting them all the way into Cassel.

THAT night the orderly office on Cassel aerodrome was a centre of unusual popularity and excitement. First, McGregor and the still-limping Marks had to describe how they had picked up the messages. Then McGregor had to explain how he had stumbled upon the secret of the scale code and to display the sheet of music covered with his scrawled lettering.

Major McKelvie took the paper and, with Mackenzie, Armitage and Townsend crowding interestedly around him, studied it intently for some moments. At first glance he could make little sense of the

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apparently random strings of letters, but gradually the nature of the code became clear as he checked the marked music score against the scribbled messages. When he had finished, he threw the papers down and laughed aloud, for the only word in the messages that could possibly have made any sense to McGregor was the name "Mackenzie." All the rest was in French.

"NEVER mind, one word of Scots is worth a dozen in any other language," Major Mackenzie retorted when McKelvie had explained his amusement. "And the best two Scottish words I've heard for many a long day were that '*Tulach Ard*' of McGregor's when they were taking me out to that car by the church."

" '*Tulach Ard*' ? " repeated Armitage in a puzzled tone. "That's a new one for McGregor, isn't it? What does it mean?"

" '*Tulach Ard*,' " Mackenzie replied with a glint in his eye, "is the war-cry of the Mackenzie clan, and the only Mackenzie it won't stir into action is a dead one!"

"Good work, McGregor!" Major McKelvie nodded approvingly. "But, look here, Mackenzie, you still haven't told us how you ever got into that confounded church in the first place."

"That's soon told," Mackenzie replied. "I was doing a late afternoon show and on the way out I came down low, as I usually did, to do a spot of trench 'strafing.'"

"Yes, we'd gathered that much from the balloon wallahs," McKelvie observed.

"Well, I suppose I was rather asking for trouble," Mackenzie continued, "but on my solo shows I'd got into the habit of coming low down behind that old church at Alluin. It seemed a safe sort of place to check up one's bearings, and for another thing, I used to set my watch by the clock in the church tower there. Well, this time I did it once too often, for just as I got level with the tower the fun started."

"You mean they opened fire on you?" McKelvie asked.

"Fire! I'll say they did," Mackenzie grinned. "Why, that clock face just opened out, and there, not fifty yards away, were about half a dozen Maxims mounted on a stand. I was just cold meat for 'em, and I still can't make out how I managed to get away with it. One bullet grazed my head and two more went through the fleshy part of my arm. They practically blasted the engine out of my 'bus and though I don't remember anything much after that, I suppose I must have pulled off some sort of landing. Next thing I knew I was in a cot in that church. They were quite decent to me in a way, and pretty bucked about having winged me. Seems they'd been gunning for me for quite a while."

"But why on earth did they keep you there?" asked Armitage.

"Don't know, for sure," Mackenzie replied. "But I rather imagine they couldn't very easily move me just then and were quite content to lie doggo for a bit. It wasn't until they found your old Handley the other night that they began to get a bit scared."

"But none of the German squadrons even seemed to know that you'd been brought down," McKelvie interjected.

"Yes, I heard about that, too," Mackenzie said. "That monk chap—of course he wasn't a monk really; it was just a disguise to keep the locals from talking—explained it to me. The idea was that the effect of the news about my being a goner would be greater on both sides of the line if it was kept quiet until the excitement had been well worked up. Damned silly, I thought it, personally."

"Not a bit of it," McKelvie objected.

"A very clever move of theirs, aimed at getting the maximum moral effect. You seem to forget that you're all kinds of a national hero and that the papers at home have been making a hell of to-do about your disappearance."

"And what made them decide to move you in the end?" Townsend enquired.

"The arrival of you fellows," was the reply. "When they found your Handley and discovered that you'd all got clear

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away they decided it was time to think of moving. I rather gathered they were scared that you, or someone else, might have got ideas about that church and would be back to call on it with a load of 112-pounders."

An appreciative chuckle came from the members of the Coffin Crew standing in the background. Then McKelvie spoke again.

"There's only one other thing I still don't understand," he said, "and that is how the monk at Cassel church here was able to listen to the organ at Alluin. Why, they must be miles apart."

"I think I can explain that, sir," offered Townsend quietly. "I've had a talk with McGregor and Marks, and they tell me that while they were in the belfry at Cassel they noticed a very sensitive microphone set with directional detectors. Now, if you look at the map, you'll see that Cassel and Alluin are about twenty-seven miles apart and in a straight line that runs between two valleys."

"Go on," said McKelvie interestedly, studying the map before him.

"Well, sir," Townsend continued, "organ music is particularly suited for sound-wave detection because of its vibration, and a sensitive receiving set could be tuned so that any especially loud or accented notes could be picked up and noted. Then, in this case, all the man at the detector had to do was to change

the music notes into the letters of his code. Of course, reception would have been impossible at that distance during a barrage or anything of that sort, but the vibrations could be heard well above the ordinary noise of war and could easily be picked up during the quiet periods of the night. And I imagine that was the time these fellows did most of their transmission of information."

THERE was a silence for several minutes as the full ingenuity of the scheme sank into the minds of the little group of fighting men, all accustomed to open and straightforward methods of waging a war, but rather at a loss in the deceitful intricacies of this web of espionage.

It was Major McKelvie who broke the silence at last, and when he spoke he voiced the general feeling of his audience.

"This war is beginning to get a bit too involved for an old war-horse like me," he said with a smile. "In fact I almost believe I'd apply for a transfer to the Army Service Corps—if it wasn't for one little thing."

"And that is, sir?" asked Armitage and Townsend almost together.

"That is, if I wasn't so darned curious to see what crazy kind of mischief the Coffin Crew'll be getting up to next," was Major McKelvie's laughing reply.

THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER :

A HIGH-SPEED "HUSH-HUSH" BOMBER

A HAWKER Henley light bomber zooming up in an almost vertical climb above a snow-covered aerodrome forms the subject of this month's striking and seasonable cover by S. R. Drigin.

The Henley's relationship with the Hurricane single-seater fighter produced by the same firm is obvious from its appearance, and both machines, in fact, owe much of their clean and impressive lines to the same talented designer, Mr. Sidney Camm, Chief Designer of Hawker Aircraft Limited.

Built to combine the highest possible speed with maximum bomb-carrying capacity, the Henley is fitted with one of the latest ethylene-glycol cooled Rolls-Royce Merlin 1,050 h.p. engines, whose radiator, mounted immediately beneath the spinner, can be clearly seen in the almost head-on view portrayed in the cover painting. Less apparent, viewed from this angle, is the unusually deep "belly" of the machine which permits of the bomb load being carried inside the fuselage, instead of in exterior racks, thus greatly assisting the machine's performance

A two-seater machine, the Henley provides comfortable accommodation for pilot and observer in an enclosed cockpit. The rear section of the cockpit covering is movable and may be slid back to give the observer a clear field of fire for his Lewis gun. The pilot is also armed with a forward-firing gun.

In conformity with modern practice, the Henley is fitted with a fully retractile undercarriage, the two landing wheels and their supports folding sideways and inwards into cavities in the underside of the wing. The retracting mechanism is operated hydraulically and there are warning devices in the pilot's cockpit to guard against any attempt to land with the undercarriage in the "up" position. Principal dimensions are a span of 48 feet, a length of 36 feet and a height of 11 feet 9 inches.

Another noteworthy feature of the Henley is the three-bladed variable-pitch metal airscrew which permits the angle of the blades to be adjusted in flight so as to ensure maximum engine efficiency.

The performance figures of the Henley may not yet be divulged, but it is no secret that this new light bomber is exceptionally fast.

Flight of a President

Two Men, an American Airman
and an Absconding President,
made Foolproof Plans for a Life
and Death Flight—but Each
Planned a Different Ending

By
"VIGILANT"

CHAPTER I Escape of a President

"THAT will be all for to-night, Gomez," said the President. "We can do nothing more, and General Valdeno has the situation well in hand. Go to bed ; you look tired."

"It has been a strenuous day, Your Excellency," agreed his secretary in tones so sympathetic that for a moment the President thought the man must really like him. But then he reminded himself that Gomez, like the rest, served him only from fear. Let him but show one sign of weakness and they would all turn on him and rend him.

"Good-night, Gomez," he said, and turned away.

"Good-night, Your Excellency. Sleep well."

The secretary bowed and withdrew.

But the President had no thought of retiring to rest. Lighting a cigar, he stepped out on to the balcony of his study to listen to the firing and read the message it conveyed. For a few moments he could hear only the crackle of rifles and the chatter of machine-guns. Then there came a sudden lull in the din, and the faint breeze carried the echoes of a defiant shout from the harbour quarter :

"*Viva Quesada, el Liberador ! Long live Quesada, the Liberator !*"



Rodriguez dived head-first into space

The President smiled. Fifteen years ago the Botogonians had acclaimed him as their liberator when he had led the mob from the harbour quarter to storm the palace held by the half-hearted troops still fighting for his predecessor, President Garcia. Now he was the

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tyrant from whom Quesada had sworn to deliver the long-suffering Republic of Botogonia.

The President smiled again. If Quesada won, he would hang on to the presidency year after year, just as all his predecessors had done. Then one day he, too, would become the tyrant, and another liberator would lead a revolution against him.

The firing broke out again, and the President listened intently. Several unsuccessful revolutions against his authority had taught him to follow the course of the fighting in the harbour quarter from the sounds of the firing he could hear on his balcony. This time he detected an ominous note which indicated that the rebels must be advancing while the Government troops, commanded by General Valdeno, whose loyalty was more than doubtful, were falling back.

It was time to quit, he reflected. Well, why not? The greater part of the fortune he had amassed in fifteen years of office lay snug and safe in a London bank. It amounted to over a million pounds sterling. Then he thought of the copper mines for which an English syndicate was in negotiation with him. If that deal came off, it ought to bring him in a second million in a few years. Then he could retire and live such a life as even he had seldom dreamt of, in Paris and on the Riviera.

He listened to the firing again, and shook his head. Of course, he might be able to suppress Quesada's rebellion and retain his office just long enough to gather in that second million but, on the other hand, he might find himself with his back to a stone wall and his chest bared to receive the bullets of a dozen rifles. That had been the fate of his predecessor, the late lamented ex-President Garcia.

Bah! Garcia had been a fool, reflected the President. The man had collected something more than a modest competence for his old age, but had been too greedy and too stupid to go while the going was good. And so he had died the death of a fool, facing those dozen

rifles.

The President's mind was made up. It was time to put his foolproof getaway into action. He closed the balcony window, strode over to his desk and took up the receiver of the palace telephone.

"Send Martin to me," he ordered. "Tell him I have instructions for him about to-morrow."

Then the President went into his bedroom and unlocked the safe.

First, he extracted a packet of Botogonian notes, smiling disdainfully as he thrust them into a trouser pocket. Their value was small, for his country's finances were a byword. However, they might serve some immediate need, but, like all Botogonians, he had more faith in the next packet his fingers grasped. This contained £2,000 in crisp, crinkly Bank of England notes, and he knew that it would be a potent bribe for anyone who tried to stop the getaway he had planned for just this emergency.

Yet even £2,000 might be too small a sum for any true patriot he might chance to meet before he won safely through to his aeroplane, and so he had a larger bribe at hand. It consisted of bearer bonds to the value of £100,000—one-tenth of the entire fortune he had earned by ruling Botogonia for fifteen long and tyrannous years! A goodly sum, but a cheap price for his life, and, if necessary, he would pay up and look pleasant. But he did not think there was any real danger of having to part with those bearer bonds, for the details of his foolproof getaway had been too carefully planned.

AS the President stowed the last of the bearer bonds about his person, there came a knock at his door.

"Come in," he called, and beamed graciously when Rudge Martin, his long, lean American pilot, entered. Although he could trust no Botogonian, he was on terms of some intimacy with this foreigner from the States who had helped to plan his means of escape.

"Going to quit to-night, Chief?" inquired the American.

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The President nodded.

"Guessed you would," his pilot continued. "I've fixed everything O.K. The ship's ready; we can take-off when you like."

The President's mind reviewed rapidly all the arrangements he had made with Martin. Everything depended on him being able to reach his private aerodrome unobserved, for anyone who saw him on his way there at this hour of night would guess the truth. Then even the lowest of his subjects would not hesitate to detain him by force in the hope of obtaining the reward Quesada would pay for his body—dead or alive. By an unlucky chance he might even fall into the hands of some super-patriot capable of refusing the money he was prepared to offer for his life.

The American pilot seemed to read his thoughts.

"Maybe you were too busy to-day to keep an eye on my movements, Mr. President," he suggested.

"I had a lot to do, Martin."

"Well, Chief, I had the ship out this afternoon and told the mechanics to stand by in case the rebels cut the line to San Diego and you wanted me to fly there with a message for the governor. Then I took her up for a couple of circuits, and when I came down again I told 'em there was something wrong with the port motor. So from then until sundown the poor devils were kept busy trying to trace a trouble that wasn't there. And you can bet your bottom dollar the word's got round this burg that the President's ship can't fly, so that he won't be able to quit if Quesada wins."

"There are many who would like to see me cornered like a rat in a trap," observed the President with a grim smile.

"Sure thing, Chief," the American agreed. "Plenty of folk would be glad to read your obituary notice, but they'll have to wait awhile. Because, you see, I stayed on after the mechanics went home and tanked the ship up good and plenty. She's ready to fly you to British Guiana as soon as you like."

The President smiled, and laid an approving hand on the airman's shoulder.

"There's twenty thousand dollars waiting in the bank at Georgetown for you, Martin, when we get there," he said.

"Sounds good to me," was Martin's reply. "And the sooner we get moving towards it the better I'll like it."

A vicious outburst of firing from the harbour quarter gave emphasis to his words, and without further delay the two men left the President's study and crept along the corridor to a small iron staircase used by the palace servants. In the circumstances, it was greatly to be preferred to the publicity attendant on the big marble front stairs with its sentinel on guard at the bottom.

Creeping up the small iron staircase, they came to a door at the top. This was always kept locked at night, for the President did not wish his domestic staff to have access to his private apartments in the small hours. Two of his predecessors had been assassinated because they neglected this elementary precaution.

But he had a key to unlock it, and, after removing their shoes, they descended noiselessly. At the bottom the President unlocked another door, which opened on to a long corridor. Some twenty paces along it, Martin halted and inserted a key in a door on the right of the passage.

"Come in, Chief," he smiled as the President entered. "Not quite so roomy as yours, I guess, but if we're wise we won't be staying long."

Although situated some twenty feet above the ground, the window of the small sitting-room allotted to Martin was guarded by a grille of iron bars, for the presidential palace had been built in the days when a handful of Spanish adventurers ruled the territory won from vast Indian hordes by virtue of their armour and superior weapons. In those troublous times, when native chiefs nursed grim thoughts of insurrection and dissatisfied conquistadores plotted to seize power, the bars were necessary defences.

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But they had long since rusted from disuse, and Martin had found no great difficulty in filing several of them to make an opening that admitted the passage of a man's body. That had been done several months ago; but Martin had left the bars in their original positions, and there was no evidence that only a slight pressure would be sufficient to displace them.

"If you'll just step into the bedroom, you'll find everything ready for you," said the American.

CHAPTER II

The Voice of Retribution

TEN minutes later the President emerged from the bedroom. His trim but fierce black beard had vanished, and he now wore the greasy overalls of a mechanic.

Martin mustered him with an approving eye. "You sure look a real dandy mechanic, Mr. President," he commented. "But I reckon we won't stop to admire the transformation. I've shifted those bars, so let's be moving along."

"Agreed," said the President. "You go first."

"O.K.," the American replied. "If the coast's clear, I'll signal by flashing my electric torch just once."

Then, clambering up on to the window-sill, Martin felt for the rope he had fixed to one of the uninjured bars while the President had been changing in the bedroom. He grasped it and slid noiselessly to the ground.

The President, standing well back from the window, waited for the signal. It came, and he slid agilely down the rope to stand beside Martin. He glanced nervously round the kitchen garden in which he found himself, but no lurking form rose up to bar his way. A sudden furious burst of machine-gun fire from the harbour quarter stirred him to action, and cautiously he led the way down the long central path. At the farther end he extracted a key with which he opened the massive gate, and the two men passed out into the park.

Less than a quarter of a mile away lay the stretch of level turf that served as the President's private aerodrome.

As they approached it in silence the President's heartbeats quickened. He had never felt quite easy about the next part of the proceedings, for everything depended upon the attitude of the sentinel on guard at the hangar.

There had to be a sentinel there. The President would gladly have dispensed with him, but the risks were too great. Only the presence of an armed guard could ensure the machine against sabotage by some zealous member of the Quesada party for, despite the manifold activities of his secret political police, he knew there were only too many undetected adherents of his rival who would gladly hazard their lives to prevent his escape at this critical moment.

What would the sentinel do? If he recognised the President in his mechanic's disguise, he must inevitably guess his intentions. Would he then summon the rest of the guard who formed a cordon round the park? Would they all turn against him and hand him over to Quesada?

"Get some fellows from one of the mountain regiments to furnish the park guard," Martin had advised him. "Hicks like them'll never know you with or without your beard."

The advice was good, and the President had acted on it, but was it good enough? Or would the million to one chance place on guard at the aerodrome just the one man who recognised and hated him? That was the possibility he foresaw and dreaded.

But the President had learnt to control his fears, and there was no outward sign to betray his uneasiness as he slouched along by Martin's side with the gait of a slovenly mechanic.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

A sentinel's bayonet gleamed before them in the moonlight.

"Friends!" replied Martin.

"The password?"

"San Cristobal. I'm the President's pilot; you ought to know me by now!"

"Ah, the Gringo!" exclaimed the

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sentry, peering into the American's face. "And your companion?"

"My new mechanic. We're due for some more work on the aeroplane. The President wants it ready for him in the morning. Here are our passes, buddy, take a look at 'em."

He handed the sentinel the papers that had been prepared for this emergency, and in the moonlight the President watched the man's swarthy, heavy features as he scrutinised them with a puzzled expression in his dull eyes. He appeared to be an Indian from the Coronado Mountains, and it was obvious that he could not read, but with the slow cunning ingrained in his race by centuries of Spanish domination, he must needs make pretence of perusing the documents. The President's hand went to the trouser pocket where he had bestowed the Botogonian notes he took from his safe.

At last the Indian appeared to be satisfied.

"Pass, *amigos*," he said in his broken Spanish. "His Excellency's orders must be obeyed, and I shall guard your labours."

THERE was exultation in the President's heart as he advanced towards the silvery De Havilland Dragonfly that gleamed in the moonlight. How foolish he had been to imagine that that illiterate Indian would try to stop him! Nevertheless, no music ever sounded sweeter in his ears than the roar of the two Gipsy Major engines when at last Martin opened the throttles.

Satisfied, after a brief test, that they were giving full power, Martin throttled back and allowed the engines to idle gently while he removed the chocks from in front of the wheels.

"Say, what about your parachute, Chief?" he asked, as the President was about to step into the cabin.

"Is it necessary?" his passenger asked impatiently.

"You never know, Chief," was the quizzical reply.

The President shot a hasty glance at the Indian marching stolidly up and

down only a few yards away.

"Don't worry," his pilot reassured him. "That goof's never seen a parachute in his life, and he won't know what it is."

"Very well, then," said the President, and allowed Martin to buckle on the harness for him.

"Now get aboard, Chief, and we'll be off," said Martin when he had finished.

The President needed no second invitation, and it was with a deep sigh of relief that, a few moments later, he felt the bumping of the wheels as the silvery Dragonfly shot forward across the turf. He settled back in his armchair seat and by force of habit donned the earphones of the special telephone set he had had installed to enable him to communicate easily with Martin in the pilot's seat in front.

The President chuckled happily. At last he was free of the cares and perils of the office he had held for fifteen long years; at last he could enjoy the wealth he had amassed. Paris! The Riviera! Le Touquet! St. Moritz! What a grand life it would be! Gay visions of future luxury and pleasure danced through his mind, until, tired out with the tension of the day, he dozed off into an ecstatic slumber.

"Say, Chief!"

The President woke up to realise that his pilot was calling him through the speaking-tube.

"Yes, Martin," he murmured, "what is it?"

"Say, Chief, do you remember a family called Rodriquez?" came Martin's voice.

Rodriquez? The President had a good memory, and when it began to function he recalled a family of that name which had given much trouble during his third year of office. They were, in fact, responsible for the first rebellion against him, but they paid for their folly.

"Guess you cleaned up that Rodriquez crowd pretty thoroughly," said Martin.

"I did," replied the President em-

AIR STORIES

phatically. True, some of the luckier male members of the family had met their doom in action, but quite a number of them survived to face a firing party.

Then it suddenly occurred to the President that his pilot's interest in the Rodriguez affair was extraordinary and not a little impertinent. But before his lips could frame the snub he intended to administer, Martin spoke again :

"You took me on, Mr. President, because you couldn't trust any Botogonians to help you with your getaway when the time came. Wasn't that the idea ? "

"That is so," replied the puzzled President, "but——"

"But you thought you'd be safe enough with a Yank if you paid him good and proper and promised him a bonus, eh ? Well, Mr. President, I'm afraid you overlooked just one little detail. You forgot to rake up your Yank's past."

"What do you mean ? " gasped the now thoroughly bewildered President.

"I mean that it just didn't strike you that your Yank mightn't be a real one, but a Botogonian with a score to settle. It never occurred to you, for instance, that your pilot from the States might be young José Rodriguez who was at school in 'Frisco when you bumped off his father, brothers, uncles and cousins. Get me now, Mr. President ? "

THE President understood, and his hand went to a coat pocket underneath his overalls. But just at that moment Martin turned round and saw the gesture.

"I took the liberty of removing your gun when I put on your parachute harness," he said. "Yeah, Mr. President. I'm José Rodriguez right enough, and though I've forgotten most of my Spanish, I've not forgotten my family. So now I'm taking you for a ride."

"What are you going to do ? " gasped the President.

"Jump overboard, but I shouldn't advise you to follow me, because your parachute's about as much use as an

umbrella. I took care of that. You can try it right now, if you don't believe me."

Involuntarily, the President's hand went to the ring on his parachute. He merely twitched it, but it came away in his hand, with about three inches of ripcord. The parachute was obviously useless.

"So you daren't jump, eh ? " sneered Rodriguez, who had been watching his action.

The prospect of imminent death sharpened the President's wits.

"Look here, Rodriguez," he protested, "if I can't bring your relations to life again, at least I can compensate you for their deaths. I promised you a bonus for this trip, and I've got two thousand pounds in English money on me. I'll hand it over to you right away."

"Nothing doing, Mr. President."

"And some bearer bonds as well. I'll give you ten thousand pounds' worth of them."

There was no reply.

"Twenty thousand pounds in bearer bonds," offered the President.

"If I wasn't flying this kite I'd come over and ram 'em down your throat ! "

"Fifty thousand ! "

"To hell with them ! "

"A hundred thousand," cried the President desperately. "That's all I've got on me. You can search me if you don't believe me. Rodriguez, it's a good offer ! One hundred thousand pounds if you'll land me anywhere in British Guiana."

"Do you think I've been waiting all this time for my chance just to sell it for a hundred thousand pounds ? " snapped the airman. "No, Mr. President, you're talking to José Rodriguez now, and he's been waiting for this moment ever since you started planning your foolproof getaway with him. So quit howling and take what's coming to you ! "

"There's more than a hundred thousand for you if you land me in British Guiana. There's half a million for you—half my fortune. I can sell

FLIGHT OF A PRESIDENT

the securities in London and hand you over the cash. I'll swear any oath you like that I'll do it ! ”

“ I wouldn't sell you your life now for the whole million,” mocked Rodriquez, and suddenly burst into a peal of ringing laughter.

“ Say, Mr. President,” he volunteered at length, “ I just can't help laughing when I think that if you'd spent just a fraction of all that money you're offering me in learning to fly yourself, you could just have carried on without me. But you didn't ; so now you're for it. And don't move from your seat till I'm off this ship, because I've got a gun, and it's only my vow to make you know the agonies of fear my family suffered before they died that stops me from using it on you right now.”

But the President was far too unnerved to contemplate an assault on his pilot which might send them both crashing to a common doom. Without attempting to stop him, he watched Rodriquez leave his seat, wrench open the cabin door and clamber out on to the wing.

“ So long, Mr. President,” came the pilot's mocking farewell. “ Fly the old ship to British Guiana if you can—or to hell if you can't.”

And, hand on the release ring of his parachute, Rodriquez dived head foremost into space.

CHAPTER III

Flight of a President

PARALYSED with fear, the President stared out of the cabin window. The bright moonlight showed him the billowing white expanse of a parachute that had opened to carry the jumper safely down to earth. In a second it was lost to sight, and he braced himself for the swift descent and the fierce, smashing impact with the ground that must inevitably follow.

It did not come. The Dragonfly continued to cruise as smoothly as though Rodriquez was still at the controls, and gradually the first paralysing shock of the President's terror began to wear off and the instinct of self-preservation

asserted itself.

“ I'll fly the machine and beat you yet, Rodriquez ! ” the President muttered as, with fumbling hands, he unbuckled his useless parachute and threw it down.

He stumbled forward towards the pilot's seat, but before he had settled into it, the Dragonfly, its equilibrium disturbed by his movements, had dipped her right wing, and the bank was rapidly becoming more acute. Remembering scraps of information gleaned from Rodriquez in various conversations, the President jerked the stick across to the left. The right wing came up again, but the left one went down so swiftly that he was nearly flung out of his seat, and he made matters still worse by an unintentional kick on the rudder-bar.

The next few minutes were a pilot's nightmare. The Dragonfly plunged down on to her nose ; then she reared up and threatened to stall. She did a couple of flick rolls which would have delighted any professor of aerobatics, but made the President's stomach protest violently. She recovered at the last critical fraction of a second from a sideslip, and by all the laws of aviation ought to have gone into at least five spins. But at last there came a moment when the Dragonfly was on an even keel again, and the President had just sufficient wits left to leave the controls alone and let her go on flying herself.

Perspiration drenched his body and blinded his eyes ; his breath came in gasps and sobs. But the machine flew on steadily, and at last he ventured to look about him and take stock of the situation.

At least he was still alive, and flying. But in what direction ? He could not tell how many times the machine had changed course during those terrible minutes when he first tried to master the controls. He sought to pick up his bearings from landmarks below, but found none that he could recognise in the moonlight. Then he looked at the sky, and his heart leapt for joy.

The moon was on his right-hand side. It had been on his right when

AIR STORIES

Rodriquez had jumped out, for he remembered how its rays illumined the parachute when it opened. So now he must be flying in precisely the same direction as he was when his pilot left him—towards British Guiana—and freedom. He had only to fly on and land!

Scraps of information picked up from Rodriquez came back to him as the Dragonfly roared through the night. He realised now that he had moved the stick too far and too hard when he endeavoured to correct that first dip; just the slightest pressure on the controls would do the trick. He experimented, and was delighted to find how well the Dragonfly responded to his manipulations. There did not seem to be anything particularly difficult in this flying business.

For a while he was so interested in his new-found power over the machine that he forgot his perilous situation and the task before him. Then he looked at the watch on the dashboard and discovered that more than an hour and a half had elapsed since the Dragonfly first took-off. Knowing her cruising speed to be 128 miles an hour, he felt sure that he must by now be flying over British Guiana. But, determined to make sure, he let the machine fly on for a while longer. Ten minutes later he heard an ominous coughing in the port engine.

He knew what it meant. Once before, when Rodriquez had been flying him to Santa Rosa on the western frontier, they had run out of petrol, with the result that they had had to spend the night in a verminous peasant's hut. He still had unpleasant memories of that mishap.

Now he would have to land, and a shiver ran through him, for he remembered Rodriquez telling him that landings were the most difficult part of a pilot's job. He also recalled that it was necessary to shut off his engines, but he had no idea as to how to do it. He tried several levers and switches at random, and at last happened upon the magneto switches. The rough sounds of the engines ceased, and the Dragonfly nosed silently downward. Vivid recol-

lections of fearful things that happened if a machine lost flying speed prompted the President to keep his machine gliding as steeply as he dared, until at last there came the moment when the ground was near and he realised that he must nerve himself for a landing.

Away on his left an even stretch of turf lay bathed in the brilliant moonlight. He did not relish the idea of going into the turn he needed to reach it, but knew it had to be done. He handled the controls gingerly this time and, though he skidded dangerously, luck was with him. He came in low over level ground that looked ideal for his purpose.

Then he remembered that he had to land into the wind. So far as he could tell, the night was windless, as might be expected at that time of the year. He decided to take the risk and carry straight ahead. He had no notion of the correct landing procedure, and the best he could manage was to let the machine sink and then, when he thought it was going to hit the ground, to pull the stick back.

The machine dropped. There was a mighty bump as the wheels hit the ground, and the Dragonfly leapt twenty feet into the air. The President thought his last moment had come. Frantically he pushed the stick forward. The 'plane hit again, bounced heavily and fell back. Then the wheels were running smoothly over the turf and he knew he had pulled off the landing.

He had done the impossible! He had beaten Rodriquez after all. He was safe in British Guiana! Once more visions of the gay life in Paris and on the Riviera danced before his eyes.

MEN ran alongside the Dragonfly when its wheels came to a standstill. They peered in at the President as he sat there, exulting in his hour of triumph. Then they helped him down.

"Where am I?" he asked them, and was amazed when two men grabbed his arms and hustled him away from the machine. They seemed to be angry with him about something.

FLIGHT OF A PRESIDENT

At first he was too indignant at their rough treatment and too dazed to take stock of his whereabouts. But gradually his eyes fixed themselves on a building that loomed before him in the moonlight. Its outlines seemed familiar; they bore a definite resemblance to those of his own palace!

Then a sharp voice bade his escort halt, and the President found himself staring at the aquiline features of Quesada, smiling at his obvious bewilderment.

"Good evening, or rather, good morning," said Quesada. "I really didn't expect you, although José Rodríguez swore you knew enough to be able to

manage the aeroplane. Permit me to congratulate you on the feat. . . . Oh, and, by the way, I expect you would like to see a priest before we get on with the next part of the proceedings."

