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SKY DEVILS

10 THRILLING STORIES OF
U. S. AIRMEN
IN ACTION!

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HERE COMES

HELL!

SMASH AIR-WAR YARN OF YANK
SKYFIGHTERS OVER THE PACIFIC

BY JOHN J. RAND



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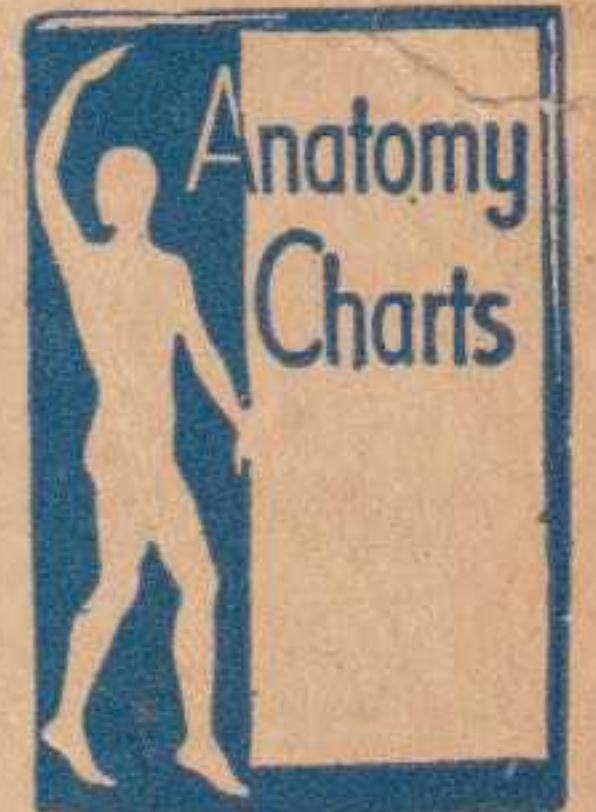
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American

SKY DEVILS

VOL. 1, NO. 2

SEPTEMBER, 1942

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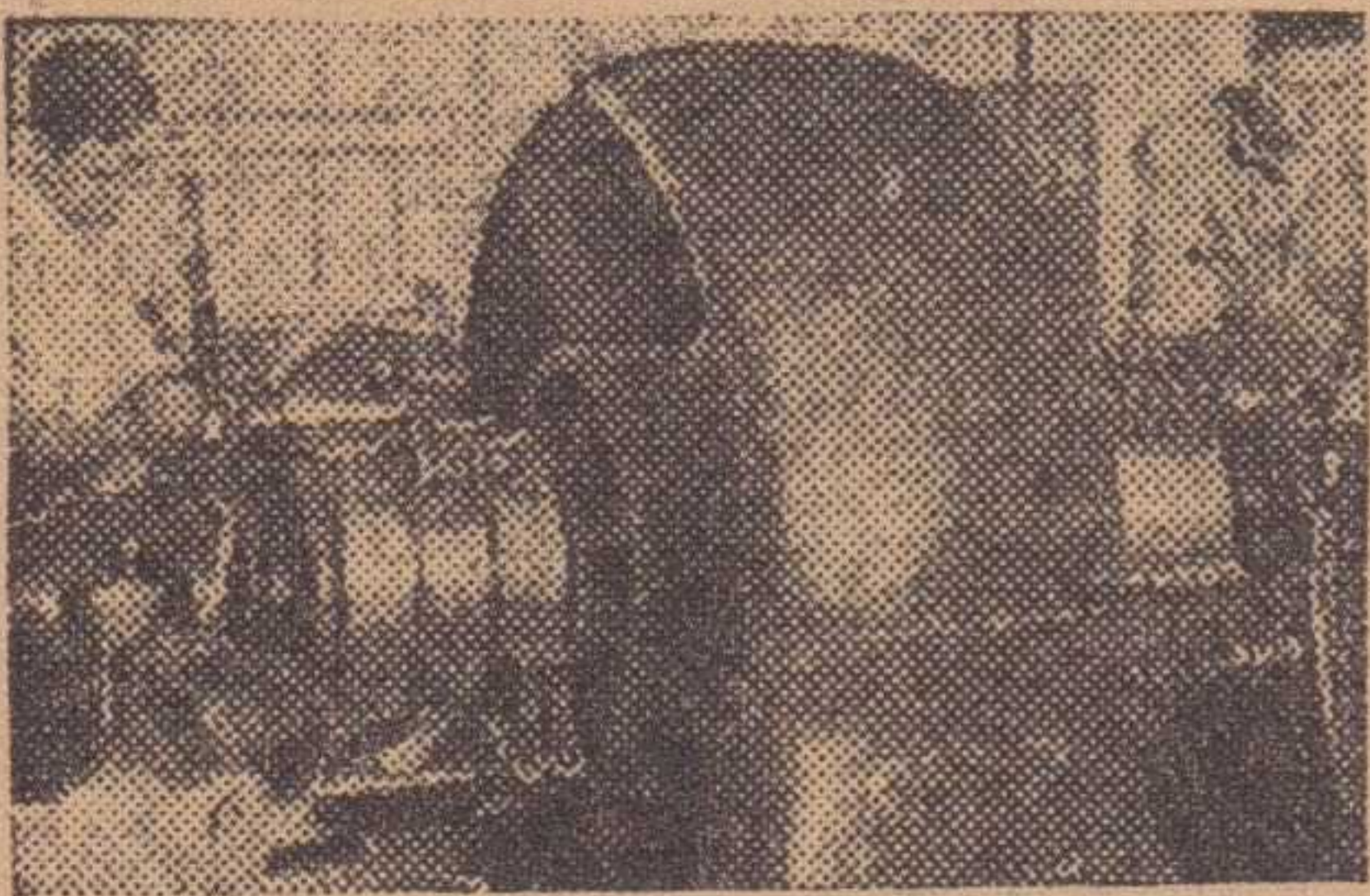
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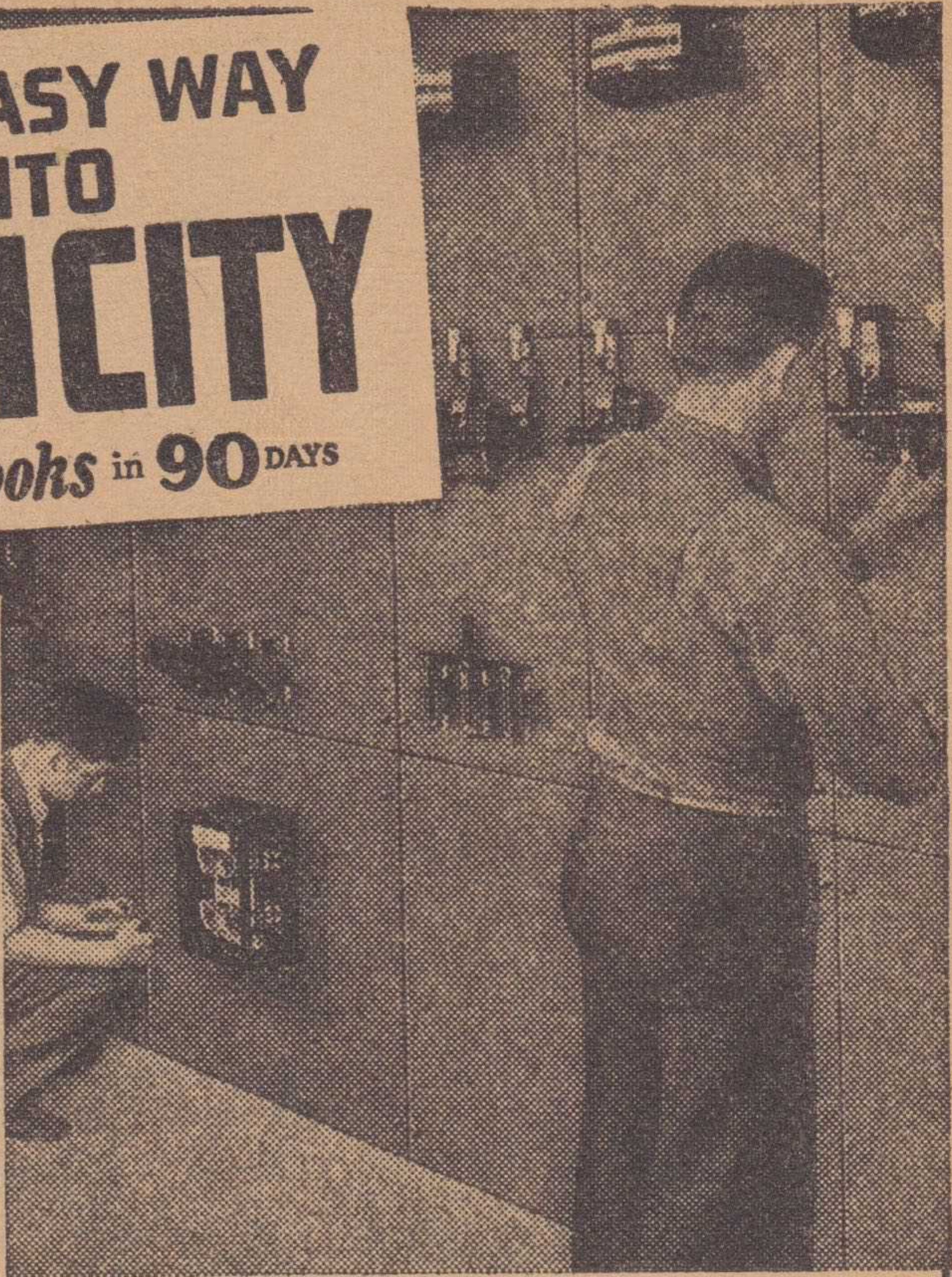
ROBERT O. ERISMAN—EDITOR

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Roaring engines split the atmosphere,

THE Nazi Major ran his short, fat fingers through his gray, close-cropped hair as he lowered his head over his map littered desk. He looked up again at the two Russian-uniformed flyers standing bareheaded before him. His eyes narrowed angrily as they fell on the grimjawed, obstinate men. His gaze tried to penetrate to

the inner souls and minds of these fighters who refused adamantly to divulge any information.

"We shoot men here who refuse to give us information," he threatened.

"So we've heard," replied Lanky Spanks calmly.

"For the last time," snapped the German Major, "we know the bombs

RED DEATH IN NAZI SKIES WITH A YANK SKYFIGHTING

in U.S.A.!

By LIEUT.
JAY D. BLAUFox
Author of "The Flying Tigers," etc.



bringing destruction for all forces of evil!

The Nazis knew the bombs were the new 210 lb. penetration type the Russian Air Force had used before Moscow, but they didn't know Yank skyfighters would be bringing the deadly explosives over from now on!

you carried in your plane were of the new penetration type. We are certain that you are aware of how they are constructed; what materials are used and how great enough speed is obtained to force them through and into our armoured tanks where they explode and destroy everything within

FOOL DISHING IT OUT!—CRACK AIR-WAR YARN!

them."

Lanky half smiled when he recalled the picture of four direct hits on as many tanks and the four complete washouts that followed.

The Major continued: "I myself watched your plane when I saw the deadly work of your bombs. Your other planes did not do so well, which leads me to believe they did not carry the same bombs that you did."

This was true. Lanky's ship was the guinea pig plane for the test of the new 210 pound penetration bomb which the Russian Air Force developed to stall the Nazi push on Moscow. That every bomb would tell, Lanky now knew. So did Gregorivitch Vasilinosoff—"Vasiline" for short—Lanky's gunner. But during the raid, a chance anti-aircraft shell blew the left engine out of its wing nacelle from their Ess-Bee Russian twin-engined dive bomber; the ship caught fire, and the two men were forced to jump into the waiting arms of the Nazis' welcoming committee of fifteen thousand.

Brought before the General Field Marshal commanding the German Infantry Division on the Vyasma-Bryansk salient, they were questioned until his superior patience ran out and they were turned over to the Major, who now, too, was beginning to despair of getting the information he knew these prisoners possessed. And now, unless they divulged the secrets of the new weapon, a firing squad awaited them. The Nazis were taking no prisoners at present.

But death was not new to the lanky Nebraskan who wore a Russian pilot's uniform. He had faced death a thousand times on many fronts during the Spanish Civil War when he flew for the Loyalists against Hitler's Spic stooge, Franco. When the war was over, he escaped to Russia where he lived during the years preceding the

Hitler attack on the Soviet Union. When the war broke out he enlisted in the Russian Air Force and took on the tricky jobs which the Commissars and Comrades knew he could do successfully. This last one, putting the new penetrating bomb to the test, was one of those tricks. And this was the first time in all his combat history that he was not able to return with the report he knew the Commissars both Commanding and Political so anxiously awaited.

"You can see," went on the Nazi Major, "that like my General, my patience is running out. . . ."

"I see that you Germans are a very impatient and impetuous people," agreed Lanky smilingly.

This made the Major storm. He struck the table with his fist with such force, that the maps bounced up almost in his face, and fluttered to the floor. Lanky made a scramble to help the Major retrieve the maps and saw one sector marked off in red on one map—the pattern was almost a complete circle and it hemmed in a Russian battalion or division—Lanky could not make out which one in the few seconds he held the map—and the position was plainly between the city of Vyasma and Teplucha, northeast of Vyasma and near Gzhatsk.

THE map was literally torn from Lanky's hand. He shrugged his massive shoulders: "I was only trying to help you, Major."

"You are very kind, my friend," sneered the Major, "but in the wrong direction." Then he added: "Did you see what was on that map?"

"How could I?" asked Lanky. "You so rudely snatched it out of my hand."

"Silence!" stormed the fuming Major. "I say you did and that is sufficient to put you before a firing squad."

Lanky, in his good old American

way of getting a man's goat, and trying to get the Nazi to forget to question him further on the penetration bomb, taunted: "In my country, calling a man a liar is a dangerous thing to do. It means fight." His eyes twinkled and he watched the red mount redder still in the portly Major's now almost apoplectic face.

The Nazi fairly shrieked: "Take this American swine in a Bolshevik pig's uniform to the guardhouse. Get him out of my sight! I'll kill him myself! I won't wait for the firing squad! Get him out of here!" He took it out on the map in his hands and by the time Lanky and Vasiline reached the door of the small hut they were promptly marched to, the map was in shreds.

Once in the shack that was used as an improvised guardhouse, both Lanky and Vasiline lay down on the floor and howled with laughter. When they finally quieted down, Vasilinosoff was the first to speak: "You know, Comrade Lanky, you should not make the Germans mad. It ain't nice. They lose themselves when they are mad—and when they lose themselves, they become confused; and when they become confused, they don't know what to do; whether to shoot you, or stick a bayonet in you, or poison or hang you." There was a mischievous look in the Russian's eyes as he spoke. He shook his head mournfully as he added: "No, Comrade Lanky—like you say in your country—it ain't kind to dumb animals."

"Right you are Vasiline," drawled the Nebraskan. "It ain't right to get a Nazi mad. It sure does things to him." Then he looked about him at the dirty hut that was used for a jail. "Nice jail they got here, don't you think?" He glanced up at the one window in the place, the sill of which crossed just below his armpit. "Thoughtful of them not to put bars

on the window."

"I see what you mean, Comrade," guessed Vasiline. "But if we wait for the firing squad we may live a little longer."

"Well, if you're worried about a guard's bayonet," said Lanky, "there's only one thing to do."

"What's that?" asked the puzzled gunner.

"Take it away from him," smiled the Yank in Russian Armor. Then his face grew serious. "Vasi, we got to get out of here. We've got to get back. I saw something on that map I picked up which says we must."

Gregorivitch Vasilinosoff had seen his friend in a serious mood before, but not that serious: "You look serious, my friend," he said. "You must have seen something important."

"I did and it was," replied Lanky. There was a grating at the lock on the door. It swung open and one of the German soldiers entered with some black bread and two tin cups of water on a tray for the prisoners. He placed the tray on the floor and without once glancing at the men for whom he brought the food, turned about and closed and locked the door after him.

"I like these Germans," ventured Lanky. "They're so doggone sociable." He glanced down at the tray. "Black bread and water," he murmured. "Thoughtful of them, don't you think?" he asked.

"Yes, Comrade," replied the gunner, "I don't."

LANKY stooped and picked up the tray: "Put this black bread in your pocket," he ordered. "We won't have time to take advantage of the Nazis' hospitality right now. We've got work to do."

"You mean—what you saw on the map, Comrade?" asked Vasiline.

"I do," replied Lanky. "Now help

me put this thing together. First, that Heinie's map showed either a battalion or a division trapped in a pincer of German Infantry somewhere between Vyasma and Teplucha northeast of Vyasma and near Gzhatsk. We know that General Markoff and the Ninth Russian Army was attacked by Von Bock and the 72nd German Infantry Division in that sector. That they were caught somewhere northeast of Vyasma and that Markoff's Division was split up by the German tanks and separated. I have an idea the battalion which disappeared is that battalion I saw on the map. If it is, I know exactly where it is and can locate it. If we can get out of here, and get the information to headquarters, we can save them. If we don't get out of here, they'll be wiped out—and so will we, by the way." Lanky suddenly thought of the threatened firing squad.

"I don't understand it," mused Vasilinosoff. "If you know where they are, why can't our other comrades see them from the air?"

"They can't see them any more than we can," replied Lanky softly. "They're in the forest between Vyasma and Teplucha. They can't be seen from the air. But the Germans know where they are—while we don't. That is, Headquarters doesn't seem to."

"But their radio. . . ." interposed Vasilinosoff.

"They may not have any," argued Lanky.

Voices reached them under their window. Vasilinosoff was about to speak when Lanky clapped his hand over the Russian's mouth. They listened. Lanky and the Russian understood German. The talk outside their window was brought on by the sound of airplane engines. Lanky rose and drew back in the shadow of the room near the window. He had not noticed it before but the shack overlooked a hidden airfield

used by Nazi airmen. Not two hundred yards away stood twelve Junkers 87 dive bombers. Men were readying them for an attack. Bombs were being fastened in the racks. One plane stood off away from the other and a lone mechanic sat in the pilot's cockpit warming up the Jumo.

As the guards under the window spoke, the men inside the hut listened. Lanky had guessed right about the doomed battalion. They were part of Markoff's Division. The Stukas were warming up for an attack on their position. The guards were discussing the Russians' chances of getting out of the pincers. The Soviets hadn't a chance; not one would survive the impending drive of a thousand tanks after the Stukas softened them up.

The men finished talking and separated. Lanky, still holding the tin cup in his hand, threw his head back and swilled the remaining water in the cup. Turning to Vasilinosoff, he asked: "Vasiline, do you think I can still do it?"

"Do what, Comrade?" asked the puzzled Russian.

"Look," urged Lanky. Vasiline watched Lanky's abnormally large hand holding the tin cup—not a thin tin cup but one really of enameled steel. He saw Lanky's powerful fingers close around the cup. As they closed in a viselike grip, the enamel started to chip away under the intense pressure; the black steel became exposed. Then the diameter of the cup collapsed and became smaller until the mouth was virtually crumpled. "Not bad, eh, Gregorivitch, my little Russian brother."

Vasilinosoff's eyes were wide with unconcealed admiration. "Mar-volious!" he exclaimed. "I think I understand, Comrade."

"You always do, little brother," smiled Lanky, significantly. Glancing out of the window he saw one of the

guards—the taller one—approaching the window. Vasiline pushed the window out and it swung forward almost striking the Nazi sentry in the face. In his best German, Vasiline apologized. The Nazi stormed angrily: "*Machen sie die fenster zu!*"

"I'll close the window if you give me a light," said the Russian drawing a long cigarette from his pocket and placing the paper end in his mouth.

"You are not allowed to smoke in there," warned the sentry.

"I know it is against the rules, Comrade, but you wouldn't deprive a man of a little smoke would you?" He pushed some coins into the sentry's hand and continued: "Especially if he gives you a few nice Russian rubles to spend when you get to Moscow,—eh?" He winked at the man and smiled significantly. The man softened and smiled back at Vasilinosoff as he accepted the bribe. He looked about him furtively as the Russian drew farther back into the room to force the man to get closer to the window as he thrust a match inside.

THE sentry's back faced Lanky. As the Nazi reached in, the big hand with the deadly grip reached out and the long, slim, powerful fingers closed over the man's throat with a grip that almost made his eyes pop at once. Vasilinosoff grabbed the man's rifle and drew it into the room. Two minutes later the half-dead sentry was lying on the floor of the hut. Lanky changed uniforms with him.

Carefully he looked out, saw no one who could see him step out of the window, and gingerly dropped to the ground. In another moment he was pacing up and down the back of the prison hut. A large hedge behind the hut further helped to conceal his escape.

Standing the rifle against the build-

ing, he started to head for the plane when the other sentry, rounding the corner of the building, called to him. Lanky halted in his tracks. He'd forgotten about the other man.

"Ja," he cried and walked straight over to the man. They met at the hedge. The other recognized Lanky and was about to cry out when Lanky's hand closed about the man's neck and the cry stopped short somewhere between his larynx and his teeth. As the man's unconscious form half slipped to the ground, Lanky caught him up and passed him through the window of the hut to Vasilinosoff.

"Get into this bird's uniform and make it snappy, Vasiline, old boy. We're getting out of here."

While he waited for the Russian to change uniforms, Lanky watched the one Stuka separated from the others. As the Russian dropped to the ground fully dressed, Lanky said: "It's a long chance, little brother, but we've got to take it. We can't lose anything—but our lives. And they told us we'd lose those anyway. Follow me and do what I do. And don't waste any time doing it."

He threw the German's steel helmet away. The Russian followed suit. Boldly the pair strode toward the lone Stuka. As they approached it together, they saw the mechanic step down on the other side and head for the hangar.

"Perfect," muttered Lanky. "Now I wonder how he knew what we wanted him to do?" Across the open field brazenly the pair walked unmolested, unobserved.

Without looking around them, Lanky and the Russian climbed into the Stuka. The ship was fully loaded with its complement of bombs and the machine guns almost burst with the shells that filled them to the last notch.

"Man that gun, Vasiline," ordered Lanky. The Junker's Jumo engine was

hot. As Lanky switched on and poured the juice to the starter, the engine clucked up and then angrily barked into life. Nobody bothered to see who was in the cockpit. Other engines were revving up. It was not until the ship swung about and faced down the field that one of the men suspected something. But his brain proved too sluggish. He did not realize what was happening until Lanky roared down the field and the Stuka rose off the ground in a chandelle that almost left the gunner's stomach down among the Nazis.

Lanky swung the ship about almost on its tail. He felt for the bomb release cable as he nosed down at the other eleven Stukas on the ground and one by one unloaded the bombs on the line of ships below that it would be days before those ships would fly again—if ever. The air beneath Lanky was filled with fragments and splinters of shattered Stukas that almost blew up in the Yank's path.

Behind him, Vasiline's gun chattered monkey fashion as he poured burning steel at the hangars and men below as the plane roared over. The last bomb found the center of a hangar roof and the building split in the middle. Each side parted company from the other and lay heavily, thunderously over on the ground with a crash where it fell apart like an egg crate.

MACHINE guns from below sent firey tracers spitting up at the Stuka cat-fashion. Anti-aircraft barked as the ship poured across the fire path and headed East,—unharméd.

"Some fun, eh, little brother?" laughed Lanky Spanks as he turned about and gazed into the grinning face of his gunner.

"Da! Da! Comrade," cried Vasiline.

The Stuka nosed in the direction of Moscow and a half hour later crossed

the town of Gzhatsk. Lanky headed north and at fifteen thousand feet circled what appeared to be a dense forest far beneath him. He cut the Jumo down to idling and nosed for the place below for closer observation. At three thousand feet he still saw nothing that would indicate a hidden battalion below.

"Do you think I could have been mistaken, Vasiline?" he asked the Russian. "I don't see a thing down there."

"Neither do I, Comrade," replied Vasiline. "But go lower, Comrade. Maybe you'll find something down there."

"I saw this place on the Major's map as plain as the nose on your own, Vasi," insisted Lanky. At one thousand feet, after careful surveillance, the pair still could not see anything and were about to regain altitude when a flash of flame poured at them from the edge of the woods. The Stuka shivered with the sudden impact of steel, trembled violently for a brief moment, the engine coughed, sputtered, and died heroically and no matter what Lanky did to get it to turn over again, it just would not come to life.

"Well of all the dirty Russian tricks," he cursed, as he nosed the ship down for a dead stick landing in an open field on the edge of the forest. As they rolled to a standstill, the place fairly bristled with small cannon that was being swung into position facing them on small tractor-towed gun-carriages.

Lanky had not intended to land. He hope to find the threatened Russian battalion, notify them of their danger, and fly on to Moscow for aid. He was as mad as a hornet tickled out of his nest. He jumped down from the German Stuka and as two Russian officers and about a hundred men with rifles pointed dangerously at him came up to meet him, he raged: "What the hell do you mean by shooting us down?"

The Russians were amazed to hear the man speak Russian so well but when they realized that he was incensed at being shot down, they roared with laughter. It struck them funny that an enemy should resent being shot down.

"I am sorry we were so ingracious as to shoot an enemy down," replied one of the officers, "but now that you are here we will be most pleased if you will accept our permanent hospitality—at least, until after we have won the war."

"Who's an enemy . . ." roared Lanky. Then he glanced down at the uniform he was wearing—and laughed himself. "Oh, this," he grinned. "We're not Germans. We're Russians, like yourselves." Then he caught himself. "That is, Vasiline here is a Russian. I'm an American in the Russian Army. We were shot down in a raid on the German Infantry quartered in Vyasma; captured and made prisoners, but we escaped in this stolen German plane and uniforms."

"The story sounds fascinating but slightly unbelievable," suggested one of the Russian officers. "But perhaps you can convince our Regimental Political Commissar as well as our Regimental Commissar himself. In the meantime I shall have to ask you to consider yourselves under arrest."

It was equally as difficult to convince the Regimental Political Commissar, a slow-thinking, obese fellow with a handlebar moustache that resembled Budenny's but with a brain that might easily be compared to a groundhog's.

HE DECIDED that a man in a German uniform flying a German plane who spoke Russian as well as Vasiline and Lanky spoke it, must be spies. But the Regimental Commissar who didn't like the Regimental Political Commissar assured him that there were many Russians who spoke German

as fluently as Russian and that at that rate a Russian who wore a Russian uniform and spoke German might also be considered a spy, which wasn't logical at all. These men therefore would be held as prisoners of war.

Lanky pleaded with him to listen. He told him of his danger. Urged him to let him fly on to Moscow for help after learning that the radio had been disabled and that no word could be gotten through to General Headquarters. Lanky warned that their position could not be seen by friendly airplanes; that their position was obviously not known else help would have been sent them before this; but the Germans knew where they were and would find them without any difficulty. He had seen the map in the Nazi camp. Their position was plainly marked on it. Now that he and Vasilinosoff had escaped with the information, it was only a matter of hours when the pincers would be completely closed, and the work of deystation begun.

He spoke so convincingly that both the Commissars were of one mind. The Regimental Political Commissar said: "If there is any soldier or officer in camp who will recognize you as one of our men, we will trust you to fly out of here for help if the plane can be repaired. That is," he smiled ingratiatingly at the Regimental Political Commissar—"if my colleague is willing."

"I would rather be willing to trust this man who speaks so logically, to save our lives than be wiped out like rats in a trap."

All the officers were rounded up. One by one they passed Lanky and his gunner as if in review. None knew them. It was growing disheartening. The last man to look at Lanky called him a filthy name in Russian, and for the next five minutes the place smelled of Old Home Week in Chisholm, Nebraska. The Regiment was saved.

Lanky discovered that all the damage the ack-ack gun did was to sever the gas line. This repair was completed in less than an hour. The Russian and Lanky were given two Russian uniforms and they stepped into the cockpit of the German Stuka in which they were to bring help to the stricken battalion.

They roared off the small field to the cheers and encouraging shouts of men who knew that their success or failure to get help meant either life or death to the hemmed-in battalion; the little handful of men who had withstood days and nights of battering gunfire and Stuka bombs.

At five thousand, Lanky lost sight of the field and nosed his ship northeast in the direction of the Kremlin. Just one hundred and twenty-five miles away, on the other side of one of the strongest batteries of anti-aircraft guns in the world, lay one of the most magnificent airports in the world. Then it suddenly dawned on Lanky. He turned about and shouted to his gunner:

"Hey! Vasiline! I was just wondering. Do you think we'll get through the ack-ack around Moscow to let them know who we really are?" The Russian's eyes took on a troubled look. "They may blow us to bits before we even get near enough to Moscow to tell them what happened to the rest of Markoff's Division. We're flying a German plane!"

"What about the radio?" asked the worried Russian. "Can't we call them and let them know who we are?"

"You know we can't!" replied Lanky. "The frequency isn't the same." He turned back to his controls and looked out on a sea of silver that seemed to stretch for endless miles and touch eternity. The white clouds were everywhere about them, above and below them. They were both so completely alone, that if they didn't know the pre-

dicament they were really in, they might have enjoyed the view. But this was no time for sightseeing but a time for deep and serious thinking. How *were* they to communicate to the ground forces who they were?

THEY had no flares or Very lights; no Very pistol to signal the ground. And if they had they would not have known what the signals were for the main military air field at Moscow. They were headed in the direction of aid for the stricken battalion, and didn't dare go on for fear of being blown out of the air before they reached their destination.

Lanky chewed desperately on the blade of grass he had torn from the field before he stepped into the Stuka. Chewing on grass was a habit he had acquired in Nebraska whenever he had a serious problem to solve. But he had almost chewed this one to a frazzle and seemed to be getting nowhere except closer to doom with each revolution of the Jumo's crankshaft. Then a thought seemed to stem from the frayed end of the blade of grass. Turning around again to Vasilinosoff, Lanky shouted: "We better forget flying into Moscow in this ship and start looking around for Markoff's main division." He looked at his watch. "We've been flying for about twenty minutes now and we should be about halfway between Vyasma and the Big City. Markoff and the rest of his Fifteen Thousand should be somewhere near here. What do you think?"

As Lanky looked straight into Vasilinosoff's eyes, he saw a startled look come into them.

"I think I had better warm up my guns," cried the gunner. "Look!" He pointed off to the right in the direction of Kaluga. Sandwiched in between two dense layers of Strato-Cumulus and riding in the direction from which Lanky

had just come, was a squadron of nine Nazi planes flying in elements of three. And they headed directly for the ship in which Lanky and the Russian were riding.

"Now what?" muttered the Yank. He slipped the earphones over his head and pressed them to his ears. He turned on the German radio and waited.

"Looks like we're gonna have company," ventured the Russian.

"Don't use your guns, Vasi, unless they do," warned Lanky. "We've got to wait and see what they do. They may not know who we are and that this ship is stolen. Then again—" he thought—"they may."

The German squadron wheeled in the direction of the stolen plane. A moment later a guttural Nazi command crackled through the earphones clapped to Lanky's ears.

"*Achtung!*" it snapped.

"*Bitte, Herr Oberst!*" replied the American into the radio mouthpiece.

In rapid German, the Nazi squadron leader snapped back at him: "Who are you and where do you come from?"

"I'm Lieutenant Gunther Schultz, from the 72nd, stationed outside of Vyasma," lied Lanky Spanks. "I got separated from my squadron and lost my way in these dense clouds."

"Fall in behind us," ordered the Nazi captain, "and follow us. We are headed for a straff on Russians in the woods somewhere between Vyasma and Teplucha. You will attack with us."

"Oh! Oh!" muttered Lanky under his breath. To the Nazi he replied. "Very good, Sir!"

AS LANKY swung the stolen Stuka behind the German squadron, Vasilinosoff cried: "What are you doing, Comrade?"

"Orders," Lanky informed him. "If we don't want to get blown out of the air, we'd better do what we're told right

now."

"What did the Leader say?" asked the Russian watching Lanky drop into position behind the last German flier in the three element.

"We're going to attack the lost Markoff men and then probably go back to the German airdrome we escaped from," answered the Yank.

"We can't do that," shouted the Russian, his face paling. "We'll be shot on sight!"

"Don't worry about it, Vasiline," he soothed. "We won't be shot. We're not going that far."

But the Nazis seemed to have other ideas. The two end planes swung in on Lanky until they flanked him on both sides. He wasn't absolutely sure, but he thought they suspected him and were making sure that he would go on with them to their destination.

A glance at the gas gauge on the panel told him that his tanks still had a good supply of fuel, but he didn't know how long the coming battle would last and if he would have enough to get him there and back again to Moscow.

"Looks as though they don't trust us, Comrade," ventured the Russian. "Do you think they know about us?"

"I don't know," replied Lanky, "but I have a sneaking suspicion they know something."

"There is a German army outside of Kaluga," said Vasilinosoff. "They must come from there. It looks as though the Nazis are attacking the Markoff men from all sides."

"That's obvious," agreed Lanky. "They're going to soften them up with the Stukas and then send the infantry and tanks in to finish them off."

"And they will, too," interposed the Russian, "unless we get to our own base and get help."

"I have an idea," said Lanky. "Keep your fingers crossed, Vasiline."

"What are you going to do?" asked

the anxious Slav.

"Just you keep your Mongolian cheek bones polished up and your turned-up Slav nose clean, Vasiline,—” said the American—"and watch."

The squadron was just entering a bank of cumulous clouds and the squadron leader's plane was enveloped by a mist that made it seem like a phantom. The other planes in his element almost immediately took on the same eerie look. In a matter of seconds they were flying wraiths; then they practically faded from sight. The second element followed the first. As Lanky, in the third element, entered the deep mist, his engine suddenly began to sputter and spit and his ship lost altitude.

"What's the matter now," asked the alarmed Russian.

"Looks like engine trouble, little brother," said Lanky turning around and winking at the worried Soviet.

Vasilinosoff lowered his head and grinned a grin of relief.

"I thought it was engine trouble," he laughed.

The Stuka started to lose altitude. Lanky made believe he was trying to get the engine to operate efficiently by blipping the motor. He glanced furtively through the perspex at the pilots and ships flanking him, saw them eyeing him suspiciously, and then he did put on an act.

THE man on the left of him was suddenly enveloped by a dense cloud and disappeared. The ship on his right was just entering a layer of cumulous that wiped out his vision. That was Lanky's cue. He gunned the motor and nosed the ship down in a power dive. Dropped sickeningly for about two hundred feet, straightened out, made a steep right turn, turning in under the plane on his right which was obliterated by the clouds above and then made a right chandelle to regain height. He entered

another dense cloud bank and with throttle wide open headed for the upper reaches in an effort to shake off the Nazi flyers. As both he and the Russian looked about them, they saw they were alone when they cleared the bank of clouds and came out into open sky. The Nazi squadron was nowhere in sight. Lanky breathed a sigh of relief and the Russian applauded with: "Good flying, little Comrade."

"Little Comrade" was the Russian's pet name for the American who stood over six feet when his shoes were off, whenever he did something he liked.

"Looks like we shook off those Nazi rats," said Lanky. "Won't that Herr Oberst be sore as an ulcerated tooth when he finds out."

His elation was short lived however. There was a steel rearview mirror on the perspex cowling above him and a chance glance showed him another Stuka diving down on him from behind with the cowling guns blazing.

"Look out behind you, Vasiline," shouted Lanky. "We're being attacked!"

Vasiline swung his guns about as he drew down his gun cowl and pressed the trigger trips to warm the barrels with a burst. Lanky slipped his ship out of the line of fire of the other Stuka as the man poured suddenly ahead of him, his Jumo virtually screaming as it blasted by.

A flip of the stick and rudder and Lanky's ship swung to the right and his own cowl guns barked ominously as tracers poured past the head of the Nazi gunner whose own guns were blazing back a stream of deadly fire.

The pilot in the attacking ship proved no novice. The nose of his plane rose toward the sky; his engine dragged the Stuka almost vertically into the air and once again, as Lanky swung his ship to the left this time, the Stuka that had caught up with him was on his tail and

blasting away at it.

But the Russian's guns were beating a song of death and his shells chipped away at the leading edges of the Nazi plane and he saw pieces of the metal fairing lift away from it. As the two ships drew closer to each other, the cowl guns operated by the pilot were silent for a moment while the two gunners tore at each other with the aft guns and sent bullets cutting through the keels of both ships without seeming to strike any vital spots.

As the Nazi passed swiftly in front of Lanky's guns, he opened them wide and saw his own metal tear into the left wing of his opponent's plane. But the other's gunner did better. As he passed that part of Lanky's cubicle, he opened his own fire and the bullets shot away part of the perspex over Lanky's head. The American ducked automatically although the bullets passed well over him. But pieces of the perspex fell into his lap and were silently warning him to be more careful.

"That was close, Vasiline, ol' sock!" he shouted.

The fight drew them both to another bank of dense clouds and before they realized it, the planes were completely obliterated from each other's view.

"Comrade," cried the Russian, "I don't think we should take any more chances right now. We must get back to get Markoff's men help. If we keep this fight up we may not be able to."

"What are you suggesting, Little Vodka?" asked Lanky. "That we run for it?"

"No," replied the Russian, "but we gotta use common sense. If we get knocked down, we may cause the death of a thousand men instead of just the two of us. Don't forget, we are the only ones who know where Markoff's lost men are; they have no radio and they have not planes."

Lanky saw the logic of Vasilinosoff's

reasoning: "Guess you're right, Vasiline," he agreed. "All right. We'll get away from here." Then he added: "Although I would like to have finished that guy off."

AS HE emerged from the cloud bank through which he had been steadily climbing, he saw the blue sky above him—and not more than a thousand yards away, the other Stuka, apparently searching for him. Both pilots saw each other at the same time and in a matter of seconds were blasting away at each other's throats. Cowl guns and rear guns spoke almost in unison. Head on they came, for a brief moment. The German suddenly rose up and crossed Lanky's ship in an effort to avoid a collision. Even Lanky's heart was in his throat as he saw the other man come head on without swerving.

Their guns continued to blaze at each other as they passed with not more than twenty to thirty feet between them. But that stupid maneuver was the Nazi's undoing. The Russian gunner, stolid now, calm, raised the nose of his machine gun and raked the Nazi from spinner to the double cross on its tail section. The bullets laid a seam that could do nothing but penetrate everything they passed through; and this included the pilot and gunner for the guns were suddenly stilled on the Nazi-flown Stuka.

Lanky saw it quiver and flounder for a moment as he swung deftly away from the stricken ship crying back over his shoulder at the Russian gunner: "Nice shooting, Russky! Nice shooting!"

A sudden blast sent the shivers through his own Stuka. For a moment, the plane vibrated and shook from the concussion and the air struck him full in the mouth silencing him and making him catch his breath. A great flash of flame half blinded him, it was so dan-

gerously close. Pieces of shrapnel tore into the fuselage between him and the gunner, leaving gaping holes. He dived and turned in an effort to get away from what he thought was a sudden burst of anti-aircraft gunfire. Even the Russian was affected.

When Lanky finally orientated himself, the other plane was nowhere in sight. Here and there pieces of the other ship was fluttering to earth. One of the Russian's bullets had evidently cut into a nose fuse of one of the Nazi's bombs—and with the fulminate ablaze, set off the fuse, and blew the attacking Stuka to shreds in the air.

"Well," sighed Lanky. "That's that!" Then turning to the Russian, he said: "Which way is Moscow now, Russky? That bird has disorientated me."

"Are you," replied the Russian, "as you Americans say, 'kiddink me?'"

But Lanky found himself quickly and consulting his compass soon had the nose of his plane pointing in the direction of Moscow. The 1,200 horses in his engine pulled him along at 250 miles an hour. The cloud banks were still heavy in the vicinity of Gzhatsk as they rounded the outskirts of the town not knowing what they'd find there.

On they flew and the minutes flew with them. Lanky was growing anxious for he knew that the Nazi squadron he had slipped away from was on the way to start the beginning of the softening up process on Markoff's lost battalion; and that now other squadrons might be moving up. It would then be a matter of a few short hours when the German pincers would be closed and several hundred tanks would be felling the trees and shrubbery in their paths and their guns would blast the hemmed-in Russians from every side.

He was so occupied with his thoughts while Vasilinosoff snatched a dozen

winks of sleep that he did not see the white spires of the Kremlin less than twenty-five miles away and fifteen thousand feet below. Had he looked, he would even have made out St. Basil's Cathedral at one end of the Red Square, while at the end of the other the Historical Museum faced it. Between him and Moscow proper lay the villages of Troparevo and Ochakovo to the left. On the right Pererva and Lyudlino.

He could have seen the Moscow River winding irregularly like a thin, snaky, silver thread from Khoroshevo right into the city of Moscow past the Kremlyovskaya, the Moskyoretskaya past the Palace of Labor and the Hotel Novomoskovskaya on the south bank of the River where he and Vasiline had soaked up many quarts of Vodka, to the accompaniment of a Balalaika Orchestra and music by Tschaikowsky and Moszkowski.

Lanky would have seen all this if he had been allowed to get close enough. But as he rode over a wooded area on his way to the huge military airdrome on the north side of the city, his plane was almost blown apart under him. The shock almost shook his teeth loose as he rode into one of the devastating anti-aircraft barrages he had ever witnessed in his years of aerial fighting. It seemed that the whole earth beneath him was a mass of fire flashes that never seemed to stop. The shock threw the Russian out of his chair and his gun swung on the parrabellum and slightly konked him.

THE engine didn't even gasp nor give off its death rattle before it died; its death was sudden and permanent. The wounded Stuka nosed down with loose controls. Observers below must have seen that the German plane was hit in its vitals and stopped the barrage to watch it slither to earth.

Lanky was the first to recover his voice. "We didn't even get near to Moscow," he moaned.

"Neither did the Germans," the Russian reminded him. He started to climb out of the ship.

"Where are you going, Vasiline?" asked Lanky half suspecting what the Russian was about to do.

"Over the side," said the Russian. "We can't stay with the ship now. It's a wreck! I'm going to jump!"

"I wouldn't advise it, Russky," warned Lanky. "At least, not until you get a parachute."

"Haaaaaaaah!" the Russian screamed when he realized what he had almost done to himself. A sheer drop of fifteen thousand feet without a parachute would have been nothing short of fatal. The Russian paled and shivered while Lanky laughed as the Junkers Stuka almost dropped into a loose spin.

"Well," he thought as he tried desperately to keep the plane straight and level in the glide, "we may not have gotten to Moscow but we can tell these birds what we came for."

A few minutes later, the ship slipped across a small cluster of trees that looked strangely artificial to the Yank and struck the ground not far from them with a bump or two. As the wheels hit the solid earth, the undercarriage separated from the fuselage; the spats fell away from the wheels; the stabilizer in the tail section fluttered to the ground as though it had been attacked by termites and rotted internally; the engine none too gently slipped from its moorings and both wings parted from the fuselage as though too tired to carry the long sleek body with its human cargo any further.

When Lanky saw all this, his stomach crawled. When he realized what a magnificent job of destruction the Russian gunners had done to the Stuka,

and remembered what might have happened if the ship had fallen apart like that fifteen thousand feet in the air, his heart and lungs and liver crawled into his stomach.

The dismembered Nazi plane was suddenly surrounded from all sides by Russian soldiers with bayoneted rifles in their hands. Two Russian officers strode up as both Lanky and his gunner were helped from the fuselage of the Stuka which now lay over on its battered side. Both men were badly shaken, but unhurt.

When they were drawn out of the hulk and stood upon their feet, an uproar went up from the men about them. The rifles rose to waist height and bayonets thrust toward the two fliers pinning them in the middle of a circle of steel.

"Hey, what's going on, you fellers," drawled Lanky in his best Nebraska Russian.

"Spies! Spies! Spies!" The cry went up all around them and continued until the officers shouted for silence. Then they turned to Lanky and Vasilinosoff.

"So. Two German spies flying a German airplane and wearing Russian uniforms." The Captain spoke German fluently. "You gentlemen won't require the regulation court martial. Your case is obvious. You hoped to get into Moscow by wearing Russian uniforms and spying on the Kremlin. That's it, isn't it?"

"Of course it isn't!" remonstrated Lanky hotly. "We're not Germans, but Russians. And we're not spies!"

The captain sneered at him. "Of course, you're not!" He called to a dozen men to fall out to form a firing squad. "I'm sorry that I have to smear one of our best walls with your rotten blood, but under the circumstances we must overlook many things." He gave orders to surround the helpless, luck-

less pair. Then Vasilinosoff, who had been too terrified to speak up to then when he realized that they were about to be shot as spies and without a trial, forgot that he was afraid and became so infuriated that he stormed at the captain in pure Moscovite.

"I demand that we be taken before the Regimental Commissar! I am Comrade Gregorivitch Vasilinosoff of the Russian Air Force, gunner to Lieutenant Lanky Spanks, American flier for the Soviet Union. We are attached to the Ninth Russian Army under Major General Kharitonoff and our regiment is stationed eight miles south of Rzhev. We demand an audience with your Regimental Commissar before you make any serious mistakes you may be sorry for!"

VASILINOSOFF was breathless when he stopped. The Russian captain eyed him in surprise. He had never heard Russian spoken so convincingly. He turned to Lanky. "Are you Lieutenant Lanky Spanks?" he asked.

"I am," replied Lanky, "and I have valuable information that must be conveyed to your Regimental Commissar at once. We know where Markoff's lost battalion can be found. They are without radio or planes and are completely encircled and cannot get a dispatch rider through the German lines to let you know of the trouble they are in. I'm inclined to advise you, Captain, that we had better be taken before your Regimental Commissar at once before Markoff's men are wiped out."

The Captain hesitated a moment, then ordered them to follow him. They were taken into a small house concealed in the trees which served as the operations office of the Commander of the anti-aircraft battery.

He listened to the Captain first, then

to Lanky.

"How do I know that this is not a trick?" he asked suspiciously.

"You have a phone at your elbow, Commissar," said Lanky. "May I respectfully suggest that you call my own Regimental Commissar to send an officer over here from Rzhev to identify us."

"Better than that," replied the Commissar. "I will send you over there in the company of this Captain and a dozen armed men. If you are all you say you are, and you have this valuable information that will save those men lost and encircled by the Nazis, you will be in a position to lead a good sized air squadron right to the place. If not—" he hesitated a moment—"well, it does not matter whether we shoot you here or they shoot you there."

It was just about fifty miles from the ack-ack battery in Troparevo to the airfield just outside of Rzhev and Lanky and the Russian in the company of the Captain and the armed guard bumped along some rough country road in a truck.

Two hours later both Lanky and the gunner were standing in the great presence of Marshal Budenny himself who was visiting the Rzhev airfield and inspecting several hundred new Stormovik fighters which only two days before had been delivered to the field. The Regimental Commissar and the Regimental Political Commissar were seated on either side of the Marshal when they were brought in and identified.

The captain apologized for his mistake when he heard Lanky tell how he came to be in a Stuka bomber. The Yank reported thereafter on the shattering results of the new Russian penetration bomb.

"Out of four bombs I dropped," he reported, "there were four hits and

four complete tank washouts. But Commissar," he added, "I should like to respectfully suggest that there is no time to be lost if we are to save those trapped men."

"You are right, Lieutenant," replied the Commissars together as they both reached for the same phone at the same time, the Regimental Commissar bowing to the Regimental Political Commissar. The latter graciously turned the telephone over to the Regimental Commissar and he ordered every available bomber on the field warmed up and the racks filled with the new penetration bombs.

Calls were put in to two other fields within a radius of twenty-five miles of Moscow and a rendezvous arranged at twenty thousand feet over Ochakovo at which point the three squadrons of Russian bombers would converge and form into one huge wing. This wing was to be led by Lanky to the place where the trapped men were; the ring around them smashed, and the men released at all costs.

THE atmosphere about the field was suddenly torn with the roar of hundreds of throaty engines warming up on the line. Swarms of mechanics like busy bees in a hive moved rapidly and efficiently about the field jamming bombs into racks; loading belts of ammunition into the wing and cockpit guns; filling gas tanks, oil reservoirs and getting everything ready for the major battle that would follow all this activity.

As Lanky and his little Russian sidekick walked across the field toward the line where their ship awaited them, Lanky said: "Couldn't you just go for Budenny's handlebar moustache? I wonder how long it took him to grow it?"

A siren wailed a weird wail and pilots ran from all directions and met

in front of the large map room on the edge of the field near the Commissar's office.

"I guess that means us too," said Lanky as he passed his hand over the sleek fuselage of the Ess-Bee he and Vasilinosoff, his gunner, would take into the air. There were over one hundred of these Russian twin-engined bombers warming up on the line. They were sweet ships, he thought. And the eleven hundred pounds of bombs they carried boded no good for the Heinies.

The siren wailed again and Lanky and the gunner swung about and rejoined the Commissars. The Regimental Commissar outlined the plan of attack. He explained the lead plane would be Lanky's. All planes would converge at Ochakovo and the three squadrons would separate fifteen miles outside of Vyasma. They would fly to three points of a triangle and attack in that formation. One squadron would attack from the northeast; one from the northwest; the third, from the south.

Squadron leaders were given their orders. The Regimental Commissar would follow in the plane behind Lanky's and issue orders as necessary over the plane's radio. When the order came to peel off and attack, they were to select their target and stay with it until it was destroyed.

"The planes will take off in elements of three and flights of nine and wait at ten thousand until the planes—all of them—are in the air. You will follow Lieutenant Spank's Ess-Bee until given orders to peel off." Squadron Leaders will keep their radios tuned at all times as will all pilots. That is all."

The men saluted, dispersed and scrambled into their cockpits as mechanics slipped down and out of them to make room. For the moment it seemed that everything was wild confusion, but after a brief second or two,

the wild confusion turned into an orderly movement of every person on the field and engines were tested by the pilots.

Two long, red streamers were fitted to the ends of Lanky's Ess-Bee wing tips and as the plane taxied into position on the broad concrete runway, they stuck out as straight as the tail on a Pointer dog.

At a signal from the Commissar in the plane to Lanky's right, nine twin-engined dive bombers—Russian low winged monoplanes powered by American Wright-Cyclones of 750 horsepower each, roared off the field and rose gracefully into the air. Each plane bore over a thousand pounds of the new penetration bombs and boded no good for any degree of tank any one of them might come in contact with.

Lanky turned to Vasilinosoff who sat behind him preening his machine gun and said: "Take a look over the side, Vasi, and see a pretty picture."

The Russian glanced down through his perspex to the ground below him and saw one nine after another leave the ground in flights and head for altitude.

"Ten flights of Ess-Bees and ten flights of Stormovik Pursuits from this field," he said, "and the same amount of Moscas and Rata Fighters and Ess-Bees from the two other fields, my little Comrade . . . is that something? Or is that something?" Lanky was obviously pleased at the thought that he was leading almost two hundred fighting planes in his own Wing, while four hundred more would meet them over Ochakovo.

"You should feel very proud, my Commissar," suggested Vasilinosoff significantly.

LANKY turned his puzzled face around to his gunner and asked: "Didn't you make a mistake, Little

Brother? You called me Commissar when you meant Comrade."

"I knew what I meant," replied Vasilinosoff. "If we succeed in smashing those Nazi dogs and releasing that trapped unit, they'll make you a Commissar for this or I ain't flying with you right this minute."

Lanky grinned from ear to ear. He stuck the nose of his ship toward a wide clearing and through a stratum of Scuds while the other ships in his flight followed in close Vee formation. It took the two hundred planes to fall into line about twenty minutes. The ninety-nine Ess-Bees fell in behind him at fifteen thousand feet in steps and stairs to keep out of each other's wash. The Stormovik Fighters formed beneath them at ten thousand. The Stormoviks were the Russian counterparts of the British Spitfires—in fact, most of the parts that went into them were sent from England and the United States and the ships were assembled in Russian dugouts and factories back in the hills.

As Lanky listened in his ear phones, he heard the Regimental Commissar's voice snap orders to all Squadron Leaders: "Attention! All Squadron Leaders! Retain close formation and follow the plane with the Red streamers. Maintain present altitude until we reach Ochakovo. I'll issue other orders at that point. That is all."

As Lanky looked below and above him at the battleplane-filled sky, he swelled a little with pardonable pride. Two hundred and ninety-seven roaring engines split the atmosphere above and around and below him and the thunder that reverberated over the earth from their exhausts portended destruction for all forces of evil.

As the two great flights poured southeast toward Ochakovo, seventy-five miles from Rzhev, they seemed to see, still far off, another and similar wing

of planes coming to meet them. Twenty minutes later, at altitudes ranging from ten thousand feet to thirty thousand feet, almost six hundred fighting planes bearing the cocarde of the red star of the Soviet Union met over Ochakovo and fell in behind the red streamers that still fluttered in the slipstream of Lanky Spanks Wright-Cyclones.

He turned the nose of his Ess-Bee divebomber in the direction of Vyasma and the rest of the great armada swung about with him. The sky was so black with planes that Lanky thought it must have appeared to those on the earth below as though the Locusts had come again.

The skies darkened over Gzhatsk and the great Wing flew over it and headed for Teplucha. Somewhere between Teplucha and Gzhatsk lay the missing men. As Lanky looked down upon the green earth below, he called the Commissar on his radio: "This is it, Commissar. This is the time to split our Squadrons. There are the German lines about fifteen miles ahead of us."

It was true. Even at that distance, small brown objects in seemingly countless numbers were worming their way along the ground in columns, lines, ranks, files from almost every direction and they all seemed to be converging on one point—a dense forest.

The Commissar snapped his orders over the radio and the three stratas of Russian fighting planes separated and three great squadrons swerved from the path set for them by the American, and took flight in three different directions.

As they broke the massive formation, the sky ahead suddenly filled with Nazi planes flying up from Vyasma proper. It was obvious to Lanky that the Soviet armada was not too soon. It was also obvious that the Russian airmen outnumbered the Germans.

The Soviet pilots were now directly

over the German tanks and the Nazi anti-aircraft was beginning to speak. Black puffs of smoke broke dangerously close to Lanky's wings. The Heinies below, mistaking the Yank for the leader of the armada, tried desperately to pick him off first.

The Pincers below were closing in on the trapped men. But this didn't completely close. Orders crackled through for the divebombers to peel off, pick out a tank and blow it back to the Rhine.

ONE by one the Ess-Bees twin-engines sang a dirge of death as they whined with the sudden change of flight direction of the ships they were dragging through the air. The bombers dived for the tanks that were crawling up on the Russian infantry below; dropped through the air at almost three hundred miles an hour, and with deadly precision laid their eggs upon the armored worms that intended to destroy their comrades.

Unlike any other bomb, the penetration bombs tore through the steel plates and blew up inside the tanks killing everything within and spreading the plates as though they were that much papier mache.

With hundreds of planes whining, and screaming in their thundering dive, with tanks blasting skyward like matchboxes as each was hit, every foot of ground and every inch of air space reek with a horrible hellfire that inferred here was so-called civilization wiping itself off the face of the earth.

Lanky's Ess-Bee chalked up tank after tank. Every bomb he carried accounted for at least one tank. Beyond other Ess-Bees gave a most significant account of themselves while Stormoviks smashed Stukas and Messerschmitts until the whole sky was ablaze with burning planes, and dying men.

When all of Lanky's bombs were dis-

posed of and with them an equal number of German tanks and more than an equal number of the crews, he drove his ship back into the air for a smashing attack at a Messerschmitt that was fastening itself to the tail of the Commissar's plane.

The Commissar's gunner was dead. And the Commissar looked as good as dead as Lanky maneuvered his ship into position behind and above the German fighter. As he was about to trip his cowl guns, he heard Vasilinosoff cuss a blue streak in Russian, and the gun behind him chattered hysterically. Vasilinosoff caught a Stuka diving on their tail and diverted the Nazi gunfire while Lanky started to pick off the Messerschmitt. But the Madsens in the Nazi plane spoke first and Lanky's Regimental Commissar was driven into the trees below where his plane burst into flames.

The man died, but not before he saw Lanky send the Messerschmitt diving for the same trees with the pilot riddled with bullets made in the Soviet Union.

The pincers had tried to close—but it was blasted so wide open that the attempt was an utter failure. The whole Nazi encirclement was broken completely and the trapped men of

Markoff's Division were freed.

On the parade ground beyond the air field back at Rzhev, Budenny himself shook Lanky's hand and thanked him on behalf of the Soviet Union and Premier Stalin and the Russian people for his splendid achievement. He placed the Order of Lenin on the Yank's chest, and brushing his huge moustache aside, planted two fervent kisses, one on each of the surprised American's cheeks in token of his gratitude. And made him the new Regimental Commissar of the Ess-Bee Squadron at Rzhev.

He placed a lesser decoration on Vasilinosoff—but nevertheless a decoration—and not to create envy between the new Commissar and his gunner, kissed him, too.

An hour after the ceremonies were over, and Budenny had installed Lanky in his new office, Lanky sat alone with his gunner. He smiled at him when he said: "Vasi, you ought to go into the prophet business."

"I told you you would be the next Commissar," boasted Vasilinoff.

"But you forgot to tell me I would be kissed by a man," added Lanky.

"Did I forget to tell you that?" the gunner asked innocently. . . .

3

**BIG SMASHING FAST-ACTION
WAR NOVELS OF OUR FIGHTING
YANKS ON ALL FRONTS!**

COMPLETE

WAR

NOVELS

THRILL

A

MINUTE

NOW

ON

SALE

ONE-MAN A.E.F. *by David Brandt*
 FIGHTING YANK AT SMOLENSK. *by Allan K. Echols*
 FOR MacARTHUR TO THE FINISH. *by John J. Rand*

Tokyo, Here Comes Hell!

By
JOHN J. RAND

Author of "Beware the Dive-Bomber Brigade!" etc.

Tokyo was the target, and back of the famous secret bomb-sights were Uncle Sam's deadliest bombardiers!



Bombs were dropping. Tokyo was being spotted with flame spurts and blasts!

CAPTAIN Pilot Bill Fancher settled his chunky self into the left seat of the bomber's office and shot a venomous glance at his new co-pilot.

"I'm warning you, Charlie, that's all I've got to say. Stay away from Marge or I'll slit your throat. And that goes for writing to her, as well."

Then Bill Fancher gunned the big

engines and the bomber roared down the runway and headed slightly north of due west. The blue Pacific lay ahead. And out of the tail, the gunner could look back and see the towering, snow-covered peak of Mount Rainier becoming rapidly dwarfed by distance.

Charlie Weeks had been brought up as co-pilot for Fancher's bomber just an hour ago, but they'd already been

at it hot and heavy over Marge Dewey, *the* girl back in Ansol, Texas.

Fancher was still mumbling to himself as he checked his course with the navigator behind at his desk.

"Why in hell couldn't Jerry Madden have had his appendix bust a month from now?"

That was what had caused the sudden switch. Co-pilot to hospitalization. New co-pilot brought up.

Bill Fancher yelled across the short space to his new partner.

"Of all the co-pilots in the world, it had to be you."

Charlie Weeks shifted his long, athletic frame, leaned his broad shoulders toward Bill and set his finely chiseled features in a tantalizing smile.

"What seems to be your trouble, sweetheart, sir?"

"I said of all the skunks in the world I could have had for a co-pilot it had to be you."

Charlie Weeks was laughing on the surface, anyway. "You're an unappreciative soandso," he yelled back above the roaring engines. "I should think you'd be glad to see an old friend from the old home town."

There wasn't any love for Bill Fancher in Charlie Weeks' heart, either. But Charlie was more the easy-going sort.

"You're not kidding me," Bill fired back at him. "Why you two-timing back-stabber you—"

He got a call from his engineer. That was Baline back at his station. Then Chase, the navigator, checked and then the radio man, Gilson, made his report and Bill listened to them all and he heard Charlie's voice through the intercommunication phones. Charlie said, "Check. Okay." And Charlie made some notes on his report pad that he held on his knee.

They got altitude and set the automatic pilot, and Bill Fancher sat back

and looked at the athletic body of Charlie Weeks and his classic features and said, "What a heel!"

Charlie sobered and leaned close.

"Listen, short and squatty. I don't take too many cracks like that from anybody."

"You don't? What do you think you'll do about it?"

"As soon as we land I'll mash in that ugly face of yours."

"As soon as we land," Bill Fancher mimicked, "I'll fix that chorus boy map of yours so it won't ever attract dames again."

The Bombardier up front in the green house looked back. He could hear some of the row and he looked worried.

"For my money," Charlie Weeks snapped, "this is as good a place as any to settle this."

He unfastened his safety belt and moved to come at the chief pilot. The navigator stuck his head between them. He handed Captain Bill Fancher an envelope.

"Here are the sealed orders. It's time to open them, sir."

Fancher took the envelope and tore it open. His eyes saw the typewritten orders and his mind registered what was written but it didn't make any great impression. He stuck the papers back in the navigator's hands. "Hold course."

"Yes, sir."

Navigator Chase hesitated. Weeks had settled back in his seat, but from the look on his face he was only relaxed until this routine matter was settled.

Chase half offered the sealed orders to Charlie Weeks.

"Wish to put them on record?"

Weeks took the papers, glanced at them, was about to fold them and then he whistled.

"Hey, know where we're going? Hey, brother. This is hot."

Bill Fancher clenched his teeth. He hissed. "Don't call me brother, you louse."

CHARLIE WEEKS didn't pay attention to that one. He said, "Hey, we're heading for—"

"Who the hell cares where we're heading?" Fancher barked.

"An island called Akku."

"Never heard of it."

"Neither did I. But it's in the Pacific Ocean somewhere. Hey, I wonder have they got Hula dancers there."

"You would, you rat," Bill Fancher said.

"Wait a minute. The course is—" Charlie Weeks stopped to whistle. "Hey, this is no tropical island. Listen, this is up in the Aleutian Group off Alaska."

"May I take the orders for setting the course, sir?" the navigator asked.

"Sure," Charlie said. "Bring them back for the records." Charlie could forget easy. He yelled, "Hey, Bill. Ever know an Eskimo dame?"

Bill Fancher turned on him. "Why you—" Fancher caught Charlie Weeks a not too tender right backhand across the cheek.

It was a very exhilarating sensation that rippled up Bill Fancher's arm as the back of his hand connected with Charlie's good-looking face. Just for luck, he'd doubled his fist a little as the blow struck. Like putting a period at the end of a sentence. But this was only the beginning.

The back hand blow knocked Charlie Weeks back in his seat. That was partly because it was a hard blow and partly because it took Charlie completely by surprise. Charlie Weeks was always the guy who was sure of himself. That was another thing that made the women like him. Sure of himself and good-looking and built like a wedge, and a good line. They fell for

Charlie.

Charlie sat there a little stunned at first. Then his face began to turn purple and from that, his features blanched.

"You louse," Fancher barked. "You got the nerve to try to take Marge away from me. Why even if Marge would fall for you, I wouldn't let you marry her. I'd slit your throat before that."

"If you could," Charlie Weeks said and his face was almost like a sheet, but there was more than whiteness. It was the white of terrific heat and pressure and there was murder in his eyes.

Slowly, Charlie Weeks was rising out of his seat. He was turning in the cramped quarters of the pilot's cockpit. The office of a bomber isn't any dance hall or squared ring with ropes around it. It's just two bucket seats with a narrow passage between for the bombardier to pass through to go up to the green house. And this is surrounded by instruments and levers and gadgets and pipes which was pretty necessary to the flight of the bomber.

Charlie wasn't worrying about anything in the office. He was not worried about anything. For Charlie, there was but one interest in life and that was to bash in the not too attractive features of one William Fancher. It mattered little if Fancher was his commanding officer. In fact, that part of it mattered not at all except it made Weeks still angrier about the whole thing.

The robot pilot was still flying the bomber on course and Charlie rose and towered in a stooped position over the knotty body of Bill Fancher, still in his seat.

"You're my superior. I understand that. But only in this bomber. I guess you'll send me to Leavenworth prison for what I'm going to do to you, chum, but that doesn't worry me a bit. Brother, I'm going to give you the

damnedest beating a white man ever gave a skunk. Get up and fight."

Bill Fancher was glowing white, too. He barked, "Sit down before I knock you down."

"You and who else?"

"You heard me."

"Make me."

Bill Fancher was short and stocky, but strong, and with a sweep of his arm, he knocked Charlie Weeks crashing into the side of the office, against levers and instruments, and it didn't do the bomber any good.

There, within sight of the Pacific coast they were leaving, the bomber did a dizzy sideslip and started plunging down.

Bill Fancher was up now. He grabbed Weeks and hurled him toward the seat. But Weeks got his leg behind him and shoved.

With a crash, he sent Fancher hurtling into the instruments, back first. The bomber quivered and shook. It continued its dive for the Pacific.

CHARLIE was fighting like mad, battering Fancher as he had him against the instruments. The bomber lurched and hurled them to the other side of the office.

Other members of the crew were coming into the fight. This was death for all of them. Chase, the navigator, and Morton, the bombardier, came crowding into the office from either end.

Chase got hold of Weeks and Morton took over Fancher.

"For God sake, stop this fighting," Morton yelled. "We'll all go to hell."

Fancher dropped back into his seat. He jerked his thumb toward Weeks. "Fasten that guy's safety belt."

He was taking the controls, trying to pull the giant bomber out of her trouble. Every face in the bomber—all six faces—were plenty white and now it wasn't from rage. Every man

had gotten his scare.

Chase took his place at the navigation desk. Morton went back out in his green house up front and they went droning on.

For hours, they flew like that. Fancher didn't look at Weeks and Weeks didn't bother to look at Fancher. There was electric tension in the office and plenty of it. The atmosphere was like that in a close-pocketed mine where dynamite has been placed and everyone waits tense, not sure just when or where the explosive will let go.

Long, long after that early morning take-off, but while it was still light, Charlie Weeks half turned to his chief.

"Knowing the kind of a guy you are," he said. "I'm betting you'll have another co-pilot assigned to you and turn me over for insubordination."

Fancher waited a long while. He sat looking out of the office at the vast expanse of north Pacific. After it seemed to Weeks that Fancher hadn't heard him, the bomber captain said, "Not on your life. Wild horses couldn't take you away as my co-pilot."

"You're lying."

Fancher shrugged.

"My only hope is that we reach some base where we'll be permanently located for a time. When that happens I'm going to get you in some alley, let you sock me first and then I'm going to beat the living daylights out of you."

"You and who else," Weeks demanded.

Fancher didn't answer. The argument would start all over again. Then they'd be fighting in the office of the bomber. After all, sore as he was, he had sense enough to remember that there were four other lives at stake.

Another long period went by and then Weeks said, "You're more of a guy than I thought you were."

"Save the compliments," Fancher snarled.

Bill Fancher burned with a sense of injustice. His mind went back to Marge Dewey there in Texas, back in their home town. Marge and he had planned to be married after he'd received his commission. But now he could see the letter she had written him about that time.

He had that letter in his pocket. He'd carried it around with him ever since it had come to him.

"I hope this isn't going to be too much of a shock to you, Bill, darling. But it's been so long since you left. It's terribly lonesome here. Well, Charlie Weeks has been taking me around on his leave and I can't just make up my mind, Bill. You see, I was so sure you were the one, and now I don't know."

He knew that much of it by heart. He'd read it over and over often enough to know it by heart. And now, months afterward, when the marriage between him and Marge seemed farther away than ever, Bill Fancher had to have his rival wished on him for a co-pilot.

There was that satisfaction, of course. He was captain of the ship. That was better than having it the other way around.

He thought of the plans he and Marge had made. After the war they'd maybe buy a cattle ranch outside of town and they'd settle down and—

There was a cloud drifting across the path of the bomber and they flew through the wispy fog of it. It was thin stuff and now that they shot out of the other side, grew thinner than the thread of affection that still—if any—bound Marge and him together.

Out of the cloud and out of the blue of the Pacific there was a little strip down in front. Charlie Weeks was already talking about it. He was saying, "Hey, look at that strip," and checking his watch and saying, "That must be the strip we're supposed to

land on for refuel."

Bill Fancher realized he was a little excited about this end of the trip even if Weeks was there beside him. There was uncertainty and excitement here. No telling where they might be sent from here. Fancher knew where he would like to be sent from here only they didn't have any bombs with them.