As the soldiers led the ex-President away, it dawned on him that Rodríguez must have turned the Dragonfly back in the direction of Botogonia before he jumped off. Also, that, knowing the presidential aerodrome was the only possible landing-ground between the capital and the frontier, he had given the machine just enough petrol to bring her over her own aerodrome.

In short, the revenge planned by José Rodríguez had been foolproof.

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

BRITISH AIR STRENGTH (D. McGuire, Dublin, I.F.S.). (1) Strength of British air service personnel in August, 1914, comprised 2,073 officers and men, representing 146 officers and 1,097 other ranks of the R.F.C., and 130 officers and 700 other ranks of the R.N.A.S. At the end of the War, in November, 1918, our total air strength had risen to 291,175, made up of 27,333 officers, 16,681 cadets and N.C.O.'s under instruction, and 247,161 N.C.O.'s and men. (2) The present R.A.F. expansion scheme aims at a total personnel strength of approximately 70,000 officers and men, excluding reserves.

AIRCRAFT ARMAMENT (R. Easson, Dunbar, Scotland). (1) The land-type Lewis gun used during the War was water-cooled. For aircraft use, the water-jacketing was removed and the gun converted to air-cooling. Vickers aeroplane machine-guns are of the air-cooled type. (2) The Constantinesco oil-pressure interruptor gear for machine-guns was first successfully demonstrated on a B.E.2c in August, 1916.

McKEEVER'S 'PLANE (H. Heap, Sheffield, 9). Sorry, but we have no reliable record of the colour scheme of Major McKeever's service aircraft. We have heard of an all-white Bristol with yellow struts and red wheel discs which was supposed to have been flown by him, but have been unable to confirm this. Perhaps one of our readers may be able to help?

THE FANTÔME (V. R. Taylor, Bristol, 6). (1) The latest version of the Fairey Fantôme single-seater fighter biplane is the Fairey Feroce, a five-gun fighter with a top speed of 270 m.p.h. It is a product of the Belgian branch of the Fairey Company. (2) No, the Fantôme was never adopted

by the R.A.F.; it was specifically designed to meet Belgian Air Force requirements.

VEGA GULL (N. Oliver, Dublin, I.F.S.). The two front seats of the Percival Vega Gull have full dual control, with separate joy-sticks and parallel motion rudder-bars. Engine throttle and wheel brake lever are in the centre, between the two seats, and the lever controlling the wing flaps is on the port side. Control cables and rods are carried in a box along the cabin floor. Chief dimensions are 39 ft. 6 in. span, 25 ft. 4 in. length and 7 ft. 4½ in. height. Best wishes for the success of your model.

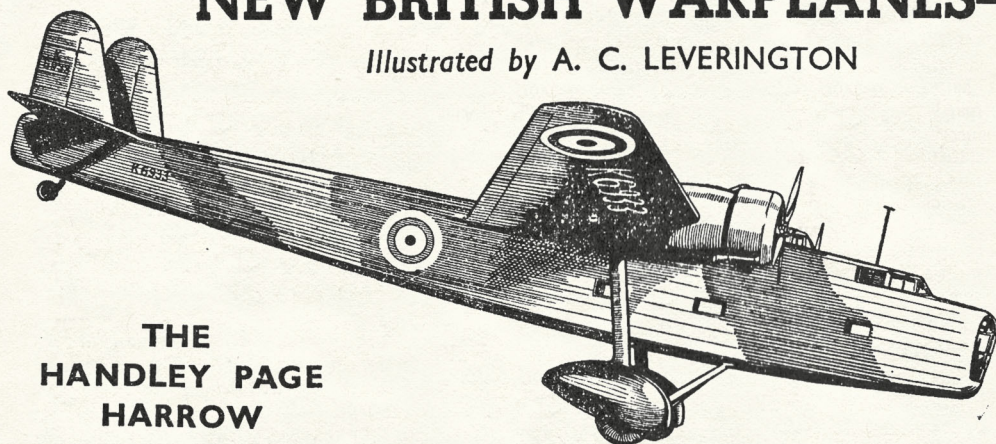
OBSERVER CORPS (E. R. Dredge, Guernsey). (1) Where have you been all these years? Most definitely Handley Page's is not an American concern, but one of the earliest and most famous firms in the British aircraft industry. It is at present busy supplying the R.A.F. with Heyford and Hampden bombers. (2) The Observer Corps is a volunteer organisation of "watchers" which, in time of war, would co-operate with the air defence authorities in giving warning of the approach to these shores of hostile aircraft. Their equipment includes sensitive sound detectors and devices for calculating the approximate course and position of aircraft. The Corps is administered by the Fighter Command, R.A.F., Stanmore Manor, Hertfordshire.

BACK NUMBERS (R. Downes, 153 Mountview Road, Stroud Green, London, N.4). Sorry, but we are right out of stock of copies of the July, August and November issues of 1935 and of the October, 1936, issue. Perhaps a reader may have one or more of these for sale or exchange and will write to you direct.

(More Replies to Readers on page 72.)

NEW BRITISH WARPLANES—

Illustrated by A. C. LEVERINGTON



THE HANDLEY PAGE HARROW

THE latest type of heavy bomber to reach R.A.F. squadrons, the Handley Page Harrow has a top speed of 190 m.p.h. at 8,000 ft. and a maximum range of 1,840 miles—equivalent to twice the distance from London to the Mediterranean Sea. Fully loaded with petrol, bombs and its normal crew of five, it weighs 23,000 lbs. or nearly 10½ tons, and has an absolute ceiling of 21,000 ft.

A high-wing monoplane, the Harrow is fitted with two 960 h.p. Bristol Pegasus engines driving three-bladed controllible pitch airscrews and is

capable of carrying a heavier bomb load over a longer distance than any other aeroplane previously in service with the R.A.F. It may also quickly be adapted for the transport of thirty or more fully-armed soldiers.

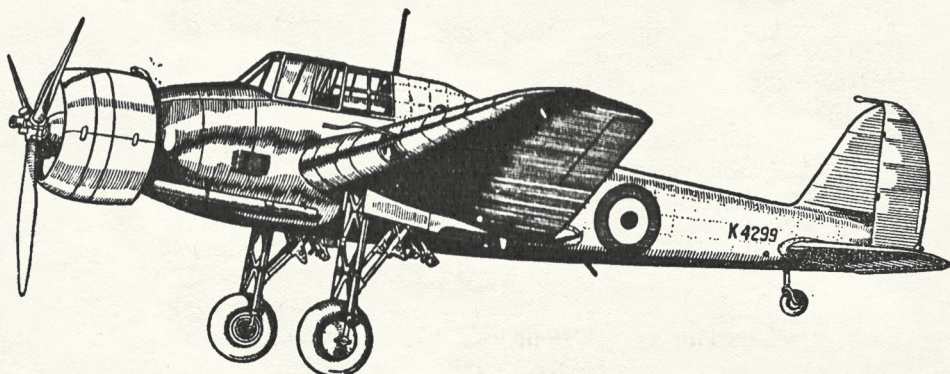
The Harrow undercarriage is fixed but so well streamlined that it causes little more head resistance than a retracted undercarriage and weighs considerably less. Chief dimensions are a span of 88 ft. 5 in., a length of 82 ft. 2 in., and a height of 19 ft. 5 in.

THE ARMSTRONG-WHITWORTH BOMBER

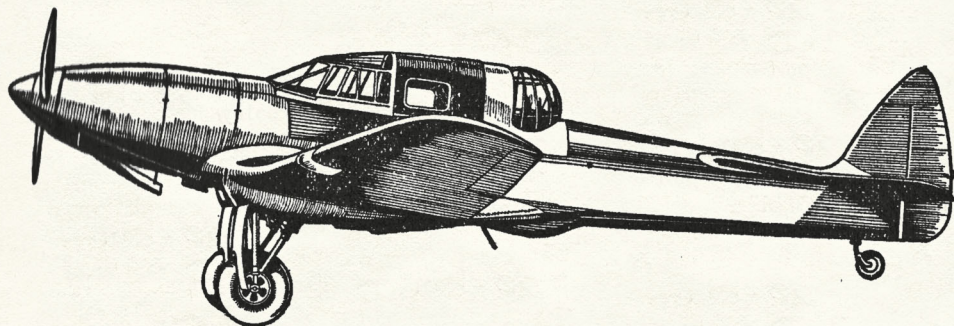
BUILT to a similar specification as the Hawker Henley and Fairey Battle light bombers, this new and experimental type of Armstrong-Whitworth bomber is an all-metal monoplane driven by an Armstrong-Siddeley air-cooled radial Tiger engine developing over 800 h.p. The glass-enclosed cockpit provides tandem seating and adequate weather protection for pilot and observer and, in accordance with the latest practice, a retractable undercarriage and a three-bladed controllible-pitch airscrew are incorporated in the design.

The short mast projecting above the cockpit roof carries the wireless aerial, the other end being secured to a fitting on top of the fin. Armament details, as well as performance figures and dimensions, may not yet be disclosed, but no State secret is revealed by pointing out the landing-lights concealed in the leading edges of the wings, or the oil-cooler on the port side of the engine cowl.

Principal dimensions of the new bomber are a span of 49 feet, a length of 44 feet and a height of 13 feet.



—High-speed Bomber and Advanced Trainer Types which have been Built for Royal Air Force Equipment



THE DE HAVILLAND DON

A NEW type of advanced trainer which has been ordered in quantity for Royal Air Force use, the De Havilland Don is a low-cantilever-winged monoplane with accommodation for three persons. It serves as a useful intermediate step between the comparatively slow types of aircraft on which new pilots learn to fly and the very fast Service types they will later be required to handle, and may also be used as a training machine for air gunners. Instructor and pupil are seated side by side in the

front, enclosed cockpit, and there is a covered gun-turret immediately behind.

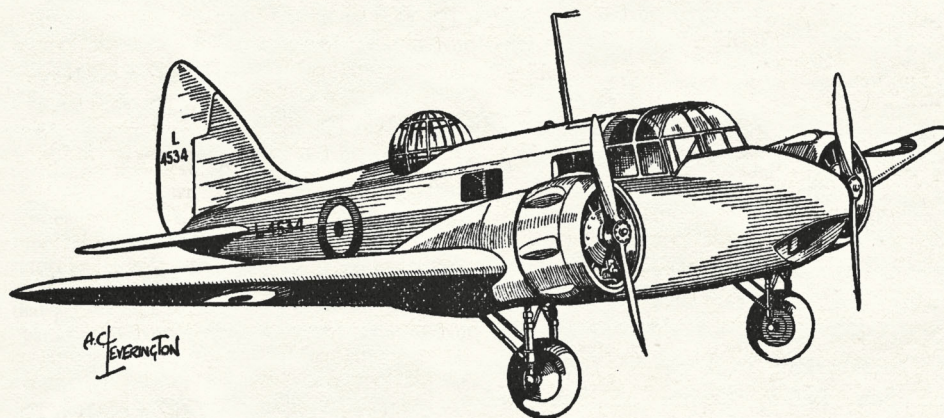
The Don is fitted with the new De Havilland "Gipsy Twelve" engine, a 12-cylinder inverted "vee" air-cooled unit, the Service name of which is the "Gipsy King." This engine drives a D.H. variable-pitch airscrew and the machine has flaps and a retractable undercarriage. A noteworthy feature is that the cooling air for the engine is taken in through wing tunnels, the entry ducts of which are faired into the undercarriage gear.

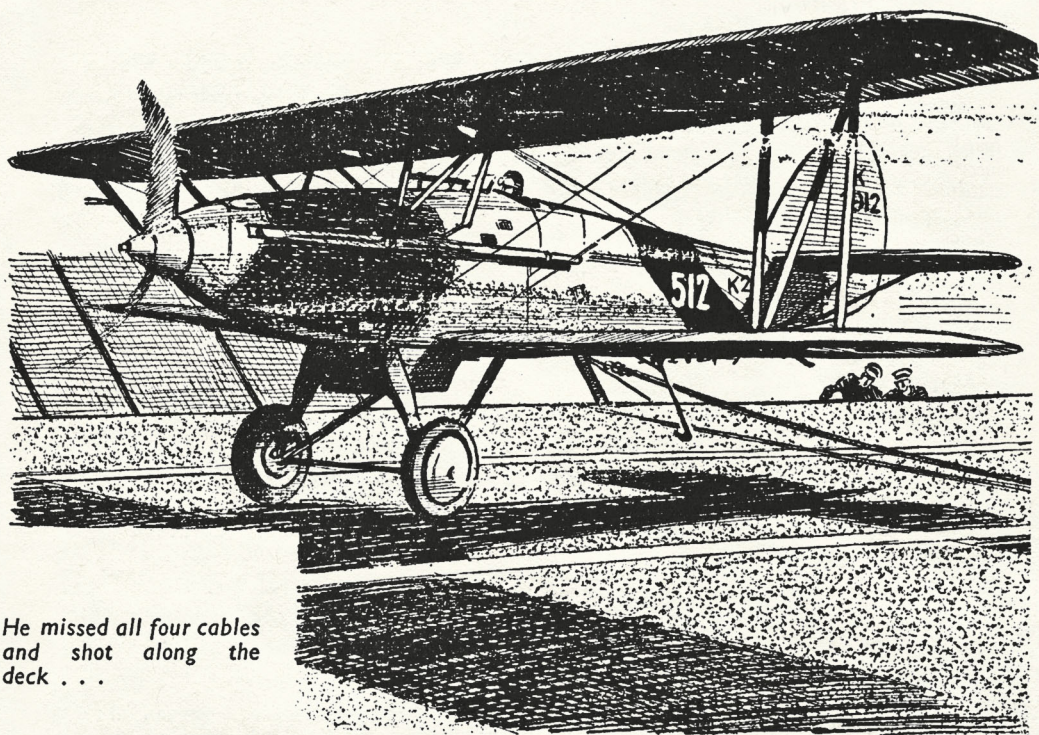
THE AIRSPEED OXFORD

A MILITARY development of the Airspeed Envoy air-liner, the Oxford has been designed to serve as a fast twin-engined advanced training type for Service pilots. It differs from its civil prototype in several respects, notably in the greater width of the forward part of the fuselage which makes possible the provision of side-by-side dual control, and also in the fitting of an Armstrong-Whitworth gun turret aft of the wing. A light

bomb load may also be carried internally for training purposes.

The engines are two Armstrong-Siddeley Cheetah radials, each developing 350 h.p. and driving D.H. variable-pitch airscrews. Like most modern high-speed monoplanes, the Oxford is fitted with a retractable undercarriage and flaps on the trailing edges of the wings, the latter serving to steepen the gliding angle and to reduce the landing speed.





He missed all four cables
and shot along the
deck . . .

SECRET OF KALUNDA

*A Long, Exciting Story of Overseas Adventure with
the Fleet Air Arm*

CHAPTER I

Sealed Orders

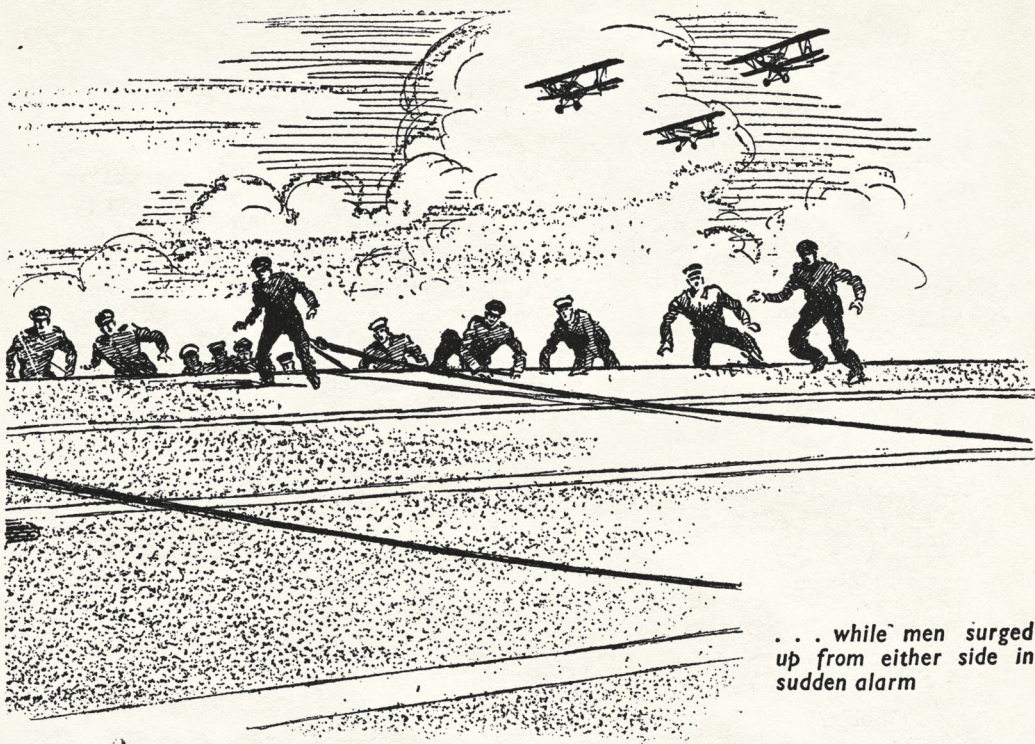
A MILE or so across the blue waters to port stretched the lonely coast of Portugal, grim and forbidding in its bleak outline, yet with a beauty all its own.

No one on board H.M. Aircraft Carrier "Uproarious," however, seemed to have an eye for such things. Her flying-deck, at any rate, was deserted, if you except her captain and one or two others who were perched on top of the narrow elongated structure which served for a navigation bridge. Indeed, to be able to stand on that deck at all just then a man would have had to brace himself firmly against the gale of wind which swept its great length. For H.M. Aircraft Carrier "Uproarious" was in

a hurry. She was steaming south at some thirty knots, and her destination was the Mediterranean—the area of civil war.

No member of the ship's company knew the precise purpose of this haste, and few cared what their destination might be. Except Captain Jervis, perhaps. He did not like to risk his ship in such troubled waters, and as he now stood scanning the coast from the bridge, he looked the picture of gloom.

The wardroom, by contrast, was a more cheerful place. It was filled for the most part with flying personnel, though there was a sprinkling of naval officers who were not for the moment on duty. Wing Commander Pateman—known to the ship's company as "Pat"—stood, glass in hand, near the bar chatting to a group of his officers.



... while men surged
up from either side in
sudden alarm

**From an Outpost of Empire came a Commissioner's
Desperate Call for Help—and, Sweeping in from the
Broad Atlantic to Hurtle Down upon a Scene of Human
Sacrifice, came a Bird of Terror, Envoy of the Aerial
Might of Britain**

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

Short, rotund and pink of face, he radiated good cheer. But then he was always cheerful.

Of a different type was Squadron Leader Vachell, commanding the Hawker Ospreys. Vachell did not take life easy. He worried a great deal over trifles; was always afraid something would go wrong in his command. At the moment he was out of temper with young Meek.

Which was, perhaps, why James Meek now sat apart from the rest, idly fingering the pages of a magazine in an armchair in a corner of the wardroom. Flying Officer James Meek had been late for embarkation at Portsmouth—a serious offence. The picket-boat had put back for him. He was not the first to offend in this way—not by a long shot—and he

had quite a good excuse for being late. But instead of proffering it when taxed with his crime, he had merely said, "Sorry, sir. Ran it a bit fine," and left it at that.

He was a slightly-built young man, sandy-haired and freckled. Because he was normally a quiet individual, some thought him shy. But there were those who thought otherwise.

Blake, for instance, a fellow flying officer who fancied his powers of perception, gave it as his opinion that Meek could not be bothered to waste time in talk. "He's too high and mighty," said Blake, "and looks down on everyone else in the ship."

"And everyone else looks down on him," commented Page, his com-

AIR STORIES

panion. "If you ask me, he's no credit to the Service. It wouldn't matter so much at a shore station, but in a carrier he lets us all down."

Meek himself was indifferent to such opinions, knowing that his silence was due neither to shyness nor superiority, but to an unfortunate impediment in his speech. And as flying officers are not permitted such defects, it was only by a due deliberation and brevity of speech that he had so far concealed his shortcoming.

But what Meek lacked in the matter of loquacity he made up for in other ways. He was, for one thing, particularly observant, and it was he who, above the chatter of the crowded wardroom, first became aware of a drop in the ship's engine revolutions.

Instinctively, he raised his eyes to where Patmore was telling a good story and noticed an orderly hand him a message. By this time the whole wardroom had sensed that something was up, and when Pat said, "Close the bar," they were certain. For the bar was never open when flying was in progress, though it was at all other times.

A hush descended on the wardroom.

"Orders are cancelled," announced the Wing Commander. "We are not going to the Mediterranean; the cruise to Capetown will be resumed. Flying training will take place whenever possible." He dropped his voice to speak to Vachell, and everyone knew what that meant.

The Nimrods were to fly at once.

MEER, brightening perceptibly on hearing the news, hurried along to his cabin, and when an orderly came to summon him a few minutes later, he was already in flying kit. He climbed down a ladder into a vast hangar, and down another to a yet lower hangar. Here was a considerable though orderly activity, in contrast to the peace of a few minutes earlier. The floor space was packed with Hawker aircraft about which ack-emmas hovered busily. Already several Kestrels were warming

up, and the noise they made was magnified a hundredfold by the steel walls of the hangar. The din was almost unbearable.

Meek twisted in and out of wings and tail-planes until he came to the cockpit of his own machine and clambered in. He grinned at the men who were ministering to the engine, secured his harness, and then sat back to wait his turn on the after lift. Presently, mechanics began to trundle his machine towards the lift, and very soon he was ascending. He passed through the upper hangar, crammed with Ospreys, to emerge at last into the brilliance of the flying-deck. His Nimrod was hurried aft, chains were hooked on its undercarriage, and after a brief test of his engine, Meek raised a hand in signal of his satisfaction. He was now ready to take-off.

Meanwhile, another aircraft had appeared and was now ahead of him, but slightly to starboard. There was one more to come; and, as he looked, it emerged through the gaping hole in the flying-deck and was hurried into position. The last machine up was always the first to take-off. Meek watched the Wing Commander's cockpit, for'ard on the port side.

Already the leading Nimrod had its engine pulling a little, so that mechanics hugged its struts to keep it in place. A green flag flashed from the Wing Commander's cockpit, a Kestrel roared, men dropped prone, and the first aircraft leapt forward towards a wisp of steam in the bows, raced down the centre of the deck and roared off into flight. A brief interval, and the second machine had followed it into the air.

For the third time the flag signal showed, and Meek surged forward. A twenty-knot wind swept the flying-deck, so that after a few yards he was able to lift his machine into the air, dip the port wing and climb in a sweeping turn to pick up formation.

Already the coast of Portugal was merging with the blue mist to the nor'ard, while on the starboard hand a curving line of sand, so pale in tint as to be almost as white as the surf that edged it, revealed

SECRET OF KALUNDA

the African continent low on the southern horizon. Below, the cigar-shaped "Uproarious" forged ahead through the green water at the meeting point of two white lines of foam which sped from her bows and widened astern, to appear like some gigantic arrow-head.

The formation complete, the leader twice circled the ship, waiting for the signal announcing that the landing practice could begin. The flight was to make three landings. Then the other flight would carry out a similar practice. After tea would come the Ospreys' turn.

The landing signal appeared on the deck below.

THE pilots were to land in the order they had taken-off, and Squadron Leader Vachell stood on a sunken platform aft, abreast of the four steel cables which were the arrester-gear, anxiously watching the first of his machines come gliding in. It flattened out gradually as speed fell away, missed the first cable and hooked the second. The cable shot out, flattening the two ahead, and six supporting arms fell on the steel deck with a thunderous crash. The pilot was brought to a standstill in a few yards. He had judged the landing nicely, but then Rogers generally did.

The "rabbit trap"—as the arrester-gear was popularly known—being again in position, the green flag was flown and the second Nimrod came gliding down. Croft was the pilot, and knowing his erratic habits, Vachell fretted nervously as he watched. Croft came in low enough, but travelling much too fast to get his tail down. He missed all four cables and shot along the deck. Men surged up from either side, but there was no need for alarm. The Kestrel roared out and Croft circled round again. This time he made no mistake. But he had given Vachell a nasty moment.

Meek flew the third machine. He was feeling rather bored, and regretted that after all they were not going to Spanish waters. At least that might have provided some excitement. This sort of flying

was good fun, but not satisfying enough. It acted like an appetiser.

The "Uproarious" grew and grew between his centre-section, and he decided to miss the first three cables and hook the fourth. The decision indicated the kind of pilot he was. He could almost play this game blindfold. He decided, too, that he would take it rather fast by way of adding to the fun of the thing.

So that Vachell, watching, got a second shock. He saw the Nimrod swoop down and then dart along the deck, so low that its wheels brushed the cable tops. It was obvious to him that it could not be hooked, for its tail was still high. To bring the tail down now would cause the machine to zoom, unless it was brought down suddenly and at exactly the right instant of time. And to achieve this entailed such a nicety of judgment that Vachell never even considered it.

So that when it did happen, he took it for a fluke. He had sprung from his platform on to the deck even as the fourth cable shot out with even more clatter than usual, then climbed back again and mopped his forehead. When he had somewhat recovered his nerve he went below and found Meek.

"You are the most benighted ass!" he exclaimed. "As near as a toucher you went into the drink, and that would have meant the loss of a perfectly good aircraft."

Helmet in hand and sandy hair awry, and with a puzzled look in his mild blue eyes, Meek gazed speechless at his superior. Words of explanation rushed to his lips, for he had a nimble brain. But they found no utterance since it was the tongue that lagged.

"Sorry, sir," he said at last. Just that.

"So I should think!" stormed Vachell. "Don't do it again. You were much too fast. Come in more slowly in future, and if in doubt open up in plenty of time."

To which Meek made no reply. But he came in more slowly for his next landing. So much so that Vachell was seized by yet another spasm. He felt

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certain now that the Nimrod would fail even to reach the deck. It would stall into the water astern.

"Open up!" he yelled futilely.

Yet Meek made the deck with a calm precision of judgment, and so slowly that he came to rest with his wheels just touching the first cable.

What Vachell said to him cannot be repeated, but it succeeded in stinging young Meek to something like verbosity.

"W... which c... cable would you l... like me to h... hook, then, sir?" he asked plaintively.

"What does it matter?" stormed Vachell, "First, second or third; first for preference, of course, but the main thing is to use a little intelligence. Come in faster in future."

"First for p... preference," repeated Meek.

And for his third landing he made an orthodox approach and neatly hooked his tail in the first cable.

"That youngster's got the luck of Old Nick himself," was Vachell's mental comment.

Flying continued without notable incident till dusk when, since it was no longer necessary to steam dead into wind, the "Uproarious" altered course a few points to port and continued her leisurely passage towards the Equator. The sun sank into a purple sea and the velvet curtain of night shrouded the world. Stars shone from this curtain with a brilliance unknown in more northerly latitudes and not surpassed even by the intermittent flash of a lighthouse on the distant African coast.

Down in the wardroom the bar was open.

CHAPTER II

The Mountain of Sacrifice

WHILE Spanish affairs filled many columns of the World press, and while the Mediterranean drew more than usual attention, it was natural that other seas and other countries should be less in the public eye.

This was true, at any rate, of the British Commonwealth and those lesser

known, but still considerable tracts which come directly under the authority of the Crown. Every English schoolboy, for instance, though he may know that Rhodesia and Kenya are parts of the African continent, hears little of the daily life of the peoples of these territories. He is probably unaware of the very existence of some of the less important areas. Take Towonga as an example.

While H.M.S. "Uproarious" was steaming south, Grant, the Commissioner of Towonga and sole representative of Britain in the several thousands of square miles that make up the Crown Colony, sat alone in his sparsely-furnished office.

He sat motionless at the table, gazing through the open window, and his only movement was a monotonous and fretful drumming of the end of a pencil on the table. He gazed through the window, shaded by a once green awning which had long since bleached white, at the towering wall of cliff which faced him beyond the ravine. From the depths of the ravine rose the distant murmur of rushing waters.

The very fixity of his gaze suggested, however, that the opposing wall of rock held no interest for him, that his thoughts were farther away in the country beyond that he knew so well.

Suddenly, he pushed his chair back, rose and went to stand before the map of Towonga which hung upon a wall. He studied it for a while and then walked briskly back to the table. It was as though, repenting his recent inaction, he was now resolved upon a course. He clapped his hands twice.

In an instant, the curtain covering the door parted to admit a native servant.

"Bali," said Grant, "*fru Ali Umtata oi behat?*" (*Has Chief Policeman Umtata returned?*)

"Yes, White Master," said Bali.

"Send him to me."

And presently there entered a veritable giant of a native. His enormous head was covered with a mass of tight black curls, and on his tunic were a sergeant's stripes.

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Grant turned his chair and gave the man a searching glance.

"What have you to report?" he asked with a calmness he was far from feeling.

"News bad, Master," Umtata replied. "The tribes gather. Afali make trouble. He talkie tribes, British no more good. He say big ship take away all white men."

Grant considered this for a moment. It was true that most of the troops at the garrison on the distant coast had been transferred by sea to Suez. Though their services had never yet been required here, their very presence had ensured an orderly and happy life for the native population. Of the massacres and atrocities that had been an almost daily occurrence before Grant took charge there had since been no sign. Until now. Within a week—within a day, almost—of the departure of those troops trouble had begun. Afali, the rebel, had emerged from his hiding to spread mischief over the countryside and to stir up religious fanaticism. From the summit of the mountain beyond the gorge, men had already been thrown with a superhuman force which carried their bodies right across the ravine to be battered to death against the rocks on the other side—the side beneath Grant's very window. For such was the unique method of sacrifice used by this primitive people.

Only that morning Grant had seen a native come hurtling down—his first warning of the unrest which now swept Towonga from end to end. For it was not until later that his men had come in with alarming news. It was then that he had sent out his massive police sergeant to try to gain some idea of the extent of the disaffection.