He was looking down at the little island. It was a little strip in the blue of the Pacific no longer than the runway of a good sized Army Base Field and not much wider than a runway, either.

COMING in, they could see a great deal. They saw ships at a small dock. There was a freighter and a tanker there at the dock. And outside, a little off shore, a Cruiser and two Destroyers were anchored.

"Hey, this looks like some action," Charlie Weeks was forgetting again, but then that was like Charlie to forget for the moment. Then, too, why shouldn't Charlie forget. He was top man. Marge had turned down Bill Fancher for Charlie Weeks. That was plain to Fancher.

The radio man, Gilson, was getting orders from the ground for landing. They could see a flock of other bombers like the one that they flew. These bombers were all parked along the north side of the strip. There were men working about. They were little specks.

The intercommunication telephones were busy now. Getting dope from the engineer for landing. Bill Fancher was guiding the bomber down to a landing on the little strip of runway. To the right, if he missed, he would crash into the bombers parked at the side. To the left, he could, without trying hard, run off into the docks and the freighter or the tanker moored there.

But Bill Fancher was a crack pilot and the bomber came winging down onto the runway, smooth as rolling out a rug. And they turned at a signal from the dispatcher and parked their bomber at the end of the line.

Charlie Weeks stared about the place and grinned. "We won't be here, long," he decided.

Bill Fancher looked about and cursed.

"What's the matter with you?" Weeks demanded.

"Doesn't look like any place a couple of guys could get away for a few minutes to settle an argument," Fancher said.

"That puts you in luck, brother," Weeks told him.

"Don't call me brother, you louse," Fancher rasped.

Weeks got out of the bomber first and Fancher followed him. It's customary for the pilot and co-pilot to walk together. It wasn't that way here. Fancher and Weeks walked their separate ways. But they got together when an officer, the major in command of the post, greeted them and showed them to their quarters.

"You're sleeping just one night here, and then you go on."

"Got any idea where we're going, major?" Weeks asked.

The major nodded. "Yes," he said. That was all.

Five minutes later another bomber came in to land. Fancher and Weeks split up at mess. The other bomber crew came in. Bill Fancher knew the chief pilot, a guy named Drake. They wandered over to the little bar at one end of the quarters shack. Everything here was temporary.

That was what Drake observed about the whole thing.

"Looks like that freighter tied up to the dock brought everything and is waiting to take it away again after we

leave. Got any idea where we're going?"

"No," Fancher said. "I suppose we're going to Russia, though, but it could be anywhere from here with our range."

About ten o'clock that night, Charlie Weeks came in with a wise look on his face. He saw Bill Fancher and he said, jerking his head toward the outside, "There isn't any alley, but it's dark. Care to take a crack at me now?"

"I don't have to go outside for that," Fancher said and he set down his glass and swung.

It was a very short right to the middle and it doubled Charlie Weeks over with a grunt and then Bill Fancher brought his glass hand up from about his waist line and caught Weeks on the chin.

Weeks rocked back on his heels, caught the bar to steady himself and, as Bill Fancher came boring in with a few well chosen uncomplimentary remarks, Weeks let go a straight left jab that snapped Fancher's head back like a bobbing cork on a rough mill pond.

Flying men pulled the two apart, not that they didn't care for a good fight, but the major in charge of the island was having a drink in the corner and was at the moment, rising to come over and see what was coming off.

Fancher and Weeks stood glaring at each other when the major came up. Charlie Weeks was first to break that angry look. Charlie broke out laughing.

"Boy, that was a honey, Bill."

The major looked perplexed.

Bill Fancher nodded, but he didn't speak. He tried to smile. He was catching on.

The major said, "Aren't you Weeks and Fancher, co-pilot and pilot of B-25-346?"

Weeks and Fancher stood very meekly and said, "Yes, sir."

"How is it you two were fighting?" the major demanded. "Don't you get along any better than that together?"

"We were only clowning, sir," Weeks said.

Fancher nodded in agreement.

THE major shook his head. "It didn't look like clowning to me. You should know, men, that the success of a bomber flight depends entirely on the teamwork between all the members of the crew."

Fancher and Weeks nodded and said, "Yes, sir."

The major hesitated. "If I could, I'd change you two, but I can't now."

Bill Fancher forced a grin. He wasn't as good at acting as Charlie Weeks was. He said, "Don't worry about us, Major. We've clowned around like this all of our lives. Just pay no attention to it, sir. And anyway, if Weeks doesn't behave himself, I can put him in his place."

"You and who else?" Weeks demanded—but he laughed.

"You see, sir," Fancher grinned.

The major looked doubtful. "All I can say is that if you were fighting, stop it," the major said and went back to his table.

Someone came in saying, "A bomber brought in mail a while ago and it's all sorted now."

Bill Fancher turned toward the door. Drake turned with him. Charlie Weeks didn't seem interested in the mail. He turned to the bar and ordered a drink.

Outside, Fancher and Drake walked side by side through the twilight of late evening. This was almost in the land of the midnight sun. The evenings in spring and summer were long, but it was not summer yet and the darkness was closing in fast.

Mail was being handed out at headquarters. Letters were arranged in little piles. They hadn't even had time

to set up slots for sorting. There weren't many letters.

Bill Fancher thought about Marge and wondered for the thousandth time if there might be a chance that she had changed her mind again, in his favor. There was always a chance that she might swing back from Charlie to him.

That was his only hope—in reality the only thing in life that was left. He'd been pretty low since that letter a long time ago announcing the change.

"Anything for Bill Fancher?"

The corporal ran through one stack and shook his head.

"Anything for Drake?" the other pilot asked.

There was a letter for Drake. He took it and went over in the corner to read it.

Bill Fancher hesitated. Another idea came into his mind. It wasn't like Bill to do a thing like this, but then he was jealous and jealousy makes changes in humans. He said, "Is there anything for Charlie Weeks? He's my co-pilot. I'll take it over to him."

The corporal ran through another stack and tossed out a letter.

Fancher's heart did a handspring. It was a letter for Charlie Weeks, all right. The same kind of letters that he used to get. Pale pink envelope with a faint scent of carnation. It was addressed in Marge Dewey's hand.

For a moment, Bill Fancher hesitated. The corporal asked, "Anything else, sir?"

"No," Fancher said. "No thanks. That's all—I guess."

He stuck the letter in his pocket and went out. He left Drake there reading his own letter. He went out into the darkness and he took Marge's letter to Weeks out of his pocket and took it between his trembling hands.

His first impulse was to tear that letter into little pieces. So Marge was writing to this guy, Weeks, and she

wasn't writing to him, Bill Fancher. That kind of settled things definitely, he guessed.

But Fancher didn't tear up the letter. Instead, he put it in the inside pocket of his coat and then he went to quarters.

He was just turning in, feeling very low, when an orderly came stomping down the hall. He was knocking on doors calling, "Up at four a.m. Up at four a.m."

Fancher knew what that meant, but it didn't make any impression so far as real significance went. Charlie Weeks came in before he could get to sleep.

"We get up at four a.m.," Charlie said.

"I know," Fancher mumbled.

Neither said anything more to the other. Weeks seemed to be pretty well down in his spirits. He was the same way when he got up next morning, before the sun rose. Charlie wasn't laughing much now. Maybe it was the job ahead, not that anyone knew about that job, yet.

At mess the major appeared before them. Pilots and crew members got up and stood at attention. The major spoke to them in a clear but rather confidential voice.

"I'm going to give you orders this morning," the major said. "If you successfully carry out these orders, the results will electrify the world."

THE place became deathly still as he paused.

"You're taking off in half an hour. Your bombers are fully loaded with bombs and fuel. You will fly about three thousand miles non-stop. Tokyo is the target. And Fuchin, China, your destination. Each plane has specific orders. You will travel according to those orders. Your attacks will be made at the same time. You will go

over and drop your bombs in waves over the city."

Men stood rigid for an instant after that. The surprise was shocking. It took them by surprise. Not a man there but that had suspected they would carry these bombers to Russia. Perhaps they would be fighting in Russia—with the Russians.

But this—this chance to bomb Tokyo—on the way to fight for China. This was too much for the explosive spirit of the American pilot to hold in. As though someone had touched the detonator button, a wild cheer suddenly burst from the throats of the men. Fancher and Weeks had forgotten their fight for the moment and were in there yelling off their heads with the others.

The major nodded when they had stopped cheering.

"Of course this must be treated with complete confidence. If you should be shot down, you are to give not the slightest information as to your take-off, your target or your destination. Is that understood?"

It was.

Men hurried through the rest of their breakfast. There were bets laid as to which bombardier would drop the first bomb on Tokyo. There was excitement, high excitement. The feel of attack was in the air.

For the moment, all sense of the past was forgotten. Fancher and Weeks made their plans for attack—made these with Morton, the bombardier and with Chase, the navigator.

They were working together like a team and then Weeks said, "I'll toss you to see who flies her while we bomb Tokyo."

Fancher looked at him—shot him one of those under the brow glances that had the old hatred in it.

"You'll toss me? Who's running this show, you or me?"

"We're both running it," Weeks said.

"Team work. Remember? Or maybe you have to be boss and wouldn't know about team work."

Then Fancher thought of the letter that was still in his coat pocket. He burned inside with the thought of Marge writing to Weeks and not to him. It was bad enough if she split her affections. But swinging all out to Weeks, that was going too far. Just what he had feared, but now this was proof.

Inwardly, Fancher rebelled. "No, by Gawd," he swore. "You get breaks enough. You get all the breaks. You'll keep your dirty hands and feet off controls while we blast hell out of Tokyo. This is one break I'm handing to myself."

Weeks looked at him with utter disgust.

"Okay," he said. "That's about the way I had you figured out. Bill Fancher, the top man—the soandso that wants everything for himself."

Weeks then stood off, spread his feet wide apart and studied Fancher with complete hatred.

"Some day, brother, I'm going to get you alone in that alley yet. Some day I'm going to get you alone and I'm going to pound that smug face off the front of your head."

The sound to cockpits came. No time for further argument except on the run. Now the pilot and co-pilot were walking to their bomber as was customary. But they were farther away from each other in mind and team spirit than ever before.

Everything was ready when they climbed into the office. Everything is always ready in a bomber when the pilots arrive. They are usually the last to climb in and close the door.

The door closed now behind these two enemies. The radio man and the navigator were busy. The engineer and the bombardier were getting set.

Orders and checks were flying over the intercommunication telephone system of the bomber.

The bombardier had his secret bomb sight in place and adjusted. Everything in readiness.

Fancher took his seat on the left and Weeks on the right. Weeks was checking instruments, making his written reports. Fancher was grim, sitting behind his controls and waiting for the signal.

The signal came and he pushed forward the throttle cluster. Other bombers were thundering out ahead of them. More were waiting behind to come roaring down the runway and take the air.

The engines of their big egg-layer droned and the giant propellers whipped the heavy-loaded bomber down the runway. Now they were in the air, following the tails of the other bombers as they thundered their way toward Tokyo.

Checking and correcting courses. Everything in order. Robot pilot was taking over and Bill Fancher relaxed.

ONCE more the blue of the north Pacific. Not once had they sighted a ship or a living thing since leaving the field below the slopes of Mount Rainier.

Pretty smart idea, this flying in bombers to China and delivering eggs to Japan on the way. Clever boys, these fellows who make our battle plans.

Fancher didn't even look at Weeks. He had a feeling that Weeks glanced at him now and then. The hours rolled by. Sealed orders said they would swarm over Tokyo at the noon hour. Nice time to hit that match stick town with bombs. Nice time to break morale and throw the islands into an uproar.

Weeks said, "You still going to fly her over Tokyo?"

Fancher nodded. But there was

something queer in Weeks' voice. Something that was almost pleading in it. He looked at Weeks now.

"What the hell do you want, everything?" Weeks asked.

"You're a funny guy to make a crack like that," Fancher said. "Certainly I'm doing the flying over Tokyo."

Weeks set his mouth in a straight line and cursed under his breath. "You're a smug soandso, Fancher. Boy, what a hog."

And they roared near to their target and Fancher got thinking that maybe Weeks was right and he was a hog and this was war. One shouldn't let a girl interfere.

The voice of the engineer came in the ear phones.

"Cutting back engines for dive to low altitude."

Fancher glanced at his watch. That was the sign they were near Tokyo.

Fancher turned to Weeks. He didn't understand just why he said it, but he said, "Okay, Charlie. You fly her over Tokyo."

Weeks looked at him as if he was ready to drop dead. His mouth lowered. He said, "Are you kidding?"

"Go ahead and fly it—from now on," Fancher said. "Your honor."

He could do something for Marge. He could make Marge doubly proud of the guy she was going to marry.

They could see the line of harbor ahead and they were very low. All the bombers were gathering for the attack, spreading out to their appointed positions so that Tokyo would be spread at the most vulnerable points.

Roaring in at full speed, they came.

Fancher could hear through his phones as the bombardier guided Weeks toward their special target. Fancher could see the bombardier up in the green house pressing a switch. He could tell by the slight reaction of the bomber that the bomb bay doors were open.

"Bomb-bay doors open?" Weeks was checking on the phone.

"Open," Morton sang back.

Now Morton was guiding some more. He was watching through his bomb sight and guiding Weeks on the course he must follow to hit the objective.

Through the phones came the Tokyo radio in English. Propaganda stuff. "Of one thing we are sure. We are so heavily protected on our island stronghold that we of Japan need have no fear of Americans bombing us. They can never reach our—"

The voice broke off as the first bombs fell. And now the voice resumed. The voice was full of the jitters and it was saying, "Ladies and gentlemen: Tokyo is being bombed. Part of the city is on fire already. We are being bombed. Seek shelter. Run for your lives."

"Give 'em hell," Weeks was yelling through his throat mike!

Bombs were dropping and the entire city of Tokyo was being spotted with flame spurts and with blasts.

Zing! Something came crashing through the side of the office and next Bill Fancher grabbed his shoulder and bent over with pain.

Charlie Weeks jerked his head round and stared at Fancher.

"Hit, Bill?" A silly question, like people ask in times of stress.

"In the shoulder."

"Fly her with your good arm. I'll take a squint at your shoulder."

CHARLIE WEEKS was coming from his seat, leaning over the top of Bill Fancher's head so he could look down on the left shoulder.

Weeks took hold of a piece of shrapnel steel sticking in Fancher's shoulder flesh. Without warning, he yanked it out.

Fancher's face went white. He hung on to the wheel with one hand. Weeks took bandage and stopped the flow of

blood in time.

Bombs gone. Bombers coming on. On, over Japan and over in across the Sea of Japan toward China.

The man in the tail said through the phones, "Jap Zeros are trying to catch us but they haven't got a chance."

All in the clear again. Weeks took over controls and spoke to Chase through the phones. "Come up and get Fancher. He looks shot."

Fancher grinned. "I'm okay," he said. "Just weak."

"Take him back and lay him down and take a good look at that wound. Put another dressing on it."

Chase came up and helped Fancher out of his seat and back.

They had landed at the airdrome near Fuchin. Fancher was feeling better as the surgeon of the dressing station made further repairs to his shoulder. "Merely a bad flesh wound," the surgeon said. "Take care of it and it will be as good as ever in a few weeks."

Weeks was there waiting for him. Outside, they paused and looked at the sun going down beyond the Yangtze River. Bill Fancher slowly, thoughtfully sat down on an engine crate.

He said, "Charlie, that was damn swell of you to catch this wound when you did, even if you did have to split the honor of flying her over Tokyo."

Charlie shrugged and looked away. "Why shouldn't I split it?"

"Maybe you shouldn't, if you knew," Bill said. "I've got a confession to make to you, you lug. Last night on Akku—"

"Now wait a minute," Weeks said. "If there's going to be any confessing around here, I'll do it. Bill, you might as well know that ever since I had the first date with Marge Dewey I've been jealous as hell of you. She thinks you're tops. She said so."

Bill Fancher stared in amazement. "Me?"

"You!" Weeks nodded. "Well, as I say, I've been jealous as hell, and last night on Akku I was there at headquarters when they brought the mail. The first letter they sorted out was for you. It was from Marge. I said I'd give it to you. It made me burn. So I stuck it in my pocket and got the hell out of there. When I got to the bar you made me sore and I said I'd be damned if you'd ever get that letter. Anyway, I'm sorry and here it is."

Weeks handed Fancher the letter and it smelled of carnation.

Then Fancher remembered the other letter and he said, "Well, I've got a confession to make to you, Charlie. I went for the mail after you'd got to the bar and there wasn't anything for me. So I asked for you and this letter had come. I swore you'd never get it."

He handed it over.

Weeks took the letter and turned it over in his hand. "Looks and smells just like yours."

"It came from Marge, too, of course," Fancher said.

Both pilots were suddenly tearing open their letters and reading them. Charlie Weeks exploded angrily. "Hey, what goes on? This letter of mine is a carbon copy."

"Yeah," Bill Fancher said drily. "I guess it's a carbon copy of mine. Look what she says."

Dear Bill and Charlie:

I hope you will understand that it has been very lonely here without either of you. That is why I have married Mr. John Marshall of the draft board.

Sincerely,

Marge

Charlie Weeks looked at Bill Fancher and he said, "Do you guess they sell alcoholic beverages in China?"

"I don't know for sure," Bill Fancher said, getting up from the engine crate, "but we're damn soon going to find out."

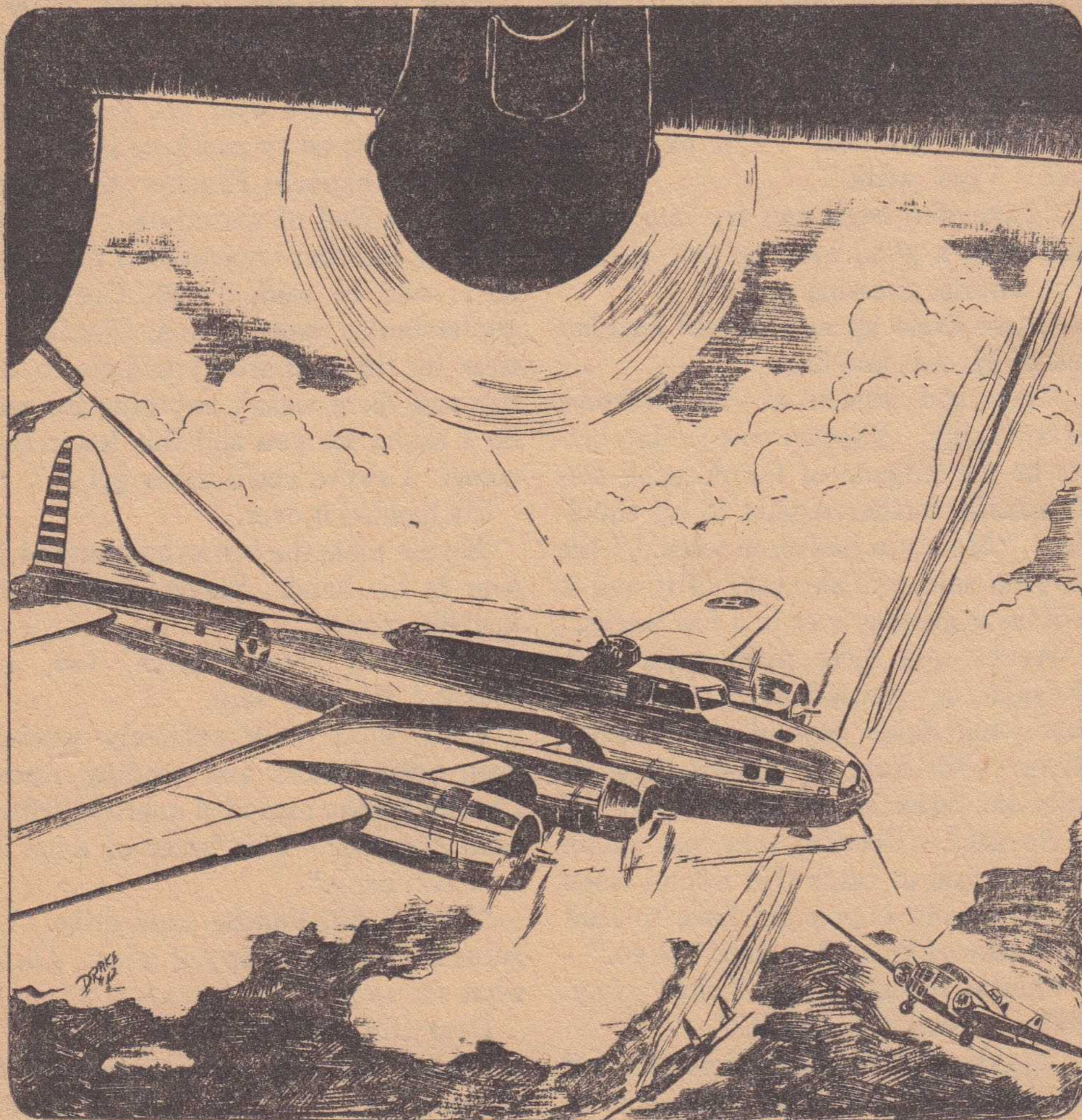
The Phantom Yank Ace

By

ALLAN K. ECHOLS

Author of "Yanks—Give Them Hell!" etc.

Even a veteran air-war ace can fight a big bomber as though it were a lightning-fast P-40 only so long!



They came at him from left and right, pouring deadly fire into him!

CHAPTER I

THE great Boeing bomber with its four motors roaring sweetly had been on a course east of south out of Panama for almost two monotonous hours, with nothing below it but four miles of air and a very blue Pacific ocean whose swells were flattened to glass by the altitude.

Inside the fortress Spike Donovan watched the horizon with his one good eye, the other one, which had been shot out by a Central American revolutionary several years before, being covered with a black patch. That was before he had established his freight lines through, or more correctly, over the jungles.

Just as he caught sight of the horizon

of mountains ahead, he heard the voice in his earphones. Spike didn't like those cultured tones, which seemed to continue reminding him of his lack of a college diploma. The voice came from the bomber alongside, commanded by Captain Wetherford Taylor, Jr., fresh out of Boston.

"We are to bear in mind, Lieutenant Donovan, that we are flying over neutral territory, or will be when we reach the coastline, and that we have no business over it, from a legal standpoint. The Republic of San Paulo is neutral in this war."

Spike Donovan would never be a good service man because he was accustomed to thinking—and talking—for himself, and regulations were non-existent to him. Captain Taylor was in command of this flight, in search of three bombers which had disappeared within recent weeks in this direction, and Donovan should have said, "Yes, sir," right politely.

But he didn't. He said, "This territory might be technically neutral, but there's something about it that stinks. We're here to look for some ships, and that's what I'm doing."

"Orders are—"

"And to hell with what orders are. I know this country, and I know what's going on—"

"Orders—"

That was as far as he got. He felt a jolt through the heavy wheel in his hand, and the steering yoke tried to jump out of his grasp. As it was, the wheel hit him in the chest as the heavy ship nosed upward, and almost knocked the breath out of him. Behind him, Dud Malone, one of his gunners, lost his footing and fell on his face on the deck.

Spike fought the heavy controls, shoved the wheel off his chest and leveled off the nose of the ship with the horizon, then shoved the left wing

down. And only then did he get a chance to take a look around.

His left wing had a jagged hole in it and a square yard of the stressed aluminum skin had whipped off in the terrific wind created by his three-hundred-mile pace, and had flown aft like a piece of paper thrown out of a train window. The skeleton frame work at the wing tip was bare.

Ben Davis, "Apples" to the gang, and co-pilot who sat next to Spike, shouted, "Somebody's telling us howdy!"

Spike spiraled the ship, looked downward to the bright blue water—and saw a small fishing boat, hardly a speck in the vast blue carpet. And then he saw a puff of white smoke come from the foredeck of the trawler. Anti-aircraft!

This time the winged fortress *did* jump out of its pants. A three-inch explosive shell knocked the outer, port-side engine into a mess of flying fragments—and its whirling prop left the ship and went spinning forward and down, a shining mass of whirling chromium relieved of all restraint and headed for the bottom of the tropic sea.

The remains of the engine nacelle whipped in the wind and tore off, to sail backward, leaving a gaping, ragged wound where the fifteen-hundred horses had once nestled, and leaving the task of keeping the ship in the air to the remaining three motors.

Spike Donovan fought the controls, readjusted his stabilizer and finally got the ship righted once more. Apples Davis helped him at the wheel.

"That's not San Paulo's coast patrol," he shouted. "We're not within the limits of their waters yet."

"Of course not! Look!" Spike shouted, as he spiraled once more. "See that?"

Davis saw it—a long gray shadow, the dark line of an object under the

water. "Sub!" he shouted. "That's a Jap refueling or repairing him." He shouted again into his transmitter, and back in the rear compartment Skinny Stein felt the cold iron of bomb levers under his hand. "We're going downstairs, Skinny," he yelled. "And don't miss him."

THE Boston voice came through the interplane phones. "Lieutenant Donovan, hold your altitude and reverse your course. We're heading back for Panama."

"Like hell we are," Donovan shouted back. "You go on if you want to."

"Those are orders," Captain Taylor snapped. "We are over a neutral—"

"Neutral, hell. Watch this."

Spike Donovan spiraled the big ship downward in a five-mile circle around the tiny craft, while Dud Malone fired a burst of tracers from the right port, then moved over and tested the machine guns on the left. Skinny checked the noses of a couple of bombs, set the brass nose caps afresh and went back to his levers while Spike leveled off, an even thousand feet above the water.

"Skinny can't miss him now," he yelled at Davis.

"And they can't miss us," Davis grinned back at him. "But boy, it's worth it."

Davis was almost right, too right, as the little fishing trawler notified them. That little fake fishing boat was a nest of anti-aircraft weapons. Machine guns came out of portholes, the sides of a deckhouse fell away and revealed a three-inch ack-ack of the rapid-fire variety, which went into action. A curtain of lead met the oncoming bomber—which had been ordered home!

Spike kept the heavy machine on a straight course as he sailed over the trawler, kept his eyes on the point to the starboard of it where he had seen the shadow in the water. From this

lower altitude the form of the submerged Jap pigboat could not be seen, but it was certain to be resting on the shallow bottom, not moving.

The bombardier in the nose of the ship, with his eye blued, held a finger over a button, then suddenly pressed it downward. A bomb bay in the belly of the plane opened for a moment and a pair of thousand-pound fish headed for the deep in a beautiful arc of a dive.

Spike threw the ship around just as the bombs hit the water, sending up silver jets. Then followed the explosion; tons of water rose into the air and settled back with gentle ease. Concentric circles of foamy waves spread outward, as though a giant had thrown a boulder into a still pool.

The little trawler floated upward into the air, ever so gently—and parted into a thousand splintered pieces of debris which floated downward and bobbed around in the water.

Spike had his ship around in another circle now, and set a second straight course toward the wreckage. And this time two more bombs shot downward in their beautiful arcs, and lifted more tons of the blue Pacific geysered upward and floated down again.

And then the water wasn't so beautiful any more. Dirty black oil seeped to the surface and flattened it out, and the foam of sulfuric acid made a great lather on the surface, and the lather was flecked with wreckage of all kinds. It was a messy piece of ocean—and there was one less Japanese sub lurking on the shores of America, and one less of those fishing boats which carried cargoes of diesel oil instead of fish.

It was the end of the sub and its tender—but it was the end of the bomb load in the Boeing. This, however, was a help, for with one engine gone and the ship out of balance, it lightened it by two tons, and gave it greater maneuver-

ability.

"Well, that's that," Davis opined. "I wondered what happened to Boston?"

"Is it?" Spike gritted. "Well, take a look at that circus parading out of that cloud bank to the left. See the pants on those wheels?"

The parade was three triads of trim light fighter ships approaching from slightly to the rear of left—all ships without retracted landing gear.

"This is a mighty busy neutral country, if you ask me," Davis said. "I'm beginning to believe they don't want us to visit them a little bit."

"Give the boys a hand with the guns," Spike answered. "Or else we'll settle here—thirty fathoms deep."

Spike circled around, headed toward the distant mountains now visible back of the coast line, and gave the three motors all they had in the way of speed. He looked back and above him, and the sight was not reassuring.

Those nine fighters had a hundred miles an hour to the good on him in the way of speed. And they meant business. They had already broken formation and were coming at him from nine directions at the same time.

"That's what's happened to the boys who came here before," Spike shouted into his transmitter. "If you boys want to go home do your stuff."

THE big crippled bomber was like a dying animal being brought down by hungry wolves. Nine of the vicious little animals flew rings around the big ship, streams of day tracers pencil-ing lines of death toward it from every direction. Spike couldn't hear the roar of their machine guns above the sound of his own motors, but he saw holes in the wings, saw the glass on his instruments shatter into a thousand splinters.

He felt something sticky by his ear, under his helmet, and knew a bullet had nicked him somewhere. He felt

the jolt as the cannon in the nose barked, he thumbed the buttons on half a dozen machine guns along the entering edges of his wings, and knew that he was throwing a cone of fire and lead four hundred feet ahead of him that no Jap ship could live through.

He fought the big bomber as though it were a trim little P40 fighter.

But he knew this was not the day of miracles, and that a bomber did not do these things forever and live through it. Somewhere down in front in the nose of the ship he had a friend, and back at the bays and in the tail turret there were other guns on his ship that were working for all they were worth. His ship bristled with guns—but it did not have the maneuverability to fight these little wolves except defensively.

He was eating up the miles now toward those distant mountains, high over a green carpet which would be the Republic of San Paulo. He caught every ship which got in front of him—and he got two of them himself.

They came up under his belly, and from left and from right, and they poured their deadly fire into him—and he limped on toward the mountains, like a crippled animal going home to die.

He saw one after another of those nine fighters get too close, saw them burst into flame, and lead a comet-like stream of white smoke and fire down to the ground and bounce and then lie there on the green carpet and burn up. He saw one of them get hit squarely in the gas tank by a tracer or explosive bullet and burst into a million pieces like a firecracker.

But there were still three or four of them following him when he saw a pass through the mountains. He had been losing altitude, and he knew that he could not climb over those white-topped peaks. He headed for the pass, and saw that a river ran through the

bottom of it—a regular water-gap as the geographers called it. He had less than five hundred feet when he went through that gap, and the mountains rose sheer on both sides of him. Sometimes it seemed that his wingspread was too wide for him to get through the narrow cliffs, and sometimes it seemed as though he hadn't enough power left to keep him above the surface of the broad, muddy river.

And at all times it seemed that within the next few seconds those remaining fighters would blow him out of the air.

He hadn't forgotten the boys scattered around in the big ship, but he didn't have time to even wonder what had happened to them. He knew they were there, but whether any of them were alive or not he had no way of knowing. There weren't any more enemy ships falling, and he couldn't hear his own guns over the roar of his motors. He felt all alone here between the sides of those steep mountains in this South American republic.

This neutral republic! Neutral, hell! No wonder so many boys hadn't come back from patrolling these waters along the shore of this little-known country hugging the mountains and the shoreline between Colombia and Ecuador, two friendly nations.

The river took a sudden turn. Straight ahead of him were the walls of the canyon, like a curtain through which he would have to pass. Spike sat taut, gripping his wheel with every ounce of his strength as he approached the short turn. Here was a perfect place to pile up.

The right wall of the canyon almost smacked him in the face, so short was the turn. Spike twisted the wheel, brought the left wing down, and yanked the wheel back into the pit of his stomach. The big ship took it standing on one wing, and as Spike pulled out and

leveled off the ship, he saw that he had got through the barrier of the mountains and was skimming over a high plateau, hardly more than tree-top high above a wide and long cultivated field.

He called back through his phones. "We're setting down, boys. Hold your hats." He hadn't had time to look back, and had no idea whether those enemy fighters were following him or not. And he had completely forgotten Captain Taylor. He had no idea what had happened to him in the fracas.

He skimmed over the cultivated farm, and saw that it might be more than a section of land—a mile on a side—cleared out of the jungle growth completely surrounding it. It was enclosed in a high, barbed wire fence and as he skimmed over it he saw a long row of buildings at the far end, low pine structures, barns, and three windmills.

BUT the one thing that attracted him was a series of three other types of windmills, little propellers, like two-blade airplane props, spinning in the wind atop high metal towers.

These were Windchargers, which manufactured electricity in as small as a seven-mile breeze. The props were fastened to generators atop the towers, the wind turned the generators and nature furnished electricity, enough to run electric lights—or a radio. Even a short wave radio!

Spike skimmed the place because there was no way of avoiding it, and hedgehopped over the trees past the big farm. He did not want to land on this cleared ground—nor within too close reach of it. He knew about such farms hereabouts, and he didn't want to squat on one now.

He landed his ship in an open patch five miles further on, in scrub which his ship sheared off as though it were

a monstrous razor blade. He didn't even drop his landing wheels, but deliberately set the ship down flat on her belly—and saved some lives in that crash landing.

Spike crawled out of the ship as he shouted, "Anybody alive?"

Ben Davis came out of a side door with blood streaming down the side of his face and a sub machine gun cradled in his arm. Skinny Stein followed, his curly blond hair matted with blood and his ripped helmet in his hand. Dud Malone piled out, and they all stood around the big ship resting on her belly, a camouflaged, broken bird.

"Where's Wilowski?" Skinny asked.

Spike's jaws tightened, and every man of them was silent as they went forward to the nose of the ship, where Wilowski had been with his camera.

They found Wilowski dead, the big camera gripped in both hands, and his head lolling forward on it. A bullet had got him in the act of snapping his last picture. The Polish boy from Brooklyn, who had been a tabloid newspaper's "one-man art department" had died as he had lived—getting the picture.

Skinny Stein swore. "Think we can bury—"

He got no further. A roar which quickly rose to a scream sent them scurrying. Spike looked up, saw three small fighter planes swooping down over the wreckage, and shouted:

"Duck!"

Even as a hail of machinegun bullets sprinkled the wrecked bomber, the four crewmen dived for the shelter of trees big enough to shelter them from the rain of lead, and tried to make their bodies shrink small enough for concealment.

These three hornets which had swooped down on them with machine-

guns going full blast ripped the bomber until its wings looked like a sieve. They circled, one after another, and sprayed it again and again, while Spike and his three companions crouched down in their hiding places.

Evidently satisfied at last that no human being could still be alive in the wreck, the three roaring fighters climbed and circled away. As their motors died in the distance, Spike got busy.

"Let's get out of here in a hurry," he said. He dug through the heavy leather of his flying suit and brought out a paper with a map sketched on it. "We've got to find our way through this jungle to a point about another five miles up from here—on the bank of a creek that runs into that river we flew over. Better ditch some of that load we're carrying."

While the four men, hidden in the depth of the jungle, pulled off their leather garments, Ben Davis asked, "Listen here, Spike. What the hell's this all about? This smells like we're doing more than just scouting for a couple of lost ships."

"Sure," Skinny Stein added, with one leg out of his leather pants. "What's this about you telling Boston to go to hell, when he was in command of the flight? You wouldn't be just trying to get us all kicked out of the service, would you?"

SPIKE DONOVAN looked at the three men with that half-smile which constantly hovered over his lean, battered face. Spike wasn't very good to look at, what with that black patch over the socket where one eye had been, and his leathery-skinned face which was burned almost black from his years in the jungle and in the air over it. He was lean himself, but his muscles were rawhide. He seemed casual, almost lazy in his movements,

but he had a way of doing the things he started to do, and his casualness did not reduce the amount of work he could do, but made it possible for him to do more than half a dozen men—because he never seemed to need rest. Spike was a kind of mystery to most of those who knew him, as though he had taken on much of the mystery of the jungle he had made his home.

And neither of those in his crew knew him very well, for this was the first time they had flown together as a crew. Back on the station they had been singled out yesterday and given orders to report to Spike. One man from one crew, one from another. And when Spike saw who they were he was satisfied, for he saw that he had been given the four toughest men on the station.

Dud Malone could practically recite the table of logarithms from memory, and he was the best navigator in the Canal Zone. Not to mention that he was the amateur champion with the gloves, the pistol champion, and that he had flown as much time as Spike himself. He was a navigator, but now he was a gunner.

And Ben Davis—Old Apples was a range-bred flying man who was too tough to get hurt when he had any chance at all. They say he migrated to the Canal Zone before the war a few jumps ahead of a sheriff with a warrant charging him with having killed a man with his bare hands.

Skinny Stein had two accomplishments which Spike now liked. One was that he had managed to work his way through college driving a New York taxi, and the other was that he could drop a bomb into a teacup from twenty thousand feet. Skinny would fight a buzz saw with one hand tied behind him. Give him a monkey wrench and he would fight the whole Japanese Army.

These were the men that Spike looked at speculatively. As for himself, Spike had established a freight line over the jungles of Central America, and considering the difficulties of building a flying service in such a place, that told practically the whole story. It meant that there was no such a word as impossible in his vocabulary, it meant that he didn't need anybody to tell him what to do, nor how to do it. It meant, more than anything else, that he was a law practically to himself.

He rolled up his flying togs and stuffed them under a juniper bush, and the men followed suit.

"I'll tell you while we're moving," he said. "You asked for it, so here's what you let yourselves in for by having a reputation for being a lawless bunch of tough lugs. We're here to commit suicide. But first we've got to contact a rubber buyer named Gringo Tanner. He's an American that has a trading post up one of these creeks. Let's move."

CHAPTER II

SPIKE took a last look at the sketch map in his hand, studied the compass on his wristwatch strap and set out through the jungle, trailed by the other three.

"I knew something was up," Davis said. "When they told us to be sure to have sidearms and extra ammunition. Let's have it."

"Here it is," Spike said, "and you can't back out now. You've been transferred to G-2—Intelligence. And we're here in a neutral country for the express purpose of violating its neutrality. Did you recognize that farm back there?"

Ben Davis answered, "It looked just like a good field of Spring oats to me,

and a mighty nice, level field at that."

"You guys ought to try reading the paper once in a while. Then you'd know something."

"Like whether the Dodgers are going to win the pennant?" Skinny Stein asked.

"Like that commission of congressmen who investigated Axis activities in South America last year. If you had read that you'd know what that oat field is. It's a flying field. Under that green carpet is a carpet of steel slats that the oats grow through. That makes it solid even in muddy weather, and if a section was bombed another section could be put in to replace it. The oats are just camouflage."

"Pretty—but why?"

"The answer is all those Allied merchantmen which have been torpedoed by subs just outside the Gulf of Panama. This is one of their bases. A Dutchman came in here years ago and bought up the land, and imported Jap laborers, who were in fact Jap submarine technicians and flyers. Those little fishing schooners like the one we dusted a while ago brought in diesel oil and supplies, and now feed it out to the subs. Those fighters, and probably a few light bombers, spot lone merchantmen and the subs finish them off."

"As well as any of us who happen to stumble on the secret," Davis grunted. "But where'd you learn all this?"

"From Intelligence, of course, who in turn learned it from Tanner, who has a shortwave set and has kept us in touch with what he could learn. But something has gone wrong somewhere."

Dud Malone pushed around a clump of bush, then summed it up. "I get it. You disobey Boston's orders and we come in here and raise hell. Then if there's an international squawk we're the goats."

"You *have* got a little brains, haven't

you?" Spike grinned. "You're right—if we come out alive."

Skinny Stein fought a swarm of insects around his face and asked. "Okay by me. What do we do?"

"Nothing," Spike assured him. "Just single-handedly destroy this whole Axis nest, try to capture this von Spiegel who's the head of it, destroy the oil dump and the ships, find out everything old von is up to, and then go home."

"That's a relief. I thought we were in for a *real* job," Davis drawled. "We ought to be able to pick up a barn door somewhere to fly home on."

They worked single-file through the jungle until they came to the bank of a creek, and followed the bank upward to a shoal. Back up from the riffles where the shallow water ran over a gravelly shallows, Spike saw a low pine building covered with rusty tin. A man in white ducks and stripped to his undershirt got up off a bench and came to meet them.

Alongside the shack were piles of round, gray balls the size of basketballs, with sticks running through each and sticking out like the sticks in a small fishing float. Crude rubber, brought in by the natives to exchange for trade goods.

The man coming down the green-lined path was tall and muscular, and the face under his white helmet was burned to a mahogany brown. He shook hands with Spike.

"You're the flyers from the Canal Zone who crashed down the creek, I suppose? I'm Tanner."

"Yeah," Spike answered. "How'd you find out about it so soon?"

The man smiled a white-toothed smile. "I've got ways of listening in on messages. I've been expecting someone from the States—"

"We're them," Spike said. "I'd like you to send a message back right away. I understand you've got a shortwave

set?"

"Sure," the man replied. "Come on. It's up in the woods a piece. Hidden, you know. It wouldn't do to have it around—"

"Of course. But we want to get this message right out. One of our ships will probably report us downed—"

"No he won't," the other replied. "You see, he followed you in, and is down himself."

THE man led them up a path to another corrugated iron hut concealed in the depths of the jungle. "See that big Brazilnut tree?" he asked. "My antenna runs up that. Clever, what?"

He led them into the shack, hardly more than twelve feet square. A Delco motor stood in one corner beside cases of gasoline, and across the other side was a bench covered with radio instruments. The man sat down at a bug. "All right, what's the message?"

"You know their call," Spike said. "Tell them we're down but alive."

The Delco motor hummed, the generator started a quiet buzzing sound, and the man flicked open the key under his fingers. The instrument started clicking a dot and dash code.

And then Spike Donovan doubled up his fist and crashed it into the man's jaw, knocking him off the keg on which he sat, and across the room, where he landed on his back in the corner and lay groaning and dazed.

"What the hell?" Skinny barked.

"Put your gun on him—quick!" Spike snapped. "That's not Tanner. He's part of that German outfit!"

Ben Davis whistled in surprise and while Skinny kept the man covered, Davis took his gun and jerked him up into a sitting position. "You sure this isn't Tanner?" he asked.

"Don't you think I know Tanner by sight?" Spike answered. "I've been flying these jungles five years, and I

know every white man in it that ever had occasion to fly a package or a letter in or out. This is the answer to what's gone wrong. They've done something to Tanner, and this hombre has been taking his place, giving us false information. Now we've got another job—finding Tanner, if he's still alive."

"We'll get a day's work out of this yet," Dud Malone opined. "Now what do we do?"

"Go take over that flying field—"

"Not yet we don't," Davis drawled. "Here's a reception committee."

Davis was looking out the foot-square window. Now he brought his automatic and crashed the glass out of the window. "Japs," he announced calmly. "In dungarees and rifles. Howdy, you yellowbellies. Glad to see you."

He shot four times in deliberate succession. Then the jungle jumped up and roared as a dozen rifles and machine guns surrounding the shack spoke in unison. A hundred bullet holes let pinpoints of light into the radio shack as the four flyers dropped to the floor in instant caution.

"Yea boy, you started something," Skinny Stein shouted above the din of lead on the steel walls. "Now how are we going to get out of this?"

"Who said we were going to get out?" Malone growled. "This is what we came for, ain't it?"

Stein was the only one who had a machine gun, the others having only their pistols. Spike lay on the clay floor a moment, thinking, then said:

"Gimme that Tommy, Skinny. I'll lead the way, and we'll crawl out the door. Then jump to your feet and duck for the trees. If we get separated, meet me just at dark at the northeast corner of that farm fence."

"Jeez," Skinny answered. "You mean we're going out in the face of this

fire? No wonder they call you nuts."

"What else can we do?" Spike snapped. "Stay here and be shot like fish in a barrel? Gimme that gun."

"Nuts to you. I'm leading this parade. I brought this chopper, and I'm taking it back. Come on if you're going with me, lugs."

He started crawling across the room toward the door, while bullets from the outside cut through the steel sides of the shack like bullets through paper, and sent radio parts and flying steel ricochetting through the room. "Everybody ready?" he asked, looking back. "Hey, Apples, coming?"

Ben Davis lay on the floor on his side, and he had not moved with the rest. His voice was husky when he answered. "No. You guys go on. I stopped one."

Spike crawled over to him, turned him over on his back. The lean Texan had his hand to his throat, trying to stop the flow of blood from a hole which had cut the jugular vein. Blood throbbed out with every pump of his sturdy heart, and already his eyes were becoming set. He looked at Spike, rubbed his hand over a second bullet hole in his chest.

"Glad I got to go on a job with you," he said, and his voice was weaker. "You hombres are all right to ride the river with. Now go on, before it's too late."

"Hell, we're not walking out on you—"

"The hell you're not. I'm on my way out now. Get going before some more of those yellowbellies join the party—and good luck to you, guy. Scram—beat it—I'm finished. . . ." A bloody froth was now at the corners of his mouth.

SPIKE took a deep breath, saw that the Texan would be dead in a matter of minutes.

Skinny looked at him and said, "We

can't leave a guy like that—"

"—if we were on our own," Spike said gruffly. "But we've got a job to do. We can't do him any good—"

"You're right," Skinny said. "Le's go."

Afterward, Spike could not report the details of that escape from the shack. Cooped up in a twelve-foot tin box, surrounded by rifles and machine guns pouring a lethal hail of lead through it, those three remaining men had little time to remember details.

Skinny and Spike, and Dud beside them, reached the narrow door on hands and knees, and with their own guns in their hands. Then Spike shouted, "Le's go!" and they jumped to their feet shooting, and racing for the edge of the clearing twenty feet away.

Four Japs in khaki shorts and undershirts barred their path with raised rifles. The three flyers poured a withering load of lead into them and four yellow faces buried themselves in the dust of the trail. The four white men bore down on them, jumped over their prostrate bodies and kept running toward the storehouse.

They reached the building at the water's edge and got behind it, while their own pistols had reduced the fire against them to some extent. They stopped there and reloaded, and just as they had thrust new clips into their automatics—two clumps of Japs came running around the house, one from each side, their bare brown feet pattering in the dirt.

The hot jungle air danced with a blaze of gunfire, and Spike and Dud, back to back, shot slowly and steadily, each intent on his nine bullets each finding its mark. There wouldn't be much time to reload this time—out there in the open.

It was the ex-taxi driver who did the job neatly. Clinging to the sub-machine gun he had nursed through the

jungle, he bore down on the group to the left with utter disregard for their return fire. He sprayed lead across them, and his narrow, pinched face wore a broad smile as the gun danced in his hand. He was within five feet of them when the last Jap fell and clawed at the earth like he was digging his own grave with his fingernails.

Then Skinny turned and started on the bunch which had rounded the opposite corner of the house. He had killed six of them, and the last of them had fallen, when one of the dying Japs raised up, lifted his rifle with the butt still resting in the black earth, and carefully aimed it.

The Jap pulled the trigger of his gun just as Spike shot him dead.

But he had made a lucky suicide shot. The Jap bullet hit Skinny Stein right between the eyes. Skinny swayed slightly on his feet, the machine gun dribbled from his dead hand slowly, and then Skinny's knees buckled and he dropped to the ground gently. Skinny was dead when he came to rest, and he did not move.

But with Skinny's sudden death also came a sudden hush, for Skinny's chopper had cut down the last of this small group of Japs who had evidently been hidden here to cover the German who was impersonating Tanner.

Spike picked up the machine gun and looked down at the boy from the slums of New York. "Poor kid," he said. "He wanted to live until Fall so he could see how the Dodgers made out in the pennant race."

"Yeah," Dud Malone said huskily. "It's tough. But we still have work to do. Now what?"

Spike reloaded the Tommy gun. "There's a canoe down on the creek. We can take that and float downstream. It passes a corner of that field, according to the sketch. Ready?"

Spike kept the machine gun ready

for action and Malone followed him, covering their rear while they made their way down the creek bank to the canoe.

As they floated down, Malone asked, "What's the plan?"

Spike guided the canoe down the swift stream with a paddle at the rear. He was quiet for a moment, and then said:

"I was planning to hide out until night, then scout around those buildings we saw before we landed. But it appears now that they knew everything that had happened, so they'll be waiting for us."

"They probably will have the place guarded airtight tonight," Malone agreed.

"Right! So we won't wait. We'll bust in on 'em now as soon as we get there!"

Dud Malone was a man who didn't know fear, but this calm announcement staggered him. "You mean that we're going to raid a sub base and air field—just the two of us in broad daylight? You haven't got a touch of the sun, have you?"

"You can wait back in the woods if you want to," Spike grinned at him. "But I figure it this way. They've got to have guards at night, but this afternoon they'll have all hands out looking for us. The one thing they won't figure on us doing is to stick our noses around their barracks in the daylight. So—that's what we *will* do. We can get practically up to the buildings through the jungle without being seen—and we'll just have to depend on luck for the rest. You can wait—"

"To hell with that," Malone answered quickly. "You've got the damndest kind of reasoning machine I ever met—but I think you're right. We haven't got a thing to lose but our lives, and they aren't worth a cigar store coupon right now anyway."

SPIKE guided the canoe down a slight rapids, caught it as it tried to twist in a small whirlpool, and when he had righted it he said, "I don't want you to get me wrong, Malone. There was nothing we could do for Skinny or Apples. If there had been, I would have stayed with them. But I figure it like this, each one of us is just one guy, but this damned rat's nest we're after is killing thousands—by interfering with our shipping. Every load of supplies that goes to the bottom just holds up things and allows thousands more to die who might have lived if they had got that stuff. They're more important than the whole five of us—"

"I see what you mean," Malone said quickly. "I don't blame you for leaving Davis, and I know he wouldn't either, when you feel that way about it."

They came around a great bend where the creek flowed into the larger river, and Spike pulled the canoe over to the steep bank, dark with the shade of the tropic trees above, and damp with the lapping water.

"Grab that limb sticking out over the water," Spike told him as he approached the bank.

Malone stood up, balanced himself in the canoe and grabbed at a limb the size of his thigh.

The limb twisted and turned, a gray, writhing mass. A gigantic snake head lifted itself off the limb a distance of two feet, then the twenty-foot anaconda slithered off into the water and disappeared. In one moment Malone had grasped the body of a watersnake as big around as his leg, and in another second the gigantic reptile was gone.

Malone flopped down into the seat of the canoe and put his head between his two hands. He was white around the collar as Spike shoved the canoe up against the bank.

Spike beached the boat and stood

looking at Malone who had not moved nor uttered a word for a full two minutes. Then Spike said, "I know how it is. I tried to walk across a stream on one of them once. They're not dangerous to humans ordinarily."

Malone wiped the perspiration off his forehead weakly. "I don't think I was ever scared before in my life," he confessed. "But if you want to know the truth, that thing scared hell out of me. Let's get on and find a safe place—like that sub base."

They cut up a trail through the undergrowth which led to a corner of the big, green landing field. "Don't touch that fence," Spike cautioned him. "Tanner says that it is electrified. He's been getting fresh meat from the animals that run into it and get electrocuted."

They kept within the protection of the forest as they followed the fence line toward the group of buildings a mile away. Spike said, "Say, did you know that an anaconda is the only snake that actually has hips? It's either been a lizard a long time ago, or was headed toward being one. The skeleton has a definite pelvic—"

"Hey, you. Have you got to give me a lecture on snakeology while we're on the way to the firing squad?"

"It keeps me from making plans," Spike explained, "and plans are dangerous in the jungle. You try to follow them no matter what, and you get into trouble. It's better to wait and see what you face, and then act accordingly."

They reached a point near the cluster of low buildings in the corner of the square nearest the river which flowed down to the sea. They could see two trawlers lying idly grating against an old wooden pier, with a warehouse alongside. To their left were buildings which might have been barns—or warehouses, and others which might have

been dormitories or machine shops. All were within the barbedwire which ran down to the river's very edge.

One building only was outside the electric enclosure. That was a small shack made of sapling poles, perhaps ten feet long by four feet wide. There was a man walking around it, and Spike studied that man.

He was short and dark, and wore khaki shorts and a white undershirt. And he carried a rifle with a bayonet attached, while he circled the building slowly.

Spike said, "Tanner's in that building, and he's still alive."

"How do you make that out?"

"They wouldn't have a single guard around a small building to keep people from breaking *in*, so it must be to keep somebody from breaking *out*!"

"You amaze me, Sherlock. So what do we do?"

"You wait here with that Tommy gun, and for God's sake don't fire it. I'm going to talk to Tanner."

"Just like that, you're going to talk to him. You make it sound so easy."

"Watch me. Here, take the gun."

Spike kicked around through the grass, found what he sought, reached down and came up with a stone in his hand the size of a baseball.

"This is what I was practicing for when I used to hunt squirrels with rocks back in Missouri," he said. "Stay here."

The sentry was behind the building on his round when Spike suddenly ran toward the shack, a hundred feet away, carrying his rock in his hand.

THEN just as the sentry turned the corner, approaching within sight on his rounds, Spike froze in his tracks. He hurled the rock with the speed of lightning and with an aim that would have done Skinny Stein proud. The stone hit the sentry between the eyes

and the little yellow man hit the ground without a sound.

Spike raced the remaining fifty feet to the sentry, picked up his fallen gun and pinned the man to the ground with it, leaving the weapon, butt upward over his chest.

Then he went around to the end of the shack and released a hasp which held the door fastened from the outside. He threw the door open, and as his eyes adjusted themselves to the darkness, he saw a man lying on a pile of gunny sacks in the corner. The man did not move.

Spike went over and examined him. The man wore dirty white slacks and nothing else. His bare feet were bloody, and blood matted his gray hair. His brown face had a week's growth of stubble on it, and there was blood in that as well. The man lay with eyes half-opened staring into nothingness. He did not look up when Spike squatted beside him.

"Tanner," Spike said softly. "Are you all right? This is Spike Donovan. Remember me? Remember that wild night we had at Bogota? Remember those two Spick sisters at Barranquilla?"

The man on the dirt floor looked up with lifeless eyes, stared at Spike. Spike watched him intently, saw reason gradually returning to them, then saw slow recognition. Finally the man spoke, and his voice was low and weak. "Yeah. I—hi, Donovan. How are you?" He turned over as though he were going to sleep.

Spike turned him back over. "Listen, Tanner. I've come to take you out. What's the matter? Those Japs work you over bad?"

"Yeah. Von Spegel's idea. He found out—" the voice trailed off.

"I know about it," Spike assured him. "You were communicating with Intelligence and he discovered you and

put one of his men in your place. Probably tortured you to make you tell him the code—”

“Yeah. The dirty German son—”

“Sure. We are getting out now. Think you can walk?”

“No, you’d better go on without me.”

“Hell no. But first tell me something. Intelligence sent me down here to break up this shebang. Where’s their diesel oil dump?”

“On the left bank of the river, fifty feet upstream from that bit needle-pointed rock. You can’t miss it. Their aviation gas dump is just across the river from the oil—under a clump of butternut trees. You can’t see it from the air, but you can’t miss the trees.”

“One other thing—has von Spegel got his fingers into anything else besides this sub base?”

“Everything else. He’s the main squeeze for all Nazi activity on the West coast of South America. Got agents from Colombia to the southern tip of Chili. My native worked for him for a while. His office is full of information—if you could get it. Papers and everything,” he said.

“The whole layout, eh?” Spike said. “If I can get my hands on that stuff it would crack the whole Nazi game in South America.”

“But you can’t get it. I’ve seen where it’s kept. They’ve got a modern cannonball safe in his office that a first class bank robber couldn’t crack in a year. And it’s got a time lock on it besides.”

Spike thought a minute. “Where’s von Spegel now? Got any idea?”

“The native that brings me my feed says he’s down to Quito. He’ll be back today, if he ain’t back now.”

“Which building is his office in?”

“That first one just inside that stockade. But be careful, there’s electricity—”

“I know it,” Spike snapped. “But

I’m going to have a try for that office. Say, you know what happened to those flyers that disappeared down this way?”

“Sure. They’ve got eighteen Jap fighter ships here. They either sink ’em out to sea, or drive them in here through that watergap or over the mountains and knock ’em off. They don’t want anybody who has ever suspected this place to live to tell about it.”

“That’s what I thought,” Spike said, getting to his feet. “I’ve got a man out there with me, and he’s armed. Where’s their hangars, and do you know about any ships they’ve got?”

“They’ve got one of your captured bombers back in that grove to the left there. Got a runway cut into it to conceal it, along with the fighters. But you can’t get in through that electric fence.”

“You get ready to go with us,” Spike snapped. “I’m going through that fence some way, and then I’m coming back for you. Get yourself together, you’re not licked yet.”

“No, but both my legs are broken. Those damned torturing dogs. I can’t get around.”

“Get your guts working, Tanner. I’ll be back for you.”

SPIKE went out and headed for the woods.

“We’re going through that fence some way,” he told Malone. “Got any ideas?”

“I’ve got two of them. I was gawking around while you were in there. Know what? Old Boston’s bomber is the other side of that machine shop, and there’s a couple of Japs working on it. The motors are turning over, so she’s hot enough to start.”

“But getting through this wire—”

“They destroy barbed wire entanglements with artillery, don’t they?”

“Are you an artillery regiment?” Spike asked.

"No, but I've got this chopper. What's the matter with it?"

"Guns talk louder than knives," Spike answered. "We'll have their whole gang down on our heads."

"Then you go tear it down with your hands," Malone answered. "Or else listen to me. I'll rip that fence down from behind that shack of Tanners, then you duck through and knock off those two mechanics and grab the bomber. I've got an idea that any extra men they've got are asleep in that barracks, since they probably do most of their work at night."

"They'll pour out like ants," Spike objected.

"And I'll kill 'em like ants. Then I'll join you. Come on, mister, you said we had a job to do."

Spike answered, "Remind me after this fracas is over that I can use you on the air lines I'm going to reopen."

"You remind me that I don't ever want to see these tropics again. I'm headed for the Arctic where it's cool, and I'll kill the man that even mentions the word banana. Come on, mister, time's a-wastin'."

"All right," Spike said. "We've got a chance, thanks to the fact that those buzzards are probably out scouring the jungle for us."

The pair skirted through the trees until they came opposite that portion of the fence just outside the machine-shop, where Boston Taylor's big bomber sat idling while a pair of Jap mechanics went over it, probably familiarizing themselves with the motor for further reference.

"There's six strands of that wire," Spike observed. "Think you can cut 'em?"

"Watch this."

Dud Malone raised his gun and pressed the trigger. The gun roared out its rataplan in the summer afternoon as he sprayed the lethal fence.

Wires whined as steel cut them and they sprang back from their taut position.

And Spike was running toward the now open fence even before the last wire snapped, both his pistols in his hands. Malone ducked back to the protection of the prison shack outside and waited with his now silent gun trained on the near door of the low-roofed barracks.

Spike had rounded the machine shop when the two men had hopped off the plane and came dashing around to check on the trouble. Spike lifted one gun as one of the Japs almost ran over him. He pulled the trigger and blew the man's whole face back through his skull.

The second man tried to stop, his dirty bare feet skidding in the dust. Spike shot him before he came to a halt. He vaulted over the man and raced toward the ship. One jump and he was on the wing, a yank at the door and he was inside and examining the gas gauges. There was plenty of fuel—and the temperature gauges showed the engines hot.

Spike dropped into the seat, eased the port motor, then the starboard one into a roar and jumped the big ship forward. He rolled it quickly around the machine shop and into a position facing the open barracks.

And just as he did so, the barracks vomited a multitude of little brown men in white undershirts and no pants—but with rifles in their hands and high-pitched cries of excitement on their lips.

Spike sat in his seat and played with the button triggers of the row of machine guns mounted in the entering edges of his wings. A withering hail of lead, aided and abetted by the few remaining bursts in Malone's guns cut down more than half the men.

Then Spike jumped out of his ship,

and with his pistols raised, advanced on the cowering Japs who were still alive. Their hands went up, and their yelps mingled with the roar of the motor behind him.

"Speak English, anybody?"

One little brown man whose face was less blank than the others said, "Me speaka Engaresha."

"Then tell those men to drop their guns and get into line. I've got a job for them."

"We no fall in line," the high pitched voice returned.

Spike pointed his gun at the man on the left, and using it as a pointer, counted men, "One, two, three." He shot the third man. Then again, "One, two—" and shot the man two places further on. "I'm going to shoot every other man until you fall in line," he announced. "One, two—"

"We fall," the little man said, and babbled at the rest of them. They fell in line.

"Now march over there to von Spegel's office. Quick."

TERROR seized the men at the thought of this indignity, and they did not move.

Spike shot another one dead. And they marched.

Malone came running up. "What's cooking?" he demanded.

"Tanner said all the papers on the Nazi activities in this whole area are in a time-locked modern safe in von Spegel's office. I can't open the safe—so, we're taking the safe along with us."

"Boy, you've got an answer for everything, haven't you? That safe probably don't weigh more'n a thousand pounds. Just drop it into your hip pocket."

Spike started the two lines of Japs marching toward von Spegel's office, while he trailed them beside Malone who kept his machine gun covering

them.

"You don't get around the libraries much, do you?" he asked.

"What's this, more snake-ology?"

"No. History. Ever hear of King Christophe?"

"I heard a dirty song about Christopho Columbo, who said the world was round-o, but that didn't come out of any public library. It was composed in an old fashioned privvy."

Spike pushed the disarmed Japs in through the office door, and entered von Spegel's headquarters, filled with office furniture, and furnished with native Indian objects. In one corner sat a heavy, cannonball safe, resembling a big steel bowling ball four feet in diameter, and built on a pedestal base. One look at its small round door, set so tightly into place that there was not room even for liquid nitroglycerine to penetrate the crack, showed Spike that he could never open it.

"You guard the door," he told Malone. "We've been having too good luck these last few minutes."

Then he poked the English-speaking Jap with the barrel of his gun. "All right, tell your men to lift that safe and carry it out to that bomber."

The little Jap looked both surprised and frightened, and then stubborn. "We not carry that. It too heavy."

"Chum," Spike said confidentially. "That safe contains the lives of probably thousands of my friends. Understand? I don't dislike you, but you can see that I think more of them than I do of your little party, don't you?"

The Jap shrugged, but did not give the order.

"That's too bad," Spike said sadly. He raised his gun, fired once and a man fell dead. He fired a second time and another man died.

"Now, if I keep on you are going to have to carry it all by yourself." He looked at his watch. "Every five

seconds I am going to kill one of you, and that will be one less to help lift the safe. —two, three, four, five—”

He shot another Jap.

The leader suddenly turned panicky and screeched his order, and a dozen of the men gathered around the safe and tugged at it.

“Cannot rift it,” the Jap announced.

Spike shot another one dead. “Now try,” he ordered.

They got it off the floor in a flood of screeching words. But it sank back.

Spike’s gun barked again, and this time they lifted it. “Out the door,” he ordered, “and into the ship with it.” He shouted to Malone, “Keep ’em moving while I go get Tanner.”

“You going to roll up the tarmac and take it along?” Malone grinned, and then trailed the sweating men heaving the safe out the door. “This luck won’t last forever.”

“Tanner deserves to go with us,” Spike said over his shoulder.

He went and found Tanner, and despite the man’s protests that his broken legs wouldn’t stand it, he picked him up over his shoulder and carried him to the bomber, where he laid him down on the deck alongside the safe.

“Where’d you put those Japs?” he asked.

“Locked them in the machine shop.”

“Why didn’t you kill ’em? There’s no use in leaving anything to chance.”

“I didn’t want to worry you,” Malone answered casually, “but I used up my last bullet twenty minutes ago. This machine gun is empty.”

“That’s fine,” Spike answered. “Maybe everybody will be kind enough to stay away from us.”

Malone was peering into the sky to the southward. “I don’t think so. Company’s coming.”

Spike squinted his good eye at the speck approaching. “That would be von Spiegel himself, returning from

Quito, I’ve an idea.”

“Then we’d better blow while we can,” Malone said. “We’re overdue to run out of luck.”

“I’ve got a better idea,” Spike said. “We’ll wait and take him along with us to the base. He can open that safe for us when we get there—and maybe answer a few polite questions.”

MALONE groaned, “And they used to call me crazy. All right, pal, it’s your funeral as well as mine.”

Spike took a quick look around, and saw nothing that might arouse von Spiegel’s suspicions. He and Malone went into the German’s office, and Spike sat down at von Spiegel’s desk while the ship circled the field and landed and rolled up before the office.

A tall man in immaculate whites strode in with military erectness. He stopped dead and his icy blue eyes glared at the man sitting behind his desk, fondling a military Colt Automatic.

“Howdy, Spiegel,” he said. “We were waiting for you. Come and jump in. We’re going visiting.”

“*Vas iss?*” the German snapped.

“See those dead Japs? See where your safe was? Now walk, or I’ll put a couple of slugs through your kneecaps. That’s painful and it leaves you terribly crippled after it’s over. Now come on, or we’ll cripple you, then knock you cold and drag your white uniform through the dirt. Move!”

“Sir, you are talking to a General.”

“And you’re talking to Spike Donovan. Move!”

Malone prodded the general in the back with his empty machine gun, and the general marched out toward the plane with great dignity. Two men in flying togs, evidently the pilot and navigator of von Spiegel’s ship, were two hundred feet away, headed toward one of the buildings.

Von Spegel shouted. "*Lieutenant Kurst!*"

Both flyers turned, saw Spike shoving the general into the big ship while Malone stood on the ground with his machine gun covering him. They started running toward the big bomber, digging guns out of their clothes. Malone turned and faced them, raised his machine gun, then, remembering, dropped it to the ground and dug out his automatic. But the men were shooting now.

Malone went down with a bullet that knocked him against the bomber's wing, and writhed in the dirt. Spike stuck his head out of the bomber and shouted at him, "Hurt?"

"Yeah. Go on!"

Spike had his own weapon out and was firing at the oncoming Germans. Malone yelled above the roar of guns and the idling motors. "You can't help me, you damned fool. Half my guts are blown out. Go on, before they puncture a tire. Do you hear me?" His voice was rising to a hysterical pitch, and he cursed Spike. "Get going, you idiot, or you'll never make it. Are you turning soft on me all of a sudden? I'll kill you myself if you don't get started."

Spike snapped his teeth. "All right, guy, but I'll be back. I'll be seeing you."

"Sure," Malone shouted, and they both knew they lied.

Spike slammed the door and turned to see von Spegel picking himself up from where Spike had slammed him down on the deck. He threw his gun to Tanner who lay propped against the safe. "Make that Heine lie down beside you, while you tie him up, and blow his guts out if he gets tough. Here's my belt."

Spike tossed his belt to the crippled jungle trader, slid under the steering yoke and gunned all four motors, just

as the two German flyers ran up. He looked out, saw them stooping over the prone body of Malone for a moment, and by the time they looked up he was out of pistol range. He saw them race toward their own ship, and he cursed them as he lifted the heavy laden bomber off the field and over the trees.

But he did not take a straight flight as he climbed for altitude. The heavy ship almost did a chandelle as he went into a steep banking turn as he climbed. He circled the field twice before the Germans got off, all the time watching Tanner tie the General's hands fast behind.

He set the big ship on a level course as he adjusted the stabilizers, took hands off and found that the ship would fly itself for a time. He crawled back out of his seat and shouted to Tanner.

"See those bomb release levers? When I lift my hand and drop it, you pull this first lever. Then when I do it again, you pull the other one. Got it?"

"Sure," Tanner answered. The old bewhiskered, tortured trader was coming to life in good shape as his adventurous nose smelled action.

Spike got back behind the wheel just as the ship was nosing up into a stall, being tail heavy with the added burden of the safe, and righted it. He circled once more with one eye on the smaller ship which was now climbing toward him, then set his course over the gasoline dump Tanner had described to him.

With one hand in the air and Tanner watching for the signal, Spike could only drop the bomb by guesswork, but he was low enough to feel some hope that he would hit it. He flew over the trees concealing the gas supply, then dropped his hand.

TANNER had pulled himself up until he could reach the levers, and

now he jerked one down in unison with Spike's signal. Two bombs whistled downward, exploded in the trees and sent a jet of smoke and fire two hundred feet in the air.

"Once more," Spike yelled, and circled again, passing over the diesel oil tanks at the dock on the river, by the big stone. He signaled again, the earth rose up in protest when the bombs hit, and the submarine fuel dump became a raging furnace. The boys from the base would see that no more came in.