Involuntarily, Grant now looked out through the window at the mountain wall confronting the bungalow, half expecting to see yet another wretched body thud sickeningly against the cliff beneath him.

"They gather above," said Umtata, whose eyes followed his master's. "For the . . ."

"Sacrifice," prompted Grant.

He swung round, to catch an expression of fear in the native's face. "We must stop this, Umtata."

"Yes, sar. You have sent the sky message for help?"

Grant nodded. "I wirelessly an hour ago. But help cannot arrive for a week at earliest. Until then we must do our best. How many men are within call?"

"Ten, sar."

"Then the patrol is not yet back?"

"No, sar, but it will come before the sun falls."

That it might never return was in the minds of both men at that moment, but neither dared voice the thought.

"Get the men together," ordered Grant. "Serve out extra ammunition, and see that five men are always within the compound. Five more will go out with the message that I will severely punish any who disobey or cause trouble in any way; that Britain is strong, has thousands of ships of the sea and ships of the air. These men will not go far, and after three hours they will return. The other five will then go out. It is clear?"

"Yes, sar," smiled Umtata, and left the room.

A MOMENT after the native sergeant had left Grant's room, a girl entered. She was young and attractive, and bore a strong resemblance to the worried man who now sat with his gaze fixed upon the sinister ravine of death.

The girl tip-toed across the room, put her arms round Grant as he sat with back turned, and kissed the top of his head.

"I'm going out," she said. "But first I'll give you tea, Daddy."

Grant turned with something near a smile, and put an arm round the girl's waist.

"Hello, Judy," he said, "I was just thinking about you. I'm afraid you'll have to go back to England very soon now."

His daughter made a mock grimace. Her father had broached this subject

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before, but she had not taken him seriously.

"Getting bored with me, then, Daddy?" she asked with a smile.

Grant became grave of face as he drew her towards him. "It's not that, Judy, as you know very well. The . . . the fact is that this place is not suitable for a woman. I thought otherwise a while ago, but I find I was wrong."

Judy stood back to look searchingly up at her father's face. From the tone of his voice, it was clear that he was gravely disturbed about something.

"In what way isn't it suitable, Daddy?" she asked quietly.

"There may be a little trouble with the natives," Grant said, after a short pause. "Of course, there probably won't be, but there are signs of trouble, and I would rather you didn't go out of sight of the compound."

Somewhat to Grant's surprise, his daughter agreed to this limitation without further question. The fact was that Judy already had a considerably greater knowledge of the history of Towonga and the habits of its people than her father imagined. Ever since his appointment, and while she was still at school, she had collected and read every book she could find that dealt with the country.

She knew of Afali the Terrible, and of Kalunda, the flat-topped mountain of sacrifice. She had known of these things before ever she set foot in the country, and indeed she had written of them in great detail to a former school-friend on the eve of her departure.

But she said nothing of her knowledge to her father, and when tea was finished she left the bungalow and passed out through the log-fence which surrounded the compound to climb a short distance up the rising ground beyond. Half-way up she stopped to look back. From here she could see over the top of the bungalow at the towering wall of Kalunda beyond the gorge. By merely raising her eyes she could scan the whole frontage of the mountain, on which was scarcely foothold even for a bird. At the summit, its outline stood sharply defined against the sky, and there, almost

opposite her, was a crag that jutted out over the chasm. It was flat-topped, and Sergeant Umtata had told her that it was from there that men, and women too, had been thrown in the old days of human sacrifice.

Judy shivered a little as she gazed, and then she screamed.

But the sound was muffled by something that had come down over her head, and which shut out all light; something which smelt vilely. She struggled to escape it, but her arms were pinioned and she was lifted from the ground. She continued to struggle for a while, and then relaxed, half suffocated, semi-conscious.

CHAPTER III

Afali, the Terrible

ACROSS the gorge, opposite Grant's bungalow, the mountain slopes were heavily wooded. Overhead the trees united to form an unbroken roof which shut out the day, so that no man who lacked the sixth sense of the bushman could hope to find his way.

The natives of Towonga, it seemed, possessed this sixth sense, for on that same evening many of them might have been seen in this dense jungle. They moved silently, and their course was always upwards. They were naked, except for belts of jungle grass about their waists, and though they stooped low, they maintained a swinging trot. In his right hand each man carried a spear.

Around the summit of the mountain there was a great and growing concourse of the tribes, and as the sun neared the horizon this army formed itself in the shape of a crescent moon. Standing apart from the rest was a tall, thin man of repulsive and filthy appearance. His face was partly covered by greasy black hair which hung in matted strands beneath his horned head-dress. On either side of him stood his bodyguard of half a dozen stalwart natives, motionless and with their spears at arm's length before them.

The man they guarded was Afali,

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priest and witch doctor, who presently began to address the gathering. He spoke clearly but quietly, and relied for emphasis on gestures rather than the volume of his voice. His audience, too, was quiet, expressing their approval only by the sudden raising of their spears above their heads. Perhaps they feared that too much noise would reach the White Chief in his station beyond the gorge.

Nor was Afali himself altogether unafraid of Grant, but he felt confident that once he could get the man in his hands, his power would be broken. Then he could easily capture the absurd little band of police who did the Englishman's bidding. He would sacrifice them all to appease his gods, and also to impress these simple children who would then marvel at the power of Afali—greater now than the British. They would surely acclaim him their king.

But Afali had not yet got Grant in his hands. True he had set a plan in motion and, if the gods willed, he would have him soon.

Presently there was a movement in the crowd, from which four men emerged. They half carried, half dragged a girl, bringing her forward to their chief. Here they released her, so that she fell at his feet. Afali's eyes blazed in triumph.

"See!" he cried, "the White Man's daughter! Our gods have delivered her into my hands, and now she is theirs. To-morrow she shall be sacrificed."

A subdued roar went up from the crowd, and spears were brandished. But there was still something half-hearted about the demonstration, as Afali was quick to recognise. His people were still in fear of this girl's father, and would not be prepared blindly to follow him until the menace of Grant had been removed. Afali had foreseen this, and now he turned to one of the warriors at his side.

"Take three men with you and go to the White Man with a message," he ordered. "Tell him that his daughter has been captured by hillmen, but that

I hold her safe till he fetches her. But warn him that he must come alone, or she will surely die. Go now, and hurry."

MASSALA is a collection of mud huts at the point where the River Wonga empties itself into the Atlantic. The river here is wide and slow running, in contrast to the fury of its upper reaches. But at its mouth it is without energy, like the inhabitants of the township on its banks.

Massala is known as the white man's tomb, for fever takes heavy toll. Besides the huts, there are the long, low, white-washed barrack buildings, behind which wireless masts reach slender fingers skywards.

Captain Crookshank was in command of the garrison—or such of it as remained. For of the men who had not been drafted to the Mediterranean a good number were sick. Crookshank felt that he would be the next to succumb. He was feeling far from well and so weak that it was an effort even to raise a hand to receive the message which his wireless-operator brought him as he lay sprawling in an armchair in the mess.

"Just picked this up, sir," the radio man announced.

Wearily, Crookshank took the paper and scanned it. The message read:—

"Signs of unrest among the natives aaa. Tribes reported gathering aaa. Suggest you send expedition aaa. Will report developments aaa." It was signed, "A. O. Grant, H.M. Commissioner, Upper Towonga."

Crookshank frowned in silence at the paper for a while, then his face brightened.

"Having no troops we can only pass the buck to someone else, Jones," he said. "Send a signal to the War Office. Make it a copy of this and add, 'Awaiting instructions.'"

Such, then, were the circumstances which inspired a couple of paragraphs in one of England's national dailies the following morning.

"Some unrest is reported from Upper Towonga . . ." the report ran. "Troops are being despatched from the coast, and the matter is said to be well in hand."

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"Our Special Correspondent points out that Towonga is a Crown Colony on the west coast of Africa. In the matter of natural resources this is the poorest of all the colonial territories, and its possession has always been regarded more as a liability than as an asset. A firm administration here is, however, of great importance for the well-being of Central Africa as a whole."

Another outcome of Crookshank's message was that the Admiralty despatched a signal to the Captain of H.M. Aircraft Carrier "Uproarious." It was headed, "Urgent and Confidential," and ran :—

"Following minor disturbances in Upper Towonga their Lordships of the Admiralty have been asked to make some display of strength. I am therefore to convey to you their Lordships' wish that, when circumstances permit, a flight of aircraft be made over this district. Their Lordships appreciate that there are no landing facilities in the country, and that any form of offensive action may be neither practicable nor desirable. I am therefore to ask you to use your discretion in the matter.—J. McIntosh, Secretary to the Admiralty."

Captain Jervis was far from pleased to get this signal. Indeed, he viewed it almost with dismay. Clearly, some action was expected of him, but the Admiralty were careful to disclaim any authority as to the outcome. Which, he reflected gloomily, was just like the Admiralty. He changed course for Massala, went to his day cabin and sent for the Wing Commander.

NOT long after Wing Commander Pateman had left the Captain's cabin, an unwonted look of seriousness on his rubicund face, an orderly came to Flying Officer Meek's cabin and warned him for duty in fifteen minutes.

"What's up, Beamish?" asked Meek, knowing that orderlies usually got wind of any new developments long before it reached the wardroom.

"Country called Towonga, I believe, sir," the man replied rather doubtfully. "Never heard of it before, but I believe

that was the name. It seems the duskies are playing up a bit rough."

Left alone, Meek mechanically climbed into his flying-suit and buckled on his harness. "Towonga," he muttered, puzzled. Certainly there was such a place and, of course, he had heard of it before. But what puzzled him was that the name was fresh in his mind. He must have heard or read of it quite recently. Which seemed strange. And then, suddenly he remembered.

His sister, Mona, had referred to it in her last letter. With a twinge of remorse he recollected that he had not even bothered to read the letter through. He went to a drawer, extracted a sheaf of papers and dropped down on his bunk. He still had ten minutes to spare.

"Dear Jim," the letter began, and then followed four closely, but not too clearly, written pages of matter that do not concern this narrative. Moreover, Meek had already waded through that part. On page five came the first reference to Towonga. "I hope you will enjoy your cruise. As you are going to Africa, you may meet my best school-friend, Judy Grant. Her father is Commissioner or something at Towonga."

At this point Meek chuckled loudly. How like Mona to imagine such a meeting possible! His ship was bound for the Cape; Towonga was thousands of miles north on the vast African continent. How perfectly ridiculous! How absolutely priceless! Then he remembered why he was wearing his flying kit, and turned again to the letter. And as he read his interest grew. A reference to the Towongan habit of human sacrifice he went over several times. He would like to have seen that mountain, and wondered by what means the human bodies were hurled out over the ravine with such force. Perhaps they were discharged from a cannon like a circus stunt he had once seen. Perhaps he would know more about it after the flight. He stuffed the many pages into an inner pocket and made for the hangar, where he ran straight into Vachell.

Vachell scowled angrily. "You're two minutes late!" he stormed.

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Backing away from the fearsome thing heading directly for him, he overbalanced and fell headlong into the gorge

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"You're quite useless, and I intend to report you! Now get along to the office at once."

Meek found the rest of the Squadron pilots gathered there, and soon the Squadron Leader was outlining their job.

"There is some insubordination among the natives of Upper Towonga," he said, "but as this is a mountainous and wild country, it is unlikely we can take any useful action except to make a show of strength by flying over. There is to be no attack of any sort, as this would only aggravate the situation. As there is no possible landing-ground in the whole country, any pilot who is doubtful of his engine will give the usual signal and return at once to the ship. Otherwise, formation will not be broken on any account. Now we will take-off in the usual order."

CHAPTER IV

The Secret of Kalunda

WHILE the squadron of Ospreys were taking-off from the "Up-roarious" several hundred miles away, Judy Grant was lying bound and gagged beneath the rocky crest of Kalunda. She had long since ceased to struggle, for her body was bruised and battered and ropes cut into her wrists. Her father lay a few feet away, and beyond him were Sergeant Umtata and two more native police, all similarly bound and gagged.

The hours of darkness had been a nightmare of horror for the girl, though they had been mercifully relieved by periods of unconsciousness. But now the sun had risen above the low trees which skirted the mountain at this point, and as its first fierce rays fell on their recumbent bodies, the victims were untied and their gags removed. Judy was dragged roughly to her feet. She looked at her father and tried to smile. His eyes met hers in a glance that was eloquent of encouragement; his lips formed words to which a parched tongue could not give utterance.

Then they were roughly hustled away

up the mountain. Judy prayed that whatever their fate was to be it would come quickly, for the sufferings she had already undergone were almost more than she could stand, and she did not want to break down and so add to her father's misery.

They had climbed but a little way up the mountain when they came out into the open and found themselves on a smooth flat rock, almost square in shape. With an involuntary gasp of horror, Judy recognised it as the traditional place of sacrifice. Now they were led forward until they stood on the very edge, so close that even the touch of a hand must overbalance them and send them hurtling down that sheer wall three thousand feet into the gorge below.

Judy took a deep breath and held it while she tried to control her trembling knees. She was convinced that their last moments had arrived, but determined to show no fear. By her side on the lip of the precipice stood her father, and beyond him were Umtata and the two other policemen. Umtata towered above her father, massive and unmoving as the rock itself. In a line, one behind each prisoner, stood their guards. Far down on the opposite cliff, the station buildings shone white and deserted in the sun.

But their moment had not yet come. Afali uttered a few brief words of command, and the prisoners were dragged back to the other side of the rock. It was then that they had their first inkling of the dread secret of the Place of Sacrifice.

For across the rock stretched a rope which was drawn tightly over granite slabs at each side. It was an immense rope, having a diameter of some six inches, and it seemed to be made of thousands of strands of jungle creeper, cunningly twisted and woven.

Around the rock on three sides was a sea of black faces which surged excitedly; expectantly. Again Afali spoke, and eight men sprang upon one of the policemen and dragged him to the rope. The low murmurs of a thousand throats

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rose from the close-packed audience. Then Grant spoke.

He, too, was weak and exhausted, more so perhaps than the girl. His tongue felt like cracked leather to his lips, but he had saved all his energy for this moment of final appeal.

"If you permit this wicked deed the Great White King will find you!" he warned. "He will punish. No matter how you hide he will find you, for his servants ride the air like birds. Set us free and return to your homes and no harm shall come to . . ."

His words were cut short by a staggering blow on the face from one of the guards, a blow that brought Grant to his knees and drew blood to his lips. In the hush that ensued he seemed to hear a distant hum, as of aircraft, but he was half dazed from the blow, and now Afali broke the silence.

"Let the first be hurled to the gods," he cried.

Grant clambered painfully to his feet, and as he rose he thought he saw a cluster of dots low against the sky to the west. An unreasoning hope clutched him, and then vanished. The mirage of the desert was a familiar sight. Why not a mirage of the sky? There could be no aircraft within a thousand miles of them.

The unfortunate policeman was dragged, struggling, to the middle of the rope. His body was doubled over it and two men seized each arm and leg. Holding him tightly, they pulled away from the precipice, and as they pulled the rope gave like the rubber of some gigantic catapult.

Now Afali raised his hands above his head and slowly bowed three times towards the sun. Then he gave a great shout, and on the instant the native was released and the rope swept him forwards and up like a shot from a cannon. The doomed man gave a long-drawn yell of despair which faded quickly as his body rocketed in a falling curve. The action of the air caused him to spin fast and unevenly like an unbalanced top. The cliffs took up the sound of his cry and echoed it back to the rock long

after he had sunk from view. Judy's knees gave way and she would have fallen but for the men who held her fast.

The crowd, now wildly excited, yelled, and then were quiet, eager for a repetition. Then, superimposed on this sudden silence, came the roar of many Kestrel engines, plainly heard. A great sob of fear seemed to rise from that close-packed multitude as they turned their heads and saw two flights of gigantic birds hurtling towards them.

AFALI, too, was visibly shaken by the sudden appearance of the white men's aeroplanes, following so closely upon Grant's threat of their coming. But he was not yet beaten. He had travelled far, and had seen the White Man's birds in distant places. He knew that they needed wide plains in which to alight, and they could not alight here. They would have to return the way they had come. Nor could they shoot their fire for fear of hitting their own people.

So he fought his fear and shouted encouragement to his followers. He called to the prisoners' guards to hold their ground, and then himself dropped from the rock and took cover among the bushes.

The formation drew near in an accumulated roar of power, passed overhead and swept round in a wide circle. It was a good formation except for one machine that lagged behind the rest. Now it was to the north of the rock, having turned 180°, so that it was headed again for the coast. And almost as rapidly as they had appeared the birds of the air diminished in size and the roar of their engines faded. They had carried out their appointed task.

It was rather a futile task, thought Squadron Leader Vachell, flying at the apex of the V formation—really a waste of time. And there was always the risk of engine failure on a job like this. The sooner they got back to the ship the better it would be for all concerned.

Meek, too, thought it unutterably futile to have come so far for no purpose.

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But then Meek had read something of the ways of the people of Towonga, and what he had read had given him a keen interest in the flat-topped mountain they had just circled. He longed to examine the mountain at closer quarters so that he could note the details, for what he had already seen had transformed his interest into an intense excitement. But that was not to be, worse luck ! As it was, he lagged behind, for it is impossible to keep one's head turned and at the same time keep good formation.

Meanwhile, on the mountain that exerted such a magnetic pull on Meek, the tragedy was being resumed. When Afali saw the birds draw away, the light of triumph glinted in his dusky eyes. No longer had he a trace of fear. Indeed, he had little difficulty in now persuading himself that he had never been frightened. He would reassure his craven warriors. He would show them that he was more to be dreaded, mightier by far, than the foolish White Man and his birds.

Leaping back on to the rock, he flung curses after the vanishing aircraft.

"See !" he shouted, "the White Man can do nothing against the power of Afali. Afali casts a spell over his birds so that they cannot stay. They will not return !"

At this assurance the crowd took courage and, eager to rouse them once more to fever pitch, Afali recklessly ordered that the next sacrifice be thrown to the gods while the formation was yet in sight.

Willing hands dragged the second native policeman to the rope, which was quickly stretched, then suddenly released. Once more a wail of mortal anguish rang out and was echoed back from the gorge.

Dazed and half-fainting with horror, Judy looked about her. Umtata's turn would be next, she guessed, and then her own ; for that was the order in which they stood. Her father would be left until last.

But the giant Umtata was not submitting without a struggle. As his captors advanced upon him he turned like a flash and, exerting his immense

strength, lifted two of them high above his head, one in either hand, and hurled them with such force that they fell clear of the rock to crash down into the crowd assembled at its base. Then, whirling round, he grasped two more of his guards by their necks and knocked their heads together with a crack that smashed their skulls.

Judy moaned in anguish. There could be but one end to it all, so why resist and prolong the agony ? Ah ! Now Umtata was overpowered by a dozen men ; now it would soon be over. Then she heard again the noise of an engine in the sky. She looked up and saw an aeroplane diving towards them, and for an instant hope again ran high. But she crushed it with a resolute effort. It could not save them. Airmen could do nothing here, except shoot them all where they stood.

But to the natives this roaring, hurtling bird was a thing of terror. Already the guards had abandoned Umtata and dashed for cover. Afali alone, though evidently frightened, still stood his ground. What he had done once he could do again. This one also would have to go, and, standing upon the rock, Afali exhorted his gods to drive away the bird of terror.

Yet the bird came on. It grew and grew to an enormous thing. It was near the rock and travelling faster even than the wind ! In a flash it was over the rock, and so low that it almost touched its surface with its feet. The roar of its voice made the senses reel.

Afali's nerves broke. He backed away quickly from this fearsome thing that seemed heading directly for him, over-balanced . . . and disappeared with a wild scream into the gorge below.

CHAPTER V

The Bird of Terror

IN the cockpit of the Bird of Terror Isat the tense figure of Flying Officer Meek. He had scarcely taken his eyes from the rock since first it had been sighted. What held him so enthralled was that when passing over it he had

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fancied he saw two white people in the midst of the assembly of natives. Also, and this interested him for a different reason, there was laid across the rock what appeared to be a solid bar. As he watched, suspicion grew to certainty that there was a white man and a white woman on the mountain top, and with the knowledge came the certainty that the Squadron was leaving them to an awful fate. Yet he could do nothing. If he were to disobey orders and leave the formation, what could he do? To attack the hordes that surrounded those two would be of little use, for they would hide from view until the threat had passed, and there was always the chance that his bullets would kill the very people he sought to help. It seemed that he was powerless to save them.

The only effective course would be to land, for such a feat might well overawe these primitive people. A Very pistol and a Colt automatic, effectively used, might also work wonders. Unfortunately, both courses were ruled out in advance. There was no room down there to bring in even an autogiro.

In his absorption, Meek lagged farther and farther behind the formation. Then, suddenly, he forgot all about the formation. That solid bar, as he had thought it, was not solid at all. It was now being drawn back at its centre by a cluster of brown dots. In a flash it had become straight again, and from it an object catapulted out over the gorge and was lost to view.

In that instant something happened to Meek. For he half-rolled and fell away and, next moment, was diving straight towards the rock in flagrant defiance of orders. But now he had a plan.

A spring that could project a body with such force as that one below might conceivably be strong enough to arrest an aeroplane, even on so small a platform. On the other hand, of course, it might not. The problem involved complications altogether beyond him, but he held fast to one belief. It was worth the risk.

Having decided this point to his satisfaction he concentrated on the job he had set himself. A deck landing was as simple as falling off a roof compared to this. He would have to approach at exactly the right height and speed. The machine must be near stalling point in the last few yards and yet under perfect control. It called for a nicety of judgment that fascinated him. He knew that with all the skill in the world he would very likely go crashing over the edge to his death, but he had plenty to occupy his thoughts without dwelling on that.

First, he dived and came hurtling low down above the rock to take a closer look at the position of the rope to which he was about to entrust his life. As he thundered past he caught a brief glimpse of a horn-crowned, long-haired figure with outstretched arms who backed towards the edge of the rock, and suddenly disappeared. But his attention was centred on the rope, and satisfied as to its position, he now roared up again and swept round into position for his final approach.

Then, hardly daring to draw breath, Meek brought the Nimrod down until it was level with the mountain top, and flattened out, feeding his engine just sufficiently to keep him afloat. And so, with hand on throttle, he approached the rock. With his other hand on the stick he gauged the air pressure against the controls, and knew that he could not come in any more slowly. The rock was very close now, and it seemed to be rushing madly at him.

Just around the rock he got a glimpse of innumerable brown bodies cowering for shelter, and on its top, to one side, stood a white man and woman and an enormous native.

Now the Nimrod was over the rock. The supreme test had come. Meek flicked off the last remnant of throttle and jerked the stick back. His tail ducked . . . he had missed it. . . . NO !

MEERK was flung forward against the instrument-board with the violence of deceleration. Could that rope,

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or whatever it was, stand this strain . . . ? Surely not ! It must have parted, for the braking force had stopped. But so had the Nimrod—with its wheels on the very lip of the chasm !

Gingerly, Meek slipped his harness, grabbed Colt and Very pistol in either hand and stood on the seat. He fired a light into the air hoping to impress the natives, but the effect was disappointing, for, now that he looked about him, most of his audience seemed to have disappeared. There were only three people in sight—an enormous native, whose grinning lips revealed two rows of even white teeth, and a man and woman, wide-eyed with amazement and joy. They came forward quickly.

"For H . . Heaven's sake don't touch this k . . k . . kite !" shouted Meek, with a scared glance at his precariously-placed wheels. "I . . I'll get out."

But Umtata apparently did not understand, for he made a dive for the fuselage, lifted the tail without apparent effort, and trundled it back to a safe place. A few feet from where it came to rest lay the rope, wrinkled and limp, and broken in the middle.

"Phew !" said Meek, as he caught sight of it, and his face was several shades paler than before as he leapt from his cockpit and faced Grant.

"Any t . . trouble with the n . . natives, sir ?" he inquired as calmly as he could.

"No," said Grant, who, under the stress of his emotions, spoke with even more difficulty than had Meek. "Not now ! You frightened the cause of all the trouble over the gorge. Anything in that ?" He touched the water-bottle that is part of an airman's equipment on overseas duty.

"Rather, sir," Meek replied, unslinging the bottle and handing it to the girl.

When both had drunk, Grant spoke loudly and in a strange language, and after a while scores of natives appeared from all directions. They stooped low and seemed in abject fear, but as Grant continued they lost some of their appearance of terror.

But Meek was paying little attention,

for now he had other things to think of. There was the awkward problem of getting away from this spot and back to the ship—not to mention the question of what he would say if, and when, he got there.

"Look here, sir," he said, when Grant had finished his address. "Do you think these people could p . . p . . p . . possibly mend this rope ? I shall need it to g . . get off from here. I reckon that if I were to t . . t . . t . . turn my arrester-hook round, and these c . . c . . chaps were to hold me back till I signalled, the pull of that r . . rope would be enough to g . . get me clear."

Which was the longest speech Meek had made for some considerable time.

Grant grasped the airman's hand and wrung it warmly. "Thank you," he said simply, but with a depth of feeling that conveyed more than eloquence. "You took a grave risk coming down here. I know little of flying, but enough to realise that. Thank you. The rope shall be repaired ; these men will give no more trouble now ; they will do what they are told."

He called Umtata and, while he explained what he wanted done, Meek turned to the girl, and there was a sudden twinkle in his eye.

"Y . . you are M . . Miss Judy Grant, aren't you ?" he smiled.

"Yes," gasped Judy, astonished. "But how . . . ?"

Meek grinned widely.

"I just d . . dropped in to give you a message from my sister, M . . Mona Meek," he said. "She sends you her l . . love."

CHAPTER VI

Return of a Hero

MORNING gave place to afternoon, afternoon to evening, and the crimson sun dipped into the Atlantic. Its fiery rays lit H.M. Aircraft Carrier "Uproarious" with a lurid glow as she rode placidly to her anchors. But all within the ship were not so peaceful.

Down in his cabin, Captain Jervis fumed with impatience.

SECRET OF KALUNDA

"I can't wait any longer," he told the Wing Commander. "I might have expected something of this sort. To send aircraft on such work is sheer damned nonsense! I'm going to weigh anchor right away."

"Very good, sir," said Pat.

But though the Wing Commander also failed to see any purpose in further delay, he was sorry to leave while there remained a vestige of hope for young Meek's life. For the hundredth time he asked himself if there was still such a hope. He glanced again at the adverse report on this officer that Vachell had handed him. Clearly this youngster was a pilot of no great ability, nor apparently was he any particular asset to the Service. He must have crashed hours ago, and surely he had killed himself. Still . . .

"You can be sure he's as dead as the dodo," said Jervis.

"Yes," agreed Pat, and turned to go. He wanted a word with Vachell.

As he left the cabin he heard the rumble of the anchor chain coming up, and then felt the slight tremor as the turbines were set in motion. He found the Squadron Leader in the ward-room.

"Look here, Vachell," he said, "I think we can take it that Meek's a goner?"

Vachell emptied his glass. "Not a doubt of it, sir. That country . . ."

"About this report, then," broke in Pat. "You'll want to withdraw it, I imagine?"

"No, sir, I think not," was Vachell's considered reply. "After all, it can't hurt him now, and if it could he'd deserve it."

"But his people!" Pateman protested. "Withdraw it, man!"

"Very good," agreed Vachell, but with obvious reluctance. He hated going back on any action of his.

An hour later found Wing Commander Pateman once again closeted with the Captain, with whom he was in the habit of passing the evening. Jervis liked Pateman and found him a ready listener to his grouses. He was grouching now.

"Straightforward Navy I understand, but this business of half bird and half fish is a wash-out. Give me a battleship and a battalion of marines and I'd undertake to subdue that country."

"Yes," agreed Pat, "in time." He felt depressed and disinclined for argument.

"What does time matter?" Jervis demanded. "The job would be done, and thoroughly."

"Rather a costly operation," the Air Force man objected.

"Judge costs by result, my lad," advised the Captain. "Here we've wasted a day with a whole ship's company, you've lost a machine and burnt a deuce of a lot of petrol, all for nothing. Now, on the other hand . . . Well, what is it?"

An orderly stood at attention at the Captain's chair.

"Compliments of the Officer of the Watch, sir. The lights of a haircraft sighted on the port quarter."

THE Wing Commander jumped to his feet with surprising speed for so rotund a person, and his face was a kaleidoscope of changing expression.

"So the young devil must have landed and got off again!" he deliberated. "I'll go up and bring him in."

"Obvious enough he's done that," growled Jervis as he got to his feet. "But what an hour to return! I'll get into wind."

But for all the Captain's gruffness, there was a glint of excitement in his eye as he followed the Wing Commander from the room.

And when in due course he returned, he paced his room restlessly. It seemed he was impatient for news. But, if so, he was determined not to show it, for when a footstep was heard outside he turned on his wireless, picked up a book and dropped into his chair. Pateman entered, but did not interrupt.

"This is the National Programme," said the wireless. "Here is the weather forecast for to-night and to-morrow. A deep depression is centred over Iceland. In northern Scotland the weather . . ."

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The Captain grunted at his book. Damn the weather in northern Scotland! The Wing Commander said nothing.

At last the Captain gave in. He dropped his book with a jerk.

"Well?" he inquired, and looked up into Pateman's beaming face.

"I've not seen him yet," said Pat, "but I'm waiting for the report."

At that moment Vachell came in and handed over a slip of paper.

"The report, sir," he announced.

Pat seized it and began to read. Then, still reading, he danced a little jig all round the room.

"I'm afraid we ought not to take it too seriously, sir," said Vachell.

Pateman stopped dead and his jaw dropped. To doubt the accuracy of the report had not even occurred to him.

"Why not, for goodness' sake?" he asked bluntly, "The man must have landed somewhere." He handed the paper to Jervis.

"Here is the third news," interrupted the wireless, "copyright reserved. As stated in our first bulletin this evening, a minor revolt has been reported from Upper Towonga. We

are now able to state that, as the result of prompt action on the part of H.M.S. 'Uproarious' (Captain F. H. Jervis), order has been completely restored. The 'Uproarious' is one of our latest types of aircraft carriers, and we have here at the microphone Commander Mulroy, R.N., who will talk to us about the work of the Fleet Air Arm. . . ."

"D'you mind?" said Pateman, and switched off the wireless. Then he turned to Vachell. "Now you'd better go and make out another report about Flying Officer Meek. Make it good and strong and recommend him for a decoration."

Vachell bit his lip and turned on his heel.

"You'd support that recommendation, wouldn't you, Skipper?" asked Pateman.

The Captain grunted. Then enthusiasm got the better of him.

"You bet I would!" he said. "And if it wasn't granted I'd hand in me papers. Let's have a drink to celebrate, . . . oh, and, let's have the lad in, too. Fellow's the right sort—ought to have been in the Navy!"

A FIVE-GUN SINGLE-SEATER FIGHTER

Details of the 270 m.p.h. Fairey Féroc—The Navy's Five New Aircraft Carriers

ONE of the more recent productions of the works of Avions Fairey, Belgian subsidiary of the Fairey company, is the Féroc single-seat biplane, a heavily armed fighter developed from the Fantôme, which was built in England for the competition held by the Belgian Government in 1934. Two Féroc biplanes were recently supplied to the Soviet Union.

Armament of the Féroc consists in a shell-firing gun and four machine-guns. The canon is mounted integrally with the 925 h.p. engine and fires through the airscrew boss; the machine-guns are located in the wings outside the disc swept by the airscrew. Striking power of the Féroc is, therefore, unusual for a single-seat aeroplane.

Although it is built to the conventional biplane formula, the machine is beautifully streamlined, with close-fitting engine cowl, fine fuselage lines, streamlined fairings over the undercarriage struts and wheels, and no unnecessary excrescences. Thanks to the "clean" structure, the performance is outstanding. Maximum speed, reached at a height of 13,000 feet above sea-level, is no less than 270 m.p.h. though landing speed is only 60 m.p.h. Ratio between maximum and minimum speeds is, therefore, more than 4 to 1, which is an excellent achievement. Absolute "ceiling" is stated to be 36,000 feet, and duration, at cruising speed of 217 m.p.h., two hours. Radio equipment is carried.

Air Power of the Navy

THE recent laying of the keel of H.M.S. "Indomitable" at the Vickers-Armstrong Barrow yard, brings up to five the number of new aircraft carriers now under construction for the Royal Navy. The farthest advanced of them is the "Ark Royal," which was begun about two years ago and is due for completion next July. She will be the first new carrier to join the Navy since 1930.

Tonnage of the "Ark Royal" will be 22,500. Her aircraft complement, which may be as many as seventy aeroplanes, will be considerably more powerful than that of earlier British carriers. Defensive armament will be provided by 4.5-inch guns.

Present plans envisage at least doubling the numerical strength of the Fleet Air Arm, control of which has recently been transferred from the Air Ministry to the Admiralty, while the substitution of modern aircraft for machines formerly in service will mean a much more proportionate increase in fighting power and efficiency. Existing establishment of first-line aircraft in British warships is 217, of which about 140 are borne in aircraft carriers, 32 in catapult-equipped battleships and cruisers, and the remainder at shore stations. Excluding the "Argus," which has been refitted for use as a "mother ship" for radio-controlled target aeroplanes, the carriers now in service have a total capacity of 165 aeroplanes.



*The Amazing Exploits of No. 1 (Naval) Squadron,
R.N.A.S., which made Air History on Three Fronts and
Numbered Two V.C.'s among its Gallant Company*

By "RECORDING OFFICER"

THE eventful War story of No. 1 Squadron of the Royal Naval Air Service really began in February, 1915, when it flew across the Channel from Dover to join a fleet of thirty-four naval aeroplanes and seaplanes in a mass attack on enemy bases between Zeebrugge and Ostend. The Squadron had been formed some five months earlier at Fort Grange, Gosport, under Squadron Commander A. M. Longmore*, but the Belgian coast raid in February was its first overseas excursion.

It proved a memorable one, for after encountering fog above the Channel, the

raiders ran into a violent snowstorm over the Belgian coast and very few of them reached their objectives. One of the Squadron's pilots, however, succeeded in finding a coastal battery at Slype and bombed it in the face of heavy ground fire, while two other pilots from different units also managed to get through to their targets.

The rest of the fleet were obliged to make for their temporary base at Dunkirk, to which they had been told to return if the weather became too bad. Several of the pilots reported hair-raising experiences in the storm, one man having been turned completely over in the air and another, Flight Lieutenant H. Rosher of No. 1 Squadron, having become lost in

* Now Air Marshal Sir A. M. Longmore, K.C.B., D.S.O., R.A.F., Commandant of the Imperial Defence College.

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the clouds and plunged 6,000 feet out of control before managing to right his machine. Even more unfortunate was the famous pioneer, Flight Commander Claud Grahame-White, a member of a detachment from Hendon, who came down in the sea off Nieuport and was rescued only in the nick of time by a French destroyer.

Further raids on the Ostend and Zeebrugge districts followed during the next few days and met with much greater success. Bombs were dropped on Ostend and Blankenberghe railway-stations, on gun positions at Middelkerke and on the defensive works and locks in Zeebrugge harbour. Bruges also came in for attention, the British attack upon it being greatly assisted by a French scout squadron which carried out a simultaneous raid on Ghisteltes aerodrome, thereby effectively "grounding" the German defence aircraft. It was during the course of these raids that No. 1 Squadron suffered its first casualty, when a machine piloted by Flight Lieutenant Gordon Riggall failed to return.

Towards the end of February, No. 1 Squadron was sent to St. Pol and, after a few days spent in becoming familiar with the lie of the land, the pilots began a sustained series of attacks on enemy positions along the coast, interspersed with reconnaissances during which they co-operated with warships of the Dover Patrol.

At this time the Squadron's equipment consisted of a rather miscellaneous collection of aircraft, including five Avros, three Vickers Fighters, three Curtisses and a Bristol two-seater. The Avros were chiefly used for the long-distance bombing raids, the main objectives of which were the airship sheds which the Germans had erected in Belgium and from which their Zeppelins were raiding the French and English coasts. The German submarine bases in occupied Belgium were also frequent targets for the Squadron during March and April and one of their most successful raids was carried out on March 24th against the submarine depot at Hoboken, near Antwerp.

This raid, in which the Squadron's

five Avros took part, was led by Squadron Commander I. T. Courtney*, who was accompanied by Flight Lieutenants B. C. Meates and H. L. Rosher, and Flight Sub-Lieutenants B. L. Huskisson and F. G. Andreae. The five men cut cards for the order of starting but though they had planned to keep in sight of one another, they very soon lost touch in the low cloud and mist that prevailed. Visibility was indeed so bad that both Huskisson and Andreae lost their bearings and after cruising around for some time were forced by a dwindling petrol supply to return home. The other three, however, succeeded in getting through independently, and coming down to within 500 feet of the ground, ran the gauntlet of a murderous hail of shrapnel and machine-gun fire to loose their bombs on the submarine dock.

A French official communiqué issued that night confirmed that a shipyard had been set on fire, and that two submarines had been completely destroyed, forty German workmen killed and sixty-two wounded.

On the return flight, Meates was forced down by engine trouble in Holland and interned, but Courtney and Rosher both reached home safely, having covered some 250 miles in a non-stop flight of over four hours—no small achievement for the Avros of 1915. A few days later, Flight Sub-Lieutenant Andreae, determined to make up for his previous misfortune, set off alone by moonlight and, reaching Hoboken undetected, delivered a successful surprise attack on the already battered dockyard.

Two Zeppelins in One Day

JUNE 6TH was a red-letter day for the Squadron, for on that date it claimed the destruction of two Zeppelins. The first was the L.Z.37, which was set on fire in the air above Bruges by Flight Sub-Lieutenant R. A. J. Warneford; the second was destroyed in its shed at Evere by Flight Lieutenant J. P. Wilson in a low bombing attack. For his achieve-

* Now Group Captain I. T. Courtney, C.B.E., R.A.F.(retired), Commandant, Observer Corps, Southern Area.

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ment, Warneford was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross, the first of two that the Squadron was to earn before the War ended.

The Squadron pilots, however, were not always so fortunate in their encounters with Zeppelins and a few days after Warneford's success, Flight Lieutenant Rosher was writing home to his father describing how a flight in which he set out to destroy a Zeppelin finished up with the Zeppelin chasing him!

"My orders were to drop bombs on an airship shed at Gontrode, near Ghent," he wrote. "The moon rose soon after midnight and at 1.30 a.m. I started off. I went out to sea *via* Zeebrugge, and then cut inland. When I arrived at the place, there was a thick ground mist and dawn was just breaking. I could not see the sheds at all, but two searchlights were going hard. I half circled round, when, lo and behold! I sighted the Zeppelin coming home over Zeebrugge. I turned off due east to avoid being seen, intending to wait until he came down and then to catch him sitting. But my luck was out. One of the searchlights picked me up, and anti-aircraft guns immediately opened fire on me.

"Then a curious thing happened. The Zeppelin sighted me (I think the searchlights were signalling) and immediately came for me. This was the tables turned on me with a vengeance, and the very last thing I ever dreamed of. It was a regular nightmare. I was only 6,000 ft. up, and the Zepp, which was very fast, must have been ten. Without being able to get above it, I was, of course, helpless and entirely at the mercy of his Maxim guns. I don't think I have been so disconcerted for a long time. We had "some" race! He tried to cut me off from Holland, but I got across his bows. He was a huge, big thing, most imposing, and turned rapidly with the greatest of ease. I hung around north of Ghent, climbing hard, and reached 8,000 ft., but the Zepp wasn't having any. He wasn't coming down while I was there and I, on the other hand, couldn't get up to him, as he had risen to some fabulous height. So, after a bit, I pushed off home feeling very discontented at such an unsatisfactory ending. . . . I disposed of my bombs in the sea before landing, and got back after three hours in the air."*

It was about this time that the Admiralty decided to effect a minor reorganisation in the R.N.A.S. by altering the nomenclature of its aeroplane units. Under this new system the units were called "wings," the word "squadron" being reserved for a group of six aeroplanes or seaplanes. Thus No. 1 Squadron became No. 1 Wing and was sent to Dover in August but returned, two weeks later, to Dunkirk in time to take part

in Admiral Bacon's attack on Zeebrugge.

This attack began at 5.30 in the morning of August 23rd and its objectives were the locks and caissons of the canal connecting the seaport with Bruges, and the factory where it was believed the enemy's submarines were being assembled. No. 1 Wing contributed five scouts to the protective air patrols that took part in the engagement but, unfortunately, the weather was so bad that they could be of little assistance. One of the Wing's pilots, Flight Sub-Lieutenant R. H. Mulock, did, however, have a brief encounter with a German seaplane and succeeded in driving it back to its base.

Bombing a U-Boat

THREE days later, the Wing was celebrating a successful attack on a submarine which had been spotted by Squadron Commander A. W. Bigsworth* while on his way to bomb Zeebrugge from a Henri Farman. The U-boat had been cruising on the surface about six miles off Ostend and Bigsworth at once came down to within 500 feet of the water, manoeuvred into position above the now frantically zig-zagging submarine and let go two 65-pounders. Both appeared to make direct hits and the resultant concussion was so great that the aged Farman was momentarily thrown out of control. But Bigsworth soon managed to get it right side up again and, on looking down, saw the U-boat disappearing, tail first, beneath the sea.

A few days later, on September 6th, Flight Sub-Lieutenant Mulock was carrying out a coastal reconnaissance with Second-Lieutenant J. H. D'Albiac† as observer, when they, too, spotted a submarine some miles north of Ostend. As they had no bombs with them, Mulock turned back, flew flat-out to Dunkirk, picked up five 20-pounders and was off again without stopping his engine. He was lucky enough to find the submarine still running on the surface, and, diving to within 400 feet of its conning-tower, he

* Now Air Commodore A. W. Bigsworth, C.M.G., D.S.O., A.F.C., R.A.F. (retired).

† Now Group Captain, R.A.F. and Senior Air Staff Officer No. 22 (Army Co-operation) Group.

* From "In the Royal Naval Air Service," by Harold Rosher, R.N., (Chatto and Windus: 1916).

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let go every bomb on board. The last two seemed to explode right over the deck in the swirl of water set up by the submerging U-boat, and from the evidence of the oil that later came to the surface there was little doubt that the submarine had dived for the last time.

Seaplanes v. Flying-Boat

THROUGHOUT September the pilots of No. 1 Wing kept up a constant patrol in conjunction with the Fleet, with occasional diversions in the form of raids on enemy bases, attacks on submarines and enemy aircraft, or "spotting" work for the coastal batteries. There were, however, comparatively few encounters with German aircraft reported in this area at that time for the enemy had not yet developed his fighter aircraft, but was relying for his defence on a highly-efficient organisation of anti-aircraft gun batteries.

Only two decisive combats appear in the Wing's records for that period. The first took place on Nov. 28th, when Flight Sub-Lieutenant J. B. P. Ferrand, with Air Mechanic G. T. Oldfield, was on submarine patrol in an F.B.A.* flying-boat and encountered a German torpedo-boat off Westende with an escort of four seaplanes. Despite the odds against him, Ferrand at once dived to attack and three of the seaplanes, having no liking for so determined a foe, promptly turned tail and fled towards Ostend. The fourth man, however, was made of sterner stuff and accepted combat; but within a few moments he had stopped a full burst from the flying-boat's observer and disappeared nose-first into the sea. Not yet satisfied, Ferrand then turned upon the torpedo-boat and only drew off after he had released all his bombs without apparently scoring a direct hit.

The second encounter took place the following month, after the Wing had received news that two enemy aeroplanes had been attempting to bomb a British merchant steamer which had stranded on a sandbank near the Whistle Buoy several days earlier. Thereafter, the Wing

maintained regular patrols in her vicinity and in the afternoon of December 14th, a large enemy two-seater came bumbling along straight into the trap. The patrol at the time was being carried out by Flight Sub-Lieutenant C. W. Graham on a Nieuport, with Sub-Lieutenant Ince as his observer, and they waited until the enemy 'plane was almost above the stranded ship before springing their surprise. Three times Graham came plunging down on the seaplane, each time flattening out beneath its belly to give his observer a chance to pour in a hail of lead from below. On his third dive the two-seater fell, a flaming mass, into the sea, where it was blown to pieces by the sudden explosion of its bombs.

The Nieuport, however, was also due for a ducking. Its petrol tank had been holed during the fight and within a few minutes of the German seaplane's downfall, the Nieuport's engine stopped abruptly. Fortunately, Graham was able to glide towards a minesweeper, the "Balmoral," which had been attracted to the scene of the firing but the Nieuport turned turtle on striking the water and the pilot, strapped to his seat, was carried under the wreckage. With great difficulty he managed to free himself and shot to the surface and, soon afterwards, both he and his observer were picked up by the minesweeper.

Early in 1916, the Wing, now re-equipped with Nieuport fighters and two-seaters, as well as several B.E.2cs. and Caudrons, found itself busily engaged in a variety of duties which included bombing, fighting and reconnaissance raids, spotting for the guns of the Fleet, anti-submarine patrols and numerous special patrols, carried out both by night and by day in all kinds of weather and over an area extending from the Belgian coast to well inland beyond the front-line trenches. Another of their side-lines was an attempt to introduce a continuous system of anti-Zeppelin patrols off the coast and on one occasion ten of the Wing's Nieuports took-off at three-minute intervals and patrolled at 10,000 feet six miles out to sea, hoping to intercept airships returning from raids on

* F.B.A. : Franco-British Aviation Co.

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England. The patrol was kept up for nearly three hours without success and only abandoned when a thick fog blotted out both land and sea.

The Defenders of Dunkirk

SUCH a variety of duties, however, was obviously more than any one unit could efficiently undertake and in March, 1916, the Wing was reorganised into five flights—three of which later became No. 1 (Naval) Squadron while, in April, all bombing operations were taken over by Nos. 4 and 5 Wings, leaving No. 1 free to concentrate all its energies on coastal patrols, fighting and Fleet co-operation work. One of its most important tasks under the last heading was to provide the daily fighting patrols needed to defend the minelayers which, towards the end of April, were engaged in laying the Belgian Coast Barrage, consisting of 18 miles of moored nets to which mines were attached. On several occasions the fighters had to repulse determined attacks made on the mine-sweepers by seaplanes from Zeebrugge and once Flight Sub-Lieutenant H. R. Simms fought a 15-minute duel with a particularly aggressive German pilot before he was able to out-manceuvre his opponent and send him crashing into the water where the seaplane was blown up by its own bombs.

More victories were claimed by the Squadron the following month when they were called upon to take part in the defence of Dunkirk against a series of violent bombing raids from which it suffered, day and night, from the 19th to the 22nd of May. During one of these raids, made in the afternoon of the 21st, the Squadron's Nieuports from St. Pol accounted for two of the raiders, the victorious pilots being Flight Commander Mulock and Flight Lieutenant Dallas. Later, on June 10th, to facilitate their defence of the Dunkirk area, the Squadron was offered the use of a French aerodrome at Furnes which, situated ten miles nearer the lines than St. Pol, gave them a much better chance of intercepting the raiders before they could reach Dunkirk.

The offer was gladly accepted and a special unit, known as "A" Squadron and consisting of two flights of Nieuport Scouts under Squadron Commander F. K. Haskins,* was detached from No. 1 Wing at St. Pol and sent to the new advanced landing-ground. It was here, too, that the Squadron received its first Sopwith Triplane, a machine far superior in performance to any other of that time and the type with which, by 1917, the whole squadron was to be equipped. For the rest of the year, both sections of the Squadron, operating from St. Pol and from Furnes respectively, were kept busy on fighting patrols and reconnaissance, and evidence of the pressure under which they worked is the fact that in July alone they made no less than 110 fighting patrols and carried out 45 escort jobs.

Towards the end of 1916, the fighting strength of the R.N.A.S. units at Dunkirk was drawn upon to strengthen the R.F.C. on the Western Front and to the squadron which resulted—known as No. 8 Naval—No. 1 contributed a flight of Sopwith Pups. So noteworthy was the work of this R.N.A.S. squadron that it was not long before General Trenchard was calling for further support from the R.N.A.S. and in February, 1917, No. 1 (Naval) Squadron, now re-equipped with Sopwith Triplanes, reported for duty at Chipilly, led by Squadron Commander Haskins, who had formerly commanded "A" Squadron at Furnes.

A Meeting with Richthofen

THE Squadron, sixteen strong, arrived on the Western Front on the eve of the Battle of Arras for which it was transferred to the 13th (Army) Wing of the 3rd Brigade and stationed at La Bellevue. Its principal duties were to carry out offensive patrols in small formations and to provide escorts for bombing raids up to 20 miles within the enemy lines. In one month, between April 22nd and May 23rd, the Squadron recorded 95 offensive patrols, and engagements with no less than 175 enemy aircraft.

* Now Air Commodore, R.A.F.(retired).

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In one of these engagements, two Sopwith Triplane pilots, Flight Commander R. S. Dallas and Flight Sub-Lieutenant T. G. Culling, found themselves opposed by an enemy formation of fourteen two-seater and single-seater fighters. Flying at 16,000 feet and confident that their great numerical superiority rendered them immune from attack, the German formation ignored the two triplanes and kept on their course towards the lines. To their amazement, the two triplanes at once gave battle.

Plunging down from opposite directions, they split up the formation in their first attack and then for forty-five minutes they waged furious war with the enemy armada, shot three of them down, and drew off only when the Germans were scattered and in full retreat to the eastward. The secret of their success in the face of such great odds lay, firstly, in their own high courage and skill and, secondly, in the superior speed and climbing powers of their triplanes which enabled the two men to keep up a continuous series of attacks. Each man chose his opponent, made a short fast dive, put in a rapid burst of fire, then regained height on a climbing turn and dived once more to the attack.

A few days later, on April 29th, the Squadron had a memorable encounter with Richtofen's "circus" of six red Albatros fighters, which, together with six more Albatri from another squadron, were having very much the best of a dogfight with three Spads of No. 19 Squadron. A formation of six of No. 1 Squadron's triplanes saw the desperate plight of the Spads and immediately piled in to help level up the odds. For twenty minutes the battle raged furiously and then, with three of their men driven down out of control, the rest of the Albatros formation broke off and fled for home. Unfortunately, the triplanes had arrived too late to save the Spads, all three of which were shot down. Moreover, one of the victims was none other than Major H. D. Harvey-Kelly, C.O. of 19 Squadron and the first R.F.C. pilot to land on French soil after the

outbreak of the War. Badly wounded, he crashed within the enemy territory, was taken prisoner and died of his wounds a few days later.

Triplanes in Trouble

MANY other valiantly-fought combats figure in No. 1 Squadron's records for that eventful summer, and deserving of special mention is the engagement in which a formation of ten triplanes led by Flight Commander T. F. N. Gerrard opposed twenty enemy scouts high above Moorslede. Half-way through the fight, several R.F.C. Nieuports joined in and one almost met immediate disaster when a hostile machine jumped on its tail and prepared to make short work of its pilot. But Gerrard, fortunately, had seen the German's manoeuvre and promptly whipped round to fire sixty rounds at point-blank range into the cockpit of the Nieuport's attacker. The German at once fell off on to one wing, spun fast for 3,000 feet and then dived vertically into the ground. Before it had hit, Gerrard had sent yet another machine plunging earthwards out of control, and before the engagement ended, three more E.A. had been shot down, victims of the superlative gunnery of Flight Sub-Lieutenant D. W. Ramsey. On the Squadron's return to its aerodrome it was found that Gerrard's triplane was literally riddled with bullets and that practically all his lateral controls had been shot away. Shortly afterwards, this gallant officer was awarded a richly-deserved Distinguished Service Cross.*

Towards the end of June, Squadron Commander Haskins returned to England and was succeeded by Flight Commander Dallas, one of the earliest members of the Squadron. Good work was done by the Squadron's triplanes in the Battle of Messines but it suffered a severe blow on July 7th when three of its men, escorting a reconnaissance flight of No. 45 Squadron, were set upon by eighteen enemy scouts and shot down while valiantly protecting their charges, all of which returned safely.

* This officer was subsequently killed playing polo in Iraq in 1923, while serving with No. 1 Squadron, R.A.F.

NAVAL ONE

Ten Victories in a Fortnight

THE Squadron's next big engagement was the Third Battle of Ypres and their most notable day's work was done on August 16th when three enemy machines were brought down in flames before breakfast, several others driven off and numerous enemy ground-targets bombed from a low altitude. The Squadron also played a prominent part in the operations against the Menin Ridge and in the attack on Polygon Wood on September 26th. Most of their work at this time consisted of "ground strafing" the enemy trenches and gun emplacements, but they also managed to find time for offensive patrols and accounted for ten enemy machines in the last two weeks of September alone.

The Squadron's attachment to the R.F.C. ended on November 2nd and they were moved to a new aerodrome at Bray Dunes and re-equipped with Sopwith Camels, fitted with 150 h.p. Bentley engines—not altogether a welcome change to the speedy triplanes which they had come to like so well. Once more their work consisted of Fleet co-operation, bombing raids and high and low offensive patrols. Enemy machines were now far more numerous than when last the Squadron had been on the coast, and there are many records of combats and not a few reports of confirmed victories.

The following month the Squadron was transferred to England for a well-deserved period of leave and their twelve Camels flown to Dover for overhaul and replacement. Early in the New Year, however, they were back in action again, this time as a unit in the Home Defence Force carrying out night patrols against London's air raiders. But the intensiveness of the anti-aircraft gunfire and the lack of an efficient warning system prevented them from ever getting to grips with a raider and it was not altogether with regret that the Squadron found itself posted back to Belgium in mid-February. Still equipped with Camels, and now thirteen strong, they flew from Dover to Teteghem on February 14th and reported for duty with No. 1 Wing which, at that time, was

responsible for all Naval air co-operation on the Belgian coast.

A month later the Wing was handed over to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces to help stem the great German offensive which had been launched on March 21st, and the Squadron was transferred, within the space of two days, first to the 2nd Brigade and then to the 13th (Army) Wing of the 3rd Brigade, with headquarters at Fienvillers. Three days later, on April 1st, 1918, the Squadron had ceased to exist for, on the amalgamation of the R.N.A.S. and the R.F.C. into the Royal Air Force on that date, it automatically became No. 201 Squadron, R.A.F.*

The change of name, however, resulted in no change in the Squadron's aggressive spirit and in the following month, flying on the Third Army's front, they encountered 200 enemy aircraft, fought 112 combats and destroyed 24 machines. ~~Three of these victories were scored~~ within a few minutes of each other on May 15th, when the Squadron's 15 Camels, led by Captains C. B. Ridley and S. M. Kinkead,† surprised a formation of thirty E.A. which were playing havoc with several Bristol Fighters. They at once shot three down in flames and caused twelve others to withdraw, either damaged or out of control.

The Secret Squadron

THREE followed, in July, a short period of attachment to the 11th Wing of the 2nd Brigade for line patrols between Ypres and Nieppe Forest, and then the Squadron was transferred to Poulainville to join the 5th Brigade in readiness for the Battle of Amiens. The authorities, anxious to keep the coming offensive secret from the enemy, were at great pains to avoid any indications of a strong force being assembled on this front and,

* Other R.N.A.S. squadrons were similarly treated, in each case 200 being added to their original number.

† Flight Lieutenant S. M. Kinkead, R.A.F., was a member of the 1928 Schneider Trophy team and lost his life in a flying accident while testing a racing seaplane.

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right up to the eve of the battle, the Squadron's presence on the front was kept secret by concealing their machines inside the sheds as much as possible and allowing them to fly only while carrying the markings of another squadron already on the front.

At 4.20 a.m. on August 8th, the great Amiens offensive was launched with a colossal bombardment, and a few minutes later, tanks, armoured cars, armed lorries and infantry moved forward to the attack. The early morning mist made air co-operation impossible at first but soon after 9 a.m. the mist cleared, to reveal terrible havoc and confusion within the German lines. Swarms of Allied aircraft then swept across the battlefield, machine-gunning and bombing the many targets that offered in the German back-areas.

Well to the fore were the pilots of No. 201 Squadron, and at about 10.30 a.m. two of their men, flying in search of targets near Harbonnieres, sighted three trains outside a village. Hoping that they were loaded with ammunition, each pilot came down to within 100 feet of the ground and planted four 25-lb. bombs as close to the trains as they could. Two of the trains, only slightly damaged, managed to get under way but the third was put out of action and within a few minutes a squadron of the 5th Dragoons, who had seen the attack from nearby, galloped up, surrounded the train and, after encountering a brief resistance, made prisoners of the train's many passengers, most of whom proved to be soldiers who had just returned to the front from leave.

Meanwhile, not far away, two more pilots were achieving the unique feat in air history of capturing an 11.5 inch gun, complete with two ammunition trains. The exploit is best described in the words of General Sir A. Montgomery, who wrote :

"Early on the 8th August, some low flying aeroplanes discovered an 11-in. long-range railway-gun, which had been used in the bombardment of Amiens, busily firing although our infantry was advancing within 1,000 yards of the position. Swooping down close to the gun, our airmen dropped a number of bombs on it with such effect that when the troops of the 5th Australian Division

arrived on the spot they found the whole gun's crew either killed or wounded."*

Shortly afterwards, a small party of Australian Engineers uncoupled the burning part of the train, filled the boiler of the engine, raised steam and drove the gun into the British lines. It was afterwards, at the wish of General Foch, placed on view to the public in Paris.

"The squadron responsible for this fine piece of work," states the official historian, "cannot be identified with certainty, but it is possible that the gun-train was one of the targets attacked by two Sopwith Camel pilots of No. 201 Squadron, whose report simply states that bombs were dropped on a burning train near Harbonnieres. The pilots were unable to see what happened after their bombs exploded because their attention was diverted by the arrival of an enemy two-seater which they attacked and forced to land."†

Official historians are, rightly, on the side of caution, but certainly the exploit well accords with the daring spirit which was ever a characteristic of 201 Squadron.

Two more of the Squadron's pilots also had exciting experiences on the opening day of the Amiens battle. One was attacked by eight Fokkers and, though driven down in flames, managed to escape unhurt. Another, forced down by four enemy scouts, crashed behind the enemy lines, but jumping out of the wreckage unhurt, sprinted towards the advancing British forces and managed to board a tank, from which he had a front-seat view of the battle for the next few hours. Altogether, on that first day of the Amiens offensive the Squadron carried out eighteen patrols, involving a total of fifty-six hours' flying, and dropped 144 25-pounder bombs.

A Daring C.O.

FIVE days later, they suffered a great loss in the death of their commanding officer, Major Booker, a most daring fighter who on every possible opportunity

* "The Story of the Fifth Army" : page 50.

† From "The War in the Air" : Vol. VI (Oxford University Press).

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took his place at the head of the Squadron when on offensive patrols. He was attacked by an enemy formation while showing a new pilot over the lines, went down in flames and was never heard of again. But his death did not go long unavenged for the same afternoon his Squadron gave battle on sight to an enemy formation of twenty-two machines and in the first sharp burst had sent two of them plunging earthwards out of control. Major Booker was succeeded on August 18th by Major C. M. Leman, and the Squadron moved to Noeux to rejoin their old friends, the 3rd Brigade.

Within the first three weeks of their new attachment, they had chalked up sixteen confirmed victories, and by the end of the month were in the thick of another great battle, this time the homeric struggle of Cambrai. Four of their machines were detailed to each Corps front and, operating from Baiseux aerodrome, they kept up an almost constant series of "ground strafing" patrols in support of the advancing infantry.

Barker's Epic Combat

AS the final tide of the War turned and the great German retreat began before the relentless pressure of the Allied armies, 201 Squadron joined valiantly with the other squadrons on the front in flying low over the retreating forces, harrying their transport with bombs and machine-guns and giving battle to any German defender that dared to try and oppose the British Army's sweeping advance.

On October 17th, the Squadron had a distinguished newcomer in the person of Major W. G. Barker, attached to the Squadron from England for a refresher course, and ten days later this distinguished officer had won for the Squadron its second Victoria Cross.