But now that he was free of his bomb load, he had a new job. The German two-seater was at his own altitude, and it was a faster ship, as it showed quickly by its gains on Spike as Spike headed over the mountains and got his first sight of the sea.

He gave all motors all they would take, and kept looking back. If he only had Malone, or Skinny or Apples to man one of the turret guns he would have had a chance to escape this little hornet. Tanner wouldn't be able to do it, because he couldn't possibly know how to operate them.

He looked back, and the Germans were almost within range now. He looked down and saw the smooth sea, and a glance at his instrument board showed that he had only five thousand feet of altitude, not much room to play tag with the Heines. If he could only get them in front of them he could use his stationary forward-mounted guns.

Suddenly he jerked the heavy wheel hard over, dropped a wingtip and pulled the yoke back into his belly, executing a flipper turn with one wing straight down toward the sea. It was the tightest turn he ever had taken in a bomber, but as he straightened out he had reversed his course.

He was flying head-on at the Germans. His hands found his gun controls just as tracers from the German

ship penciled lines through the air between them. He opened all guns at once as German lead filled his own cockpit. One burst was about all either would get, and he kept his guns wide open.

If he didn't go home, neither would they!

High over the water the two ships held on their courses until it appeared that they surely would crash, and the pencil lines of their tracers merged with each other. It would be one or the other—or both—who would settle under thirty fathoms of Pacific.

Spike pulled back on his yoke, and passed over the German just as everything exploded before him in a blinding light. Bullets had already whined through his windshield and he had hardly noticed them.

The flash was instantaneous, and after that there was a series of colors in his only eye, and then it was dark all around him. Nothing but darkness and the high-pitched roar of his motors. What had happened to the German he did not know, for he did not see that machine as it crashed to the water behind him.

There was only one thing that concerned him now. He had only one eye, and now it felt as though a hot poker had been thrust into it—and more important, he could not see. The varicolored lights were growing dimmer in the blackness, but the blackness itself was not fading.

He was alone at the wheel five thousand feet above the Pacific, and blinded temporarily. Sure, it was only temporary. It would be all right in a minute. But it was nearly two hours up to the base at Panama! And there was a landing to make, even if he got there. That eye *had* to get all right. It would in a minute. But it hurt like hell, like the time his other eye had been shot out!

He wiped the eye with the back of his hand, and his hand came away sticky.

He felt a tug at his arm, and heard Tanner's voice in his ear.

"What's the matter, Spike? You're flyin' like a drunk man." There was a moment, then, "Oh, can't you see good, feller?"

"I'll be all right in a minute," Spike said. "Just a scratch. But give me a hand, will you?"

"I can't drive one of these things," the bearded trader said.

"Sure. But just do what I tell you." Spike reached out to the instrument board and tapped a Tee shaped pair of tubes. "See that dingus? It's a turn and bank indicator. Tells you when you're flying level. See those bubbles in that red fluid? It works like a carpenter's spirit level. Now you tell me which side of center the bubble in the crossways glass is, and watch it till I get the wings level. Then watch the upright glass till the bubble is in the center and we'll have her nose and tail level. Get it?"

"Sure, Spike. The crossways bubble is to the right of center, and the up-and-down one is below center."

"All right. Watch them and tell me when they're both centered."

SPIKE lifted the left wing until Tanner told him the bubble was centered, and lifted the nose until they were in level flight. Then he tapped the compass on the instrument board. "What's the number behind the little upright line?"

"Ten."

"Watch it crawl back, then, and tell me when it is approaching Zero. We've got to head due north until we sight the coastline. Got it, now?"

Thus they flew for an hour and a half over the sea.

"Here's the coastline ahead of us,"

Tanner said, and his voice had taken on a sudden huskiness. "Say, Spike, how are we going to land this thing?"

"Watch the instruments," Spike snapped. "I want to follow the coastline up to the left to the landing field. When you see it, look for a big T-shaped yellow thing on the ground. It'll tell us which way the wind is blowing."

"But how're we going to get down?"

"You always go down. You can't stay up. Now get this straight. After you see that T, tell me how to get around until I'm about five miles back of it, and headed toward the field in a direction from the butt of the T to the crossbar. Then watch the indicator bubble as I nose down, and at the same time keep calling off the altitude I'm losing as fast as you can. I'm depending on you to let me know when to level off. Any more ships in the air?"

"Only three—way the other side of the landing field."

"Okay, watch and let me know if I get close to them. Where are we now?"

Tanner did not answer. Spike reached out and clutched him, repeated his question.

Again Tanner did not answer. Instead—his body slumped over into Spike's lap.

Spike yelled at him. "Tanner! Tanner! Snap out of it! You can't pass out on me now! We've still got a job to do. Do you hear me, guy?"

Tanner groaned, and Spike caught him by the throat and sat him back up in his seat. "Wake up, guy. What's wrong? We've got to land this truck!"

"I didn't want to worry you," Tanner said weakly, "but them Germans—they got me—in the lungs. I can't—"

"Don't tell me now," Spike barked. "Save your breath till we get through landing—"

"Sure, we'll make it," Tanner said, almost inaudibly. "We're over the

field. You gotta make about a quarter of a turn to get lined up with that T."

Spike clawed the wheel, pulled back the yoke and fed the rudder by instinct and by the guidance of a dying man. He could hardly hear Tanner's weak voice now as the trader called altitude and angle of descent. "Forty-five hundred—thirty degrees . . . four thousand—twenty-eight degrees . . . thirty-five hundred . . . three thousand . . . two thousand . . ."

The idling motors swished and the wind screamed around his giant ship.

". . . a thousand feet—five hundred—twenty degrees—fifteen degrees—the altimeter don't register no more—twelve degrees—ten—five hold tight, we're gonna hit—"

The heavy front wheels of the bomber pounded the tarmac and the giant bomber bounced fifty feet in the air. Spike nosed down a bit, caught the lift and leveled off again. The wheels pounded the ground in a series of decreasing crowhops; the tail wheel hit first and slammed the front wheels down with one final, bone-jolting smash. He had wheels locked instantly and the big bomber rammed her nose into the closed doors of the hangar and stopped.

The sudden quiet was deafening, and Spike sat still in his darkness and pain.

"Well, we're here, Tanner," he said. "Didn't I tell you?"

Tanner did not answer. And Spike did not know that he was dead.

It was several days later when Spike was first conscious of being in a hospital bed. His head was bandaged, and it was still dark, for the bandage still covered his pain-deadened eye. He felt as though he had been lying doped for a long time—which was true. But now he could hear the familiar voice of the doctor.

"Feeling better?"

"I guess so," Spike answered. "How's Tanner?"

The doctor chose his words carefully. "They buried him yesterday, with full military honors. You see, you told us practically the whole story—you were reliving it while you were under—" He hesitated.

"Ether?"

"Yes. And then other sedatives."

"The eye, Doc?"

Spike felt an encouraging hand on his shoulder. "There's nothing to worry about—"

"Don't lie to me, Doc. How about the eye? Yes or no—"

"Now, don't worry—"

"Yes or no?"

The doctor's seamed face grew tighter. "I guess you can take it, Spike. There wasn't much left of it. We had to remove—"

"Sure!"

"But there's nothing to get morose about. You've done a great job for your country, and it won't be forgotten. You'll be taken care of—"

"To hell with that preaching. I don't need to be taken care of. What am I lying here in bed for? My legs and hands are not crippled are they? Get me a cane so I can get around. There's plenty I can do."

"No, Spike—"

"Hell, yes. Only last week the skipper was trying to round up somebody to give the boys lessons in these native dialects. I lied out of it then, because I wanted to do something else. Tell him I can teach any dialect from the Rio Grande down to the Cape—and I'll start in the morning. Now ask the nurse for a cane for me, will you, Doc?"

There was relief in the good old doctor's laugh, for he had seen too many minds go blind along with the eyes. "All right, Spike, you damned fool. But you'd better rest up—"

"Nuts!"

Screaming Steel

by

CHARLES W. HARBAUGH

Author of "Tracer Terror," etc.

A Flying Fortress crew is built on the idea of all members working, playing, living together, so Pilot Stark knew none of his bombardier buddies could be a Nazi spy!

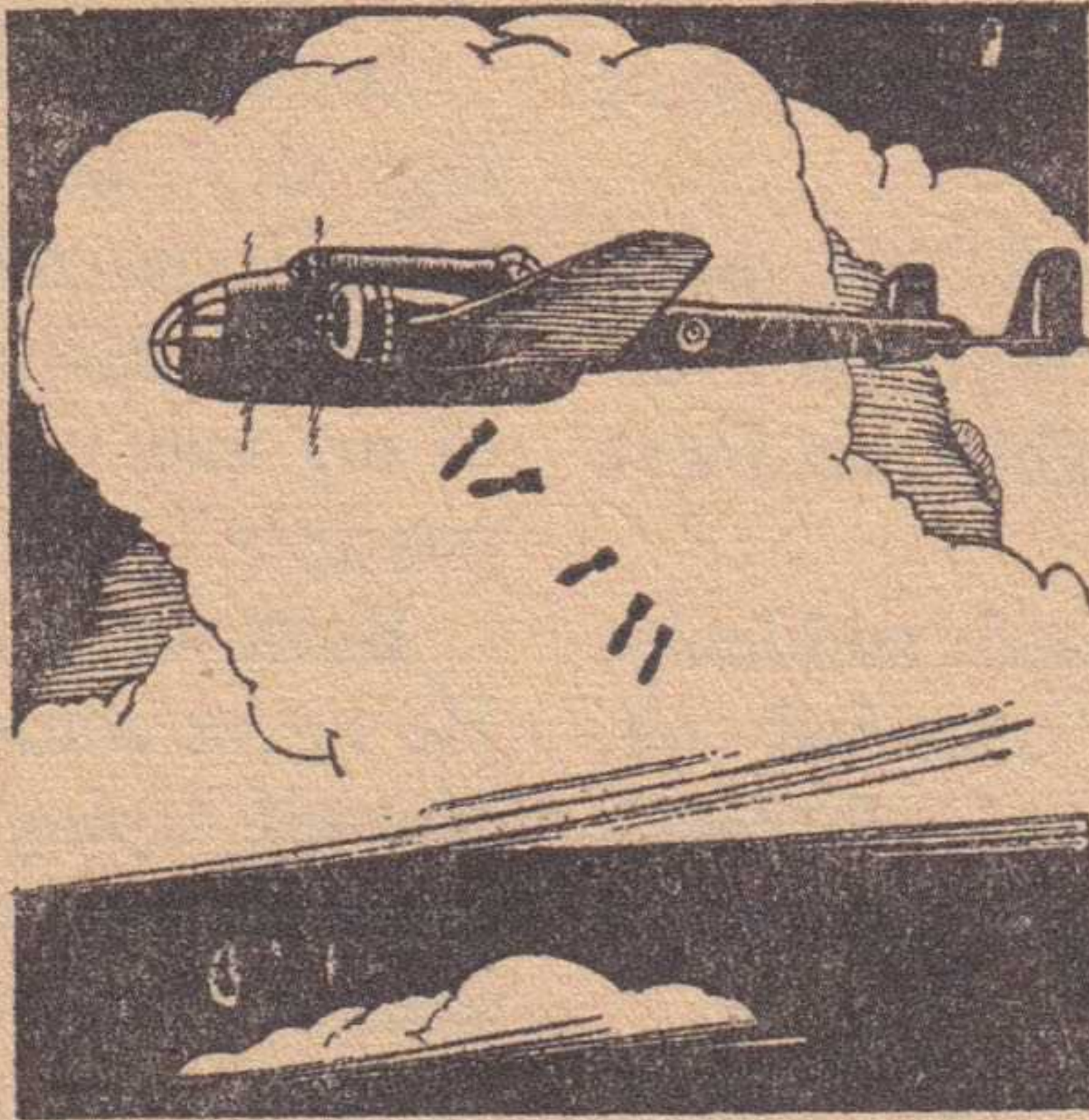
FIRST Lieutenant Robert Stark had been well trained by the United States Army Air Corps to command and pilot a Fortress bomber, but he had never received any instruction that would help him fight suspicion.

Heading out over the South Atlantic on the night run to Africa from Brazil, Stark had a brainful of suspicion that set him back on his heels.

He and his crew were fresh from Texas, on their way to the war in the Far East. Their schedule was tough, and they had spent the better part of the last three days in the air, droning endlessly along the route to Florida, to Trinidad, to Natal, and now to Liberia, Africa. None of them had had much sleep and they were beginning to get loggy from the strain. Not that they complained—they were on their way to the war! But hour after hour of continuous duty could knock the spots out of any man's constitution.

Their passengers seemed okay—four Chinese Army men on their way back to Chungking from Washington. They'd hitched a ride at Miami, with orders from Washington to make it legal.

Up to an hour ago, when they pulled out of the Brazilian airport, Stark had felt plenty okay. Then a Major Brett arrived, introduced himself as a member of the British Intelligence, gave



credentials and spilled a story that opened First Lieutenant Stark's eyes and ears.

Brett claimed that an attempt was going to be made to sabotage the big half million dollar bomber while she was droning over the South Atlantic. His agents who had given him the infor-

mation could not describe the potential saboteur. All they knew was that he was posing as a member of the crew. Brett wanted to go to Africa anyway, so he came along to see if he could prevent the plot. All this happened a few minutes before they took off.

Once they had reached ten thousand feet, Stark turned the ship over to Wright, his co-pilot, and began to think the situation over. At first it seemed a little ridiculous to him. He would vouch personally for every member of his crew. Take Wright, for example—a swell guy. Stark had graduated from Kelly with him.

"Heil, Hitler!" Wright shouted over to him, thumbing his nose in the general direction of Berlin.

Stark grinned back. It was a way they had of saying "Thumbs up" to each other. Whenever anyone in the bomber crew looked downhearted someone was sure to yell "Heil, Hitler" to him and make a gesture of defiance to show what they really thought of Der Fuehrer.

Stark's thoughts wandered back to

the sabotage business. How could he suspect any of the crew? He'd trained with all of them for six months. Surely Wright wasn't a Nazi spy, nor Toby Weymouth, the little blond navigator, nor Snapper Young, the bombardier. They were all second lieutenants. And Staff Sergeant Mullins, the crew chief, and Foerster, the radioman, were just as reliable. The three gunners were topnotchers.

The commander shook his head wearily. He wished he could get a little sleep to clear his thoughts, but there was no chance for that.

The inter-phone buzzed suddenly, and Toby Weymouth sounded off. "Navigator to commander! Recheck on course for drift. Fly a course of five-one."

"Right, Weymouth!" Stark replied. Then he glanced over at Wright to make sure he got it.

The co-pilot nodded and slid the bomber over on her new course. They had been flying six-one.

Stark's brain felt leaden. He knew the others on board were almost as tired as he was, but most of them had had cat-naps on the way down from Trinidad. Maybe he'd better go back and talk things over with this Major Brett.

A final glance at the instruments and he rose from his seat. "All yours," he told Wright.

First he went downstairs to see how Weymouth and Young were making out. The bombardier was squatting in the nose, arms folded, head nodding. Weymouth yawned over his chart table.

Surely neither one of these two men was a spy! Stark couldn't bring himself to suspect them any more than Wright. A bomber team is built on the idea of all members working, playing and living together. Stark felt he knew these men as well as if they were his

brothers.

Back across the cat-walk over the bomb bay he found Foerster, the radioman, gabbing with Mullins. The four Chinese officers, wrapped in their great-coats, were trying to sleep on the uncomfortable floor. Major Brett was farther back, in the shadows where the gunners kept their posts.

Stark went to him. "I've been thinking, sir," he began. "Are you sure there is no mistake? I'll swear on a stack of Bibles a mile high that none of my men are saboteurs. It just isn't possible."

Brett was a big man with a hard face. He never smiled and he never strained himself trying to look human. "My information came from a reliable source, lieutenant," he said coldly. "One of your men is going to wreck this plane if he gets the chance."

STARK lowered his voice. "How about the Chinese? They could be Japs for all I know."

Brett shook his head. "No, the man is German. I can't identify him for you, so you'll just have to consider *all* your men as suspects until you learn differently. Is everything going all right? Are you on your course?"

"Yeah," Stark nodded glumly. "We're dead on a course of five-one."

Brett's eyes kindled with suspicion. "Fifty-one degrees? Isn't that too far north?"

Stark began to figure. The chart course had been sixty-one degrees, and Weymouth had measured the drift and changed it to fifty-one. Yet . . . Stark cursed suddenly and bit his lip. The prevailing wind off the Brazilian coast is the southeast trade. Weymouth had applied the drift correction the wrong way!

Suspicion is an ugly thing. Once it gets in your mind you can't rub it out. And Stark began to wonder if Wey-

mouth was the spy.

He went forward hastily and wedged into the navigator's office. Weymouth had slouched down over his chart, but snapped to alert when Stark came in.

"Recheck your course, Weymouth!" Stark ordered curtly. "Your drift is way off."

Weymouth was a good mathematician. He loved his job, and his face went brick red. Quickly he bent over his calculations, and when he raised his head again he looked as guilty as if he had just murdered his grandmother.

"I applied the drift correction negative instead of positive, sir!"

For a moment Stark wanted to reach out and clap him on the shoulder. The poor kid looked ashamed enough to need bucking up. Hell, anyone can make a mistake when he goes without sleep for three days.

But Major Brett poked his nose down at the chart. After a moment's scrutiny, he placed a protractor on their position and laid out a course of five-one. To his horror, Stark saw that if the bomber had continued along the course Weymouth had given them it would have flown directly to Dakar—the German-controlled Vichy port in West Africa!

It looked bad. It looked like verification of Brett's suspicions. Maybe there was all hell waiting for them at Dakar.

Stark turned on his heel and left. Numbly, he thought that Weymouth's blondhead even made him look German. Just as he was climbing into the cockpit, he heard a screaming gasp from the motors. Then all four stopped simultaneously. For a moment the huge bomber rushed on in awful silence. Then the nose dropped and she went into a glide.

In a split second Stark hauled himself into his chair. Major Brett was right behind him.

"What is it, Wright!" Stark yelled at the co-pilot.

Wright turned an ashen face. "I don't know, sir. They just stopped dead!"

Stark took over the controls and flattened the bomber's angle of glide as much as possible. A quick glance at the altimeter showed nine thousand feet.

"Commander to flight engineer," he barked into the inter-phone. "What's the matter with those motors?"

"Don't know, sir!" the sergeant replied frantically. "What in hell can make four motors stop at once?"

What indeed! Stark groaned as he whispered the answer, "Sabotage!"

He tried the starters one after another, but the motor only coughed, backfired and remained dead. They were evidently getting gas and ignition or they wouldn't do that much.

"Lieutenant!" Brett rasped. His face was flushed with anger. "You must keep this plane in the air!"

Stark didn't have time to reflect that it was a funny thing for Brett to say. He was busy checking instruments, trying fuel mixtures, inspecting gas gauges. Nothing was wrong!

Wright's face was agonized. "Skipper," he groaned. "I don't get it! All four motors at once!"

Again the hot wave of suspicion rocked through Stark's brain. Maybe it wasn't Weymouth—maybe Wright was the spy. Maybe he had tampered with the motors—no that would be Mullins' work. Maybe Wright had messed up the controls somehow. Maybe they were all in league: Weymouth, Wright and Mullins!

The altimeter hit three thousand. Down below, the dark Atlantic was glistening in the light of the moon.

"Commander to radioman!" Stark barked desperately. "Did you get out a distress call?"

"No, sir," Foerster replied. He sounded flustered. "Something's wrong with the transmitter."

TWO THOUSAND feet now. The water was coming up fast. Stark groaned as he tried to stretch the glide without stalling. His beloved bomber! His first command wrecked by dirty sabotage!

"Skipper!" Wright's voice cracked out like a pistol shot. "I've got it! I must have dozed off, and my elbow hit the pitch-control lever. The prop blades couldn't take the full pitch and the motor stalled!"

"Reset the pitch! Hurry!" Stark snapped.

He tried the starter on number one motor. A lovely cough and then a steady roar of power answered him. Hastily, he started number four, and then he pulled the bomber out of its glide. The altimeter showed five hundred feet when they levelled off.

Numbers two and three added their note to the song of power, and the Fortress began to lift away from the black sea and thunder along her course to Liberia. Stark tried to take a deep breath, but he felt shaky inside. He glanced over at Wright.

The co-pilot was a picture of misery. "I'm—I'm sorry, Stark," he muttered. It was a freak accident. It happened because Wright was so dog-tired he couldn't keep his eyes open.

Stark forgot everything except that Wright was his buddy and they had just pulled out of a tight squeak together. He grinned and called loudly, "Heil, Hitler!" and thumbed his nose. A sudden motion at his elbow caused him to turn. He saw Major Brett stiffen to attention, his right arm half raised. A foolish expression came over the Britisher's face, and he scratched his head.

But Stark had suddenly remembered

his suspicions. The plane was safe now. He had it back at twelve thousand feet. There was time to think about Weymouth and Wright. Were they really sabotaging the bomber? It seemed impossible.

Yet it was like those dirty Huns to sneak into your confidence, pretend they were Americans and make you like them before they stuck a dagger in your back!

Angrily, he glanced over at Wright. The co-pilot's face was still a little pale. He had taken over the controls again and he seemed grimly determined not to repeat his foolish accident.

"Hell!" Stark told himself miserably. "Wright just *can't* be fixing to wreck this plane. He's too damned decent!" And yet the suspicion remained, and with the suspicion—doubt and hesitation.

He turned to see where Major Brett was, but the Britisher had disappeared. Stark was surprised. He thought maybe the Intelligence man would want to put Wright and Weymouth under guard. Funny guy, Brett. Something odd about the way he talked. Of course, Englishmen always talk as if they were trying to gargle at the same time. But Brett sort of pounded hard on his words.

And it was funny the way he had reacted to that "Heil, Hitler" gag, too. Maybe he resented it. Maybe he—Stark paused and sucked in his breath. When you came to think of it, Brett had almost raised his hand in the Nazi salute!

Stark sank back in his chair and stared out through the windshield at the black reaches of ocean. He was thinking fast now. All his weariness, his leaden mental languor had gone. He began to think clearly for the first time since they left Brazil.

After all, what did he know about Brett? Merely that he had claimed to

be a British Intelligence officer three minutes before the take-off. No one had vouched for him.

And that Nazi salute! Foerster said his radio was on the bum—Brett had been near that radio while Foerster was talking to Mullins.

The whole elaborately simple plan dawned on Lieutenant Stark. He was so dumbfounded he could not even curse his own stupidity. Brett was the saboteur! Brett was the spy who was going to wreck the bomber! He had posed as a Britisher to take care of his accent, and he had skillfully shoved suspicion on everyone but himself.

Stark pressed his microphone close to his lips. No one but the bomber crew could hear what he said. "Hello, Foerster," he called guardedly. "Can you see Major Brett around anywhere?"

There was a pause, then Brett himself answered. "I thought you'd catch on when I made that mistake about saluting, Stark. There's no use calling Foerster. He's dead. I've got your gunners covered, and if anyone tries to come back here he'll regret it."

A singing tenseness crept over the commander. He knew he ought to feel a towering rage, but all he felt was overwhelming relief. Weymouth, Wright and Mullins were all right! No more suspicion, no more silent, cat-like agony of thinking your friends are your enemies.

BRETT was the spy. He was a definite, known quantity and you could fight something you knew. Suspicion was different.

"I don't get it, Brett," he spoke into the interphone. "Why all this bother about one bomber? Is it worth the trouble?"

Brett laughed nastily. "Don't pretend you don't know who your Chinese passengers are! They're general staff men carrying vital instructions from

Washington to Chungking, so vital that they couldn't be written down. But I'll sweat the information out of them later. Now listen, Stark. Soon you'll see a white blinking light on the sea ahead. Crash-land your bomber as close as possible, and small boats will pick us up. If you do as I say no one will be hurt, but if there's any monkey business I'll shoot every man."

Almost as he finished speaking, a shot rang out, clearly heard over the thunder of the motors.

"What was that?" Stark rapped the words out.

Brett's cold drawl continued. "Your navigator thought he could attack me, and I was forced to shoot the stupid pig. I mean what I say, Stark."

Something tingled up Stark's spine and he rose from his chair with a growl. Little Toby Weymouth shot!

"I'll get that swine—" Stark started to leave the cockpit, but Wright hauled him back.

"He'll get you, too, skipper," the co-pilot warned.

Stark fell back in his chair. If he tried to rush Brett, he'd just get himself knocked down like a clay pigeon. Yet, he had to do something. Nobody was going to wreck his first bomber command.

"Look, Wright," he said, speaking into the co-pilot's ear. "You count up to thirty, then stick this bomber's nose in the sky. Understand? I'll take care of the rest."

Then he bent down and ripped out the inter-phone socket in his own chair. That killed the whole system. He had no gun for the job ahead, but he didn't want one. He wanted to feel his fingers close around Brett's throat.

He left the cockpit cautiously, with his hands in the air. When he started out across the catwalk, he saw Brett seated in the wireless cubby, a Luger resting lightly on his knee. The Ger-

man got to his feet menacingly when he saw the commander. After a moment's hesitation he waved, and Stark went on.

"What is it?" the German shouted when Stark could hear him.

"Inter-phone is dead!" Stark shouted back. "I came to tell you we sighted that blinking white light."

Brett nodded. "Good! Go back to your controls. Do as I ordered."

Stark glanced curiously at the four Chinese who were sitting stolidly on the floor. Their greatcoats were opened now, and he saw the glint of high-ranking insignias. He'd been carrying precious cargo all the time without knowing it.

Wright must have counted to thirty by now. Stark lingered on the catwalk, tense in every muscle.

"Go back!" Brett roared, waving his automatic in an ugly way.

Then the bomber lurched. Stark heard the motors scream and he was expecting it, but Brett lost his balance. He fell over backwards, cursing foully. At that moment Stark launched himself.

As he collided with the German, the automatic went off, roaring like doomsday in his ear. Something hot and powerful kicked his shoulder, and for a moment his brain blacked out. Then he felt Brett struggling to line up another shot, and he kicked out blindly. The gun went flying.

With his left arm, he pounded the German. His right was useless. Brett roared like a bull, lashing out with two ham-sized fists. One of his blows connected and Stark reeled back. He caught a flashing glimpse of the four Chinese. One had Brett's gun, but he didn't dare fire.

Forgetting the wild pain in his shoulder, Stark coiled and met Brett's charge. The German was slamming his fists out wildly. Another heavy blow caught Stark on the cheek, but he shook his

head doggedly. With all his strength he brought his left arm up in a slashing uppercut. Brett staggered back, howling. Stark followed like a tiger, knowing an advantage when he had one. Another powerful left that started from the soles of his shoes drove into Brett's face. The German went down like sacked flour. He rolled over and lay still.

Stark was panting now. Young and Mullins came running across the catwalk, and the Chinese officer with the gun calmly sat down on Brett's chest and thrust the muzzle of the Luger in his ear.

"Good work, lieutenant," said one of the Chinese, an elderly man with four stars on his otherwise undecorated tunic. "Washington will hear about this."

STARK grinned again. It was pretty damned swell to rub the suspicion out of your brain! Fighting Brett had cleared his thinking up. Then he suddenly remembered that somewhere ahead an Axis ship lay waiting for them, blinking a white light.

"Young!" he barked. "How many bombs in the racks?"

"Four, sir!"

"Think you can land them on an unlighted ship tonight?"

"Can I!" he cried. "Just give me the chance!"

Fifteen minutes later they spotted the flashing white light. Stark lined up the bomber. The inter-phone had been connected again, and Young's voice came in staccato orders, "One thirty right. Left a shade. Steady!"

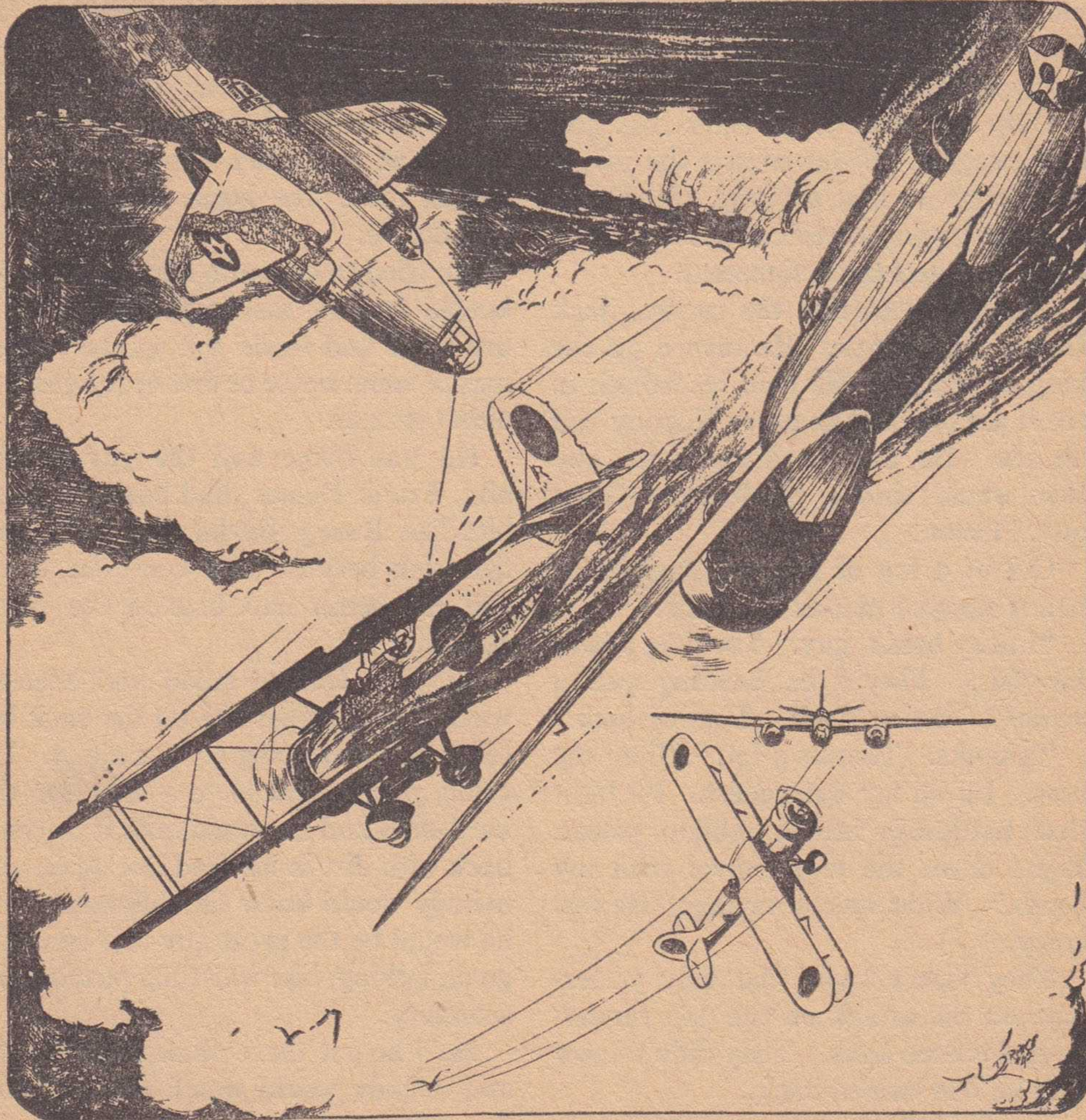
Stark felt the bomber "jump" as the bombs left her racks. An orange and white flower of flame and destruction blossomed on the inky sea.

"Heil Hitler!" Lieutenant Stark whispered grimly, and thumbed his nose elaborately in the direction of Berlin.

Hell-Diver Holiday

by
ROY J. HAZZARD

The U. S. Navy Air Arm didn't know it was sending a coward in a Curtiss Hell Diver to blast that Jap battleship!



He tipped the nose of his dive bomber down and headed for hell!

THAT sinking sensation was coming back to him. Like when he'd been afraid on that mission to get the aircraft carrier in the Timor Sea. To say that he was ashamed of that would be a gross understatement.

Ensign Jack Horton stood in the ready room and listened to the awed silence. Before him was the skipper who handed out the assignments.

"This one is going to be tough," the skipper was saying.

Jack Horton knew that. He knew that was why the skipper had asked for a volunteer.

Great showoff, Jack Horton. He said that to himself now. Sticking his neck out because he couldn't stand it to be the one to hang back. Yellow show-off he was. Afraid of his own shadow, but

afraid also of what his fellows would think of him. Scared of everything was Jack Horton. Nobody knew it better than he. He had to live with it. He was stuck with himself.

The skipper was looking Jack Horton over. He was looking over a dozen more naval pilots of the Carrier Hialeah. He took from the desk in the ready room a deck of cards.

Only one man to go after that Jap battlewagon. Whoever gets the job, it will be up to him entirely. You men who have volunteered can cut the cards. High man gets the assignment.

They were cutting the cards. Jack Horton cut fourth. He turned up the king of spades. He held his breath to see if anyone had an ace. Nobody had an ace. He was it. He was the guy that would sink a battleship. Great guy, Horton.

Out of a fog of fear and trembling, hands slapped him on the back.

"Lucky break, guy. You'll be a hero for this. They'll be handing you a medal of honor, Jack. Lots of luck."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot. I'll do my best. I'll do my damndest. I'll blast that battleship into a million pieces. Right down the rear funnel with my bomb." What was he saying? He was crazy.

They didn't know that only yesterday, on the attack on the Jap carrier, he had turned back. They didn't know why he had turned back.

He was living it over now. His hands were shaking and his brain was bursting with fright and desperation. Far off, at the front line of the planes that had gone in a long rat tail to attack, he saw the first of the Curtiss Hell Divers going down and he saw a direct hit from the Jap anti-aircraft gun. Ronny Burks never knew what had hit him. He and his ship and his bomb were blown into a million pieces without a split second of warning.

That's when he'd gone completely haywire. That's why his engine had sputtered, thank God. It had given him the excuse. Even black smoke had spurting from the exhaust and that was a good excuse.

But the engine had picked up right away again. That didn't matter. It had sputtered. That was excuse enough. Anything was excuse enough to let him turn around and head back to mother. And that was when the Hialeah had looked more like home than she ever had before.