No finer account of the epic fight by which Barker gained the decoration has ever been written than the combat report which his commanding officer prepared for him. It is here reproduced from the pages of the Official History of the War in the Air :—

"8.25 a.m. : Observed enemy two-seater at 21,000 feet N.E. of Forêt de Mormal. Enemy aircraft climbed east and Major Barker, following fired a short burst from underneath at point-blank range. Enemy aircraft broke up in the air and one of the occupants jumped with a parachute. He then observed a Fokker biplane 1,000 feet below stalling and shooting at him, one of the bullets wounding him in the right thigh. He fell into a spin from which he pulled out in the middle of a formation of about 15 Fokkers, two of which he attacked indecisively, both enemy aircraft spinning down. He turned, and getting on the tail of a third which was attacking him, shot it down in flames from within 10 yards range. At this moment he was again wounded in the left thigh by others of the formation who were diving on him. He fainted and fell out of control again.

"On recovering, he pulled his machine out and was immediately attacked by another large formation of twelve to fifteen enemy aircraft. He got on the tail of one and from a range of less than 5 yards shot it down in flames. At this moment he received a third wound from the remainder of the formation who were attacking him, the bullet shattering his left elbow. The enemy machine which wounded him closed to within 10 yards. He again fainted and fell out of control to 12,000 feet and, recovering, was at once attacked by another large formation of enemy aircraft.

"He then noticed heavy smoke coming from his machine, and under the impression he was on fire, tried to ram a Fokker just ahead of him. He opened fire on it from 2 to 3 yards range and the enemy aircraft fell in flames. He then dived to within a few thousand feet of the ground and began to fly towards our lines, but found his retreat cut off by another formation of eight enemy aircraft who attacked him. He fired a few bursts at some of them and, shaking them off, dived down and returned to our lines, finally crashing close to one of our balloons. . . ."

The coming of the Armistice found 201 Squadron at La Targette and a few weeks later it was transferred to Bethencourt and reduced to cadre. In February, 1919, this cadre was moved to Salisbury and the unit disbanded. For just over four years the Squadron had been almost continuously on active service, fighting on the Belgian and Western Fronts, on the Belgian coast and in the defence of London, and had achieved a record of distinguished service worthy to rank with that of any fighter squadron in the Royal Air Force. Its casualties totalled 26 killed in action and 7 killed in flying accidents. In addition, 12 of its pilots had been wounded in action and 18 made prisoners of war.*

* In January, 1929, No. 480 (Coastal Reconnaissance) Squadron, was renamed No. 201 (Flying Boat) Squadron and, now equipped with Saro Londons, carries on in the same tradition and with much the same fine spirit as its immortal predecessor, "Naval One."

FOOTLIGHT ACE

That Suicide Club, the Balloon Busters, had no Stranger Member than Basil Harlow, the Actor-Airman, who, even in War, was not Content with a Part in the Chorus

CHAPTER I

Behind the Scenes

LIFE had always been a little too easy for Basil Harlow. Even when the Great War spread insecurity and disaster, Basil carried on with greater success and acquired even more money than had come his way in times of peace.

It happened that war enhanced Basil's assets, just as it produced grand pianos and limousines for purveyors of bully-beef, blankets and gas-masks. True, Basil's attributes were of a more æsthetic nature. He was the possessor of strikingly good looks, decided acting talent and a flair for the theatre fostered through several generations of a theatrical family.

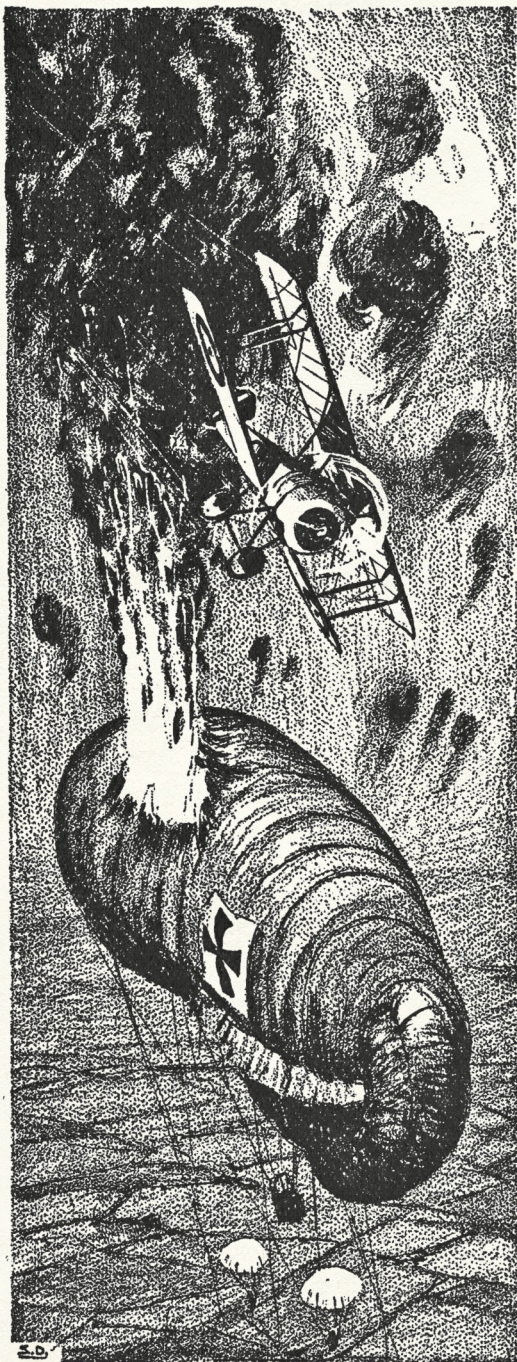
At twenty-three, he was a popular musical comedy artiste. In the early years of the War he rose to stardom with the celerity of a starshell soaring over No-Man's-Land, except that in Basil's case, the flickering-out process was more prolonged.

By

RUSSELL MALLINSON

With the leave trains pouring thousands of war-jaded soldiery into London, the theatres in 1916 were playing to crowded houses. The quality of the show did not matter particularly, so long as there were lights and music and pretty girls to help blot out the war horrors and drug overwrought nerves into temporary quiescence.

On a certain October evening in 1916, an unexpected cloud drifted across the peaceful vista of Basil's existence. The Palace Theatre was packed with khaki. It was a restless excited crowd. News from France was not too good. Outside in the darkened streets the raucous shouts of newsboys heralded the first tidings of the British offensive.



... there was a sudden burst of flame from the bellying monster

FOOTLIGHT ACE

Even the efforts of the resourceful Censor could not hide the fact that the offensive was not proceeding to plan.

When, early in the first act, Basil sauntered on to the stage, he received his customary enthusiastic ovation. His pleasant baritone voice was well suited to the sentimental duet he sang with Peggy Malone, a dazzling blonde who was the toast of all junior officers of the town.

When Peggy pirouetted gracefully into the wings, the limelight concentrated on the tall debonair Basil. Tapping his shining silk hat more firmly on his fair head, he commenced to dance with languid ease.

The orchestra had softened and certain extraneous noises from the stage-box became more audible. A frown flickered across Basil's good-looking face. The bunch of officers hanging over the rim of the box were displaying only too obvious signs of their festive mood.

Basil had reached a tricky series of steps which invariably produced a ripple of applause, when suddenly the expected plaudits were anticipated by a derisive voice from the stage-box.

"Kitchener wants you. What about it, Basil?"

Basil fozzled a step, but recovered neatly. He ignored the impudent interrupter. The fellow was tight, of course. Yet that derisive challenge had given him a shock. So far his popularity had been proof against such attacks.

Basil danced on, his footlight smile becoming more fixed, as other voices took up the challenge.

A raucous sing-song floated down from the box:

"We don't want to lose you, but we feel you ought to go. . . .

Your King and Country both need you so. . . ."

Basil's face stiffened beneath his make-up. A rotten show, ragging a fellow like this. Didn't the fools realise that he was doing a better job entertaining the soldiery and keeping up the morale of the troops, than becoming just another not very efficient soldier?

WHEN the curtain descended at the end of the first act, Basil seemed to detect a shade less enthusiasm in the applause. Moreover, it was embarrassingly mingled with catcalls.

He walked to his dressing-room, without pausing to chatter with his fellow actors. Closing the door, he slumped into a chair and lit a cigarette with a hand that was not quite steady.

It was then that he noticed something white gleaming amongst the grease paints on the dressing-table. He bent forward, his mouth compressing as he stared down at the object lit by the clustered lights around the mirror.

"Who the devil?"

As he looked at the white feather between his fingers a faint familiar perfume rose to his nostrils.

His eyes narrowed. Peggy Malone favoured that peculiar Oriental scent. He had noticed it when he danced with her to-night.

So Peggy had presented him with that symbol of cowardice. It was a gesture which told him that she was in sympathy with the crowd that had giped at him over the footlights to-night.

A pity, for he valued Peggy's opinion. She was one of the few women in his life he took seriously.

The resentment faded from his eyes as he realised that Peggy was right. She had confirmed, a little crudely perhaps, doubts that had lingered at the back of his mind for some time. He had sensed the hollowness of what he was doing, although he had not wanted to admit those things, even to himself. He had been dancing like a marionette in a world of make-believe when the real world was agonising in the throes of war.

War had become the only real drama. Its tragedy, thrills and stark pageantry reduced the tinsel and glitter of the theatre to the level of a penny gaff.

Basil squared his shoulders. Well, the Harlows had never played in second-rate shows. He would find a part worthy of himself, in one of the theatres of war, as the fighting fronts were so aptly termed.

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Yet he was conscious of a sinking feeling in the vicinity of his solar plexus. The Harlows hadn't much of a record as soldiers. He was aware of a sense of inefficiency, something akin to the stage fright that came upon him when he waited in the wings for his cue on a first night.

Out in the corridor a call-boy knocked on the dressing-room door.

"Beginners for the second act, please. . . ."

The words echoed prophetically in Basil's ears with a sense of ill omen.

CHAPTER II

"Beginners, Please"

A MONTH later, Basil Harlow joined the Royal Flying Corps. A certain amount of egotism influenced his choice. The lone self-sufficiency of a fighting pilot would give him the dignity of a leading part. The Harlows, who interpreted most things through theatrical values, could not imagine themselves in the chorus, even in a war.

Basil's commission came through quickly. It was good publicity for recruiting to have a comparative celebrity risking his neck in an R.F.C. squadron. It inspired the young idea to go and do likewise.

He was posted to the School of Aeronautics at Reading where his initiation proved somewhat disappointing.

He was taught engine control in the running sheds, where the strident clamour of 190 Raf's echoing against corrugated iron walls convinced an almost deafened Basil that flying was among the noisier of the arts.

There was also an aged Farman Shorthorn in the tram sheds, where the vagaries of turnbuckles and bracing wires and the intricacies of rigging were taught. The Farman had been reassembled after a crash. So far as flying was concerned it was a "write off," but it served for the ground instruction of the young idea.

A similar morgue-like atmosphere pervaded the engine class. The exhibits scattered about the benches reminded Basil of a post-mortem. Most of the

cylinders and magnetos and oil pumps bore evidence of violent contact with the earth, for the dismantled Gnômes and Renaults had, almost without exception, been salvaged from crashes. With that rather too vivid imagination of his, Basil wondered what stories those relics could tell of tragic first solos.

As though he were learning a part, Basil absorbed a varied knowledge of engine timing, and Morse, and the functions of ailerons and elevators and pitot tubes. A retentive memory enabled him to scrape through the examination which was the passport to preliminary flying instruction.

He was posted to Catterick. The Adjutant, as the result of much experience of the uncertainties of life in a training squadron, had become a realist, and his first request from Basil was for a cheque of five pounds in advance for his mess bill.

A surprised Basil realised the significance of the request a moment later as he watched the Adjutant's preoccupied gaze wander through the window to where, across the 'drome, a Shorthorn had piled up in a ditch. He wondered if that pilot, too, had had the forethought to pay his mess-bill in advance.

FOR the next few weeks Basil was just one of the crowd of aspiring pupils, a period when any illusions he might have had concerning the poetry of flight were eradicated from his mind.

He rose heavy-eyed from his camp bed at dawn to be given dual control in the still air of the early morning. He wore an atrocious crash-helmet of leather and springs which seemed to have been devised to direct a chill blast down the back of his neck and to drift down over his goggles at critical moments, usually when an impatient instructor was bellying behind him and grabbing the throttle to give the Renault a burst to retrieve a particularly bumpy landing.

Basil was moody and unhappy. Psychologically, he hated being one of a crowd when, in his own sphere, he had been applauded as a star.

The morning Captain Ross sent him

FOOTLIGHT ACE

up for his first solo, he was very scared. But as he clambered stiffly into the front seat of the unwieldy mass of wires and spars which was a Shorthorn, he glanced at the crowd of pupils and instructors gathered on the tarmac, and pulled himself together with the realisation that at last he had an audience. His stage training helped him now. For the first time since he had buckled a Sam Browne round his slim waist he was in the lime-light again—was playing a leading part. Just how murky the drama would prove depended on his ability to control the lumbering Farman.

He opened out the Renault and, breathing a prayer, pushed forward the hand grips. The huge tail rose slowly, and he took-off shakily, his eye glued on the air speed indicator. The ground dropped away beneath his spreading wings. The stable Shorthorn was climbing steadily, and as Basil's jangling nerves grew more quiescent, something of the joy of flying penetrated at last to his inner being.

The reassuring rhythm of the Renault, the orchestration of twanging wires and humming fabric and the deeper tone of the air wash in the Farman's wake were as pleasing a symphony of sound as any melody that had inspired him over the footlights.

He made a wide circuit and a careful bank brought him back across the 'drome. His excited brain remembered a tip a successful soloist had given him the previous evening.

"Throttle back five hundred feet over the mess and you'll glide clean into the circle."

Basil eased the throttle and pushed forward the twin grips. The huge kite floated earthwards with singing wires. The fleeting grass came into Basil's line of vision, and he flattened out. Next moment the reassuring rumble of the undercarriage told him that he was safely on the ground.

He taxied towards the sheds with a flourish.

"Good show, Harlow," said Captain Ross, quietly signalling to the ambulance driver to switch off his engine.

Basil grinned. He was blissfully unaware that his crash helmet was tilted over his right eye and a large smear of oil was trickling down his handsome face.

He was just an excited young man who had flown alone for the first time, which, as every aviator knows, is not a moment associated with an inferiority complex.

AT Montrose, Basil was again relegated to the "chorus." He sat in the cramped front cockpit of a B.E.2c with the slipstream splaying hot oil over his face, while his deafened ears struggled to listen to the instructor's theme song from the back seat.

Frequent reminders to keep the cowling level with the horizon were punctuated with sundry expostulatory jerkings of the stick, as Basil struggled to keep the swaying exhaust manifolds on the misty line which was the Scottish horizon.

He soon got the hang of the stable 2c. His solo hours, carefully recorded in his pilot's log-book, mounted steadily.

After an odd twenty-four hours' solo, which included two cross-country flights—without any effort of navigation, for he just followed the coastline to Stonehaven and Aberdeen—and forced-landing practice when he slid perilously over hedges into fields which, had he known it, were larger than many war-time aerodromes behind the lines, he was given his wings.

His delight was tempered by a disturbing feeling of inefficiency though, in point of fact, his training had been no less casual and hurried than that of his fellow officers who filtered through the sieves of Reading, Catterick and Montrose, sieves whose meshes were widened through the exigencies of war. With the German Albatros D.3 and Halberstadt scouts exacting a terrible toll from inferior British machines over the Western Front, the cry for more pilots was incessant and had to be met, somehow.

Basil had good hands, and his performance on 80 Gnome-engined Avros quickly resulted in his being recommended as suitable for instruction as a scout pilot.

AIR STORIES

A few hours' solo on Sopwith Camels and he was posted overseas. At the Pilot's Pool near Abbeville, he was given a few more hours' instruction in aerial gunnery. A wheeled-truck, shaped like a pilot's cockpit, was propelled along the curving rails of a light railway whilst the occupant gained a certain experience in deflection by firing a Lewis at a moving target propelled along a second set of rails.

With that final polish, Basil was packed into a Crossley tender and delivered, somewhat tired and dusty, a few hours later at 140 Squadron, the flying personnel of which had been drastically depleted by the German supremacy during the "Bloody April" of 1917.

The curtain was rising for Basil at a period when the probabilities of survival of an untried British fighting pilot over the Western Front had been generously estimated at three minutes.

CHAPTER III

The Curtain Rises

MAJOR RILEY, the Commanding Officer of 140 Squadron, stared across the orderly-room desk at Basil Harlow with a quietly appraising scrutiny. Unreasonably, he felt a twinge of dislike as he looked at Basil, tall and debonair and handsome, and immaculately garbed from his split-air hat to the dark sheen of his slim field-boots.

He had seen pictures of Second Lieutenant Basil Harlow in the illustrated papers, with laudatory captions stressing the brilliant stage career he had abandoned to serve his King and Country.

Riley's resentment deepened as he thought of the medical studies he had abandoned to join up. No one had made a song and dance about that. He hadn't expected it. Everyone was in the same boat, and if Basil Harlow anticipated any preferential treatment because he was a stage celebrity, the sooner he was disillusioned the better.

He looked up from Basil's papers.

"You may be a heart throb to the ladies, Harlow," he said curtly, "but

I'd like you to know that here it's only combat reports that matter."

Basil's smooth jaw tightened. It had grown a trifle firmer of recent weeks.

"Exactly, sir," he answered with his practised footlight smile, "I hope I shall be able to give you . . . er . . . a heart throb or two with my combat reports in the near future."

Major Riley grunted and, relenting, thrust a box of cigarettes across the desk.

"How many hours' solo on Camels?" he jerked.

"Three, sir . . ." said Basil apologetically.

"It's sheer murder," thought Riley.

He was twenty-two, but he looked a worn and aged man as he rose and, walking slowly to the orderly-room door, hailed Captain Ryan as he came out of "C" Flight shed.

"Ryan will take you up to the line and show you the more obvious landmarks," he said over his shoulder to Basil. "You can take up A.409."

Basil felt an instant liking for "Puggy" Ryan. There was a certain rugged honesty about the little man whose face, with its splayed nose and scarred mouth, had been robbed, through a crash, of any claim to good looks it might once have possessed.

"Keep close to my tail," advised Puggy as they stood by the machines, warming up on the tarmac. "If I waggle my wings it's a signal for you to push off home as fast as your Clerget can carry you. We may meet a wandering Boche or two and you'll only get in the way of my guns if you try to tackle him. They're the customary orders for a newcomer, so don't take it personally."

"Of course not . . ." murmured Basil, wondering if his mentor really believed that he was anxious to hurl himself into aerial combat like a death and glory ace. He felt more like a lamb being led to the slaughter.

Puggy Ryan gave his companion an understanding glance as they walked to the waiting machine. He laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder with a kindly gesture.

FOOTLIGHT ACE

"Stick tight to me and you'll be all right," he said quietly.

BASIL took the Camel off carefully, well aware of critical eyes watching him. It was a kind of dress rehearsal, and he did not want to put up a bad show.

Rocking in the wash of Ryan's Camel, he followed his guide over the grey desolation of Ypres and Passchendaele. From ten thousand feet, the War seemed a leisurely business. Shrapnel bursts unrolled lazy balls of black smoke with deceptive casualness. Occasional gun flashes flickered amidst the sombre landscape.

Giving his map roller an occasional twist, Basil memorised the more prominent landmarks, smoke-blackened ruins, shell-torn cross-roads, the wreckage of mud-logged tanks—all the transient guides which were continually in a state of flux and often disappeared in a night.

Glancing up from his map, after recording the fact that the straggling shell-torn ruins below were all that artillery and bombs had left of Menin, Basil became suddenly aware that Puggy Ryan was vigorously rocking his Camel's wings.

Basil's brain, not yet attuned to the swift thinking of aerial warfare, had scarcely assimilated the fact that he was being warned to high tail back home when two green Albatros D.3's came plunging out of the evening sun like screaming hawks. Frantically he clutched at the stick, and as the Camel's nose reared convulsively, a flaming burst from a diving Albatros missed his machine's vitals by inches.

He saw Puggy Ryan pull up vertically to escape the fire of chattering Spandaus and then, heeling over on the top of a crisp loop, fire as he dived, etching a jagged line along a black-crossed fuselage.

Basil stared at the swiftly moving drama with an odd sense of detachment. It was as though he sat watching a perfectly rehearsed act. There was

rhythm and a sense of beauty in the curving machines circling as if poised on invisible wires, the silver discs of their propellers reflecting sparkling lights in the evening sun.

The leading Albatros turned in a fast bank and with the perfect timing that only experience can give, Puggy Ryan flashed into a tight circle, his guns deflecting on the German's tail. A flame of tracer rippled from the Camel's nose, slashing the tail assembly of the Albatros into a shambles of fluttering fabric and disintegrating ribs. The Boche 'plane went down in a fast spin, and Basil let out a triumphant yell which next moment froze on his lips.

Rat-tat-tat-tat—

The whip and crack of bullets close to his head shocked him back to grim realities. His instrument-board melted before his eyes in a welter of ripped three-ply and shattered glass. Basil tore at the stick in sudden panic, and the unstable Camel reared up and fell off the top of a ragged loop.

Green wings streaked across Basil's Aldis sight and his thumbs clamped down on the gun triggers. An uncertain stream of tracer reached downwards and the Albatros' propeller blurred and disappeared in a medley of splinters. It looked like skilful deflection on the part of the Camel pilot, but, in fact, the swerving German had heeled clean into the burst.

The Albatros fell away into a steep glide eastwards and Basil drew a choking breath of relief.

Beginner's luck. Hell, but he had been scared! He flattened out unsteadily, a cold sweat on his brow.

With a shrilling of wires Puggy Ryan flew alongside. He leaned out of the cockpit of the hurtling Camel, his thumb lifted and an approving grin relaxing his rugged features. Then he waved Basil peremptorily westwards.

Basil waved his hand cheerfully. He'd broken his duck. He had proved that he was not so miscast for the rôle of a fighting airman as he had thought.

If only he could forget how scared he had been.

AIR STORIES

CHAPTER IV

Harlow Plays the Lead

BASIL became popular in the Mess. When he sat down at the piano and reeled off popular songs or swung into the lugubrious sentimental war-time melodies which, crude as they were, faintly echoed thoughts Englishmen normally repress, he was surrounded by an enthusiastic throng.

Audiences . . . applause. Something of the old zest for life quickened in his veins when his practised hands drew rhythm from the battered, beer-stained piano and silence fell around him as his artistry brought momentary forgetfulness of the strident clamour of war. Those moments carried him back to the past when he had felt that appreciative silence coming to him from the dim sea of faces beyond the footlights, a silence which, later, had quickened into a storm of applause.

He hadn't been just one of a crowd in those days. He had been a star, and often he lay awake at night in the dimness of his Nissen hut, wondering how he could rise to stardom again in this bewilderingly strange business of war into which he had been swept.

He had become increasingly aware that his chances of achieving fame as an air ace were extremely slender. He realised that he lacked the cool temperament of the successful air fighter, and was painfully conscious of his limitations every time he flew behind Puggy Ryan's streamered Camel in offensive patrols.

He was just a cog in a machine, and not a very efficient cog at that. It was all so mechanical and uninspiring: the eternal roar of the Clerget deafening his ears, the constant swivelling of his head to watch the skies for enemy aircraft, and that relentless flogging of his nerves whenever a fight was on, if he was to control his panic sufficiently to put up some sort of show and not let the rest of the flight down.

He was preoccupied with such thoughts one evening when Major Riley had called a conference in the anteroom

after dinner. The unusually serious tone of the C.O. caught his wandering attention.

"I've just had urgent orders from Wing," Major Riley was saying. "Our job is to prevent the Boche observers from spotting the supplies and reinforcements moving up the line to the jumping-off ground for our big offensive. Unfortunately, news has been filtering through to the German Intelligence. It's clear they know what we are doing, and cross-roads and dumps are being bombed every night. That leakage of information must be stopped."

Basil was stroking his fair wisp of a moustache thoughtfully.

"If I may suggest it, sir . . ."

Major Riley turned his tired eyes on Basil, impatient at the interruption.

"Suggest what, Harlow?"

"I shouldn't be surprised, sir, if that German observation balloon near Moorselle is partially the cause of the mischief. The German observers would have an excellent view of the sector . . ."

Basil stopped abruptly. He had all the artiste's sensitiveness to atmosphere, and he was aware that his words had produced a certain cynical amusement in his listeners.

"That balloon is a decoy," Major Riley snapped impatiently. "Our orders, as you well know, are to keep clear of it. The basket is filled with dummy observers and probably enough T.N.T. to blow you or any damn fool pilot who fires a shot into the basket, to perdition. That is, if you could ever get close enough to use your guns with any effect. Ack-ack batteries have the range laid dead to an inch, just waiting to blow any interfering pilot out of the sky . . ."

Basil lapsed into silence. But his thoughts were still occupied with the bulbous grey kite-balloon he had frequently noticed flaunting its iron crosses in the sky east of Moorselle.

For Basil had excellent eyesight, and only that morning, when the dawn patrol had swung warily past the *drachen*, he could have sworn that he had spotted faint flickers of light above the rim of

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the suspended basket. Were the Zeiss lenses of powerful binoculars reflecting those flickering lights in the rays of the rising sun? It was a possible theory, and if it were a fact, then the occupants of the balloon basket were not dummies after all.

"We've got to screen our activities from the Boche," Major Riley's curt voice went on. "It's up to us to stop any photographic machines getting across the lines. If any snooping German obtains obliques of the lines of communication there'll be the very devil to pay..."

Basil was looking at the C.O. with an air of concentration which was merely one of the expressions his mobile actor's face could assume at will. He was not listening. His brain was busy with the details of an offensive which was purely personal, a chance, perhaps, to get out of the crowd and prove that even in the air he was capable of playing a leading part.

AT dawn the next morning, a formation of echeloned Camels climbed steadily away from the Flanders aerodrome and headed for the lines.

The eastern sky was brightening, but a preoccupied Basil, flying on the right flank of Puggy Ryan's streamered Camel, noted with approval that drifting clouds were blanketing the beams of the rising sun.

He did not want good visibility to put into effect the plan he had worked out in detail. Now, as his gaze went towards Moorselle and he saw the bulbous grey kite-balloon swaying at its moorings, he realised with a breath of relief that the stage was admirably set. The half light of dawn would confuse the aim of the defensive gunners guarding the balloon. And the cloud-bank he spotted slowly drifting towards the *drachen* and slightly above it would provide him with excellent cover for a stealthy approach.

His hand reached for the throttle, and the roar of his Clerget subsided to a slightly deeper note as he cut down the revs. He was edging away from the

formation, moving closer to the drifting cloud-bank.

His hand moved restlessly on the stick. His temperament reacted badly to suspense, but he was keeping a tight grip on his nerves. He was conscious of a rising excitement something akin to stage fright, a sense of waiting for the curtain to rise.

He was very near to the cloud-bank now, and the rest of the formation were swiftly drawing away from his laggard Camel.

He kicked the rudder and moved the stick across and the fast-banking Camel veered into the clouds. Grey vapour swirled against his face like the touch of ghostly hands. The throb of the Clerget echoed in his ears with a strangely muffled note.

He flew level for a few seconds. Then, taking a deep breath, he pushed forward the stick.

The Camel, diving steeply, plunged clear of the vaporous mists with Basil's straining eyes searching for the kite-balloon. He spotted it some five hundred feet below and slightly to the right. A kick on the rudder deflected his nose on to the target, and he went down with screaming wires in a power dive.

He was conscious of an exultant joy in letting himself go. He was no longer just one of a covey of patrolling machines flying across a shrapnel-spattered sky. He had regained his individuality, he was playing a leading part with an audience entirely his own. He pictured the uplifted faces beneath shrapnel helmets watching him from the British and German trenches and his hand steadied on the controls with something of the calmness with which he had schooled himself to give of his best—to an audience.

Yet, behind that streak of theatricality, lay genuine courage. It carried him through the first dreadful barrage of anti-aircraft fire which met his plunging Camel. The air quivered around him as hell was let loose. Shells mushroomed behind his tail, and the single-seater lurched sickeningly as lead bit into its longerons.

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Basil shook his head to clear the smoke from his eyes and let loose a desperate burst at the belling balloon now swelling within his ring sight. He swore as he saw the tracers curve harmlessly past the envelope, and then his target was lost as he shot past it with the impetus of his headlong dive.

He pulled up in a zoom, and sheer speed momentarily dragged him clear of the murderous zone of ack-ack fire. He rolled over on the top of a ragged loop, the shell-torn earth below streaming past his vision and melting into shrapnel-splashed sky as he flattened out. Through rifts of smoke he spotted the balloon again. His unsteady hand clutched the gun grips and he let loose a burst.

There was a sudden puff of smoke from the belling monster and a lapping of flame.

Basil laughed a little wildly. He was aware that the Camel's controls had gone horribly spongy and the nose was dropping in the first convulsive whirl of a spin.

The fire gushing from the stricken balloon lit two swaying figures with parachutes mushrooming above them as the *drachen's* crew leapt for safety.

"So I was right," Basil gritted. "There were live observers in the balloon."

The parachutes drifted out of the line of his blurred vision. The Camel was spinning earthwards and he fought helplessly with controls whose wires had been severed. The ground rushed up to meet the battered machine with its trailing wires and fluttering fabric.

Basil kicked the rudder, not with any hope of reprieve, but with the instinct of self-preservation. The oil-flecked nose lifted a trifle and the battered Camel, buffeting to destruction on one wing, subsided into ruin.

The 'plane had skimmed the lines to fall into a shell-scarred field near to an advance dump, and the R.E.'s who raced to the pilot's aid saw Basil Harlow's lips moving as they dragged him through the tangle of wire and broken spars. His barely-conscious brain was reiterating words which did not reach his lips.

"I've done it. I've done it at last. . . ."

That was what Basil thought he was shouting. In reality, he was gibbering.

CHAPTER V

Interval

THE ack-emmas of Rely Aircraft Park had made a sound job of the theatre. The stage proscenium occupied the full width of the double hangar which Corps had commandeered for the use of the Divisional Concert Party.

Corps' august approval of the plan had sanctioned, if not officially, at least effectively, the necessary scrounging, and the Aircraft Park's depleted stores had provided slabs of beaver-board for the orchestral pit, and wing-tip lights for the stage footlights. An ingenious adaptation of pulley-wheels and bracing wire raised and lowered the curtain according to the requirements of the talented performers, in quest of which units throughout the sector had been combed.

It was, perhaps, Basil Harlow's reputation as a stage star which had influenced his attachment to the Aircraft Park when he was discharged from the British hospital in Poperinghe. His medical board had recommended "three months light ground duties." His nerves were in pieces. "Traumatic neurasthenia," the M.O.'s called it.

Basil reported at Rely with a sense of escape, an inner thankfulness at being free of the deepening fear of offensive patrols, those nightmares when his restless sleep had been haunted with pictures of machines plunging down the sky with fire and smoke pouring from riddled tanks.

What nerve he had possessed for flying, he told himself, he had lost irretrievably during that crazy theatrical attack on the German kite-balloon. That had only been a flash of courage which had burnt itself out, and it was beyond him to re-kindle that courage again.

When the C.O. at Rely suggested that Basil should take over the reorganisation of the Divisional Concert Party and become its stage director, he accepted with alacrity, not only because it would

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carry him back to the atmosphere of his first love, the theatre, but for another reason of which in his honest moments he was ashamed.

If he made himself indispensable to the Divisional Entertainments Branch, he argued, his period of ground duty might be prolonged indefinitely. Such things could be discreetly wangled, and he thought he had enough personality and stage experience to ensure his successful exploitation of the chance that had come his way.

Under Basil's expert direction, the Divisional Concert Party soon became one of the most popular institutions of its kind in the sector. Basil groomed and polished the mixed talent at his disposal until the show ran with professional slickness, and with more than a colourable imitation of a West End revue—as those who still remember with gratitude the momentary forgetfulness that particular concert party provided will perhaps recall.

Basil's own practised artistry always ensured an enthusiastic ovation. One sultry August evening when he sauntered on to the hangar stage a prolonged burst of applause heralded his popularity with the khaki-clad audience stretching beyond the wing-tip footlights. Tapping his gleaming silk hat more firmly on his handsome head, Basil commenced to dance with languid ease.

In the perfectly-creased striped trousers and morning coat of a man-about-town, there was little to associate this poised and immaculate Basil with the scared, white-faced pilot who had dived frantically through the screeching hell of a balloon barrage.

His act ended, and the prolonged applause was like music in his ears. It quietened his conscience. He was doing a good job. This was his *métier*. He had been a fool to try his hand at heroics.

During the interval, he slipped out of the stage-door for a breath of air. It was cool out on the aerodrome with the freshening night wind stirring the wind-sock on its mast. It was a typical Flanders night, raw and misty and still,

save for the interminable rumble of distant gunfire.

He paused to light a cigarette, and it was then that he started as a light hand fell on his arm and a familiar voice greeted him.

"Hullo, Basil . . ."

He lifted his head to stare for some moments at the khaki-clad girl smiling up at him.

"Peggy Malone!" he gasped in pleased recognition. "Well, this is a surprise. . . ."

BASIL had scarcely recognised her at first. She was a changed Peggy in a rather stained uniform of the Field Ambulance Nursing Yeomanry Service. Yet the masculine cut of her khaki could not conceal the charm of her slight figure, or the essential femininity of her as she laughed up at him with curving lips, the night wind stirring a red gold curl against her soft cheek.

"Well, don't you think I make a rather devastating Fanny?" she laughed.

"You're a positive danger to the soldiery," he grinned. "Come along to my dressing-room and I'll find you a drink. We'll have a talk over old times."

She shook her head.

"Sorry, Basil," she said, "but it just can't be done. I'm on duty. There's a general air raid warning. I'm standing by with the ambulance column out on the road."

She paused and he saw her eyes on the grease paint on his face.

"So you've gone back to your first love, Basil?"

He laughed, a laugh that was a trifle forced.

"The cobbler should stick to his last, my dear. I'm an actor, not a chocolate air ace. . . ."

She looked at him steadily for a moment.

"A pity, Basil. I had great hopes of you."

"Hang it all," he said, a little angrily, "you needn't jump to conclusions. I'm only on light duty temporarily."

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My next medical board'll probably send me back to my squadron. . . ."

His voice trailed away and he avoided her frank eyes with the pretence of grinding out his cigarette end beneath his heel. He knew his words had not rung true. He felt a sudden surge of self-pity, a desire to confide in her that his nerve had gone. If only she would understand. . . . Damn it, what right had she to stand there looking at him with that faint contempt in her eyes?

He took a step forward, his mouth working.

"Look here, Peggy. . . ." he began unsteadily, "I know what you're thinking, and you're not the only one. . . ."

He stopped as he saw that she was not listening. Her gaze had gone beyond him to where a cluster of vague lights moved across the sable sky. Basil stiffened as he followed the girl's tense gaze and he recognised those lights as the glowing exhausts of a formation of bombers.

The drone of massed engines now drifted to their ears. Somewhere across the 'drome, a Klaxon shrilled its warning.

"I'd better get back to the ambulances," the girl said quickly, "it looks as though I'll have a job pretty soon."

Basil's lips twisted. A job! This girl who in the next hour would probably have to face calmly, heaven alone knew what mutilation and horror, filled him with a sense of inferiority. He realised suddenly the futility of what he was doing; his job which wasn't a real war job at all and, for what it was worth, ended when he wiped the grease paint from his face.

"**H**ULLO! Isn't that a machine?"

Peggy's startled voice broke in on his thoughts. He followed her gaze, and out of the sable night sky he saw a machine materialising from the shadows as it glided in to land, a British Camel. A searchlight caught and held the oddly wavering 'plane for a moment and then swerved away so as not to blind the pilot.

"He's in trouble," Basil gritted.

He had started to run, and he was

within a few yards of the Camel when it hit the turf with a bumpy landing and rolled to a standstill. Next moment he was bending over the cockpit, his arm about the shoulders of the wounded pilot. He was babbling incoherently. His mouth was flecked with blood.

"All right, old chap," Basil said gently.

He lifted the pilot from the cockpit and lowered him on to the grass. He looked up into Basil's face, urgent entreaty in his shadowed eyes.

"They got me. . . ." he breathed, "but the machine's all right. Someone must take it up. We'll need every machine in the sector to-night. There's a massed raid. . . . the Kampfgeschwader. . . ."

As the pilot's head fell forward, Basil heard Peggy's voice beside him.

"I'll look after him."

Basil straightened and he saw the girl's eyes on his face. He was conscious of a sense of expectancy in her gaze. And suddenly he knew, as clearly as though she had spoken, that she had overheard the wounded pilot's urgent words. . . . knew what Peggy Malone wanted him to do.

Overhead the drone of massed engines was growing louder. The earth shook with the sudden crash of bombs. Across the 'drome, Basil saw the wall of the theatre hangar dissolve like tearing cardboard. Through a gush of fire and smoke he saw the flimsy stage and shattered footlights, and the garish drop curtain fluttering like a signal of distress.

Somehow it seemed symbolical, this destruction of the futile things he had used to hide his cowardice. But at least it was not too late for him to regain one thing he had almost lost—his self-respect.

"Give me that man's flying helmet and goggles," he heard himself saying, "I'm going up. . . ."

He climbed into the cockpit of the Camel, and the old familiar fear clutched at his heart, but he fought it grimly. He braced his feet on the rudder-bar and, gripping the stick, reached for the throttle.

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A figure came out of the darkness, and then Peggy Malone was standing beside him. She was rather white, but her eyes were smiling with a strange tenderness.

"Stout show, Basil," she said, and her breath seemed to catch in her throat. "The Harlows have always been—good theatre."

CHAPTER VI

The Last Act

WITH his nerves stretched almost to breaking-point, Basil took-off after a perilously short run. He felt the controls go soggy and for a horrible moment he thought the Camel was going to stall into the ground. The shock steadied him, and he eased off the machine until the engine revs. picked up.

Climbing steadily, he watched the moving lights which were the crimson exhausts of the Friedrichshafens circling ponderously to renew their attack on the Aircraft Park.

He could not hope to drive the bombers away from their objective. But the very audacity of his attack might deceive the pilots of the Kampfgeschwader that his Camel was the spearhead of an assault, the forerunner of a large formation of British fighters plunging down from the night sky.

No doubt an emergency Zone Call was already, in fact, bringing every available fighter in the sector to the defence of Rely. But something had to be done quickly to prevent the bombers unloading their devastating cargo on the long line of hangars packed with reserve machines. If only he could divert the attention of the bomber pilots from those hangars until reinforcements arrived!

He had reached the bombers' ceiling and now he was edging round the arrow-head formation to climb above his quarry. The air reverberated with the nocturnal dirge of massed engines. The clamour grew fainter as he clawed for altitude and then he flattened out above the white-crossed black wings of the

clustering Friedrichshafens.

He drew a deep breath and, pushing forward the stick, went down in a power dive. He warmed his guns with a trial burst as he plunged down the sky into what seemed a vast suspended cage of black wings whose glossy dope gleamed suddenly with the flame of tracer as a score of guns converged on the crazy Englishman.

The Camel hurtled through an inferno of lead and flame, and only the darkness which confused the gunners' aim and the Camel's terrific speed saved Basil from immediate annihilation. As the line of mammoth invaders flashed past him, he splayed a stream of lead into a pilot's cockpit which swirled across his sights. He had a fleeting glimpse of the pilot reeling back, his arm clamped across his shattered face.

The huge bomber reeled drunkenly, and the machine flying on its star-board side banked desperately to avoid the yawing mass that came side-slipping towards it. The two machines met with a rending crash and went down with locked wings, trailing spars and fabric.

FIRST blood! Basil ran his tongue over his dry lips and, pulling out of his dive, rocketed upwards with the velocity of the Camel's zoom.

Hanging on to his prop., he pounded away with his Vickers, and he saw his tracer etching a jagged line beneath an iron-crossed fuselage. There was a flicker of fire and then flaming petrol was pouring from a shattered tank as the bomber fell over on one wing to go spinning down into the abyss of darkness.

Basil kicked on rudder and wrenched the Camel into a vertical bank to escape the flaming mass which threatened to engulf him—only to find himself caught in a murderous hail of converging fire from swivelling Spandaus.

The Camel shivered under the violence of the attack. It fell away with slashed fabric and bracing wires snarling round its wings. In the cockpit Basil crumpled as something struck his head with a fierce blinding pain which subsided into

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numbness. He lifted his hand to his helmet and vaguely knew that his fingers were wet with blood.

How dark it was ! He shook his head, but the mist would not clear from his eyes. He did not see the fanning formation of Camels diving down the night sky to head the bombers off, nor hear the opening snarl of aerial combat as the fighter squadrons which the Zone Call had brought hurtling to Rely, completed the havoc Basil had begun in those courageous moments when he had redeemed his self-respect.

In the spinning cockpit everything was growing dim for Basil. He was glad they had switched off the footlights. They had hurt his eyes. Now

the curtain was falling. As if from far away he seemed to hear a soft chorus of voices, like a wave of applause sweeping across the footlights.

The crippled Camel spun down through the starlit sky and tore its way through the shattered framework of the wrecked hangar of the Divisional Concert Party. It slid down and came to rest amidst the splintered débris of the stage with its tangled footlights and drunken scenery.

The shock loosened the broken supports of the garish curtain. It dropped slowly over Basil Harlow's broken body, falling like a kindly shroud over the peaceful face on which a smile still lingered.

HERE'S THE ANSWER

More Replies to Readers' Enquiries

BALLOON "BUSTERS" (R. McC. Mohr, Sydney, Australia). (1) The Allied airman with the highest balloon victory score was Chevalier Willy Coppens of Belgium, whose total victory score of 36 included 26 gasbags. (2) "The Clutching Hand" was the nickname of the De Havilland 6, a war-time trainer produced in 1916 and fitted with a 70-h.p. Renault. (3) Both the D.H.7 and D.H.8 appear to have been experimental types which did not pass beyond the trial stage.

SOPWITH CO. (D. Mackenzie, Dunedin, New Zealand). The Sopwith Aircraft Company was incorporated in the Hawker Aircraft concern soon after the War. The builders of the S.E. and R.E. series of war-time aircraft were the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough, a Government organisation. It is now the Royal Aircraft Establishment, and has not built aircraft since the war.

RICHTHOFEN (S. Bedwell, Herne Bay, Kent). There are two books on Richtofen available in England. One, by Floyd Gibbons, is published by Cassells and sells at 3s. 6d.; the other, by "Vigilant," is published by John Hamilton Ltd. at 7s. 6d.

BUNT (R. K. Harris, Maldon, Essex). A "bunt" is an aerobatic manoeuvre in which the aircraft performs the first half of an inverted loop and from this inverted position resumes a normal attitude either by half-rolling or by a further roll in the opposite direction. In the latter case the manoeuvre is generally termed a "double bunt."

HORSE-POWER (George Norwell, Broad Green, Liverpool). Horse-power, as applied to aero-, or other types of engines, means a unit of power, equalling 33,000 ft.-lb., or, if you prefer it, 33,000 lb. raised 1 foot in 1 minute. Now you tell us how many pounds the new 1,050 h.p. Rolls-Royce Merlin aero-engine raises every minute !

A.A. DEFENCE (G. King, London, N.W.2). (1) Age limits for enlistment in the Territorial Anti-Aircraft Defences are eighteen to thirty-eight. There is an annual training camp of eight to fifteen days' duration which all members must attend, and also occasional week-end training camps and evening drills. Full particulars may be obtained from any Territorial Army depot. (2) No. 11 Squadron, R.A.F., is a light bomber unit, and is at present stationed at Risalpur, in India.

FLEET AIR ARM (G. C. Colton, Leek, Staffs.). (1) Present aircraft equipment of the Fleet Air Arm consists principally of Hawker Nimrods, Hawker Ospreys, Blackburn Sharks and Baffins, Fairey Swordfish and Vickers' Walruses. New equipment now going into service includes the Blackburn Skua dive-bomber and the Fairey Seafox light reconnaissance seaplane. The Fleet Air Arm also uses De Havilland Queen Bee and Airspeed Queen Wasp radio-controlled target 'planes. (2) We decline to be drawn into the old argument of bomber versus battleship, but our personal preference would always be for a seat with the bomber rather than with the bombed, whether the argument was on land or sea.

AIR WAR CASUALTIES (G. Drover, Oxshott, Surrey). Total casualties, from all causes, to British air service personnel during the Great War amounted to 16,623 British and 15,906 German. British losses in killed or died were 6,166 as against Germany's 5,853, and of the British figure 4,579 were officers, whereas Germany lost only 2,397 officers, killed or died. Balance in each case represented N.C.O.'s and men. British wounded or injured, officers and men, totalled 7,245, and British missing or interned totalled 3,212. Corresponding German official figures were 7,302 and 2,751.

WAR MAPS (R. D. Williams, London, N.4). A full set of maps of the Western Front, which would enable you to identify most of the places mentioned in the war yarns in AIR STORIES, appeared in Part 42 of the serial publication "Twenty Years After." Copies, price 9d., post free, are obtainable from the publishers, Tower House, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

An Ace from New Zealand

A New Zealander who Flew with a Fighting Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps, Captain H. G. Watson gained Ten Victories and a Reputation as a Fearless "Ground Strafer" and "Balloon Buster"

By

A. H. PRITCHARD

THE subject of this month's brief biography is an unsung British "Ace," Captain H. G. Watson, D.F.C., of New Zealand, who survived the Great War with ten victories to his credit. Watson has often been described as an Australian, an error that may be attributable to the fact that he saw service with the Australian Flying Corps. Actually, he was born at Caversham, Dunedin, New Zealand, on March 30th, 1890.

His first war service was with the Australian Army Service Corps, with which he remained as a *depôt*-manager until late in 1917. The checking and despatch of so much bacon and so many tins of plum and apple jam to "so and so" division was no job for a fighting man, however, and round about September, 1917, he put in a successful application for a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps.

Like most of the Australian pilots, Watson was trained in England, and by the time he could land a machine without having to sort himself out of the wreckage, the fighting squadrons of the Australian Flying Corps had been formed. His promise as a pilot won him a place with the single-seaters, and towards the close of February, 1918, he was duly packed off to France with No. 4 Squadron, A.F.C.—just in time to receive his



Captain H. G. Watson—a sketch from a photograph taken in 1918

baptism of aerial warfare during Germany's last great blow for victory.

During that terrible retreat there was no time for a new pilot to enjoy the usual sight-seeing introductory tour of the Front, and the only tour Watson had was in a hangar where he was allotted a Camel and told, "We are fighting with our backs to the wall. Go out and lay a few Jerries on *their* backs."

He soon proved an adept at the game of "ground strafing," and his flight of March 26th may be taken as typical of the hundreds of such raids that were carried out by Allied pilots during that grim retreat. About 11.0 a.m., an R.E.8 observer reported that the enemy were showing considerable activity around Achiet-le-Grand, and within half an hour Watson was flying at one thousand feet over the area, and had dropped two bombs that blew a group of huts, comprising the officers' quarters of a reserve regiment, to eternity. Going down still lower, he then spotted a long column of troops and transport lorries moving up towards the lines. For ten minutes he shot merry hell out of that unfortunate column, and when he flew off several lorries lay overturned, the road was littered with dead and wounded troops, and the orderly

AIR STORIES

line had dissolved into scattered groups of men, madly running for any cover that would protect them from the mad *Englischer* who had run his wheels almost on their helmets. Before calling it a day, Watson then machine-gunned a light field-battery and set fire to an ammunition limber.

Attacked by 34 Scouts

ALTHOUGH Watson had many fights during March, a decisive victory eluded him, and it was not until May 11th that he received credit for his first "kill." On the evening of that day a bomber flight from No. 110 (Naval) Squadron attacked the great ammunition dump at Armentières, covered by a protecting flight of ten Camels from Watson's squadron. The Naval war-birds made a good job of one great dump of shells and then turned for home, well satisfied with their morning's work. It was then that trouble, in the shape of thirty-four enemy scouts, came roaring down out of the misty sky.

A Camel went down in flames, then Captain N. L. Petschler, the Australian flight leader, evened the score by shooting the wings off an Albatros. Watson was hotly engaged by two machines, one of which soon disappeared through the clouds with steam pouring from a bullet-torn radiator. Thereupon, Watson turned his guns on a Pfalz Scout, which soon fell like a spent rocket with a plume of oily smoke billowing from beneath its engine cowl—smoke which was soon thinned by flames as the blazing machine spun into the ground not far from the still exploding dump.

The fight was soon over, without further casualties on either side, but before the raiders reached the lines they were caught in a heavy fog, and not a single machine was able to reach its own aerodrome. Two of the Naval pilots were killed when their machines crashed into trees, and six of the ten Camels were damaged beyond repair in forced landings, one pilot breaking his foot.

Three days later, Watson and Captain R. King attacked two L.F.G. two-seaters, and both pilots saw their chosen

victims go spinning down completely out of control. By a stroke of sheer ill-luck, neither pilot received confirmation of these victories, for mist had prevented ground observers from seeing the machines crash, and they were only allowed "out of control."

On June 1st, Watson went out with Captain A. H. Cobby on a "balloon busting" expedition, and the latter pilot soon sent a balloon down enveloped in flames. Watson then attacked the balloon's observer and shot clean through the rope of his parachute. "Bad sportsmanship," a critic might say, but that same critic would probably be unaware that on many occasions our own observers had been killed by German pilots while descending in their parachutes, and that orders had been issued to the effect that our pilots must retaliate at every opportunity. Furthermore, it was agreed that while a balloon could be, and often was, replaced almost at once, specially-trained observers could not be conjured up at a moment's notice. Bad sportsmanship, perhaps, but then war is not a sport.

Hunting with Cobby

WATSON'S next victim, a balloon, went down over Sailly, and ten days later he again put up a great fight in company with Cobby. The squadron were returning from a raid on Bac-St. Maur, when Cobby wagged his wings at Watson and motioned towards five distant specks. Watson was game, and the two pilots left their formation to attack the enemy machines, which proved to be five Pfalz D.12's and an Albatros, flying over Laventie. Watson bagged one Pfalz in flames; Cobby fired a burst that caused another to disintegrate in mid-air, and then chased the Albatros until he saw it crash in a field. Watson attacked the remaining machines and killed the pilot of one, the survivors escaping through the clouds.

At this time Watson was flying regular two-men offensive patrols with Cobby, and between them the intrepid pair were causing the Imperial Air Service much grief in lost men and machines, not to

AN ACE FROM NEW ZEALAND

mention the damage they did when engaged upon their favourite pastime of "ground strafing." On one occasion, while flying over Bac-St. Maur, they spotted a Pfalz buzzing around as escort for an A.G.O. two-seater, a type of machine rarely seen on the Western Front, and they at once went down to introduce themselves. The Pfalz pilot, evidently putting discretion before valour, did not tarry, but he left his charge and made off, with Cobby hot on his tail. Watson dived on the two-seater, but, receiving a well-placed burst through the bottom of his cockpit, decided to play safe until he could pick out the A.G.O.'s weak spot. Coming up from below he ran into another hail of lead from a gun that was firing through a flap beneath the fuselage. Meanwhile, however, his own guns were tracing a line of holes along the entire underside of his opponent's machine, and, very soon, the A.G.O. went down, manned by a dead crew. Cobby was nowhere to be seen, so Watson returned home, and was informed that a Pfalz had been reported to have gone down near Estaires—Cobby's chase had been rewarded.

Only two machines fell to Watson's guns during July, but the first of these victories was obtained during the most hectic half-hour of his life. After lunch on the 15th, Cobby decided to attack the Estaires balloon line and Watson offered to accompany him. Shortly after four o'clock, the two pilots took-off and placed themselves in position for an attack. Cobby started to dive, but before he had time to fire Watson flew in front of him and pointed with fingers extended—five E.A. approaching! The two men then dived down into the clouds, only to run into a formation of eight Fokker Triplanes that, as yet, had failed to observe them.

Choosing the lesser of two evils, Watson and Cobby promptly attacked the five Pfalz, and one went down after Watson's guns had filled the pilot's back full of lead, while another was shot down in flames by his companion. Watson then engaged in a bout of tail-chasing with two more machines, while Cobby, attack-

CAPT. H. G. WATSON'S VICTORY LOG

1 Fokker D.7
2 Pfalz D.3's
3 Pfalz D.12's
1 L.V.G. C4
1 A.G.O. C2
2 Balloons

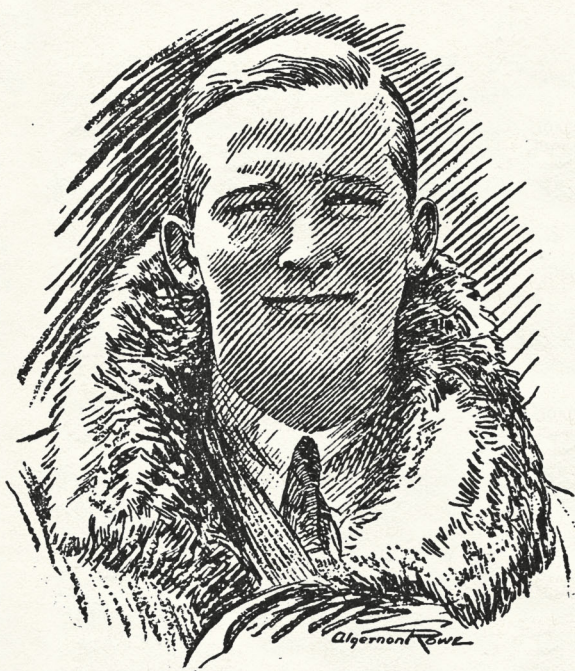
ing the leader of the German flight, shot his wings off. In the meantime, the Fokkers had gained height, and bullets began to hit the two Camels. For the next twenty minutes the Fokkers chased them in and out of the clouds, and it was only by making a terrific power-dive and hedge-hopping at a height of about thirty feet that they were at last able to escape. The Triplanes dare not dive too steeply for fear of losing their wings, and Watson's last glimpse of his tormentors was when he turned to salute them with the time-honoured "long nose and short shrift"—thumb to nose and extended fingers wagging derisively.

Watson—The Balloon "Strafer"

A FEW days after this escape, Watson noted a new balloon position being prepared near Comings and pin-pointed the place on his map as a likely objective for his next trip over the lines. Bad weather called a halt to flying, however, during the next three days, and it was not until July 25th that he was able to give the new position its baptism of fire. Crossing the lines at dawn, he found the great gasbag had just been inflated and was rising with a jerky swing on the end of its steel cable. Five short bursts and the balloon collapsed, to fall, with a sudden gush of flame, upon the heads of the amazed and terrified winch-crew.

On August 16th, Watson took part in the great raid on Lomme aerodrome, a raid in which sixty-five machines took part. His flight bombed a group of officers' huts and workshops on the edge of a wood, and Watson flew so low that he returned home with the greater part

AIR STORIES



Captain A. H. Cobby, D.S.O., D.F.C., A.F.C., the Australian Air Ace with whom Captain Watson carried out some of his most daring and successful "ground strafing" exploits.

Captain Cobby's own record totalled 24 victories, all scored within eight months, and including five observation balloons

of a small bush entangled in the spreader bar of his undercarriage.

Much of Watson's time thereafter was taken up with "ground strafing" and bombing raids, and it was not until September 16th that he obtained his tenth and last victory. At dawn, he and Captain King were attacked by three black Fokker D.7's to the north-west of Lille, and in the fight that followed both pilots secured victories.

Here it is that Watson's record passes

into the unknown, for no mention is made of him in official records. He was not killed or even wounded, and it is highly improbable that he went on leave at such a busy period. If any readers can help solve the apparent mystery of his last days in France, or know of Watson's present whereabouts, AIR STORIES would like to hear from them, and so complete the war record of this unsung hero who rallied to the aid of the Mother Country from the other side of the World.

Flt. Lt. KINLEY RETURNS NEXT MONTH

Captain J. E. Gurdon's popular character, Flt. Lt. Kinley of the British Secret Service, returns to AIR STORIES next month in the first of a great new series of exciting adventures. Look out for him and his inseparable flying companion, Tony Carew, in next month's long complete mystery-thriller

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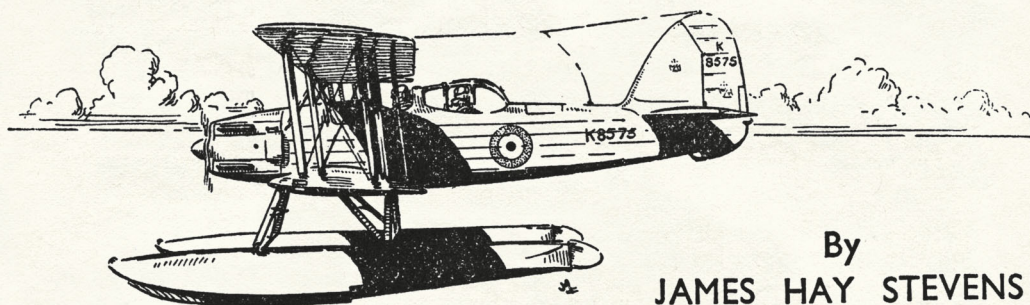
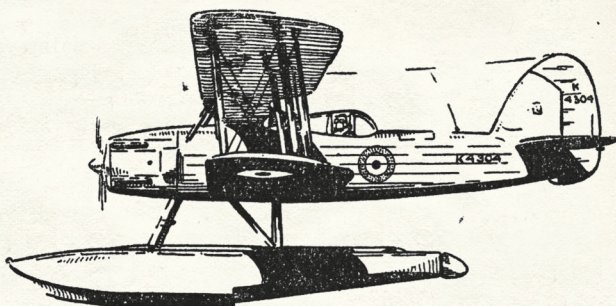
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A New Naval Scout



By
JAMES HAY STEVENS

A Description of the Fairey Seafox Fleet Reconnaissance Seaplane, with Full Instructions for Building a Solid Scale Model

LONG before the Fairey company became famous for its well-known "Eversharp" streamlines, it had earned a reputation as a producer of first-rate seaplanes for Fleet Air Arm work. As far back as 1916, the company built a series of experimental floatplanes for the R.N.A.S. to use in the seaplane-carrier "Campania." Those early models had folding wings, and, what is more interesting still, trailing-edge flaps; for the Fairey variable camber wing with which they were fitted was the first practical application of trailing-edge flaps, so much in vogue to-day.

The Fairey Seafox of 1938 is a logical development of those early wartime seaplanes. Possibly it will prove to be the last biplane to be adopted by the Royal Air Force—unless our designers turn their attention to the production of cantilever biplanes. Meanwhile, the Seafox is one of the latest adoptions of the Royal Air Force and, though of conventional appearance and built to the specification S.11/32 contempora-

neously with the very modern Battle, may not yet be described in too much detail. It may, however, be said that it is in quantity production for Fleet Air Arm use as a light reconnaissance seaplane, and that it has a maximum speed of 123½ miles an hour.

Despite its fairly conventional appearance, however, the Seafox contains many neat and workmanlike features which should make it popular in service. The wings are of equal span and chord, with inset Frise-balanced ailerons and Fairey trailing-edge flaps. Both flaps and ailerons on upper and lower planes are joined by streamline struts—the aileron struts being located at the extreme leading-edges of the ailerons, and probably acting as mass-balances. All sections of the wings and controls are fabric-covered. Landing lights are fitted in the leading-edges of the lower planes.

A 16-Cylinder Engine

AS a sign of the times the fuselage is a light alloy monocoque of business-

AIR STORIES

like, streamline shape. The pilot is in an open cockpit with a headrest (a necessity for catapult operation) which forms part of the transparent rear cockpit covering. The rear part of the covering tilts up, forming a hood under the shelter of which the observer can use his Lewis gun. The engine fitted is the Napier Rapier sixteen-cylinder H-type. This engine has four banks of four cylinders, operating two parallel crankshafts. The top and bottom banks on each side oppose one another, operating on one shaft, the two separately driven crankshafts being spur-gearred to a single central airscrew shaft.