He tried to compose himself when he landed and the mechanics couldn't figure what had made the sputter unless maybe some water or dirt in the gas. It didn't matter.

He was home and the guy behind him, Frank Demar, had been blown to bits like Ronny Burks only he'd done the trick because he'd come on, dead, and his bomb had blasted the plane carrier.

So Jack Horton stood and boasted while they slapped him on the back because this was going to be a cinch. He could go out and have a look for the battleship and he would miss it or come back with dirt in his feed line again and nobody would know the difference, and he would be the great guy and he could go on talking, like whistling past a dark cemetery.

He'd be out there alone over the sea and nobody would watch him or know the difference.

He was up on the landing deck and his engine had started. He traded places with his mechanic in the cockpit and said, "Bomb set?" which it obviously was, and the mechanic said, "All set."

The red light was on in the island tower and he waited for the signal to turn. It turned amber and he got set and then the dispatcher on the island tower waived him away.

The engine thundered him off the carrier—he was in the air an instant before he reached the end of the long runway deck. Great stuff. He felt very good and was not scared any more because this was going to be a cinch. Nobody to watch and see that he did the job he was sent to do. Nobody would see him at all. He wouldn't find the Jap battleship.

HE wondered about a convoy for that battlewagon of the enemy. Nothing had been said about that. Nothing had been said about Jap planes that might be there as protection for the battle wagon. That was something else he hadn't thought about.

Maybe it would be just as well if he flew until he was far out of sight of the Hialeah and then circle for a while until time and come back again and land.

Then he thought about the facts of this thing. The battleship was on its way, so the dope read, to join the Jap fleet somewhere in the Timor in a heavy shelling attack at a landing point somewhere on the coast of Australia. That battleship might spell the difference between success and failure for the Japs.

And it all depended on one miserable guy named Jack Horton who probably didn't have the guts to carry through his mission. Who had volunteered to go on it because his greatest fear was what his mates thought of him. That was why he was always showing off, so they'd think he was a great guy. . . .

He was out of sight of the Hialeah now and he sent his Hell Diver roaring farther across the vast blue of the Timor Sea and tried not to see too far. He was fighting with himself so that he would feel that he had tried.

But there the battlewagon was, off on the horizon. He tightened up instantly and his heart began pounding. He was flying high, but he pulled up higher. He'd fly just as high as he could with-

out having to suck on oxygen.

Strangely enough, the Jap battleship was coming alone. Back from repairs or for reinforcements. They did brazen things, these little yellow monkeys. They took chances that no one with common sense would take. Like him. He had sense. He wasn't going down on any suicide mission if he could help it. Even now, in sight of the battleship he hesitated and yet he couldn't help flying nearer for a closer look.

Now he was high over the battlewagon and he heard explosions and he knew that they were shooting at him. He turned in leisurely fashion over the battlewagon and headed back. He was still play acting, just like somebody was watching him. He was fairly safe at this height and he was maneuvering just as he would if someone were watching him—if someone were spying on him and he were finally going down to the attack. He was making motions, like a lone gangling kid on the springboard at the old swimming hole, making motions of diving—making the motions he'd go through if he were the great sky devil which he wished he was.

Now he was squared away and set for the dive. It would be easy to make the dive from here. Those Japs on the battlewagon shooting up at him couldn't do any more than kill him. He would bravely give his life for his country.

He could think all this stuff bravely because he wasn't going to attack. He was going back to the carrier and tell them he couldn't find the damn battlewagon. Well, maybe he'd drop his bomb from this height and then say he'd missed.

How was that? He'd maneuver and then drop the bomb from the high altitude. He didn't have a bomb sight for it, though. His sights were for diving on his target. They weren't any good for high altitudes. Well, anyway, he could drop the bomb from up here and

then go back and tell his story.

He squared away for the drop. Got all set, wiggled into his seat a little more solidly before time to release the bomb. Almost four miles up. A long way to watch the bomb go.

The battlewagon was still firing at him. Shells bursting all around. But they hadn't come close enough yet to make him worry.

He shot a glance around, just from force of habit. He nearly jumped out of his flying suit. Another plane was trailing him. He didn't take a long look at it, but it looked like the skipper's plane. Couldn't see it well because it was up in the sun.

EVERYTHING was changed now. Everything completely different. He was being watched. He had an audience and he had to play to it. He couldn't do what he had planned. With the skipper up there watching him he had to go down and lay that bomb into the rear stack of the battlewagon.

He knew all about it now. Likely the skipper had even planned this whole flight today. He'd suspected Horton of running away from the job yesterday and had sent him out so he could come along and watch and see if he really was yellow. He'd sent him alone to see what he would do.

Now it was up to Jack Horton to show him. With someone watching him, Jack Horton didn't hesitate.

He tipped the nose of his dive bomber down and headed for hell. Now the guns on the deck of the battlewagon were going mad. Everything was roaring and bursting around him and the hell diver was bucking and hard to handle, but somehow he managed to keep the sights on the target. He was holding the sights on the rear stack.

Down, down. To ten thousand and seven and five and on. Down, down into that hell that the antiaircraft fire

made about him. Something nicked his shoulder and something slashed away his goggles and he couldn't see much about him, but he could somehow see the target and hold it on the rear stack.

The Cyclone was going wild under him and the whole ship was quivering and he felt more nicks as the shells burst about him.

He was yelling now, and pulling the release to drop the bomb. Now the pull out. As he zoomed, things went black and he was in fog.

He tried to turn around and look back, but his neck and shoulder pained him too much. He sat slumped a little because the pain wasn't so great like that. He sat slumped in his seat and tried to see ahead and flew by compass.

Things fogged up before he got there and he didn't know much. He wasn't sure how he got down on the landing deck but he must have made it all right because now he was awake and conscious and feeling stronger.

He opened his eyes and knew he was in sick bay. He saw tubes being gathered up and he saw the skipper getting up off a table next to him and he somehow, realized that the skipper had been giving him a blood transfusion.

That made him feel swell. That gave him the strength and the courage to say, "Well I came through skipper. I guess you saw. But did I make the hit? I couldn't turn around and see what I did to the battlewagon. Too much pain, sir."

"I wish I had seen you," the skipper said. "It must have been a battle judging from the way your hell diver was shot up."

Weakly, Jack Horton said, "You mean you weren't flying out after me, sir? You didn't come back with me?"

"Not me," the skipper said. "But you didn't come back alone. A Jap combat ship was trying to catch up with you when you came in to land here."

When a Kid Becomes a Flying Cadet

By **GEORGE M. CONKLIN**

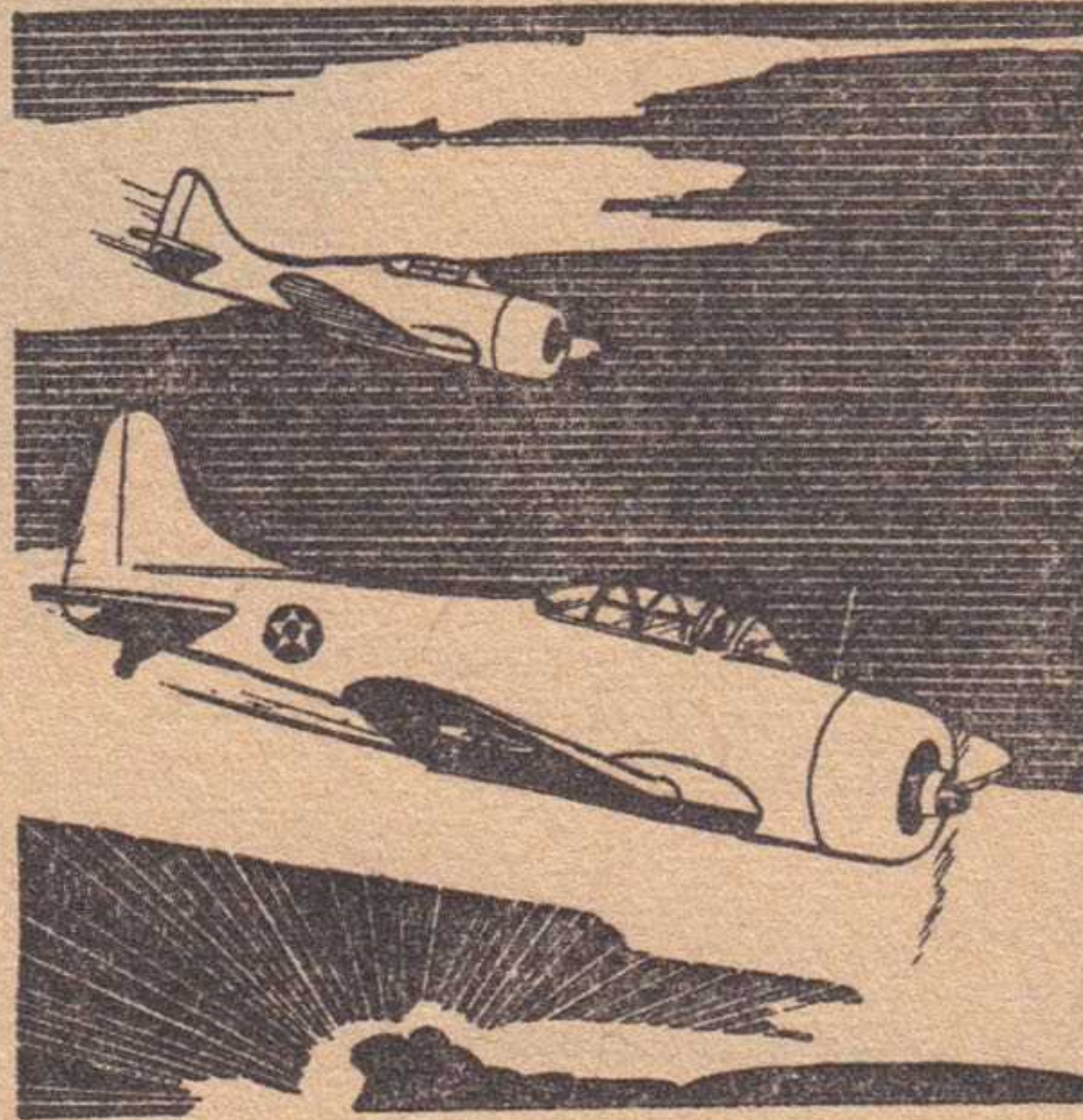
It takes guts and brains to win silver wings and join the mighty Air Force of the greatest nation in the world!

WITH all restrictions for the admission of new flying cadets eliminated, the U. S. Army Air Forces were—and still are—being deluged with new applications.

Hundreds of the applicants already knew how to fly through their training in the Civil Pilot's Training Programs—thousands of them didn't. Of these thousands very few had seen the inside of a college. But they were admitted; have graduated—and to the theatres of war such as Australia, with MacArthur; Britain with the R.A.F.; China, with Kai-shek.

The ships these boys trained in are interesting. We know about the fighters they use in combat; but the trainers the fledglings are taught to fly first are vitally important. A trainee doesn't just step from a ground school classroom into a thousand horsepower P-40. No, sir! He's asked to step into the rear cockpit of a Ryan PT-21 low-wing, all-metal ship powered by a Kinner 160 horsepower radial engine. The maximum speed of this ship is only 131 miles per hour; it cruises at 123 miles per hour, and lands at approximately 54 miles an hour.

The Ryan PT-21 is completely equipped with dual controls for both instructor and student; has the beginner's complement of instruments; al-



timeter, compass, tachometer, oil pressure gauge, and gas gauge; dual brakes operated either hydraulically or mechanically; steel crash protector post in case of a turnover in landing.

The Army uses other models of this ship such as the PT-20; the PT-20A

and the PT-16; all are the same in construction except the PT-16 uses an inverted Menasco straight-in-line powerplant instead of a Kinner Radial.

The Fairchild PT-19—the PT stands for Primary Trainer—is another of the ships the cadet steps into for the first lessons in flying in the Army. This is not an all-metal job but is covered by plywood and fabric. The fuselage is welded steel tubing. Just between the instructor and student is a protective crash truss as in the case of the Ryan. Both cockpits carry a full complement of instruments with the compass and fuel gauges in the instructor's cubicle only. This ship is powered by an air-cooled, inline, Ranger inverted engine delivering 175 horsepower. The top speed of this ship is 135 miles an hour; its cruising speed is 120 miles an hour and it lands at 48 miles an hour.

When the cadet proves his proficiency in these trainers, he is advanced to faster types until he completes his course, sprouts wings, and joins the greatest fighting Air Forces in the world.

Peel Off and Pulverize 'Em!

by
JUDE BRAYTON

Would another United Nations' squadron be blown out of the air by uncannily accurate Jap ack-ack—or could the new Yank sky-devil smash the mysterious Nip battery single-handed?



Mickey was diving after the Jap with Brownings burning into the Nip plane!

BLINKEY FARRELL, a subconscious ace recently arrived with the vanguard of the American Air Forces in India, was seated at the end of the long mess table in the hastily erected Mess Hut just off the R.A.F. airfield outside of Calcutta.

A listener might have thought he was bragging.

"All I need," he told the rest of the

Yanks around the table, "is a pair of spectacles and a paper bag, and with one fell swipe I'll put a permanent stop to that Japanese pop-corn factory in no time at all."

Mickey Walsh had grown up with Blinkey; loved him like a brother and thought to humour him. "Not a real honest-to-goodness paper bag, Blinkey?"

Some of the others laughed nervously. They knew they had a man's-sized job on their hands. And their young and handsome faces were all too serious about their new assignment.

"Let's not kid ourselves about this job," suggested one of the more serious minded. "The Brass Hats have been in a huddle for three days now. They know what we're up against just as well as we know."

"The Japs have wiped out two British and Chinese Squadrons already which means they ain't goin' to take anything we can hand out lyin' down," ventured Tennessee Jackson, a lad right from the Tobacco Road country.

"Well," Blinkey started again, "if the Brass Hats want to know what I think—"

"We don't," said a cold voice—a hard voice that suddenly roared over the noise of the mess as some one cried: "Ten-shun!" and every man in the big room jumped to his feet.

"We don't want any suggestions," the American Staff Officer continued. "We're fully decided on what we are to do and we'll tell you what our decision is, if you'll be good enough to lend us your ears."

A few of the more sensitive youngsters felt the warmth of blushes rise to their cheeks as they detected a slight tinge of sarcasm in the voice of their superior officer.

Blinkey started to cough in embarrassment but succeeded only in choking once or twice as the officer glared at him and waited for the pilot to quiet down before proceeding with orders.

"As you already know," he began, "the United Nations have been driven out of most of their strongholds in Burma. We've lost Lashio, Maymyo, Mandalay and other important strategic cities and towns. We intend to get them back for they are vital to us. For the past three weeks, however, we have

been frustrated by a heavy artillery battery that until now even our allied Air Forces have been unable to locate it and put it out of business."

He paused to see the effect his talk was having on the men. He was satisfied that they were deeply interested. He went on after drawing a deep breath.

"We believe we now know where that battery is to be found. We judge that from the photos that have been taken over the area."

"I thought it was by the number of British and Allied Squadrons that have been knocked out over the area, flying obsolete bombers," thought Blinkey to himself.

"Therefore," continued the Headquarters man, "an all out, twenty-four hour air offensive starts tomorrow morning over that area to devastate it. At eight-thirty sharp, a Squadron of Avro Anson Bombers loaned us by the R.A.F.—" Blinkey moaned inwardly. The Ansons were the slow, sluggish ships the Japs had been knocking out of the air—"will take off for a point between Lashio and Maymyo in Burma. Each bomber will be accompanied by two American Curtiss Hawks flying above and below it—" he hesitated a moment as if in deliberation—then went on—"about a thousand feet above and below it."

"Poor Limy devils," thought Blinkey. "They'll have the same chance the others had, I guess."

"You men," went on the Officer, "will escort the bombers and see that they get through the anti-aircraft line of fire which, in that sector, happens to be extremely strong. It will be your duty to strafe and otherwise to divert their fire, and also to protect the bombers from possible attack from Japanese Mitsubishi fighters."

"As much chance as a snowball in the hands of a thirsty Libyan," thought

Blinkey.

"The bomberpilots who have been here for several days—and who know the territory," added the Officers, "will set your course and you will follow them. Thirty thousand brave Chinese and British troops have been killed in this sector in the past three weeks attempting to hold back the Japanese thrust into China proper. That should mean a good deal to you men. To us, we of the combined British, Chinese and American Staff"—three British Brass Hats, two Chinese Generals and Three American Staff Officers in addition to the Squadron C.O. were standing before the men assembled in the Hut—"it means that that destruction must be stopped at all costs; the battery be silenced, and Maymyo and Lashio retaken from the Japanese."

HE PAUSED again a moment, turned to the other Staff officers for agreement, got their nods, and turned back to the pilots. "It is up to you. It's a serious business from which many of you will not return; but the yellow men must not be allowed to go on until they reach even the very doors of India itself. You must prevent that, you men. That is all!"

He glanced about the room and rubbed the bulb on the end of his nose. "At ease," he called and turned and walked the other high officers out.

For three weeks the toll of United Nations infantry had been ten thousand lives a week paid out to a hidden battery of Japanese guns that were so well concealed, that nothing the Allies had attempted to ferret them out with was successful.

For a while this section of the Chinese and British line had been so successful that the Nipponese so-called Impregnable had been forced back beyond Mandalay, thus preventing a complete collapse of the United Nations

hold in Burma. But they came on again in such force and in such numbers that the Allies were driven northeast almost to the Chinese border. There they held and finally forced their way down the Irrawaddy, fought right up to Mandalay's back door, until a wedge of United Nations' Infantry stuck its nose between the three cities of Mandalay, Maymyo and Lashio.

British and Chinese replacements after replacements were blown to pieces in the hills and jungles of the sector. As men were destroyed, other men were brought up to fill the gaps, but the gaps were reopened again with more Japanese shell fire. And the thing that ripped at the hearts of the men who died was not that they gave their lives fighting, but that they were not given a fighting chance for their lives. Air support up to now had been too little, not good enough when it did come; and more often too late to do any good. When they did arrive they were blown out of the air by uncanny ack-ack marksmanship.

They knew that hidden somewhere in the far hills lay a gigantic heavy artillery battery of big guns that never stopped firing day or night. The Allied wedge had to be driven back. But the wedge held in spite of the battering but the cost was great.

Three air squadrons of the combined British and Chinese Air Commands had been shot out of the skies by the Archies that surrounded and protected the battery. Giant bombers were blown apart in the air as Japanese anti-aircraft gunners expertly sliced the wings from their fuselages. It was said the Nips had a new secret weapon, an anti-aircraft range finder that was infallibly accurate. The results seemed to warrant belief in such a fantastic yarn.

Ordinary Reconnaissance Patrols could get no nearer to the battery than the first line of ack-ack. They were

invariably driven off.

The combined British, Chinese and American Headquarters staff knew that the guns were placed well behind the first line of anti-aircraft batteries. They knew too that anti-aircraft guns lay hidden in the jungles along the shell trajectory route from the big guns and that the successful demolition of the damaging Japanese gun fire would have to start with the elimination of the lines or nests of anti-aircraft batteries. This would then have to be followed by the unearthing of the big battery itself.

TWO new air squadrons had just arrived and were based on the new military air field outside of Calcutta. One was an R.A.F. bombing squadron whose personnel would use the Avro Anson bombers already hangared at the field; the other was a Yank Air Force fighter squadron who would temporarily use the Curtiss Hawks 75-A's that were sent up to Calcutta when they were rescued from the Dutch East Indies two days before Java fell.

The week that followed the Yankee squadron's arrival in Calcutta, British, Chinese and American Staff officers infested the place. The pilots, all of them, British, Yank and Chinese who were quartered on the field laid their bets with the odds against themselves.

However, the Americans were a little more confident—though much less experienced—of what they would do to the Jap invisible battery than the British or Chinese lads. At least, they said they were. To the Yanks, the job was a mere matter of a few hours when they would put a stop to the whole fuss. Now they were given something real to think about with the address of the American Staff officer whom Blinkey was pleased to dub "old bulbous nose" merely because the man's proboscis was slightly inflated.

When the Brass Hats were gone, the

pilots dropped into their various chairs once more and wiped the perspiration from their harassed brows.

"That's a swell one," cried Blinkey. "Stop that Battery! Stop the Japs! Save China! Save India!" He became a little disgusted and made no effort to hide his feelings. "Why the heck don't they tell us just where the battery is located so we can stop it?"

"He really didn't mention that, now did he?" wondered Quigley, an Irishman from Hoboken. "Now why, do you think?"

"That, my Mick friend, is a headquarters secret that old bulbous nose is going to keep until after the War." Then he added: "He did say something about pictures."

"Those Avro Ansons'll lay their eggs like they always do," cried another Yank, "in places that mean nothing. The lousy tubs are slow, heavy and one good shot of grapejuice from a Jap anti and they'll fold up like a lot of Nipponese fans!"

"Well," cried Mickey Walsh, "why don't you boys quit? Resign! Tell 'em you don't want to work for them any more!"

"Of course," injected a pilot from Rhode Island, "one hundred and eighty-eight miles an hour is slow compared to our own Flying Fortresses, but we can't wait until enough of those get over here from the States."

But the pilot just glared at the men and called him "a Rhode Island Red" and let the quips fall and lay wherever they landed.

The sun was high the following morning when the first of the Anson Bombers roared over the Hawk hangars and gained height for its rendezvous with the first of the escort planes.

The bomber with its two Armstrong-Siddeley "Cheetah" engines of only 350 horsepower and moderate wing spread looked formidable and terrifying

enough. But for modern warfare and bombing, its speed was too slow. However, nestled close in its huge insides, it hugged to its metal bosom ten bombs constructed especially for the job in hand.

To Blinkey the whole show seemed a horrible waste of good planes—that is, fairly good planes—and perfectly good pilots. They knew the general direction in which they were to fly, but they did not know exactly the precise spot where to lay their bombs. It was a paradox, he thought, that even in broad daylight the whole squadron was in the dark.

DOGGEDLY he pulled his helmet down over his head and fastened his chin strap with a tug of disgust. For a moment he stood by his snout-nosed ship with his foot in the step and watched another Anson ride over. He shook his head hopelessly. It was bloody murder.

Once inside the cockpit, he was soon winging his way aloft as his Cyclone engine yanked him into the upper areas for his own rendezvous with a lumbering Anson. Since the maximum speed of the Ansons was only 188 miles an hour, and the cruising speed of his own Hawk 262 miles an hour, he knew that he would have to fly well throttled down if he didn't want to leave his charge behind. Just what that would do to the engine he had a faint idea, but if that's what they wanted, that's what he'd give them.

Fifteen minutes later, Blinkey and five other Hawks had throttled down to ride a thousand feet below six, slow Anson Bombers while six other Yanks in Hawks rode above them a thousand feet to keep possible Jap marauders from interfering with the plans of the United Nations Far Eastern High Command.

Blinkey knew it was only a matter of

minutes when the Japs would spot the aerial parade if not by actually seeing them, then by the sound of the engines.

He could hear the deafening roar around him over the noise of his own powerplant and laid a bet with himself that the whole squadron would not get beyond the first line of anti-aircraft fire.

But Blinkey lost his bet. Nestling in the palm and teak trees twenty thousand feet below him as he and the rest of the expedition crossed the Jap lines beyond the eastern outskirts of Mandalay, he knew there was a battery of Nip ack-ack. But they were silent. And he was worried.

The Irrawaddy River snaked its silvery path to Rangoon and the Gulf of Martaban below them. Sabu and Worang Mountains, the tallest peaks in the Shan area—over eleven thousand feet above sea level—which they crossed, lay like two low hillocks beneath them. Other mountain ranges and hills sank into the terrain beneath them.

Ten miles beyond the Irrawaddy Basin lay the apex of the British-Chinese wedge. The cold perspiration leaked through the visor of Blinkey's helmet and he was admittedly nervous. The whole business wasn't right, somehow. It seemed too easy. To the southeast lay Maymyo. To the northeast beyond the Kachin Hills lay Lashio.

There were no Japanese planes in the air to meet them. It seemed the whole thing was a flying picnic and they were the guests of the friendly Nipponese.

Blinkey removed one of his gloves and wiped the perspiration from his palm. He wasn't afraid. But he suspected a trap. He knew the formation had been sighted long before and the news of the impending raid telephoned on to Jap Headquarters.

The drone of the engines above him; the sound of his own Wright-Cyclone and the others riding beside him, seemed to annoy him for some unaccountable reason. He did not know that it was the nervous tension he had brought upon himself that was causing the dull pain in the pit of his stomach and the pain in his ears—not the altitude alone. Not even the oxygen he sucked through the tube helped that.

On rode the flights toward what they thought was their objective. Blinkey looked on ahead and saw a small, dense forest of teak trees and palms. There were small patches of open space near it, and these were finally closed up by larger and more dense arrangements of jungle foliage. Was that the place they were heading for, he wondered?

SOMEHOW it didn't look natural. The peculiar shape of that particular greenery made him think of the quadrangle at Yale; classrooms on four sides and a large attractive campus in the middle.

This arrangement was like that but instead of classrooms or dormitories, there were trees; huge Teaks and abundant green foliage. In the middle, no campus here but another gathering of tall trees which seemed to have been stuck there by Japanese gardeners. Strange arrangement, he thought.

Still he wondered why no enemy aircraft had tried to intercept the flight. But not only had no enemy planes been sighted, but no anti-aircraft guns had fired on them since they left Calcutta.

His fears seemed to allay themselves and he became less suspicious and more alert. The engines droned on and the squadron rode in good order. Nearer and nearer they flew to the vast forest square. The air about them was undisturbed except for the churning their propellers were giving it. Blinkey imagined the forest wild with animal life.

He almost heard tropical birds singing; or so it seemed to his vivid imagination. He sensed slimy reptiles crawling and slithering through the swamps below.

Only a few white scuds drifted here and there at their altitude. The visibility was clear below; the sky above was bright and blue. A voice came over the radio and seeped into his headphones. It was the Bomber Squadron Leader: "Ready all," he cried. "Ansons to fifteen thousand; Hawks to ten thousand. Hawks peel and dive if the ack-ack gets too hot up here and start straffing them at lower altitudes. This looks easy. Go!"

The whole squadron cut their engines—Blinkey was relieved at that for his temperature meter and Tachometers were telling him that his engine under the lower revs was not happy—and all ships nosed for the lower altitudes.

The Hawk pilot was not feeling quite comfortable when he finally rode into the wooded square. He glanced down over the side of his ship, then up at the flight of British Ansons above him and the rest of the American Hawks above them. He turned back to the trees below and his eyes fairly popped from their sockets. The whole of the wooded area below suddenly came alive with flashes of fire that clawed up at the roaring flight like flaming fingers from hell.

Every foot of the quadrangle below seemed to cover a fiery menace that threatened to destroy every plane in the air. It was almost a solid mass—a blanket of fire. Thunderous barks as from the infected throats of mad dogs reached Blinkey's ears. He knew only too well what they were.

A quick glance about him and he observed that the whole flight was suspended right in the middle of the burning square. He judged that it would be a miracle if one of them got out of it alive. Guns blazed below from every

angle; from in front of the planes; from behind them; and from both sides completely encircling them.

"So this looked easy, did it?" he swore. So violent, so sudden and so accurate had been the attack from below that the three forward Hawks were caught in the first blast and burst into flames dropping like match boxes that had been accidentally touched off in contact with a red hot stove.

The sky became black with burning shrapnel. Fire from the four sides concentrated on the squadron and the gap made by the falling Hawks was soon filled with burning Anson Bombers.

The whole expedition peeled off in such disorder that two of the upper flight of Hawks crashed head on, locked wings and fluttered to earth in flames with two dead American pilots crumpled in their cockpits. Wherever a plane dived, he ran into consuming fire and shrapnel. It did not seem possible that that horrible inferno could be safely penetrated by a single plane.

BLINKEY suddenly threw the full throttle to his Cyclone and nosed toward the sky away from the guns below. But even he carried with him, it seemed, a ton of shrapnel imbedded in the wings and fuselage of his Hawk. He climbed and circled inside the burning square until he was safely out of range of the ack-ack. At thirty thousand feet he gasped for breath; then remembered his oxygen and hurriedly stuck the tube in his mouth and found relief. He succeeded in crossing the outer rim of the quadrangle of anti-aircraft guns but not until a bit of shrapnel had struck him in the middle of his forehead and stunned him almost into insensibility. He did not know how it got up that high; he wondered if the new Jap ack-ack guns could reach that altitude. Apparently they could. The force of the metal however had evi-

dently been spent when it hit him; it would have penetrated his brain if it had not, and Blinkey would have joined his fallen comrades in the hell below.

He swung his Hawk out and away from the still blasting gunfire. He saw more Ansons too slow to get away finished off, blown to pieces either in the air by ack-ack marksmanship, or when they came in contact with the ground and their own bombs blew them back into the sky again spewing the wreckage over the entire area. The attack came so unexpectedly, and with such terrific impact, that the bombs the Ansons did manage to loose upon the enemy fell far short of their targets.

Almost all of the Hawks which rode in the underflight with Blinkey were destroyed. One bomber in the rear managed to turn about and retreat as far as the outer edge of the great quadrangle where another battery of anti-aircraft guns sent it sprawling into a nearby swamp with its crew of three, where its gas tanks and bombs blew them into the mud and buried them without even simple honors.

Blinkey was right. It was bloody slaughter!

Still dazed from contact with the stray piece of shrapnel, Blinkey rode on, heading back for Calcutta.

A glance at his instrument panel showed him his gasoline gauge had departed this life and his compass had departed from the instrument board. A large hole, ragged from shrapnel, and slightly shredded, took their place. A hole in the floor just underneath the panel showed him where the shrapnel had penetrated, and as he looked down through it, he saw the terrain below. The engine continued to behave sensibly fortunately, so he assumed that the gas tanks had not been injured.

His wings were porous with shrapnel punctures. His fuselage and wings were loaded with the metal and the

weight of his ship was far greater than when he had taken off from the field.

Blinkey prayed that his ship would hold together long enough to carry him safely home; that his engine would keep alive until he cut the switch in front of his cherished hangars. Then, they could cut off and he would cut loose.

He nosed to the Hawk's absolute ceiling which was 33,000 feet. He knew that although he had escaped the murder grounds, they would telephone toward the line for other anti-aircraft to keep a sharp lookout for him and where the ack-ack couldn't reach him, they might send up some Zero fighters to lay him low. He hoped too that his oxygen supply would last; his head even with the gas felt ready to split.

Off in the distance to the right of him he saw three other planes headed in the same direction and recognized them as Hawks from the ill-fated raid.

"Annihilation!" he cursed under his breath. "Bloody annihilation!" Not a single bomber had escaped the blast. "Wait 'til I see those lousy Brass Hats. I'll spit enough sulphur in their faces to turn their brass as black as their hearts." He was mad—right from his sweatcovered shirt to his rapidly beating heart.

HIS prayers were answered. The Cyclone roared him down right to the concrete apron of the Calcutta field. The ship had been equally true to its trust. Once on the field, the right wing collapsed under the weight of the large quantity of Japanese steel it carried.

The other planes rolled in almost at the same time. The Brass Hats were waiting in front of the Operations Office for the return of the Squadron.

With bloodshot eyes and murder in his heart, Blinkey Farrell strode over to the officers of the High Command. He spread his legs apart to support him, ripped the helmet and goggles from his

head without saluting. In defiance he placed his hands on his hips and stood a moment glaring at them. Then he virtually screamed at them:

"You lousy lot of lice! You stinking lot of murderers! You swivel chair stinkpots!"

The Brass Hats stiffened as though they had been thrust through with steel bayonets. Their faces reddened to a man. Old Bulbous Nose was right up in front; he turned livid with rage. Even the red of the bulb paled.

"Who the devil is this man?" he roared.

"I'll tell you who I am," shouted Blinkey hysterically. "I'll tell you who I am, you bulbous-nosed liquor sponge! I'm one of the men you tried to murder! I'm one of the men you sent out with that bunch of lousy, obsolete flying coffins to die without a chance with the others. I'm one of the men you ignorant, self-satisfied saps sent out into a fire trap and one of only four out of thirty men to get back with a whole skin. You murdered the others because you knew what you were sending us into and didn't care. You knew it because you sent two other Squadrons out before us with the same ships and they were destroyed to a man!"

The officer Blinkey called Old Bulbous Nose would have fallen over if his high blood pressure hadn't held him up. "Arrest that man," he thundered. "Arrest him and throw him in the guard-house!"

Blinkey hadn't a chance. At the Court-Martial he told his story. Told of the quadrangle of anti-aircraft guns from which only four men escaped. Told of how the Hawks were caught only because they had to fly almost a hundred miles an hour under their normal cruising speed and how that had affected their engines, making sudden maneuverability of their ships almost impossible; how they were blasted out

of the sky before they had a chance to recover.

The jury of his peers agreed that Blinkey Farrell might have been slightly justified in his tirade, but he was still just a Lieutenant and Colonels and Generals had to command respect even when they didn't earn it or deserve it.

So they cashiered Blinkey; stripped him of his wings, his commission, and sent him to a chemical laboratory in Calcutta where he could wallow in the making of stink bombs for the Jap trench rats.

Blinkey was permanently grounded and almost broken-hearted, but for one thing. He vowed that he would one day wipe out that nest of anti-aircraft guns and avenge the death of every man in that fatal flight; in the *three* stricken squadrons, in fact.

Just how he was going to do that he didn't know at the moment. But he carried something back with him from the sudden retreat from the quadrangle which he hadn't told the court martial about. And why should he have. It was his secret and he would bring it out in the open in the way that suited his purpose.

At the chemical plant Blinkey went to work in earnest. He had been sentenced to the job because he wanted it that way. If he had to be transferred out of the Air Force, the chemical branch was the one he could serve in next best. He had been a chemical engineer in civil life.

MICKEY WALSH, the chap who had taunted Blinkey about his paper bag in mess the night before the aerial massacre, was on the jury that tried Blinkey. He knew Blinkey—had grown up with him as a kid, went to the same school together, and loved the impetuous pilot like a brother. It was he who had suggested to the jury of officers that Blinkey be transferred to the

Chemical Corps. And he did it because he knew that was the one thing he could do for his friend that would make his cross a lot easier to bear.