As this is the first Rapier-engined aeroplane to go into service, the following details of the power unit may be of interest :

Bore	3.5 in.
Stroke	3.5 in.
Compression ratio	7 : 1
Weight	713 lb.
Rated output, 345/360 b.h.p. at		4,000 ft.
Maximum output, 380/395 b.h.p. at		5,800 ft.

An important feature of this engine is, of course, its extremely low frontal area for power. In the case of a single engined-machine this allows for an instal-

lation which gives the pilot an excellent forward view, as typified by the Seafox. The airscrew is a fixed-pitch, three-bladed of Fairey design and construction, and is made from a flat duralumin forging, the angle of the blades being given by a special press.

Fin and tail-plane are both stressed skin cantilever structures. Rudder and elevator, each horn-balanced, are fabric covered.

The undercarriage has two long, single-step duralumin floats attached to the fuselage by a conventional strut system. The Fairey company is one of the largest float manufacturers in this country, and their streamline metal floats are justly famous. Each float is divided by transverse bulkheads into something like a dozen watertight compartments, each with a handhole in the top of the float for cleaning purposes. Should a float be pierced, as through striking some object while taxiing, these watertight compartments give a measure of security from sinking. Good control of the seaplane on the water is obtained by means of small rudders attached to the rear ends of the floats and connected to the rudder-bar.

HOW TO BUILD THE SCALE MODEL

Details of Materials, Tools and Constructional Methods for Building a Solid Scale Model

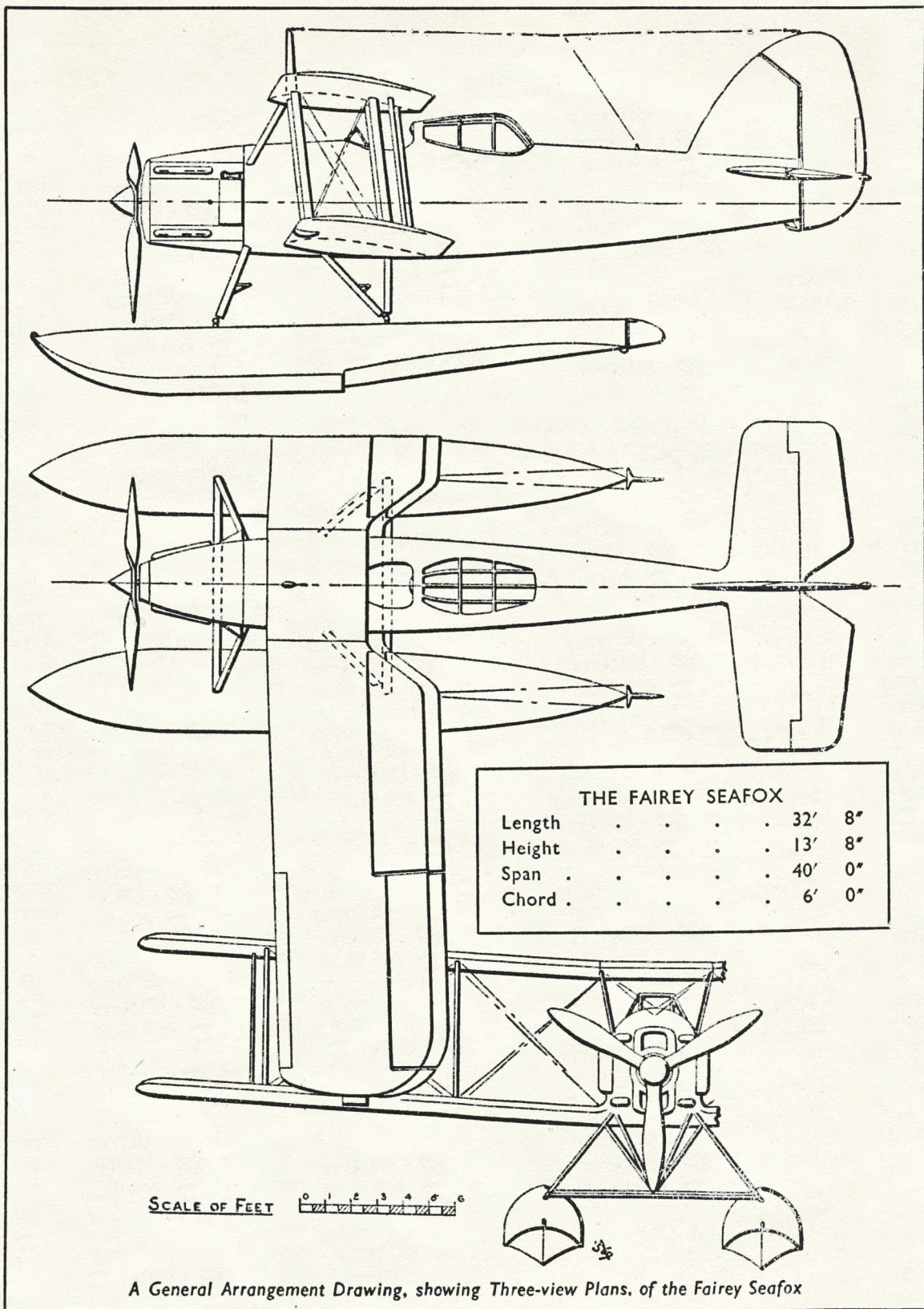
REPRODUCED on the opposite page is a General Arrangement Drawing of the Fairey Seafox, drawn to a scale of $\frac{1}{72}$ nd—the uniform scale adopted for this series of model-making articles. Although all the sizes of materials given hereafter and, in addition, the dimensions on the line-cuts, refer to a $\frac{1}{72}$ nd model, it is a simple matter for the modeller to convert them to any other scale more suitable to his needs. In such cases it is advisable to redraw the G.A. Drawing to the full size of the proposed model.

Materials and Tools

THE most important materials for the model, and their approximate sizes, are as follows : a block of American white-

wood (or similar soft wood), $4\frac{1}{4} \times 1 \times \frac{3}{4}$ in. for the fuselage ; another block, $8 \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. for the floats ; a sheet of fretwood (birch or satin walnut is very good) for the main planes, $7 \times 2\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{8}$ in. ; a piece of fibre, $4 \times 2 \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. for the tail unit ; and about 2 ft. of 20-gauge brass wire for interplane and undercarriage struts. A piece of cellophane or, better still, some synthetic and non-inflammable substitute should be obtained for the rear cockpit cover. The airscrew is best purchased from a model shop, and is bought in two parts, a flat aluminium stamping and a turned brass spinner. The blades are then twisted with a pair of pliers to the shape shown in the G.A. Drawing.

A NEW NAVAL SCOUT



A General Arrangement Drawing, showing Three-view Plans, of the Fairey Seafox

AIR STORIES

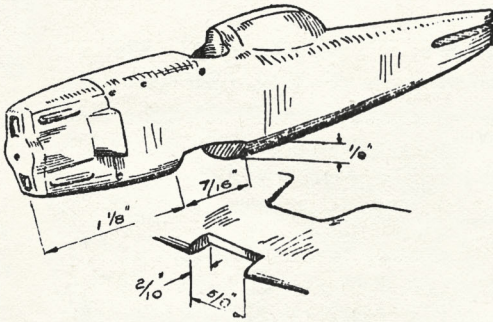


Fig. 1.—The finished fuselage, showing position of the lower plane

A useful collection of tools for the new modeller is the following : a $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. chisel ; small plane ; penknife ; oilstone ; small half-round file ; $\frac{1}{16}$ -in. bradawl ; archimedean drill ; fretsaw ; small long-nosed pliers ; plastic wood ; tube of cellulose glue ; a penny ruler measuring in $\frac{1}{10}$ ths, $\frac{1}{12}$ ths and $\frac{1}{16}$ ths of an inch—or, if modelling is to be taken up seriously it will be well worth while to purchase a 6-in. steel rule from a tool shop. These rules, costing usually about 2s., are arranged with various divisions on each edge, the most useful being one divided in $\frac{1}{100}$ ths, $\frac{1}{96}$ ths, and $\frac{1}{64}$ ths of an inch.

Constructional Details

IN the space available, these notes can deal only with the elementary details of modelling, and are intended mainly as a guide for new modellers. The experienced miniaturist will already have his own pet and unshakable method of doing things. The newcomer to the game, however, will be well advised to read these notes carefully through, and to make sure that he understands them fully before getting his materials and tools together and starting work.

The first step is to trace the side elevation of the fuselage from the G.A. Drawing. Include in this tracing the outline of the rear cockpit and also mark the position of the cut-out for the lower plane, which is shown in Fig. 1. Next, place the tracing on the fuselage block, pin-prick the outline, remove the tracing and join the pin-pricks with a pencil. Now cut the surplus wood away with chisel and plane. On the top and bottom

surfaces of the resulting block mark centre-lines and, in addition, draw the plan of the fuselage on the top surface. Again remove the surplus, making a cubist caricature of the fuselage. Now, carefully shape the whole of the fuselage until it appears as in Fig. 1. At this stage, the rear cockpit cover should be made as described in the next paragraph and, when satisfactory, the wooden cover can be cut off and both cockpits hollowed out.

The cockpit cover may at first appear rather terrifying, but, in practice, its making is quite easy. A piece of thin cellophane should be warmed in hot water and moulded with the fingers over the cockpit section of the fuselage. It may be necessary to heat the stuff two or three times, according to the plasticity of the material, before it can be made to assume its correct shape. An oversize piece of material should be used and the ends trimmed after shaping. *On no account heat the material, even if it is supposed to be non-inflammable, over a flame—hot water is more efficient as well as being much safer.*

The floats are made in a manner similar to that employed on the fuselage ; the most important point to watch is that the two floats shall be identical in every respect. The side elevation is marked out by the pin-prick system and the wood cut away. The plan and a centre-line are next marked on top of the block, and a centre-line only along the bottom ; waste wood is again removed.

The line of the chine (i.e., the division

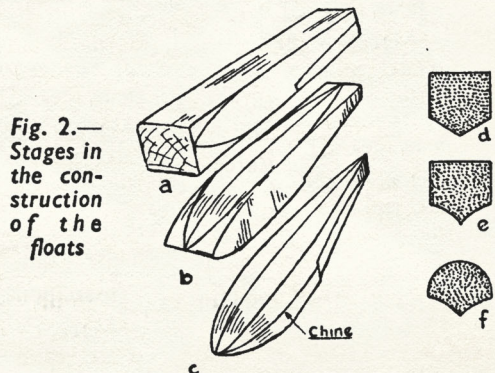


Fig. 2.—Stages in the construction of the floats

A NEW NAVAL SCOUT

between the curved top and the "vee" bottom) is marked down each side of the block (see Fig. 2C). As the "vee" bottom is more difficult to shape than the convex top surface, it is best to do that first. A plain "vee" is first carved (Fig. 2D) and then made convex with a little further chiselling and glass-papery, as shown by the cross-section in Fig. 2E. The curve comes last, and it is this which produces the typical finished cross-section of Fig. 2F.

The outlines of the main planes are then drawn on the sheet of wood and cut out with a fretsaw. They are given a bi-convex camber (see dotted line on G.A. Drawing) with a wood plane and glasspaper. Dihedral angle is obtained by heating in steam or a candle flame and bending between fingers and thumbs. Holes must be made for the interplane struts, and the outlines of the flaps, slots and ailerons are indicated by scoring with a bradawl and ruler.

The fibre tail-unit is simply made like the wings; the pin-prick method can be used for marking it out if desired.

As regards the struts, it is sufficient to cut them approximately to length at this stage and leave the final fitting until the moment of assembly.

Assembling Instructions

GLUE the lower plane beneath the fuselage and fair any irregularities with plastic wood. When glue and plastic wood have set, smooth the juncture of wing and fuselage with glasspaper. Fit the interplane and centre-section struts, then adjust the top plane. When everything is fitting truly, dismantle the parts, reassemble them with glue and allow them to set.

Fig. 3 shows how the floats are attached to the fuselage. The struts drawn in solid line are fitted first into their holes in the fuselage and floats. The two spreader-bars are next glued

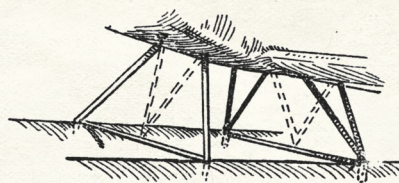


Fig. 3.—Details of float strut attachment

between the lower ends of the float struts. The central V-struts are glued in place last, and are only dummies, as they do not support the floats at all. Great care should be taken to align the floats accurately.

Now glue the tail-plane and elevator unit into the slot at the rear of the fuselage. The fin and rudder section is next glued in place and the whole, once the glue has set, carefully faired in with plastic wood. Final details are now fitted. These are shown in the drawings and include the water rudders, made from pieces of cardboard; the cockpit cover; the airscrew, already described; and the landing lights, which are made in a similar way to the cockpit cover, etc.

Colour Scheme Painting

THE main colour of the machine is silver. The struts, exhaust pipes and the framing of the cockpit cover are painted pale grey. The backs of the airscrew blades are black. The machine number is painted in black on the sides of the fuselage and rudder. R.A.F. cockades are borne on wings and fuselage, those on the wings being of such a size as not to overlap either ailerons or slots.

Small 3d. pots of enamel and a No. 5 sable brush furnish the painting materials. The cockades can be bought from model shops in the form of transfers and are infinitely preferable to hand-painted ones. Apply the paint thinly and evenly, allowing plenty of time for each coat to dry, and the result will be a model worthy of the modeller's time and trouble.

NEXT MONTH: The Vickers F.B.9 "Gun Bus"

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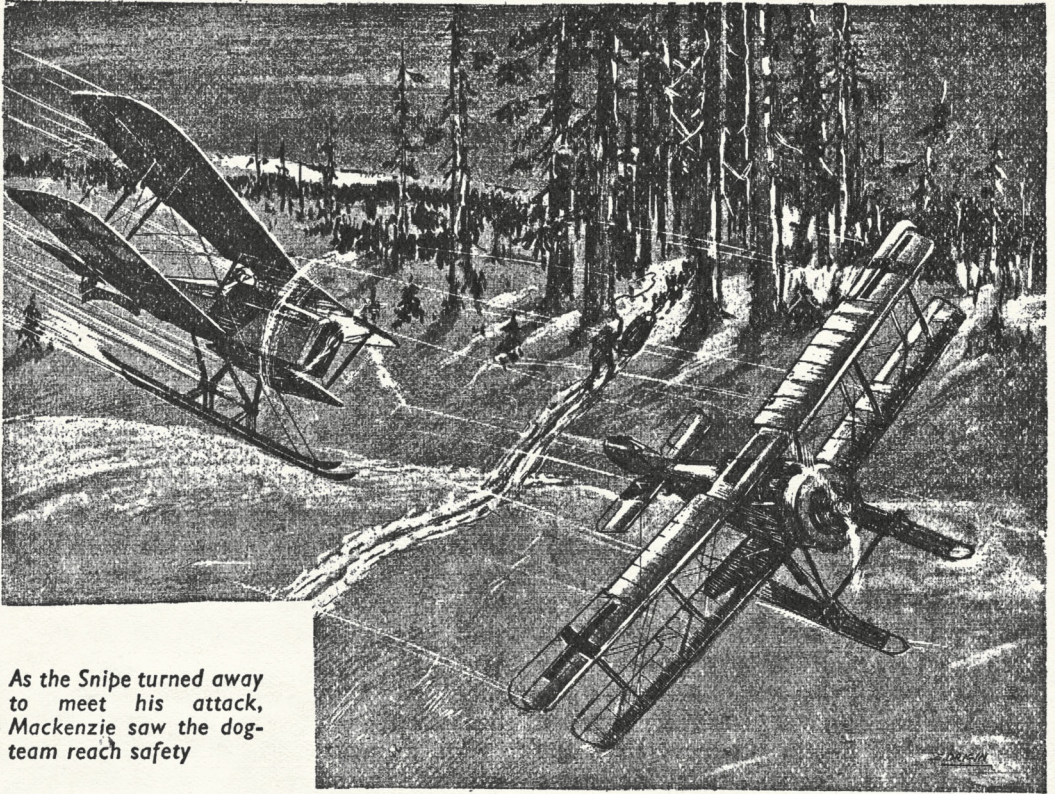
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As the Snipe turned away to meet his attack, Mackenzie saw the dog-team reach safety

THE LAST THROW

Deep in the Trackless Bush of the Canadian North, Four Thousand Miles from the Seat of War, a Reckless Air Fighter prepared his Desperate Attempt to Sever a Life Line of the Allies

By HUGH STANDISH

CHAPTER I

A Spectre from the Past

THE ice-covered river lay silent beneath its layer of snow and, bright to the very horizon, the stars shone through the thick, pure air. Along the river's banks gaunt trees stood like muted sentinels.

Set back a little from the water's edge, just within the shelter of the bush, was a tent, and from it came a faint yellow glow that barely pierced the darkness of the surrounding jack pines. Nearby were the signs of a traveller,

a cariole up-ended and snowshoes hung on a tree. A little farther away four thin clouds of steam rose from four dishevelled heaps on the snow's smoothness, betokening where the huskies had dug themselves in for the night.

Within the tent a man squatted Indian-wise on his heels, a packing-case serving as a table for his scrivening. A queen stove, fired from a pile of tamarac and birch, blazed merrily and the subdued roar of its flue spoke of the outside cold with which it had to combat. But inside the tent was a pleasing warmth; indeed, the man had thrown off his

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clothes save for pants and singlet.

He wrote laboriously, for his left hand was withered and kept little hold on the notebook in which he was writing. Where his shoulder showed above the singlet was an ugly scar, and in the way he squatted there was a suggestion of something amiss with his legs. His face, though peaceful at the moment, bore the unmistakable signs of one who had suffered greatly.

His notes finished, the man rolled over on one side, luxuriantly stretching his limbs on the bed of pungent-smelling tamarac which covered the floor of the tent. Lying on his back, he watched the smoke of his pipe curling upwards, and listened to the subdued roar of the stove. Beyond it was silence, deep, infinite, impenetrable.

Peace !

Aye, he had that—at last. 'Those fool doctors ! They and their nerve shock treatment ; their yapping about low vitality and all the rest of their hot air. Oh, he had known what he wanted when he had finally cut loose from the Medical Board of the Air Ministry ; when he came back to Canada and made straight for his former chief, the stolid, elderly engineer in charge of the Government's rivers.

Peace—and freedom from mankind, that was what he had wanted.

And now, in this lonely waste of snow-covered forest, he had found it ; while four thousand miles away the closing scenes of the Flanders drama were still blasting their record on the pages of history. In the high sky from Bapaume to Ypres the men who had followed in his footsteps were realising at last the dream of an air force immeasurably superior to that of the enemy. And on the other side, outnumbered, out-machined, and with makeshift equipment, the Imperial German Air Force was writing its history of unparalleled skill, courage and tenacity.

SO ran his thoughts for a few moments, moments not without their danger, for his nervous system was still all too susceptible to any memories of the ordeals

which had wrecked his body. Yet they lingered a little wistfully ; his time in the air had been so short, yet so packed with incident, so packed with death to the enemy. If only this battered body of his would let him have one more throw before the end.

But that thought he put resolutely away. It was no use crying over spilt milk ; the Medical Board had been all too emphatic about his condition. He'd be lucky if he lived at all, so he had read their thoughts.

Captain Alastair Mackenzie, late of the R.F.C., roused himself, pulled on cardigan, heavy mackinaws, mocassins, and undoing the flap of the tent, went out into the night.

Down to the river and out on to the frozen expanse he made his way, the deer hide crunching the firm snow beneath him. Presently he came to a staff gauge set against a rock. He broke the fresh ice in the hole cut at the foot and took the reading with a flashlamp.

For a moment he stood there, idly enjoying the stillness. The thermometer had fallen a lot ; now it stood at forty below, yet the windless air gave a meretricious feeling of warmth. And there was something else . . .

Against the background of his thoughts something was impinging, a faint hum, so distant, so faint . . .

Instantly his attention was caught. There must be some stir in the air, for that sound could only be the Manitou Falls. Perhaps there was a change coming ; that might mean snow, soft and trail blocking.

Then through the night air came a sudden, unmistakable break in that evanescent humming.

Mackenzie stiffened. His shattered nervous system reacted violently. He broke into a violent sweat, and, next instant, was running madly for his tent.

Half an hour later, tucked into his sleeping-bag and with his stove roaring beside him, he sought to pull himself together.

Gosh ! How one imagined things out here in the wilds !

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To think that a rotary aero engine would be running in the dead of night, in the depths of the bush where no trail ran, where there was no settlement, and where game were so scarce that neither Indian nor trapper ever visited the district.

Gradually his sick nerves steadied. He fell into a dreamless sleep. The roar of the stove died away ; insidiously, the cold crept into the tent, chilling the nose and cheeks of the sleeping man. Instinctively, while still asleep, he pulled his head beneath the sleeping-bag, and slept on.

THE next day broke clear, cold and still, without any sign of a break in the weather.

Mackenzie awoke clear-headed and hungry. He got up, lit the stove and made breakfast.

Now he could laugh at his fancy of the night before.

The idea of an aeroplane in the bush !

He thought of his plans ; that day he had to go down-stream—the river ran north to empty into Hudson Bay—to where automatic gauges had been installed above and below the Manitou Falls. The ice would be good to within a short distance of the broken water, the snow well packed. He would travel with the dogs, leaving his camp where it stood, and return to it that evening.

The huskies were up and about, already on the prowl for breakfast. When he had fed them, he lugged the cariole down to the smooth snow on the river and packed what he needed.

He harnessed the dogs.

"Ho ! there, Carlo !" he shouted to the leader, "Ho ! there, Mishibikoko !" to the wheeler. "Mush !"

The light cariole needed no breaking out. In a few seconds, Mackenzie was running at a dog-trot to keep up. Then he stepped on to the flat at the back and away the sledge sped down the stream, Carlo, the wise old leader, asking no trail save that of the river.

Two hours later Mackenzie turned Carlo towards the right bank. Ahead lay a great plume of white, the rising

cloud of steam from the falls, and already he could hear the deep rumble of torn water.

Near the shore on good ice, he made his way to a bay where lay the head of the little-used portage. Here also was the tiny shelter which housed the mechanism of the gauge. Neglecting this for the time being, and leaving the dogs squatting in their traces, he ran down the portage.

Only at one place did it come near to the falls, and here the trees were festooned with icicles, and the thunder of the waters was deafening as the great river hurled its huge discharge between mist-hidden walls of rock for perhaps a quarter of a mile, a dead straight cleft in the mother rock. An awesome spot, with the very ground shaking under the released energy of the water.

Further on it grew quieter, and the portage ended on a long beach of glistening shingle, free from snow. Alongside ran the river, still unfrozen, its black waters sullen and deep. On each bank stood tall trees, while overhead hung a white canopy of mist, floating down from the falls.

Here stood the gauge in its shelter close by a rock. Mackenzie dealt with it faithfully, and then examined the shingle, as he had the snow on the portage, for signs of tracks. He knew that the only other traveller on this route was due from the north any day now, one De Rousier, a *voyageur* who made the trip once a month from a Hudson Bay post sixty miles farther north.

Seeing no tracks, Mackenzie replaced the chart in the automatic gauge at the head of the portage. He wound up the mechanism and locked the tiny shelter which housed it.

A few hundred yards away a white cloud of steam hung high in the air, and even at this distance, the vast roar still filled the air.

"Not much like a rotary engine now," he grinned to himself.

And then a new sound, like the droning of a gargantuan bee raised to a piercing crescendo, penetrated the roar of the falls. Next moment an aero-

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plane swept into view just over the pine tops, then vanished beyond the wooded skyline on the other side of the river.

Mackenzie remained staring into the blank sky where it had disappeared.

On the wings and fuselage he had seen the black crosses of the Imperial German Air Force.

CHAPTER II

The Secret Air Base

THROUGH some strange psychological reaction, the crashing reality of that contact with war actually steadied Mackenzie's nerves instead of shattering them. To his amazement, he found himself standing calm and collected after the hum of the aeroplane's engine had faded.

In the trapped, still air and the bright sun, the low temperature did not make itself felt, and for a quarter of an hour he sat thinking, his brain alive and tingling. Then he routed out a prismatic compass and carefully took the bearing, as near as he could make it, of what had been the course of the aeroplane.

After that he lined out the dogs and hit the trail for camp.

That night he did not feed them, but with occasional offers of food kept them from settling down for the night. Unused to night work, they might be difficult to get going, and he would be wanting them soon.

From a large flour tin he rigged up a device on a rough stand. This he took down to the river and planted it on the snow. As darkness fell, he listened.

Then, out of the starlit sky it came again, so faint, so distant, but unmistakably the sound of an aero engine running up. Mackenzie swung his improvised sound-locator. Yes! he had got the direction of maximum intensity. He fixed the position and then took a compass reading.

Back to camp he raced and harnessed the dogs to the cariole, lying ready on the river's edge.

"Ho! Carlo! Ho! Mishibikoko!"

"Mush!"

Five miles up-stream he halted, and

once again rigged up his sound gear.

This time he had longer to wait, and to keep himself from freezing he had to light a fire in the bush. The dogs, in desperation, had dug themselves in.

Then once again he picked up that evanescent roar and spotted its approximate bearing with the aid of his crude sound-locator and prismatic compass. Routing out his sleepy dogs, sulky at being disturbed at such an hour, he soon had them in the traces and made good speed on his homeward journey.

Back in camp, he lit his stove, thawed out some frozen fish for the dogs and then settled down to his problem.

First, he laid out the plan of the river which, fortunately, his Department had already surveyed, and on it plotted his three intersecting bearings. They met in a small triangle of error.

He whistled long and thoughtfully.

Somewhere, ten miles to the left of the river, buried in an unsurveyed and little-known section of the bush, there lay some sort of air base, and that a German one.

Four thousand miles from the seat of the War!

It seemed incredible. Yet there it was, and it was up to him to hit the trail back to civilisation as hard as he could and give the alarm. But to Mackenzie, such a course of action had become surprisingly distasteful. The harsh reality of renewed contact with aerial warfare had swept the psychological sickness from his mind. His nerves were rock-steady now, unnaturally perhaps, and impermanent, but for the moment, at all events, up to any work that they might be called upon to do.

No, he would not go to the authorities just yet. First, he would explore cautiously on his own account.

But how, he thought, was he to cover that ten miles through untrailed bush in the depths of winter? There was a creek running roughly in the direction in which he would have to go. If windfalls were not bad he could use the dogs for so far.

He made his arrangements that night,

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packing the cariole with what he might need. He was weaponless, but that could not be helped and, anyway, he had no intention of tackling anyone. Nor did he waste much time in puzzling about the reason for an enemy base in the bush, or how it was that they were using a machine which he had distinctly recognised as a British type. It was sufficient that he had a job of work in hand which would require all his energy and thought.

EARLY the next morning he donned snowshoes and, harnessing the dogs, was soon on his way up the creek. Like all creeks, it wound intriguingly through the bush, ever suggesting something unexpected around the next bend, and each time showing the same never-ending vista of dark green spruce and tangled undergrowth.

He kept a record of distance and bearing, and soon after he had estimated that they had covered some five miles, the creek petered out. He unharnessed the dogs, fed them, made himself a meal and prepared for his solitary reconnaissance. Before he left, he was about to tie up the dogs, and then thought better of it. Loose, they'd be able to fend for themselves—just in case.

So, alone on snowshoes, he set off, leaving the dogs squatting curiously, ears cocked, around the up-ended cariole. His food he had carefully cached in the fork of a jack pine out of their reach.

The creek had ended in a muskeg, a wide treeless expanse of rushes showing above the snow. He did not cross it—though as near as he could determine it lay on his route—because, for one reason, aircraft might spot him, and for another, muskegs are queer places; even in the severest frost there might be weak patches in the underlying ice.

He made his way along close to the edge, relying upon his bush sense and his engineer's instinct for bearing, time and distance to keep him at least sure of his route back to the dogs, even if there was some doubt as to where he was heading. For three hours he ploughed steadily but slowly forward,

held up repeatedly by windfalls and underbrush, and pausing at times to listen intently. But no sound could he hear, nor was he altogether surprised, for noise could not carry far in the bush and in the cold, heavy air.

Then suddenly he came upon a clearing. He had been moving through good timber, and now found himself on the edge of a large cutting where the trees had been felled extensively. Cautiously, he made his way around the edge until he came to a corduroy road.

Travelling in the windless air had not been cold, and already Mackenzie had slipped off his mackinaw. Now he decided to discard his snowshoes, and as he sat down on a log to unloose them there came to him, faint but unmistakable in that pure air, the smell of tobacco.

Mackenzie froze to immobility. Then, with infinite slowness, he rotated his head as far as he could, his keen eyes searching the bush. Now he saw it. Some distance away to his left, almost hidden by the timber, a man was leaning against a tree. His axe was stuck in the bole of the tree, and blue smoke was curling upwards from his pipe.

The man had not heard him. True, Mackenzie travelled with all an Indian's silence, yet, even so, the man should have seen him moving—if he had been a bush man. And that tobacco, it had neither the odour of Bull Durham nor of the coarse pipe tobacco of the woods.

Motionless, Mackenzie watched the stranger. Presently he saw him push off from his stance against the tree, pluck the axe with some slight difficulty from the bole, and walk across to a log on which he had apparently been working. He walked rather quickly, unevenly.

For Mackenzie that clinched the matter; this man was a townsman and very new to the bush.

CHAPTER III

Refuge of the Falls

FLYING men, for their lives' sake, have to think at a speed which is astonishing to ground folk.

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Mackenzie could not follow the steps of his reasoning, but he acted. He began to walk openly towards the man.

It was some minutes before the townsman became aware of his approach. And yet when, at last, he did look up from his job of dressing the log, he showed no surprise. He merely grunted a greeting as Mackenzie lounged up and took a seat on the log at the end of which the townsman was working.

Mackenzie pulled out his pipe and began to fill it leisurely.