A week after the trial Mickey got a one day's furlough and he spent it in town with his friend. They walked and talked for hours among the monuments of the beautiful Maidan—the Central Park of Calcutta—and circled the walks of Fort William overlooking the magnificent race track.

They strolled along the tree studded Red Road where the Elite of Calcutta spent the warm evenings. They even took time out to view the Indian Memorial to the good Queen Victoria; the marble hall which held the relics of Clive, Roberts, the Black Hole of Calcutta, and others of historical memory. They finished up at one of the fashionable hotels on the Chowinghee, the Park Avenue of the city, for dinner.

Finally—over a bottle of Scotch—Blinkey told Mickey the idea he had in mind to wipe out the anti-aircraft quadrangle and the Great Battery; told Mickey he was sure he knew its absolute location. It could never be even approached in the daylight—it had to be wiped out at night. But at night it was impossible to locate except through the application of his idea. With that—and only with that—could the absolute destruction of the objective be accomplished. "And the idea, Mickey," said Blinkey, "is wrapped up in that paper bag; several of them."

"You're kidding," chaffed Mickey.

"Am I?" asked Blinkey seriously. "Well, my fine, fat and feather-brained friend, you'll see whether I am or not in a minute. Just listen with your head a moment."

Blinkey outlined the whole idea to his friend and Mickey's eyes widened as he listened to the fantastic tale as it was unwound. When Blinkey had finished, Mickey exclaimed enthusias-

tically: "Blinkey, it's terrific!" And he added grinning: "And so are your paper bags!"

"They'll never get that battery in the daytime," Mickey continued. "And you can't possibly locate it at night. Even the flashes of gunfire from the great guns are so well concealed that they can't be seen from the air. It's fool proof and the most positive man-killing outfit on any battle front anywhere. If we can stop that battery, we can make it possible for the big guys to spread that wedge, recapture Maymyo, and Lashio and even Mandalay and drive those yellow rats completely out of Burma."

"If you make good, Blinkey," hazarded Mickey, "you'll get yourself a Congressional Medal of Honor from the President; A Victoria Cross from the blooming King, and whatever Chiang Kai-shek slips to his heroes."

"I don't care about those baubles," said Blinkey, his jaw tightening perceptibly. "I want to get back at those jaundiced swine for what they did to our Squadron; and make it impossible for them to repeat the offense. I want to show up the dopey Brass Hats—especially Old Bulbous Nose—and if I can—and I think I can—keep the Chinks from being slaughtered like sheep." He paused a moment as his glance wandered and he seemed to be searching within himself; then he added slowly: "And that's where you come in."

"Me?" asked the puzzled Mickey.

"Yes, you," replied Blinkey. He outlined the rest of his idea to Mickey very carefully.

When he was through, they realized that it might mean a firing squad for both of them if they failed; or a basketful of decorations if they succeeded. Blinkey was so emphatic that the plan could not fail that Mickey was induced to throw in with him.

BACK at his quarters, Blinkey acted mysteriously. He drew the blinds of his windows; locked his door; then opened a small trunk and drew out four bottles containing a peculiarly colored liquid.

He held them up proudly for Mickey to see: "This is it, Mickey," he glowed. "This is the stuff that's going into those paper bags we talked about."

He placed the bottles gingerly on the table and drew several paraffined bags out of the trunk. Carefully he emptied the contents of the bottles into them. Then he sealed them up and put them into a small paper carton.

"Hide this carton in the cockpit of your ship, Mickey," he suggested. "Better do it tonight. We won't have any time to waste tomorrow."

"Okay, Blinkey," replied Mickey. "I'll see that nothing slips up. I'll tie the box under the chair."

"Good boy," smiled Blinkey gratefully. "We'll be wearing the Medal of Honor together—or we'll be pushing up tea balls under a Burmese rice paddy."

"You mean rice cakes, don't you, Mister," grinned Mickey.

"Rice cakes or tea balls," laughed Blinkey, "we won't know the difference if we ever get into that condition."

The following dawn, Mickey Walsh was standing behind the hangar which housed his Hawk. In the still darkened air field he waited.

He was fully dressed for his patrol over Burma. His ship was being readied by the mechanics; the engine was turning over gently as it warmed preparatory to the flight. Anxiously his eyes strained for the sight of Blinkey.

Seemingly out of nowhere, his face partially covered with his scarf, Blinkey appeared. Both men slipped into the shadows of the hangar and in two minutes had changed clothes agreeing on a place to meet where Blinkey would

turn back the plane he was borrowing for his job to Mickey.

He pulled Mickey's goggles down over his eyes and stepped into the cockpit of the waiting Hawk. He gave the signal and the chocks were yanked away.

"Happy landing, Lieutenant Walsh," cried the Indian aircraftsman.

Blinkey waved silently at the man, gave the ship the gun, and roared off as Mickey watched anxiously from the shadows.

Blinkey turned the nose of the ship dead on the compass direction in which the massacred flight had flown that tragic morning. He reached under his chair; the box was fastened there.

Inserting the oxygen tube in his mouth, he opened the tank valves and started the flow of gas. Then he nosed the ship to the thirty thousand foot altitude and held it there. He knew that if he was to succeed in his plan he would have to get well over the range of the Japanese anti-aircraft.

Three times he changed his course to avoid and confuse Jap observation posts below. When he arrived about ten miles off the spot where the quadrangular anti-aircraft gun emplacements were located, he veered North to go around it and find himself heading in the general direction of home when the job was completed.

He reached under the seat again and tore the cover off the box. Carefully he lifted the first of the strong paper bags out and held it on his lap. The parafine coating on the bags had prevented seepage of the chemical.

THE Wright-Cyclone roared on with a steady cadence that was almost musical. Its rhythm was the rhythm of a heart beat whose regularity gave no hint of possible disaster. The wary pilot smiled confidently. All was going well. It should be so.

Blinkey noted his various compass directions, time, and altitude on a sheet of paper attached to a board on his knee. The notations were important; most important when the final blow would be struck.

Off in the distance he caught sight of the forest quadrangle. He knew now what lay within its seemingly serene bowers. This time he would not be caught dozing. He was not fooling himself. He knew that by now he had been sighted and his ship located on the range finders. He knew too that they were waiting for him. But he had to avoid them this time. He had another objective. He was not after the ack-ack.

One mile beyond the quadrangle, and almost hidden from sight even at that great height by the tall Teak trees, stood four large colorful buildings that resembled Burmese Temples. A hurried glance would miss them. They covered, Blinkey judged, about ten acres of the vast foliaged grounds on which they stood. They were a silent, serene looking lot of temples shielded by the Teaks in many places. Because of these trees, they were unnoticed by the other attacking squadrons in the past. They were not suspicious looking buildings. Their greens and browns and reds almost blended completely as a chameleon might with the foliage surrounding them.

Blinkey noticed an occasional flash of light that came from the openings that might be windows in the temples, but those flashes could easily be attributed to the reflection of the sun against glass window panes. The very low rumble that followed the flash could easily be attributed to thunder, or the rumble of a dying volcano.

What the pilot particularly noticed was the absence of religious life although the place indicated that there might be—should be—priests, white-

robed and fervently devout, roaming the grounds.

As he ruminated thus, Blinkey suddenly felt his wings rock with the concussion of an archie blast. Less than five hundred feet away, a puff of black smoke appeared below him. This was followed by another blast closer than the first. By this time he was directly over the temples. He had cut the motor and had glided toward the temples leaving the quadrangle of anti-aircraft guns behind him. Had they fired sooner, they might have gotten a hit. At thirty thousand he was out of the range. But he had to come down now. He was too high for accuracy himself; for his own job. For a perfect job—with no bomb sight—he could not hit his objective properly over five thousand feet up, he thought. It was dangerously low; but he had to take that chance.

He swung the Hawk in a wide circle over the temples to get them directly under his wing. He kept circling over them as he descended. At ten thousand his ship was convulsed with vibrations as Archies from all sides of him burst around him; holes appeared in the wings and fuselage of the ship. He realized then that the temples themselves were encircled by a protecting quadrangle of anti-aircraft guns of their own.

This confirmed his suspicions. Now he knew he had to act fast. He had found the big gun emplacement that had cost the Chinese and British ten thousand men killed a week for the past three weeks. The innocent looking temples held death within their ostensibly peaceful interiors.

Once more he was in the middle of that anti-aircraft blast from which he had seen so few of his fellow pilots escape. He knew he had only a few seconds to work and he worked fast.

He dived the Hawk until his stomach begged for mercy. He pulled out un-

der five thousand and lifted the nose of the ship until his view past the trailing edge of his right wing was clear.

HE LIFTED the first of the paper bags over the side of the ship as another burst of Archie almost rolled the ship over on its side. Fortunately, the plane rolled over on the side toward which the first of the temples lay directly beneath him. The bag went hurtling for the stone roof below. He reached under the seat for another bag but did not have time to use it. He had to nose for altitude and lots of it—and in a hurry. He was wafted up with the assistance of a burst of anti-aircraft that ripped through his right wing and tore part of the metal clean off the right aileron exposing its midstructure.

One more glance over the side as he tore through and between two black bursts and he shrieked for joy. The roof of the Temple was smeared with the chemical, part of which had struck the parapet and run down the side of the building.

The firing of the anti-aircraft below suddenly ceased. Blinkey was puzzled. But he guessed that when there was no explosion from his paper bomb, the command below decided that they did not need to waste too many ack-ack shells on him. As for pictures, he could not possibly have taken any in that dim light. He judged they left him to the mercy—or lack of it—of some Mitsubishi fighter who would get him—if he let him—on the way back.

Given the opportunity and now fifteen thousand feet above his objective, he tried his luck at dumping the rest of his load of paper bags. He rode in a parallel line with the Temple roofs, cast the bags over the side, and hiked like the wind in the direction of home. Since there was still the danger of enemy fighters, he kept a sharp lookout for them. He leveled off again at twen-

ty-eight thousand and nosed for Calcutta.

Two miles this side of the Calcutta field and on a field where he and Mickey had arranged to meet, he saw his friend waiting for him. After he turned the ship over and told Mickey of the success of his mission, he said: "Now let's pray the sun shines like blazes all day," He apologized for the condition of the plane: "Sorry," he said, "they messed up your Hawk. But Boy! it was worth it!"

"I don't care about the ship," replied Mickey. "I was more concerned about you."

"Thanks," smiled Blinkey. "Now about that Anson for tonight—"

"It'll be warmed up and on the line ready for you," replied Mickey. "That little job cost me fifty Rupees to take care of the three Hindu greasemonkeys, but if you make good it will be worth it, and more."

"I'll make good now, Mickey," said Blinkey. "I can't help it. No matter how dark it will be, I'll be able to make that target out tonight." Then he added: "How about the bombs?"

"They'll be in the racks and ready," Mickey informed him. "All you'll have to do is start rolling out of the hangar and keep going." Mickey's face grew serious a moment. Then he said: "I wish you'd let me go with you, Blinkey, instead of trying it alone. I could handle the few bombs we carry while you fly the tub. Besides, you know what we agreed on; we share our decorations on this job, or a plot in a rice paddy."

The two friends eyed each other for a brief second. Blinkey's eyelids flickered a bit suspiciously. Then he said quietly: "Don't think I'm selfish and want all the glory of this job for myself. It isn't that, Mickey. We'll share the glory, all right. But not the danger. The risk is too great." He smiled kindly at his friend. "No! This is my

show! My risk and only mine! I insist on going it alone."

Mickey shrugged his shoulders: "Okay," he said. "If that's the way you want it, that's the way you'll have it."

"I'm not kidding myself, Mickey," added Blinkey. "I got away with the paper bags because they didn't go off. This job isn't going to be that easy. The minute they hear the first bomb go boom—they'll give me everything in the book—and I know it. No sense the both of us getting it."

THE Brass Hats still hovered about the Squadron and Blinkey had to be careful not to be seen near the field. It wouldn't do to have any one of them catch him near the hangars.

His prayer was answered. The sun shone brilliantly all that day. The skies were clear and though no moon was promised for that night, Blinkey knew that he'd have no difficulty in locating his objective. If there would be no moon in the sky, there would be one on earth; the one he himself had created.

Activities about the field that night were unusually quiet. The Brass Hats had folded their tents and gone into town with the Squadron C. O. who knew the right places where lonely tired men could get some relaxation. This left everything wide open for Blinkey's operations.

At eleven-thirty a twin-engined Avro Anson poured out of a Squadron hangar and tore down the field and into the air as mechanics sprawled out of the way in its mad takeoff.

Blinkey was at the controls. Ten high explosive and incendiary bombs nestled in the steel racks. The 350 horsepower "Cheetahs" ripped an otherwise quiet night to ribbons.

Blinkey headed directly for the spot between Lashio and Maymyo. He

climbed the ship to gain as much height as the heavy, now slower than ever, bomber would acquire. In the dim beam of a flashlight lamp, Blinkey examined his notes; those he had made that morning; the compass direction, time of flight from point to point; and altitude. He guided his present flight by those notes allowing for the difference in altitude and speed of the plane he was in as against the Hawk he had used earlier.

At fifteen thousand feet his engines were still rolling over steadily. He searched the skies for other ships but found that he was alone.

A layer of clouds blew in under him and cut off the view of the terrain below where occasional lights from the towns and villages over which he flew seemed to wink encouragingly at him.

He passed over Piroznur; rose higher across the islands below Raipur at the tip of the Bay of Bengal; saw Chittagong, the first of the Indian cities to be bombed by the Japs, roared on over the mountains beyond Mandalay and headed northeast for his objective.

"This is curtains," he thought, "for them—or for me."

He swung northwest again to make the wide circle he had made on his dawn trip out when he laid his paper bags in the middle of the Burmese Temples. The Temples which he knew held the Big Battery the Brass Hats would give their extra shirts to have silenced. Once silenced, there would be no more thirty thousand dead. The dead would live again in their victorious comrades in peace. And those others who had to fight in that area, would have a fighting chance for their lives.

A surge welled up within him. He seemed inspired as he flew on. His face shone but he knew it not. The lumbering craft beneath him was slow. True, in ordinary flying 188 miles an hour was fast; but in a bombing raid or combat,

the speed was boresomely slow. But he was really in no great hurry. Everything was running smoothly and according to schedule. Although he had passed over enemy territory as before, he was not molested. It was obvious that the Japs believed with infinite confidence in the infallibility of the anti-aircraft quadrangles and felt that any other device was merely a waste of time and much needed ammunition. Let the Yanks and British and Chinese ride into their spiderlike webs of gunfire unsuspectingly. They'd never get out alive. And in most instances in the past, that is exactly what happened to the Allied airman.

HE REACHED an altitude of twenty thousand feet and tried to push the bus higher; but she was riding at her absolute ceiling. The controls were heavy in his hands. Gently, almost paternally, he stroked the bomb trips and smiled at them in the dark.

The moon was not in the sky that night; but in the distance he could see a huge, ragged edged ball of greenish blue that resembled a moon and his heart beat faster; his nerves quivered with excitement. It looked like a moon on the earth; a moon that would help him wipe the devastating battery that caused so much havoc off the face of Burma; a moon that was earthbound.

The sun had done its work well. Deep in the chemical it had left its rays for him to see by night the thing that was almost invisible by day. There were evidences of an attempt to obliterate it, even at that distance. Blinkey laughed at the thought. He throttled his engines down to idling. If he would be successful, they must not be heard on the ground. He glanced down through the perspex cowling but could see nothing else below. All was utter darkness there. But it was enough for him that he saw the light of the green actinic that

splotched the Temple roofs.

Carefully he glided for the spot. The exhilaration of the moment was great. His hand rose to the bomb trips as the great green splotch settled on the trailing edge of his wings. The Anson glided gracefully though heavily toward the earth; its motors barely turning over.

His thumb tightened on the bomb trip; then relaxed quickly for a moment when he thought he heard the sound of other engines. His eyes narrowed; his jaw tightened. There were engines; unfamiliar engines. They did not sound like Mitsubishis. He took a quick look behind him and above him. There were flashes of exhaust in the sky above. There were also great black shadows of unfamiliar ships. But there were also the familiar silhouettes of Curtiss Hawks.

The fools! They had followed him; Mickey had disobeyed him after all and brought the others on; but what were those ships above? They were definitely not Ansons. He had no time to lose now. They flew at thirty thousand feet he was certain. Ansons could not reach that altitude. But he had to hurry. The gunners below must be hearing the thunder of the engines; they couldn't possibly help hearing it.

Again he turned to his trips. His thumb tightened once more—and before he had an opportunity to release his bombs, the air was suddenly filled with tracer bullets that seared the sky all about him. He had been expected after all.

From a height of twenty-five thousand feet, unseen because he was so intent on his job and his examination of the huge squadron above him, Mitsubishi fighters jumped him with both their engines and machine guns wide open.

Frantically he swung the controls to maneuver the ship out of the path of the madly driving Japs but the Anson responded lazily, lumberingly, and be-

fore Blinkey could swing it over for a dive, flaming tracers ate into the nose of his ship and dangerously close to his knees and ripped through the metal fairing on the other side of the fuselage.

The Nip formation broke all over him. He poured everything he had to the Cheetahs and dived heavily for the green splotch below determined not to be outdone or deterred from his job at no matter what it cost him. Three Mitsubishis stuck to his tail. His own machine guns were out of reach in the blister gun turret in the rear of the ship. For a moment he wished he had allowed Mickey to accompany him; at least, he could have manned the guns. Now he was practically helpless for armament protection.

DESPERATELY he looked back. Only one Mitsubishi followed him down now. The other two were engaged above him in an attempt to save themselves from the attacking Hawks. He tried to maneuver the Anson away from the Jap fighter as with full engines on, he yanked the wheel back to his chest with one hand, while with the other he pulled the bomb trips in rapid succession and poured the whole load of his bombs loose from the racks upon the earthbound moon below.

As he shot a hurried glance over the port side of the Anson to see what damage his bombs had perpetrated, splinters sprayed back into his face as a Jap blast shattered his instrument panel in front of him.

A sudden explosion behind him almost blew him out of his seat as the terrific vibration shook the Anson from tail section to nose.

Swinging quickly about in his seat, he saw the Mitsubishi which had followed him down now in flames and dropping past him like a plummet as his own plane rose again with its lightened weight. In the dark, a shadowy form

shot past; the silhouette of the pilot waved his hand high as he went by. That could only be Mickey, he thought. The double-crossing punk!

Another Hawk dropped down on the other side of him to protect his other flank as Mickey rose again and took his position on his right. Other Hawks were in the middle of a raging battle above him when one of the Japs dropped out of the fight and powerdived on the Anson all of his guns blazing a path of fire on the way down.

Blinkey stiffened in his seat; a searing, burning pain caused him to shriek and shoot his hand to his left shoulder as the black shadowy shape rode past him in the dark, Mitsubishi guns spurt-ing flame that seemed to have torn at the very root of his soul.

He drew his hand away from his shoulder and it was wet with blood. He saw Mickey break away from his right flank and dive after the Jap with Brownings burning into the tail section of the Nipponese plane. He saw another burst of fire and the man below continued on in his crazy dive and blew apart not far from the Temples that were ablaze now from his bombs. The light of the flames showed plainly the huge guns the buildings, whose roofs were blown apart, had concealed. Then, for the first time during the fight, the anti-aircraft quadrangle below opened up. The sky itself now was on fire and the light illuminated the forest of Teaks and Palms below with strange flickering shadow shapes.

Painfully, Blinkey tried to climb the Anson out of range of the ack-ack. He felt like passing out and he knew he mustn't; the pain in his shoulder was making his stomach crawl. He shook himself out of the impending lethargy. A quick glance at Mickey and he saw his friend signalling to him; he was pointing toward home and urging him to head for Calcutta. As he followed

Mickey's lead, he glanced up at the thundering herd of giant planes moving swiftly over him. He sensed they were attempting to get into position and he was in the way. He swung the Anson out of the path of the bombers above and saw dozens of black objects leave the ships above him. Then the whole burning earth below seemed to be lifted into the atmosphere. The Anson was raised as though it were a feather fluttering on the breeze. The explosions were deafening. Great fires were started in almost every point in the forest and jungle below. The whole area was a huge mass of flames that stretched its fiery fingers farther and farther into the Burmese acreage. Where a moment before the deadly anti-aircraft quadrangle sent its burning death into the sky where fiery tentacles reached hungrily for the British and American planes and pilots, there was nothing but death and destruction; the quadrangle had been smashed.

As the bombers now behind him continued to fly back and forth, to angulate for miles over the place where other quadrangles had spoken, more incendiary and high explosive bombs left their racks and laid waste to the land below.

Blinkey swung painfully on toward home. The big bombers too seemed to have finished their destruction and turned toward Calcutta. Mickey and the other Hawk pilot stayed with Blinkey to escort him safely in. Blinkey prayed silently that he would not lose too much blood before he got in. He held a handkerchief tightly over the wound with one hand while he handled his ship with the other. He continued praying not to lose consciousness at least until he had reached the Calcutta field. After that, he didn't care what happened to him.

He glanced wearily back a moment to the raging inferno he and the others had

left behind them. The greenish glow of his earthbound moon was gone. Only a forest of flames that would burn deep in the hearts of Hitler's little yellow Aryan brothers for a long time to come swept into oblivion everything in its fiery, destructive path.

AS BLINKEY lay on his cot in the hospital ward the next morning, Mickey Walsh walked in with a bundle of flowers: "A Bundle for Blinkey, the Battery Buster!" smiled Mickey.

Blinkey looked up at his friend and in feigned anger replied: "Go on, you dirty doublecrosser!" Then he grinned in appreciation: "Thanks for the flowers, anyway."

"You can console yourself with the fact that you can smell them," taunted Mickey. "If I hadn't doublecrossed you, you'd be pushing up tea plants in a rice paddy by now." He looked quizzically at Blinkey. "Isn't that how you expressed it?"

"Never mind that," said Blinkey brushing the quip aside. "Those weren't Ansons you brought along with you last night. . . ."

"No," replied Mickey. "They were a new squadron of Bristol Blenheims which arrived in the afternoon; ferried in from Egypt." Then he added: "And lucky for you too."

"I'll say it was lucky," agreed Blinkey.

"Why you big lunkhead!" bullied

Mickey.

"Do you think that Anson and just ten bombs would have put that battery out of business? I had to doublecross you to save you from yourself," Mickey said.

"How did you do it?" asked Blinkey. "Get the bombers to follow me, I mean?"

"Well," said Mickey thoughtfully, "I had a man to man talk with your pal—you know, the chap you call 'Bulbous Nose.' I explained your idea to him. The phosphorous chemical in the paper bags and everything. He wouldn't listen at first, but then I worked on his powers of reason, and the first thing you know, he agreed. Even said although you were cashiered for insubordination, if the plan succeeded he would restore your rank and recommend you for the Congressional Medal of Honor."

"If the plan had failed," queried Blinkey, "what then?"

"You'd have been shot!" replied his friend. "So you see, I had to doublecross you."

"I'll never know how you got old Bulbous Nose to listen to you, Mickey, I swear," said Blinkey shaking his head dubiously.

"Well," explained Mickey lowering his face as he tried to hide an impish grin. "You see, I've reasoned with him before. I'd never told you this but—he's my Dad."

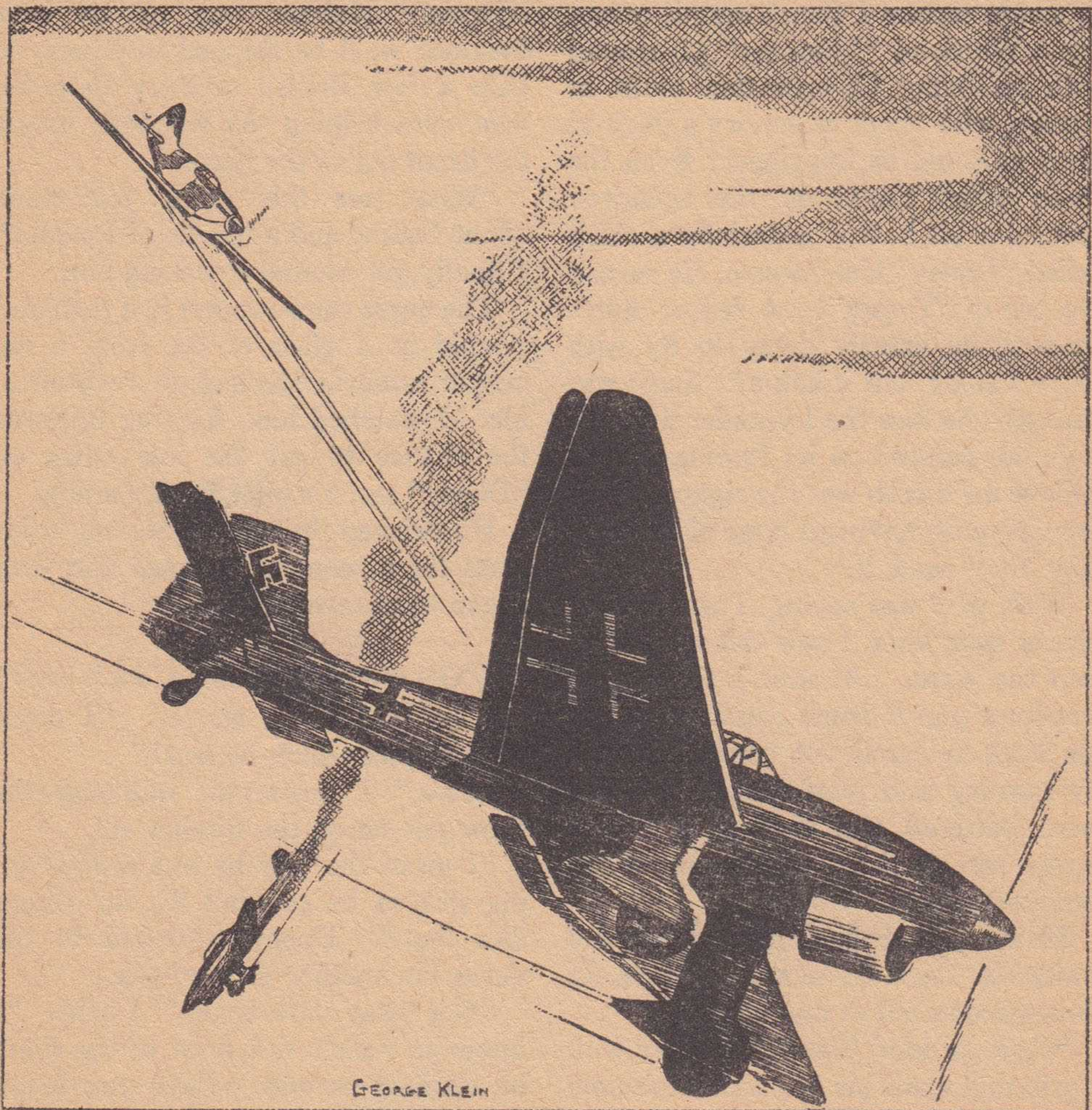
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by
F. E. RECHNITZER

Lucky? Well, maybe this flying fool was lucky, or maybe he really could do tricks in that gun turret!



I WAS feeling pretty low that day. I always did after the Russian M.O. came in with the meat wagon and changed my dressings. I was getting used to the way he yanked off the adhesive tape, but it got my goat when he'd start probing around inside of me looking for splinters of a couple of explosive slugs a nasty little Nazi had planted between my ribs a month or so

before. I guess I didn't have sense enough to realize that a nice warm hospital ward was a lot better than mucking around the front where it was about twenty below. And the fact that the United States had been jumped by the Japanazis didn't help my feelings much. I was still cussing the fact that I'd been too eager to fight to wait for the thing I knew was going to happen. If I'd

taken a little more time I might have been flying with the Americans over around Hawaii where the waters are blue and the air is balmy with the prospect of getting hot. But no, I had to rush off to Canada, enlist in the R.A.F. with the dream of one day becoming a Hurricane or Spitfire pilot. But instead of single seaters I found myself mashing a Westland "Lysander" 11 around with an Army Co-operation outfit in Russia, with about as screwy a flock of fliers as could be imagined. Even the three other Yanks in the squadron seemed a bit balmy, especially a cluck called "Dopey" Hatchworth. He earned the tag of "Dopey"! A fellow didn't have to be exactly crazy to fly with Steve Laning, but it helped. Steve was the egg who flew the Lysander with the big crab painted on its fuselage. And believe me a crab was the right insignia for that pair, although none of us knew why they used it.

Well, as I was saying, I was feeling plenty sour when I saw this chap limp into the ward. At first I thought he was some punch drunk Russian who got his beak smeared out across his face by running into Nazi tanks. His lips were battered and that gave him a funny sort of lisp. One eyebrow had been replaced by a scar.

He stopped at the foot of my bed and waited for the Russian nurse to take the thermometer out of my mouth.

"How ya doin', Slats?" he asked with a grin that made his lips turn into something that looked like a mushroom pulled inside out.

Then I tumbled to who he was. "Dopey!" I cried and then winced. Right there I knew the Russian M.O. had a little more probing to do. "Dopey, you ole fool. Come over here and sit down. How's the gang? What's cookin' back at the outfit? Are the Nazis still high tailing it for home?"

"Dopey" grinned and shuffled around

to the chair. "Didn't think you'd recognize me with my contours changed. I got that the day Laning got his parcel of medals. All I did get too."

We commiserated with each other for a while over the fact that we were stuck in Russia while the United States was taking on the little yellow devils from Nippon. Neither one of us ever dreamed we'd be shipped to Russia to help a few British artillery batteries who were helping the Russians knock the kraut out of the Nazis.

"What was this crack you made about Laning and a bundle of medals?" I finally got around to asking him.

The nurse came around just then and poured us a glass of tea from a big copper samovar she had on a wheel table. I watched him, figuring this was the chance to get the low down on "Dopey" and his pilot Steve Laning.

He swished the hot tea around in his glass for a moment, grinned and then began to unravel.

"YOU remember Laning, don't you?" he said for a starter. "I mean what a queer duck he was?"

"Sure," I answered, watching the snow pile up on the window sill.

"I mean the way he was always going sick so he couldn't fly, an' things like that?" Dopey motioned to the nurse for another glass of tea.

"Got away with it too," I said. "I know he wasn't sick a lot of the times he claimed he was. Gave you break though. Kept you on the ground and out of the cold."

"Sure," Dopey lisped. "But I couldn't see it that way at the time. I was all hopped up about being a hero. I figured you had to get in the air every day. Law of averages our salesman used to say in the days when I was selling trick can openers house to house."

"Sure," I shot back. "The more times you went up the better your

chances of having the M.O. trying to figure out whether one of your ribs was a hunk of dural or a tappet rod. Look-it me, I played the law of averages once too often."

"But I was figuring the other way," Dopey said. "Laning had his chances all doped out too. Only he wasn't going by the law of averages an' the lead we could sling. He went by the stars."

"Astrology?" I asked. "Never knew he was a star hound."

Dopey nodded slowly as if his neck hurt. "Every night he poured over those charts and that book they were folded in. At first I thought he was handicapping the bangtails. But then I found out all the nags in Russia were in a bigger stake race."

The nurse came over and filled his glass. Dopey tried to wink at her but that one eyebrow of his wasn't in working condition.

"Some nights," Dopey went on, "he'd snap that book shut an' say, 'No flying for us tomorrow.' An' right away he'd start to develop symptoms. He knew more ways of wangling his way out of flying duty than a duck does about getting into the water. Burned me up. There'd be shows scheduled that were pips, but when the signs in that book said the stars were against him we didn't fly, that's all. He spent hours trying to prove to me the stars influenced our destinies, but I always figured a star a couple of million miles away didn't give a damn whether a half-winger got a slug in his guts or became an ace."

"So that's why you two were always snapping at each other like a couple of half-starved huskies," I said. "Remember the afternoon I had to hold you back from slapping him down?"

Dopey nodded, put the glass on the table beside my cot, wiped the back of his hand across his spongy looking lips and said, "Laning even had that

crab painted on the side of our bus. He called it the sign of Cancer. Every time I saw it I got itchy. Looked more like a nice fat Russian cootie to me."

"Swell trade mark for you two," I grinned.

"You never saw the half of it," he said. "We had our real arguments in the hut. He went to that book for everything. Never made a move without consulting it first. I couldn't see any sense to it an' tried to coax the C.O. into transferring me to another bus so I'd have a pilot who was willing to fly without taking a peek at the stars first. But the C.O. said I was the only guy in the outfit who could get along with Laning."

I didn't tell Dopey that we got wind of his little scheme and hiked over to the C.O. before he did and made him promise he wouldn't split up any of the combinations. We were all working pretty good and couldn't see any sense in starting a real row by shuffling pilots just because two guys kept snarling at each other.

"What did you finally do?" I asked. "Seems to me you and Laning were getting along pretty good around the time I got mine."

"I stole the book," Dopey grinned. "And did that start the stars whirling?"

"He know you stole it?" I asked.

Dopey shook his head. "I had him believing he lost it. That's when he put on a real sick act. I didn't get in the air for four days. That was when you fellows did that bombing show on the Nazi ammunition dump, set it on fire with your little eggs and got all kinds of mentions in the communiques, with medals and plane credits handed out like it was Christmas."

"And I got this," I interrupted and pointed to my chest. "Wilkins, my observer, got killed an' yet you squawk."

"I know," Dopey said slowly. "But I figured if it hadn't been for Laning

playing sick I might have grabbed myself a medal or credit for a couple of flammers. Pickin's were getting pretty easy around there with the good Nazi pilots being pulled out and sent further south. That's when I decided I'd have to use the old noodle and get Laning back in a flying mood, only with me controlling the course of the stars. An' believe me, no drowning man ever grabbed at a straw any quicker than I snatched that almanac from a table in the inn down at the village."

"What good would an almanac do you?" I asked.