"Cold as hell per usual," grumbled the townsman, leaning on his axe, "I'll sure be glad when Kront gets this stunt over."

"You're right," agreed Mackenzie, biding his time.

"You been here long?" queried the other.

"Long enough to be some sore with that there Kront," answered Mackenzie, starting from the only clue he had.

It did not seem quite to click. The other looked a little surprised.

"Waal, friend," he drawled, "mebbe you've some call to grouch, but most of the boys here seem to think that they draw something good in this outfit. Mebbe the cold gets me a bit, but pay an' grub are good—pay mighty good"—he leered significantly—"to us good Deutschers."

"How long you been with the outfit?" asked Mackenzie, beginning to see his way, "I ain't sorter seen your face before."

"Mebbe not," answered the other. "I was brought here on the underground from Minneapolis two—three weeks back."

He eyed Mackenzie.

"Aye, I'll guess you're one of the old hands," he suggested.

Obviously, the man had no suspicions about his companion. Mackenzie sat and talked to him for half an hour, and though he learnt something, it was of no great importance. A native of Minneapolis, this townsman, it seemed, had been approached with an offer of pay ten times his normal wage. He had jumped at it, and thereafter had never

been left alone for an instant until he had been brought to this camp, some three weeks ago. He had no idea where he was. Since his arrival he had been kept busy on various unskilled jobs. Yes—in reply to a cautious lead from Mackenzie—he had seen two or three aeroplanes take-off—but obviously he was not greatly interested. Mackenzie got little technical information from him. He could only guess that craft were being delivered by air in sections and assembled on the spot; that one, Kront, a tough guy and one to keep clear of, was the boss; and that there were just a few pilots. He also learnt that if he strolled down the corduroy road he would arrive unchallenged into the centre of activities. Presumably, the remoteness of this secret air base was considered sufficient security by itself.

When he had gleaned all the information he could from his companion, Mackenzie stood up, knocked the dottle from his pipe and tucked it into a side-pocket of his mackinaw.

"I'll be seein' yeh," said the man from Minneapolis indifferently as he took up his axe.

MACKENZIE strode off down the corduroy road, and ten minutes' brisk walking brought him within earshot of sounds of industry, seemingly coming from directly ahead. Rounding a bend in the road, he got a glimpse of white through the green spruce. Here the road widened, and buildings appeared. Beyond them lay the smooth, white expanse of a lake on which were several aircraft fitted with skids instead of landing wheels. Running parallel to the shore was what appeared to be a street—a broad clearing with a corduroy road in the centre.

In a flash Mackenzie understood.

This territory lay on the boundary of the Laurentian and granite rocks, where there was always the possibility of valuable ore. This man, Kront, had no doubt got hold of a disused mine, the equipment of which was practically untouched owing to the tremendous

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transport difficulties making the cost of salvaging more than the value of the plant.

Here, remote from civilisation, lay workshops with all necessary equipment and power, together with—in winter, at any rate—a good aerodrome on the ice-covered lake.

About the camp there were signs of much activity. The drone of machinery filled the air, and men could be seen hurrying about in the clearing. Just off the road, close to where Mackenzie found himself, a gang of men were pulling on the fall rope of a hoisting tackle. The foreman was just in the act of calling to some of the passers-by to give a hand, and Mackenzie hurriedly joined them. On this job and some others that followed he was able to make himself useful for the rest of the day without, so far as he could see, arousing the slightest suspicion.

THAT evening Mackenzie had little trouble in bunking in with some forty men in one of the bunk-houses ; blankets were available for all.

He listened to the talk that flowed about him, and by the time that snores alone were to be heard, he had got a pretty good idea of what was happening. The chief subject of conversation among the men had been the big money they were earning, but there had also been some discussion of rumours that were rife in the camp. From these, Mackenzie gathered that from the depths of this bush, a land of impassable muskeg, rock and bush, a blow was to be struck at the only two railroads, far away to the South. These were the highways, during the autumn, of the great wheat rush from the prairies of the West to the ports of the East, and thence to the hungry, war-stricken Allies in Europe.

The moving spirit in the affair was apparently the man Kront—"bats in the belfry, but a sure dangerous guy" was one opinion Mackenzie heard expressed about him. He was, it seemed, some German ace who, after being badly shot up in the War, had got out to the

States, whence he had organised this crazy venture.

One last throw ! Only yesterday that had been Mackenzie's dearest wish. And now, here was this crazy German airman, Kront, doing precisely the same thing for his own side. Perhaps it was a game at which two might play.

Through a night of snores and uneasy rustling of tired, sleeping men, Mackenzie made his plans. When morning came he would surreptitiously disappear, reach his dogs and beat it for outside as hard as he could. How long had he got ? How soon would it be before Kront struck ? To-morrow ? Next week ? Next month ? Supposing it happened while he was hurrying South with his dogs ?

Mackenzie spent a sleepless night.

Before dawn he heard a rotary engine start up. He tossed off his blankets, struggled into his clothes and made his way down to the water's edge just in time to see an Avro taking-off. It climbed a few hundred feet and circled, its pilot apparently testing the air ; then came down and landed. On its skids it taxied up to the fuel line where an S.E. was already being run up. A man sprang out of the Avro and walked over to the S.E. Mackenzie heard him speak to the mechanic standing by and from the man's reply he knew that the Avro's occupant had been none other than Kront himself.

A plan flashed suddenly into Mackenzie's mind and, walking as casually as he could manage, he strolled out on to the lake's white surface. The Hispano of the S.E. roared up on test as he reached the Avro. Then, waiting until the chocks of the S.E. had been jerked away and the mechanic was on the wing-tip watching the pilot, Mackenzie slipped over the fuselage of the Avro and into its cockpit. In a second he had pushed up the familiar switches and set the throttle of the Le Rhône engine. Then he was out again in a flash and frantically swinging the propeller. The engine, warm and flooded, picked up immediately, and when, a few moments later, Kront in the S.E.

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floated up over the tree tops at the end of the lake, Mackenzie in the Avro was roaring up off the ice, well hidden behind and below the tail of the S.E.

Tense and watchful, Mackenzie waited for the S.E. to turn, and immediately he saw the first movement of its aileron for a left turn he eased the stick of the Avro forward and turned a little to the right. With any luck Kront, unsuspecting, would be looking left and ahead.

The S.E. held on its course, and Mackenzie, now skimming the virgin bush, headed for the sun, a red ball of fire just showing over the skyline of trees.

With throttle wide open he fled into the East and when, at length, he dared to look back, it was to see, with a sudden terror, that the S.E. had turned and now was diving down upon him, growing larger every instant.

DESPERATELY Mackenzie surveyed the landscape. Then his eyes steadied. He altered course and settled down to race for what he had just seen—a dazzling outline of white and gold just above the treeline ahead, the sun-caught cloud of moisture above the Manitou.

So slowly grew that golden cloud, so quickly grew the black menace of the S.E. behind him.

Now, when he risked another backward glance, he could plainly see the wings of his pursuer. Soon Kront would have the Avro within range of his guns. Yet already the cloud was towering high above Mackenzie. Already he could see the break in the trees where lay the river.

Tat-tat-tat—

Kront was warming up his guns, though still too far for anything but a chance shot. Mackenzie fought the temptation to "S-turn" and held grimly to his course.

Now, just ahead and beneath lay the river, ice yielding to black open water, black giving place to white, and then plunging into a dark chasm hidden from view by the rising cloud of steam.

Never faltering, Mackenzie swung left, parallel to the river, and headed straight for the chasm. Close and vicious, something cracked and splintered in his cockpit.

But now water, dark and swift, was beneath him . . . now it was white and foaming . . . now he was above the inferno of the chasm.

And then all became white miasma.

But in those few seconds of straight flying, Mackenzie had seen his swinging compass steady—on the southerly course of the river at this point. Engulfed in biting-cold, moisture-laden air, he held his course. His eyes were riveted on his compass, ultra-sensitive on its southerly bearing, as he plunged blindly on, throttled back and relying on sensitive feet and hands.

Around him boomed the vast thunder of the falls, and on his face was the burning sting of frozen spray. On each side, in the dank walls of the chasm beneath him, lay death, if he as much as altered course by two degrees.

For an eternity, it seemed, he flew on. Yet it was no more than fifteen seconds, and then the white miasma of cloud was above his head, and fifty feet below, and stretching for some hundreds of yards ahead, lay a narrow strip of smooth sand.

Just a trifle clumsily, his tail not quite down, Mackenzie made his first landing for eighteen months. He switched off his engine as the machine came to rest.

Overhead there still lay a canopy of white billowing steam. On each side of the chasm rose a wall of trees.

Out of sight, somewhere above, roared a baffled S.E.

CHAPTER IV

The Last Throw

IT was very still down in the gorge where Mackenzie had landed, still and cold with the piercing cold of moisture-laden air far below zero.

The noise of the fall was no more than a subdued rumble emerging from the twisted cloud upstream. Nearby, the dark and sullen water gurgled with

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the low note that betokens depth. Upstream, the roar of the S.E. faded suddenly away.

Reaction gripped Mackenzie's war-wrecked nerves. For minutes he sat in the cockpit until, at last, the penetrating cold roused him and he got up and stamped up and down the beach.

What would Kront do now? he wondered; Kront, who was a dangerous man—and not likely to be easily turned from his objective.

No doubt he would think that the Avro was a total write-off, and the pilot dead. But that would not be enough, he would surely want to make certain of it. In that case he would probably land on the nearest possible place. That would be the river upstream, above the falls, and not more than half a mile away!

Mackenzie leapt from his cockpit. Even now, Kront might be racing down the portage towards him.

Into the scrub beneath the green pine he ran, and there with the bushman's skill in which he excelled he made his way upstream, parallel to the little-used, overgrown portage. He travelled carefully and not too swiftly, for he had to see yet not be seen. Five minutes later he froze to immobility.

K RONT was running down the portage, leaping over falls, crashing through undergrowth, utterly regardless of the noise he was making. Mackenzie kept still until Kront was safely out of sight, for he was unarmed, whereas Kront carried in his right hand a heavy revolver. Then, as fast as his condition permitted, Mackenzie raced up the portage until he emerged on the river in the ice-covered bay at the head.

Not three hundred yards away was his goal, the S.E., standing where it had come to rest after Kront's landing run. For a moment Mackenzie paused, listening. There was no sound but the muted rumble of the falls. He raced up to the machine.

"Funny idea those light stay wires from wing to tail," he muttered, as he groped on the left-hand side of the

cockpit for the throttle and eased it forward. Then he raced around to the prop. and sucked in, then back again to leap into the cockpit. Back came the throttle, up went the switches, the starter mag. whirled and the Hispano engine coughed into life.

Not until then did Mackenzie notice the wireless gear, and before he had time fully to realise its importance to him, an instinctive warning made him turn round. There, behind him, was the Avro coming up the river, high above the plume of cloud. Kront must have taken-off from the beach below the falls and climbed through the mist.

Then across the sky, just above the tree tops, something else came hurtling into view. Its terrific speed made the Avro appear almost to be standing still and its pilot was obviously hurrying in to land. It looked like a rotary-engined job, Mackenzie thought, yet somehow it didn't sound like one. Snipes with radial engines were as yet unknown to him.

But there was no time for speculation. He opened up the Hispano, the S.E. picked up speed, and in a few seconds he was off. Out of the corner of his eye as he climbed, Mackenzie saw Kront leap from the still moving Avro and run to where the Snipe would finish its landing run.

Next instant the S.E. had risen above the tree line, and Mackenzie's heart sank.

In the crystal-clear air, where lay the base, aircraft were scattering in a wide fan southwards to intercept him. The arrival of that powerful-looking craft on the ice below, with whose pilot Kront was even now changing places, these searching 'planes to the South—all these had obviously been no matters of chance, but in obedience to Kront's orders by radio.

Mackenzie pushed his stick forward and dropped below the tree line again, his skids only a few feet above the snow-covered ice. Flying low he would be hidden, if only for a minute or so, from those aircraft to the South.

But not from Kront.

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Up the river he tore, close to the line of trees, but below their tops. Now the river bore south, and here discovery would be inevitable.

He could fight it out, of course, but with the knowledge he possessed that would be a criminal risk to take.

Just ahead lay the outlet of the creek up which he had travelled with his dogs. One wing almost scraping the ice, he birlled his machine around, switching off before he had brought his wings level because the drag of the air-screw would be needed for what he was about to attempt. He swung his tail to one side, exposing the full side of the fuselage to the airflow, then, just as he felt the stall impending, he kicked the rudder straight and touched down. The skids grounded just at the outlet of the creek and the S.E. slid forward to come to rest some distance up a narrow avenue whose green walls almost blotted out the sky.

Through the sudden silence that followed could be heard the roar of a radial engine coming in from the river, passing near, and fading into the South.

Mackenzie had gone to earth just in time—and left no skid tracks on the river outside to betray the manner of his going.

As the roar of aircraft faded out, the silent cold of the untrodden bush manifested itself, and the shattered wreck of Mackenzie's body rose up rebelliously against his will. Gasping and shaking as though with ague, he lay semi-conscious in the cockpit.

KRONT was no fool. He quickly realised that he had overshot his quarry, and within a few minutes had turned back towards the creek. Once again the crescendo roar of his radial engine awoke the will and spirit of Mackenzie, and his body answered.

From the top wing he pulled down the Lewis gun and swung it vertically. Through the gap in the trees directly overhead he caught a momentary glimpse of the Snipe, and before it flashed out of view Mackenzie saw it swing up into a climbing turn.

Kront had seen the S.E.

Mackenzie awaited the attack. He knew he had all the advantage even with one gun against Kront's two.

Up swept the Snipe to a thousand feet, and then flicked over in a vertical dive with engine off.

Guns chattered, and the trees around Mackenzie spat and crackled.

The Snipe came unexpectedly out of its dive.

Mackenzie had demonstrated all too effectively the advantage of a steady gun platform over a moving one. Kront would have to try other tactics.

Tensely Mackenzie waited, listening for the radial to burst into full throttle. He heard nothing but the faint splutter of an idling engine.

Now the Snipe was getting lower—still lower.

Kront, relentless and undeviating from his purpose, was landing on the river! And he was armed, while Mackenzie had nothing but two guns uselessly fixed on the craft.

His mind reeling and with the single idea of getting news to the authorities still hammering in his brain, Mackenzie feverishly hurled himself from his cockpit and lifted the tail around so that the S.E. was pointing down the creek towards the river. Clambering back, he spun the starting mag., and once again the Hispano leapt into life.

At full throttle, he raced down the narrow corridor of the creek towards the wide river where Kront had just landed the Snipe and was getting out of its cockpit.

As the S.E. emerged like a comet from the bush, Kront scrambled back and opened up the throttle of the Snipe. Not until then did it occur to Mackenzie that he could have unshipped the Lewis gun and, from the cover of the bush, have held Kront at his mercy after he had landed.

Bitterly he cursed his lapse.

Now there was no choice but to fight it out with Kront in the air before his allies came up from the South.

Then, downstream and heading up from the Manitou, Mackenzie caught

THE LAST THROW

sight of a short black line on the snow of the river.

Old De Rousier ! Bush wise, and the finest dog-driver in the North !

Around on one wing, Mackenzie whirled his craft and dived for that black line on the white expanse of snow. Without altering course he landed, timing his run to finish by the dogs.

He gesticulated wildly at De Rousier, who ran up to him. Leaning over the cockpit, yelling above the noise of the idling engine, Mackenzie told De Rousier his news.

"—get into the bush and never stop hitting the trail until you connect with wire or radio," he finished.

Behind them came a roar of power.

Frantically, Mackenzie opened up his throttle and raced across the snow. De Rousier, quick as a rattlesnake on the uptake, was already mushing his dogs straight for the shore and the cover of the pines.

Five hundred feet up, Mackenzie swung his craft around and, heading straight for the Snipe, opened fire. It had its effect. Kront, who had been diving on the dog team, pulled up sharply, and as the Snipe turned to meet his attack Mackenzie saw De Rousier reach safety.

He breathed a sigh of relief. The burden of his responsibility had been transferred to the capable shoulders of De Rousier. Now he could fight it out with Kront with a clear conscience.

The old feel was coming back. The chilled air had a perfect grip on the wings.

Captain Alistair Mackenzie, late of the R.F.C. scout squadrons, was finding his hands and feet again. The sense of time, distance, and speed awoke once more in him, and with it came a lust for battle.

MACKENZIE flew a close circle to begin with, but the Snipe made height without losing angle. Surprised, for he still thought that an S.E. had the legs on anything else in the sky, Mackenzie eased off the elevator on which he was turning and, concentrating all

his flying sense on the task, began to scrounge height.

But still the Snipe's gun-sights swung dangerously near to his tail, and all the time it was gaining height. At any moment Kront would flick over and trade his altitude for manoeuvrability.

Now they were fighting at a bare thousand feet, their machines glinting in the sunlight, and below them the virgin bush, still and green above the snow.

Suddenly, Kront swept down, and Mackenzie, ever watchful, flicked into a spin and hurled downwards towards the sea of green.

He came perilously near to it before centralising his rudder, then, zooming out of his dive into a loop, and while still on his back, he caught the Snipe in his sights for an instant as it swept upwards. He pressed the triggers. Surely he had got him ? Yet, undeviating, Kront in the Snipe swept forward on his course.

So fought these men, shattering the peace of the North, deep in its winter sleep, while, on another continent where still lived their hearts, a great stillness had descended on Flanders, and dazed men staggered from shallow trench and shattered building.

Yet here, four thousand miles away, the last reverberation of those four years of slaughter had found an echo. Two men, still strung to the fever pitch of high endeavour, were fighting to the death, all unaware that the world's agony that very day was over.

Once more Kront, with height in hand, came down on the S.E., now penned by the green mantle of the earth.

This time there was no escape. Something kicked Mackenzie in the back. His throat filled chokingly. Dizzily, he watched the whirling horizon as he tried to steady his machine.

So blue the sky . . . so green . . . so white . . . a whirling phantasmagoria . . . a crash . . . the pungent smell of spruce brushing his face. . . .

CONSCIOUSNESS crept slowly back into Mackenzie's mind.

AIR STORIES

He was lying on moss, and around him the trees that had taken the impact of his machine were uprooted and shattered.

Through the silence of the bush something was roaring. Then it stopped. Skyward through the riven trees he saw the Snipe floundering down—out of control. As though from a great distance he watched it side-slip, zoom and dive. How would it hit the ground? In a head-on dive or a side-slip? He lost sight of it behind a tree top.

Quite close to him came a crescendoing whistle, followed by a rending crash.

The trees near him swayed and creaked in a sudden blast.

Some last reserve of energy, some last reservoir of the spirit, brought Mackenzie staggering to his feet.

Through the bush he floundered and found the shattered Snipe, and the still figure lying clear where it had been flung. He staggered over to the dying pilot and stooping, fell, one arm protectively across the body of his enemy.

"Der letzt versuch," murmured Kront, and died.

"The last throw," Mackenzie echoed, and was still.

AIR BOOKS

New Books of Aviation
Interest Reviewed

SMITHY'S LIFE STORY

"*Cæsar of the Skies*": By Flying Officer Beau Sheil: Cassell: 8s. 6d.

DESCRIBED as "the official life story of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith," this biography of Australia's greatest airman has been written by a former personal assistant and co-pilot, in collaboration with Colin Simpson.

It is a record of constant adventure that starts from the day in 1915 when the eighteen-year old Kingsford-Smith first landed in Gallipoli as a member of the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade and saw action against the Turks. A year later, after a period of service as a dispatch rider in France, he obtained his long-coveted transfer to the R.F.C. and there began the career that was to lead him to world fame. Drafted to France with No. 19 Squadron, the twenty-year old novice soon showed his mettle for, on his first flight over the lines, he tackled, single-handed, a pair of two-seaters, "collected" one in flames, a wound in his leg, 180 bullets in his machine and, later, the Military Cross from the hands of the King.

The war over, Kingsford-Smith set out to make aviation his career. It was to be a long and sometimes heartbreaking struggle, and this book gives an intimate picture of a man who would never admit defeat and who, by sheer determination and personal courage, won his way through to successful achievement. It tells, too, of the vast amount of preparation that went to the making of Kingsford-Smith's great world flights, of the narrow margins that separated triumph from disaster, and it casts a new and truer light on those controversies which raged around him when he and his companions were lost for eighteen days in the wilds of north-west Australia, and again, over his entry in the MacRobertson air race.

To read this book is to realise anew that "Smithy" was a great man as well as one of the finest pilots aviation has yet produced.

"STEELEY" FLIES AGAIN

"*Murder By Air*": By Captain W. E. Johns: George Newnes: 3s. 6d.

THIS latest air thriller by W. E. Johns marks the dramatic reappearance of that popular character, Captain "Steeley" Delaroy, the ex-War "ace" and freelance flier whose earlier adventures as an air smuggler were recently recorded, in serial form, in AIR STORIES.

This time, Delaroy and his two comrades, "Tubby" Wilde and Brian Ballantyne, are on the side of the law. A fatality at a flying club has been dismissed as an accident by a country coroner, but the three airmen are not satisfied with the verdict. They have good grounds for suspicion. How could an aeroplane remain in the air longer than its fuel capacity permitted? How could a pilot crush the back of his skull in a machine which nose-dived into the ground? And what was the meaning of the dying pilot's reference to a "white dog"?

Investigations lead to some remarkable discoveries and the trail soon takes the airmen into situations as dangerous and as exciting as any they experienced in their former days of lawlessness.

Captain Johns well knows how to keep a story moving, and it will be a stolid reader indeed who is not a little breathless on reaching the last lap of "*Murder by Air*."

SPIES IN EGYPT

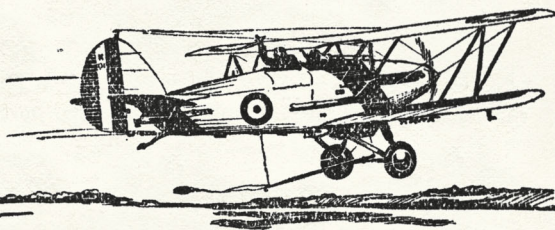
"*Spider Flies Again*": By J. Railton Holden: George Newnes: 3s. 6d.

HERE are the further adventures of two famous characters already familiar to most readers of AIR STORIES, "Spider" Stockwell and "Nugget" Willis, two Australian airmen attached to the Suez Canal Zone Intelligence Service. Trouble of all kinds is a veritable magnet to these breezy swashbucklers and their love of a fight, whether in the air or on the ground, is equalled only by their amazing capacity for evading the consequences of their unofficial exploits.

This time, they blunder into a nest of Turko-German spies in the Canal Zone. For those who like it, there is a strong love interest, supplied by "Spider" and Marie Lamonte, a French girl spy. For those who don't, there is flying action and desert adventure in plenty set against the colourful background of Egypt.

CONTACT

BY THE
EDITOR



Editorial Offices: Tower House, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

SOME eighteen years ago that "great little airman," the late Bert Hinkler, first demonstrated the immense possibilities of light aeroplane touring when he set out to fly from England to Australia in a tiny Avro Baby biplane, fitted with an engine of only 35 h.p. On his first, "hop" he astonished the experts and proved his point by flying 700 miles non-stop to Turin in 9½ hours, the longest non-stop flight that had ever been achieved by a small aeroplane.

Official obstruction, which refused him permission to fly over the Iraq desert, later forced him to abandon his project, and, flying back to London, he shipped the Baby to Australia. There he made a number of remarkable flights with it, including a non-stop journey from Sydney to his hometown of Bundaberg.

That was in 1921, and now, nearly seventeen years later, comes the news from an Australian reader that this historic little aeroplane—the pioneer of all subsequent long-distance flights by light aeroplanes—is still flying to-day, and with its original 35 h.p. engine!

Our informant is Mr. Ross McCallum Mohr of Sydney, who writes:—

'While I was spending a recent holiday at Hamilton, Victoria, a young Australian, J. Smith, flew from that city to Melbourne—a distance of about 200 miles—in 2 hours, 20 minutes. Nothing wonderful about that, you may think, until I add that his machine was none other than Bert Hinkler's original Avro Baby, still fitted with its 35 h.p. Green engine.

"Some time later, I had to visit my dentist at home in Sydney, and, by a curious coincidence, he proved to be the man who had bought the Baby from Hinkler in 1921 and who had owned it up to about seven years ago. He is Mr. William Hart, who, late in 1911, was granted the No. 1 Pilot's Licence of Australia, and he told me that though the Avro Baby itself was not built until 1920, its 35 h.p. Green engine is considerably older. This engine, it appears, was used during the Great War in a training machine, and was subsequently bought by an English garage owner, who used it in his workshop for about eighteen months. It was from him that Hinkler obtained it for installation in the Baby, and there it is to-day, still working as well as ever! Does anyone know of an aero engine of this size with a more remarkable record?"

CHRISTMAS, 1937

The Editor and his Staff cordially thank their many Friends who have sent them Greetings, and offer to all Readers of AIR STORIES the Compliments of the Season and Best Wishes for Blue Skies and Happy Landings in the New Year

We should imagine not, and its extraordinary reliability is a high tribute both to Bert Hinkler's good judgment and to the soundness of that early Green design. But isn't it now about time that Australia purchased this historic aeroplane and its engine and preserved it for all time in memory of one of her greatest and most modest sons of the air?

AIR STORIES

The Story of Fenton Barns

SEVERAL Scottish correspondents have been kind enough to respond to a reader's recent request in these columns for information about the war-time aerodrome at Fenton Barns, in Scotland. The first to reply was Mr. R. Easson of Dunbar, who wrote :—

"Fenton Barns, now a farm outside East Fortune, was an R.N.A.S. base from 1916-1919. It was, I believe, established as a training and Zeppelin-defence centre following the Zeppelin raids on Edinburgh and other Scottish towns in April, 1916."

Another reader, Mr. W. S. Bain of North Berwick, confirming that Fenton Barns is now a dairy farm, adds that the nearby East Fortune aerodrome, from which R.34 started on her flight to Canada, has also been abandoned and is now the grounds of a sanatorium. He also writes :—

"Though no longer an aerodrome, Fenton Barns was used temporarily as such by the R.A.F. a few years ago in connection with Fleet exercises. A large number of aircraft were there at the time, and on their way back to England after the exercises several of them crashed owing to some particularly bad weather they encountered."

A Memorial to Mannock

HOW many readers, we wonder, have seen the Mannock memorial in Canterbury Cathedral, referred to in the following letter from Mr. H. Cossons, of Margate, Kent :

"I have for a long time been puzzled as to the late Major E. Mannock's birthplace," writes our correspondent, "and should be very grateful if one of your readers would finally settle the point for me. Captain W. E. Johns, writing in his book, 'Air V.C.'s,' states that Mannock was born in Preston Cavalry Barracks, Brighton, yet I can find no record of any such barracks having been located in that town. AIR STORIES, in a recent reply to a reader, said merely 'Preston,' presumably meaning Preston, Lancs., whereas on a recent visit to Canterbury Cathedral, I saw there a tablet in memory of Mannock, raised by local subscriptions. Presumably, therefore, Mannock was either a native of that town or else had some very close connection with it. Is the answer, I wonder, that he was born in Preston Cavalry Barracks, Canterbury?"

The answer is that Mannock was born on May 24th, 1887, in the Cavalry Barracks at Preston, near Brighton, where his father, a corporal in the 2nd Dragoons (Royal Scots Greys) was then stationed. These barracks, incidentally, are still in use, though no longer a cavalry centre.

Mannock's connection with Canterbury began several years later when, after his father's service in the Boer War, the family returned to England and were stationed at the Cavalry Dépôt, Canterbury. A few months later Mannock senior was demobilised and the family settled in Military Road, Canterbury, from where "Mick" Mannock attended St. Thomas's School. On leaving school, Mannock worked first as a grocer's errand boy and then as a barber's assistant before securing a clerk's post with the National Telephone Co. at Canterbury. He held this job for several years, was a member of St. Gregory's Cricket XI., and a kettle-drummer in the local Church Lads' Brigade, and even when transferred to Wellingborough he maintained his association with Canterbury by joining the Home Counties (Territorial) R.A.M.C. at Canterbury and attending each annual camp.

In honouring Mannock's name Canterbury is, therefore, perpetuating the memory of one of her most famous citizens.

A Query from Norway

FROM a reader in Norway, Mr. Helge Baggerud, of Oslo, comes the following enquiry :

"Do you know if Colonel Bishop has written anything about his second spell of fighting? His most interesting book, 'Winged Warfare,' covers only his first 48 victories and I have been unable to trace any account of the rest. Unfortunately, too, the book was written during the War and is lacking in detail, such as names, dates and aircraft performance figures—probably on account of the censorship."

"And what about Wing Commander Raymond Collishaw? Surely he has written something about his eventful and distinguished War-time career?"

So far as we know, "Winged Warfare" is Colonel Bishop's only book of War-time reminiscences, and he has never written the story of his subsequent 24 victories; though there must be many like our Norwegian correspondent who earnestly wish that he would. Wing Commander Collishaw is still a serving officer in the Royal Air Force—but what a book he should be able to write if and when he ever retires!

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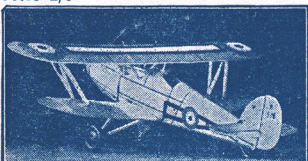
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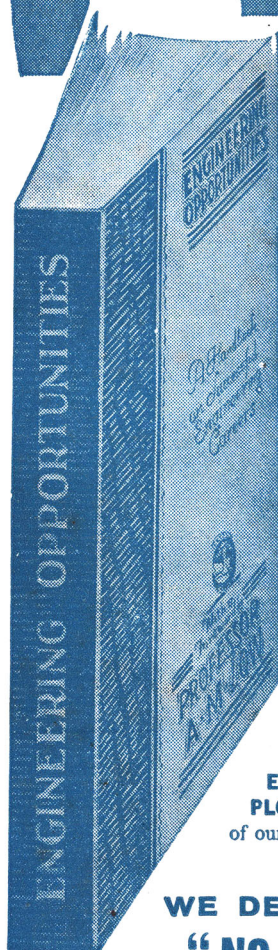
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