"**H**OLD your horses," Dopey says as he tries to coax another glass of tea out of the nurse. "That Russian almanac was a life saver. It had one of those pictures in, you know, the man with his guts showing, and all the signs of the zodiac around the border. An' around the margin of every page with the calendar for the month was another flock of signs. I saw they were the same as the pictures Laning used to show me. So I grabbed it and hustled back to the hut.

"'Look!' I said to Laning. 'Look, I found an astrology book.' Boy, did his eyes shine for a minute. Then they went sort of bleary when he saw the book was Russian.

"'It's in Russian!' he squeaked.

"'What of it?' I pipes back. 'I can read Russian like Einstein can read this relativity stuff. I can tell what every day has up its sleeve for a guy born under the sign of Cancer.'

"'You're not kidding,' he says getting the old smile back for a minute.

"'Look,' I said as I started leafing through the book to find the date. 'Today it says good fortune will come to those born under the sign of Cancer!'

"'That's me!' Laning yelps.

"'Right!' I pops back. 'This is our lucky day,' an' when I saw he was

hooked I began to pour it on."

"But just a minute, Dopey," I interrupted him. "You know darn well you can't speak a word of Russian. Bet you a busted thermometer you couldn't even ask for a plate of borsch in Russian."

Dopey grinned and swished the tea around in his glass for a while. Then he went on.

"Neither could Laning. So what was to stop me from throwing a bluff. I even took him for a walk down to the village and knocked off a string of words to every Rusky we met. I must have said something that really sounded like Russian to one big Cossack because he wanted to fight the two of us right away. I had a time explaining that to Laning because it was supposed to be our lucky day. Well, it was at that. For the big guy's wife yelled for him to come back in the house about the time he was getting his third coat unbuttoned. That was when Laning was sure I'd read the book right."

"And that got you two guys started flying again, I suppose," I said while Dopey bit a wedge from a chunk of black bread.

"And how," Dopey grinned. "We started off that same afternoon with an artillery shoot for those 5.9's under the hill. Just as we had the boys hitting the bull's eye a flock of Heinkels hopped us. Laning got two and I busted one all to pieces without us getting a single slug in our crate. Was I sitting pretty? Had Laning right where I wanted him. Believe me I held onto that almanac like it was a first edition. Kept it under my pillow at night for fear Laning might show it to somebody who would spill the beans.

"I played the game right up to the handle. On days when we were washed out, I'd make out I was studying the book, scribble some figures and give Laning a line about the stars being

against us that day. He'd crawl into bed and beg me to be careful. It was swell, while it lasted."

"What happened, lose the almanac?" I asked cautiously. I wasn't quite sure whether Dopey wasn't feeding me a line or not.

"No, I didn't lose it," Dopey said after a minute. "I pulled a boner."

"Wrong translation I suppose."

"And how," Dopey said as he snapped viciously at the last of the bread. "Got up one morning, took a look at the low ceiling an' figures it was a dud day. Figuring as how we couldn't fly I thought I'd change my technique. I'd been overdoing that bad weather gag and I decided it wouldn't hurt to revise my story a bit. So instead of telling him the stars were against us, I studied the book a while and then sells him a bill of goods about it being the best day of the year for us. I remembered a lot of the patter he'd fed me and spooned it right back. According to the book our lucky stars were in conjunction, whatever that meant, and everything was in our favor except perhaps the weather."

Dopey got up and hobbled over to the samovar table and grabbed himself another hunk of bread while the nurse wasn't looking. He got a bit of crust that really was crust and had to dunk it to get it in shape for eating.

"Teeth are still pretty sore," he mumbled.

"Get them that lucky day of yours?" I asked.

DOPEY blotted up some more tea, pushed the black mass in his mouth and then continued between chews.

"That bit of astrology was the worst mistake I ever made in my life," he said slowly. "Only I didn't know it until Laning comes running back from the mess, just as I finished dressing

and stuck the book in my pocket.

"'We're flyin'!' he yells.

"'Flyin'!' I yelled back and took one look at the wet snow slanting past the window. 'You're nuts, Laning!'

"'No I'm not!' Laning grins. 'Word just came from H. Q. asking for volunteers to go over and have a look at the cross roads outside Blinitsky. They figure the Nazis will try to shove re-enforcements up today because the weather is bad . . . So I volunteered for us.'

"'But it *is* dud!' I screamed back. 'Hardly a five hundred foot ceiling and the weather's like a bit of wet sponge ala mode.'

"'But the stars say everything we do will be successful,' Laning reminded me. 'You read it to me just a couple of minutes ago.'

"'Musta been looking at the wrong date,' I stalled.

"'I saw the date,' Laning insisted. 'It was the right one. Get ready. I'll go have the bus warmed up.'"

"So what did you do?" I asked Dopey while he dunked.

"What could I do?" Dopey mumbled. "I was just a half winger. And besides I'd done a nice job in leading myself to a fall. I got into my flying suit and went up to the mess for a cup of java. It tasted lousy, and everybody called us a coupla dumb clucks for sticking our chins out with a ninety to one chance of getting wooden crosses instead of tin ones. What could I do?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Go out and crawl into the rear office and hang on I guess."

"That's what I did," Dopey said a bit sadly. "An' everybody came out to wave us good bye like they didn't expect us to come back. An' what a take-off. Slush rattled against our wings like a flock of Gene Koupras bangin' on drums. But we crawled into the air with wet snow flyin' past us like strings of dirty yarn. And to make things

worse I couldn't get my hatch shut an' the stuff was trickling down my neck. Hot air was supposed to be heating my cockpit but it was flyin' right out through the open hatch.

"It wasn't until we got over Nazi territory I noticed we had a couple of bombs on the special wing stubs fitted to the undercarriage legs. That's when I got a hunch Laning had ideas. I suspected he was going to drop eggs on the crossroads if we found Nazis there.

"Ever see tracer slithering through snow, Slats?" Dopey asked me. "One minute it's there an' the next it's gone. Only with us, some of it was staying. A lot was sticking in our struts. Then somebody down there began to throw Bofors slugs at us. I could see them, and hear them whanging past us, an' I knew if one of them hit I was through worryin' about the cold. I took a peek over the side and glanced toward Laning. He was looking back and grinning. I couldn't get my teeth clamped long enough to return the grin. The dizzy coot.

"I gotta admit Laning was a good pilot, might a been better for me if he wasn't. He hit the spot where the roads converged on the sector right on the nose. The place was busy as Times Square on New Year's Eve. One road was chock full of trucks discharging supplies and ammunition while the other was choked with tanks of all sizes. Lot of them big troop carrying trucks there too. Mind you, we had to go in low to see them through the snow squalls. An' did they throw stuff at us."

"Hit a hot corner, did you, Dopey?" I asked while he dunked another hunk of bread.

"Hotter'n a dry cylinder," Dopey said. "But not enough to keep me from shivering. My notes looked like shorthand I was shaking so. Never so homesick in my life, especially when Laning decided to curl right over that herd of

Nazis. My back felt like sandpaper it was that full of goose pimples.

"'Here goes the first load, Dopey,' I heard Laning yell over the inter-comm. I didn't pay much attention to where those first two eggs landed. Slugs were snapping and cracking all around us, an' I wanted home. But Laning just circled over the road like he was rowing on a pond. I was too scared to get mad at him, and kinda busy hanging on. But I remember yelling at him between bursts. An' the things I called him would have made the stars turn pale. But the crazy mug just carried on, figuring the stars were going to protect us. Maybe they were—something was.

"I hung onto the gun-mounting to keep my brains from getting knocked out against the cowling. Every time Laning leveled off I took a quick peek over the side. An' for once in my life I actually saw bombs hitting their target. The stars sure had it in for the Nazis on the cross road that day. They were tangled in an awful mess. Trucks turned over and burning. Ammunition exploding all over the place, and throwing plenty of muck back at us. I lost my coffee when a big baby let go just above us and chewed a chunk out of our right wing and took half of our undercarriage with it. I saw the wheel hit the road below us an' bounce a mile.

"'Ready to go home?' Laning blasted through the inter-comm. 'If you are you better do something about those Nasty Nazis.'

"THAT was when I saw those Heinkels for the first time. I'd heard machine-guns rattling but figured somebody down stairs was popping away at us. But instead of that it was a flock of Heinkels who had found a hole in the ceiling. An' were they pouring it to us. I counted while I made a grab

for my guns. There were eight of them, eight of the nastiest Heinkels I ever laid eyes on. They were coming out of the overcast where the storm was breaking up. From then on that cross roads business was like an Epworth strawberry festival alongside the entertainment the Nazi boys were giving us.

"Hurry up!" Laning yelps at me.

"What's the matter?" I yells back. 'Losing confidence in the planets?' I yanked the trigger. The guns yammered a couple of times and went to sleep just as I had a Heinkel in my sights. I grabbed another drum from the rack and tried to fit it on the post, with slugs buzzing at me like I'd bumped my noggin on a hornet's nest.

"Laning was plenty busy too. Guess he figured the stars needed a little help. He kept going from one bank into another, rattling me around in the rear office like I was a pair of dice in a cup. I kept stabbing at the post with the ammunition drum, an' tracer kept stabbing at me. Slugs hitting our fabric sounded like hail on a tar-paper roof. One yellow-tailed Heinkel kept swinging in at us every time Laning banked. An' did he make life miserable for me?"

"Was Laning still grinning?" I asked.

"Didn't take time out to look," Dopey said. "But I knew he was feelin' pretty good because I could hear him laughing over the inter-comm. An' why shouldn't he? I saw some of the luckiest shooting that morning I ever saw in my life. He got three with his front guns, two of 'em flamers. An' me, I couldn't get that drum on, guess a slug had flattened itself against the post. But even if I had'a got a drum on I wouldn't have done much shooting. Not the way Laning was tossing that crate around. I had all I could do to keep from getting tossed out on my ear.

"There was them Heinkels buzzing

around us like buzz saws on a drunk. Tracer was zig-zagging around us like somebody was trying to knit an over-size sweater. Imagine it. All those Nazis and me with bum guns. The only shooting being done by our side was done by Laning. He'd cut the odds down to four to one by knocking down his fourth for the morning while I hadn't even knocked the paint off a Hun.

"Then I smelled smoke an' would like to have passed out when I hears Laning yell something about fire. For a minute he wasn't banking, an' in those sixty seconds two of the Heinkels hosed us with plenty of hot lead. The stars musta been with us, me any way, because I felt those slugs bore through my flying suit like a flock of moths who had just come off an eight day diet. I forgot all about the smoke and Laning yelling while I felt myself to see if I was hit.

"Bale out!" I heard Laning yell. 'We're on fire. Jump.'

"When I started to push through the hatch my broolley caught on the cowl. I reached around to pull it free and would like to have died right there when I discovered that last burst had chewed my harness to a fair you well. It was hanging by one leg strap and even that had been cut. If I'd jumped me an' that chute would have parted company the minute it popped.

"My chute's shot to hell,' I yells at Laning. 'Can't jump.'

"For a minute Laning didn't say a word, while I was trying to bat out the flames coming through the boards with my useless chute. But it wasn't any use.

"Crawl up on the hatch an' hang on,' I heard Laning yelp. 'I'll get you down. Me an' our lucky star!'"

"You mean Laning stuck with the plane just to save you?" I asked in amazement.

DOPEY nodded soberly. "That guy coulda jumped. His chute was okay. But after I crawled out on the hatch and dug my toes through the fairing an' got nerve enough to take a peek, there was Laning standing on the root of the V-strut reaching into the cockpit to handle the stick. An' the yellow-tailed Heinkel was there too, only he was behind getting ready to lead the other three into the easiest pickin's any Nazi ever had.

"Then the shooting faded. I figured I was dead for sure. Only thing I could hear was the wind playin' across the two V-struts and around the jagged edges of the bullet holes."

Dopey sort of shivered and went on.

"You see," he said. "When I jerked my eyes open there was nothing but a mass of white around me. But a flare of red flickering against it made the skin pucker at the back of my neck. It came from flames busting out from the other side of the ship. Then I spotted Laning up front an' knew we were still riding the ship.

"'Side-slipping her,' Lanning yells into the freezing wind pouring around us. 'If we come out of this squall before we smack in we'll be okay. Don't forget, this is our lucky day.'"

"Nice spot to be yelling about luck," I said to Dopey.

"You're telling me," he grinned. "But before I could even think about luck Laning spots the ground coming up at us an' levels off. An' did we plow in? We hit with every point on the crate. It was crash, an' I was flying over the wing with my chute flapping behind me like a busted elevator. I kept right on rolling, putting yards between me an' that burning crate. When I finally stopped and took a look, there was Laning walking away."

"Got any idea whether we are on our own side or not?" he asks.

"Nope," I said. "Just glad to get my

feet on the ground without worrying who it belongs to.'

"In a few minutes the squall passed and we spotted a flock of Russian peasants come piling out of a grove of spruce and head our way. When they saw we weren't Nazis they began to pump our fists and jabber.

"'What are they saying?' Laning asked.

"Thinking fast I says, 'That the storm is over.'

"He gave me a queer look. 'One of them slugs crease that thick dome?' he asked. 'Ask them where we are.'

"So I reeled off a flock of sounds that might as well have been Chinese or Bulgarian for all I knew, or Laning for that matter. He thought I was talking Russian an' Lord knows what they thought. They looked awful dumb an' sort of surprised."

"'What's the matter?' Laning sort of snarls. 'Don't they know? Always heard these Russian farmers were dumb.'

"'Ah, we are not dumb, comrade,' a big guy with a bushel of whiskers pops up. 'You are Engleesh no . . . We are lost also.'

"'Well why didn't you tell my observer before?' Laning cracks back.

"'We could not understand him, Comrade,' the big Rusky replied.

"Laning swings around on me, starts to say something an' then stops. He was staring at the ground where my flying suit was lying. Did I want to take a powder then, because there was that almanac where it had fallen while I was yanking off the suit. We both made a dive for it, but he beat me to it."

"It was tragic," Dopey said. "I knew Laning was going to find out about that book before many minutes were up. 'We better git outta here!' I yelled. 'The Nazis will find us.'

"Laning paid me no never mind. He just walks up to the Russian an' holds

out the book. 'Comrade,' he asked nice like. 'What is this?'

"The big Rusky takes the book, leafs through it while the others crowd around. Then he hands it back. 'It is what you call in Engleesh an almanac . . . A farmer's almanac. See,' he says pointing to a page. 'It says today will be bright and much sunshine. It is funny, no. It is full of jokes, but they are not all weather jokes.'

"That guy didn't have any sense of humor, Slats," Dopey went on. "I hope I never get another dirty look like the one he tossed at me. 'You dirty double crossing so an' so,' he screamed. 'Been filling me full of bologny about this being an astrology book . . . making me think you were giving me the low down on what the stars predicted . . . You—you!'

"'Take it easy, Steve,' I said stepping back to get out of his reach while I tried to figure out an alibi. Then just when I had one figured out an' was going to tell him he was wrong, that I had the astrology book back at our hut, he steps up and lets one go from the ground. His knuckles fairly whistled through the air an' before I could move they plastered my kisser all over my face. I musta done a snap roll before I lit. If you don't think that guy can hit lookit my mug. The cold sort of froze it just like his knuckles left it."

"You must have seen stars," I smiled. "Plenty of them."

FOR a second Dopey looked as if he wanted to swing on me.

"What happened then?" I asked to cover up.

"I was sitting there wondering whether we'd really crashed and were still in the wreckage when somebody yells 'Nazis! Nazis!' They all ran, Laning with them, heading for the woods at the other side of the field."

"And you got nabbed," I said. "How

come you're here?"

"The minute I sees these Nazis chasing Laning an' the Russians," Dopey went on, "I used my bean. I crouched and managed to crawl into a clump of spruce on the north side of the field. Never saw me at all. When it got dark I crawled out and got what was left of my fur-lined flying suit. Was that a cold night?"

"Well you know what happened the next morning. The Russians got tired of being pushed around in the cold, so to keep warm they started chasing the Nazis. I could hear it from where I was hiding, an' soon I saw the krauts traveling toward Berlin instead of Moscow. I got all nice an' warm figuring as to how I'd soon be back with the outfit, only working with a different pilot, I was that sure Laning was a prisoner. I was sure feelin' swell an' thinking about grub to put in my belly. It being empty, though, was the only break I got, so the Russian M.O. said."

"You mean you were wounded?"

"Sure," Dopey said quietly. "Got mine about nine in the morning just when I was figuring I could crawl out and get sent back. Somebody musta seen me move. I'll never know which direction that shell came from. All I remember is me an' that grove of spruce going into a zoom, a tight turn an' then a crash landing. Next thing I knew I was in a hospital with a couple of Rusky doctors pulling splinters and pieces of shell outta my hide. I just got transferred here today."

"But what about Laning?" I asked.

"You said something about medals."

Dopey's face twisted into a silly grin. "It came out just like I told him it would. He gets away from the Nazis an' sneaks back in time to make a report about the heavy concentration of troops and tanks. For it he gets a flock of hammers and sickles pinned on his chest, an' when he gets to London he's

gonna get the D.F.C. He's a hero an' I'm a bum!"

"You mean he's going back to London?" I asked a bit envious.

"Yeah," Dopey snorted. "I not only get a belly wound and a chunk nicked outta my leg, but some brass hats come around asking me embarrassing questions about why I didn't stick with Laning. Claimed I hit near the crash to make sure I'd be taken prisoner. Can you tie that? Thought sure I was going to be court martialed. But I guess they figured I had enough with my wounds. They even thought the shell busted up my face an' I didn't tell them any different. I'm telling you, the stars sure had it figured out."

"What do you mean the stars?" I interrupted. "You know it was a blind stab when you faked Laning's horoscope from an almanac."

"Oh, yeah!" Dopey reported. "The stars made me do that."

"Nuts!" I said.

"Listen," Dopey said very serious. "While I was in the hospital one of the nurses tried to find me something to read. The only thing she could locate was one of these astrology books, written in English. Right away she comes to me an' wants me to figure out when the war's gonna be over so's she can go home an' marry her boy friend. She leaves the book with me an' naturally the first thing I do is turn to the big day in my life. An' knock me cock-eyed with a wet corn cob, Slats, it was Laning's lucky day. For a guy born under the sign of Cancer there was a big line about danger, surmounting all difficulties an' coming out on top dripping with glory."

"And then you turned to see what your horoscope was for that day, eh Dopey?" I grinned.

"You're darn tootin'," he shot back. "An' I wish you could have seen the setup for me. There just wasn't noth-

in' right about that day for me. Everything I did would be wrong. Here, look, I'll show you."

AND with that he pulled a paper-backed book out of his bath-robe pocket and inched his chair closer to my cot. "See," he said pointing to a page. "There's my birthday under the sign of Taurus. That's the Bull."

"That's what it sounds like to me, Dopey, I mean this astrology stuff." I think he got a little peeved.

Just then the nurse came along and gave Dopey the high sign that his time was up.

"Seen Laning since that day?" I asked Dopey as he scrambled to his feet.

A sour look came across Dopey's wrinkled pan. "That lug's a backslider," he growled. "Came to see me just before he left for England. Said he wanted to apologize for messing my face up. Like a Boy Scout I forgives him an' to show there wasn't any hard feelin's I offers him this book. For a minute I thought he was gonna take another poke at me. Insinuated this astrology business was a heap of Taurus. Swell way for a guy like him to talk, wasn't it, Slats?"

I agreed that it was as Dopey laid the book on my table. "Look it over," he said. "I'll come in every afternoon to see you if the stars give the okay sign . . . Be seeing you."

Dopey is on his way back to London now, headed for a discharge. I was scheduled to leave the hospital tomorrow. But after looking up my horoscope in the book Dopey left me I've asked them to postpone it until the day after tomorrow.

The M.O. said something about maybe that would be better and gave the nod to the nurse to shove a thermometer between my teeth.

I'm still wondering why.

Butcher Buzzards

by
ORLANDO RIGONI

All Pilot Officer Tom Boothe asked was, just give him and his Curtiss Tomahawk a crack at the Nazi Heinkels with the blood-dripping-knives insignia on their cockpits that had slaughtered his wingmates!

MAJOR ERIC STROBER of the German Luftwaffe sat erect in the gray limousine which purred through the Thiergarten, on down Unter Den Linden toward the Wilhelmstrasse. He was a one-man parade and the Heils of the anxious Germans who weren't so sure of victory as they had been at the first, sounded good to his ears.

Strober's thick lips were drawn in a grin which did little to eliminate the deadly killer-light in his piggish eyes. His loose jowls hung down over his collar and there was little to suggest the hero about him.

What did he care about appearances? It was how good you could kill which counted. He, Eric Strober, had started from less than nothing. He had been pig sticker in his father's slaughterhouse in Essen. He had always liked the feel of the warm blood running over his hands. It took a miracle to create a pig, to give it life, and it required days, weeks, years of care and feeding to prepare it for market. With one thrust of a knife he could defeat all

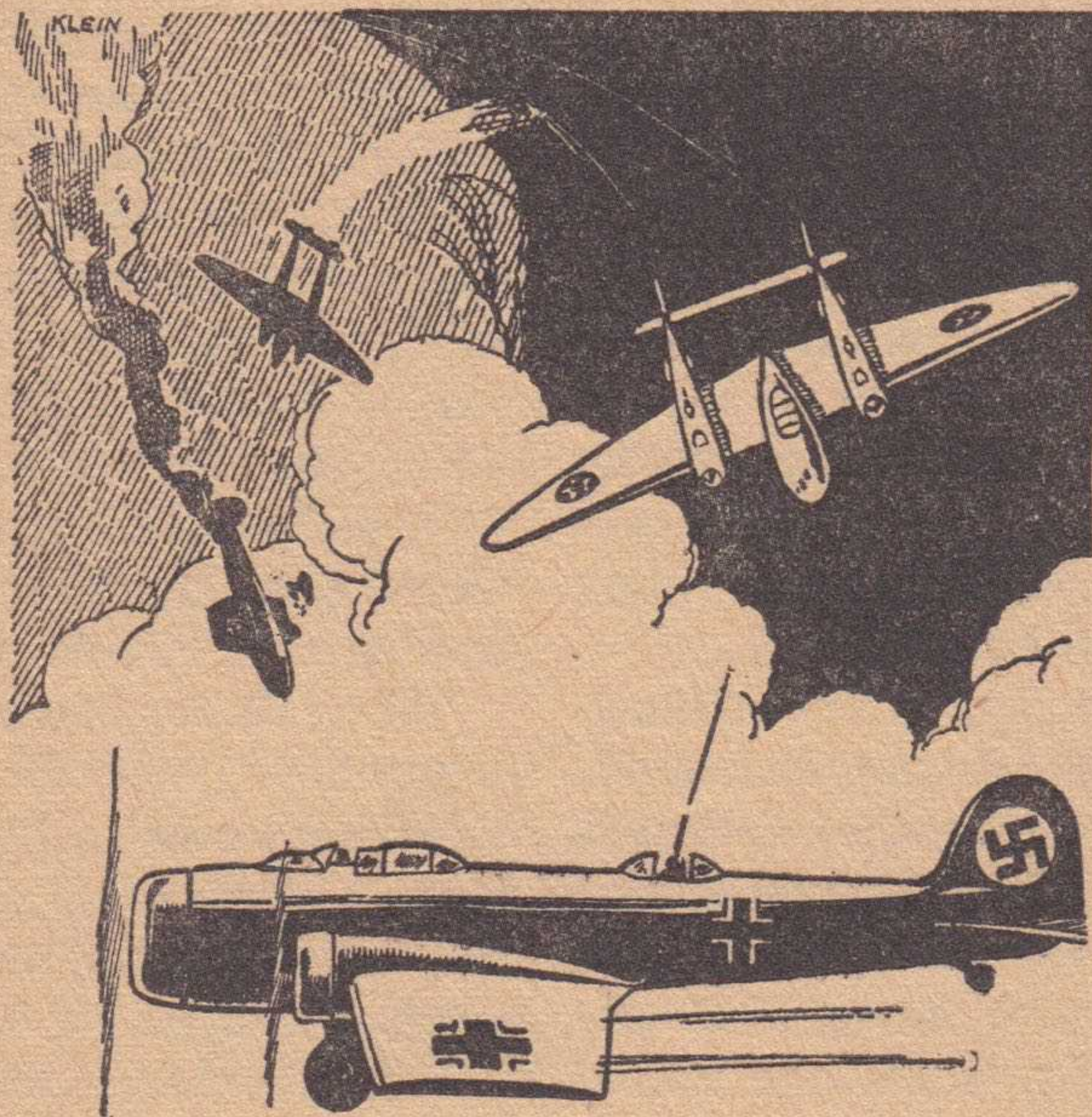
this. He could end it. This thought had given him a feeling of power, because Eric Strober wasn't brave, and cowards must seek some outlet for their fear and bolster their courage in any way they can.

He had joined the Luftwaffe at the time Hitler's agents were seeking thousands of youths to make up their war machine. He proved adept at flying, became second to none before the war started, and after the war got going he

proved unbeatable as a killer.

He had delighted in strafing refugees on the crowded roads of Belgium and France. He had roared with glee when his Madsens chopped down the old women and children like tenpins, and his greatest delight was in flying low enough to see the blood spurting from the wounds.

It had been kind of lonely at first for even the Germans were afraid of him, and then, to his disgust all of Europe surrendered and he had no one to fight but the accursed English. The killing wasn't so easy then and he had to make every victim count. He took as few



chances as possible and once he got lead into a man he followed that man into the gates of hell, delighting in killing men hanging on chutes, or flying low and finishing them off on the ground.

Even the German squadrons tried to avoid him, but Goering loved him—held him up as an example of courage and daring, and finally made him a major and gave him a Luftkreis of his own made up of killers as bloody, but not as sly as he. Strober led his men into battle and while they bore the brunt of the fight he waited for easy chances. Strober's Luftkreis made a name for itself, and Strober became famous as the greatest killer of them all.

Now he was to be decorated again. The double iron cross, perhaps. Goering would be there in person in front of the Reichsluftfahrtministerium on the Leipziger Strasse. Possibly he would be promoted to a colonel this time, and it would be Oberst Eric Strober!

And it came to pass as he had imagined with Goering pinning the decoration upon his arched chest, and even as the Air Marshal stood close enough so that Strober could smell his breath, Strober couldn't keep his mind off killing. He thought, while the crowd cheered, how like a fat pig the air marshal looked and wondered would the blood spurt very far if he was to ram a knife in the fat throat? After all, he might be a Generalmajor like Udet. . . .

Two days later Strober was back with his squadron. The men "Hoched" him in dark beer and he pounded his chest and showed his teeth, and made a speech in which he said:

"I have swam to glory in British blood. There is much more English blood, and there is much more glory and we may all be famous!"

THIS took the edge off the cheers, for the Germans knew how costly

was British blood, and how cheap German blood had become in the foreign exchange of hell. Perhaps Strober noticed their subdued cheers, for he added:

"When the British blood is gone, there will be American blood—we have tasted of it already. . . ."

That didn't help much, either, for the taste of American blood had been very bad for them. The slim, blond Ober-leutnant Haus, who sat next to Eric Strober, rose and said softly:

"I suppose, now, Oberst Strober, you will go out and kill the verdammt American in the new ship with the bear on the cockpit, nein?"

Strober tensed and his fat head pulled in on his short neck. Fear yeasted to his eyes, and through his mind flashed the times when he had almost died. Hate and anger covered up his fear, and without warning, he struck Ober-Leutnant Haus across the face and knocked him down.

"You talk too much, Herr Haus," he snapped. "I will kill the Amerikaner Dog in my own good time. If it's the last act of my life, I shall see his blood spill out in a warm, red stream! I shall teach him manners, but he'll never be able to use them. Himmel's Gott! I shall butcher him!"

Strober sat down amid a tense silence.

And at the same time on the camouflaged drome of Fighter 56 at Ainsby Station, Pilot Officer Tom Boothe sat in the lounge doggedly drinking beer. The wrinkles around his blue eyes were caused by smiling, but he wasn't smiling now. He dragged hard on his coffin nail, and tossed it away.

He had nothing left to smile about. Of course he was still alive, and that was something to be thankful for, but Stooky and Manse were gone. Others of 56 were gone, too, and most of them had fallen victim to the Butcher Buz-

zards who had blood-dripping knives painted upon the sides of their Heinkels.

But Boothe missed Stooky and Manse more than the others because they were Yanks, like him, and had joined up at the same time he had. They had formed a threesome which had piled up a stack of glory until the butchers had come along.

Even then, had they known what to expect, they might have gone on piling up their score. But they had made the mistake of crediting all of the enemy with common decency; of believing that there was chivalry even in war. They had discovered to their sorrow that the Butchers lacked everything but the lust to kill.

Stooky had gone first. He had bailed out over the cliffs at Margate, and the leader of the butchers had dived upon him, killing him as he hung helpless upon the shrouds. Boothe had tried to revenge that murder and had been almost killed a dozen times. But the chief butcher, Eric Strober, escaped Boothe's guns. He had some close calls and tried desperately to kill Boothe until it became a duel between them on the installment plan.

Manse had died next. He had cracked up in the surf near Hunstanton, and Strober had roared over him as he was crawling smashed and half drowned from the wreck. Strober's guns had snarled their lust and Strober had swung back purposely to make sure he had done his work well.

Boothe had gone on a binge for two days after that. Now he was sobering up on beer and all he could think of was getting back in the air. He had to ask Squadron Leader Lemp for special permission to fly high above the formation. There must be some way into tricking Eric Strober away from his flight and completing their duel without interference.

Boothe's brooding thoughts were interrupted by a gay, "Cheerio, old chap. See you're back on the job." A slim hand was thrust out before him and he looked up into the humorous eyes of Pilot Officer Deever. Deever had a boyish face with curly hair, but in spite of that there was an indication of grave reliability about him. With Deever was his cobber, Pilot Officer Smith. Smith was a little on the fat side, but was as graceful as a dancer on his feet.

"It's a miracle where you put all that slop, old fellow," Smith grinned. "I might help you lap some of it up if you must get rid of it."

"Hello, fellas," Boothe greeted shortly. He hoped they wouldn't stop. He wanted them to move on. He wanted to be alone.

BUT they didn't move on. With an understanding wink at Smith, Deever sat down.

"I say, old bean, I know how you feel. Deuced bad about your pals. Isn't it possible I could help you straighten things out—sort of even up the score?" Deever asked.

Boothe shook his head. "The butcher is my meat, pal. I'm going to draw and quarter him myself. Anyway, I'd be bad luck for you."

When Deever found he couldn't change Boothe's mind, he moved on, but his face was grim. They were a fine bunch, these Americans, but they took themselves too earnestly.

The next morning Fighter 56 awoke to the screech of the siren. They were ordered to intercept some planes moving in from Clacton-on-the-sea. They grabbed a hot cup as they scrambled. The ground crews got the motors going. The planes were mostly Spitfires, but Boothe had a Curtiss Tomahawk fighter with a cub bear painted on the pit.

Boothe sought out Squadron Leader Lemp and asked for permission to fly

alone high above the formation, but Lemp would have none of it.

"This is formation fighting, Boothe. We each have our place and individual glory means nothing. I know how you feel about your pals, but sticking your neck out won't bring them back. The butchers thrive on just such tactics," Lemp said curtly.

Argument failed to change his position. Boothe climbed grimly into his Curtiss and slid the coop shut. He revved up the Allison and looked grimly at the flight commander for the signal to take off.

The motors belched thunder—the props clawed madly at the curtain of mist. Boothe watched the ten planes leap forward one by one. He saw Deever and Smith. Then it was his turn. The Curtiss leaped forward, drummed across the turf and then angled up!

They hadn't far to go. Five Junkers 86 were roaring in over the coast. Boothe heard the familiar cry in his intercoms:

"Get the bombers!"

That was their job, to stop the bombers. Of course fighters would come down to save the German ships, but the primary object of the interceptors was to turn the bombers back or destroy them.

Boothe gritted his teeth. He wanted to go up and search for the Heinkel and Messerschmitt fighters. Instead he went down with the flight, cut wide of the formation and started his guns pumping death into the nearest Junkers.

The back gunner on the Junkers swung his K.B. gun up in an arc. Boothe felt his ship shudder as bullets plucked at the wings. He held his course. He saw the top gunner on the Dornier slump dead over his gun. Boothe checked his descent, pulled back on the controls and swung around a little. He came up under the side of the Junkers and pumped his guns. He

saw the slotted flap on the left wing break loose and whip back, fouling the rudder. The Junkers made a slow turn out of control, but it didn't go down.

At the same instant the fighters hit! Heinkels they were and even in the confusion of the fight Boothe saw the dripping butchers' knives on the side of the cockpits. His lips drew off his teeth. He had to finish the Dornier, and then. . . .

By the time he had pumped a last burst into the right engine of the Dornier, setting it ablaze, the main fight was a little behind him. He whipped back, gunned his Allison and fisted the blur from his eyes. His throat felt dry and his eyes burned.

Then he saw the setup and his flesh crawled. One of the butchers had jumped on Pilot Officer Smith and was ripping his Spitter to pieces. The Rolls cut out, and a plume of black smoke belched from the cowling vents. Smith headed away from the fight so as not to endanger the other planes and began to bail out.

He didn't get far. He had one leg over the side when Eric Strober's Heinkel screamed toward him. The tracer tongues from the Heinkel smashed Smith back into the burning Spitfire. But Smith didn't feel the heat. There was only one vast spasm of exquisite pain and then complete peace.

The sight of that butchery did something to Boothe. He forced the Allison to the limit of its 1050 horses. He hawked his eyes on the sights and smashed his way toward Strober's tail. He caught a flick of gray on his wires. He hosed out his lead. For one instant the Heinkel shuddered. Then it nosed up in a panic—zoomed toward the clouds like a frightened rabbit, fish-tailing, twisting—up—up—up!

BOOTHE cursed when his shots missed. He beat his fist upon the

panel as though to drive the Curtiss faster. He wept as he saw Strobler disappear into the clouds and roared in after him. But the white mist defeated him. It fogged his windows. It opened before him like feathers and closed in behind him like a shroud. And deep in the cloud, heading wildly for German territory, Eric Strober sat trembling in his cockpit for he had never come so close to death before.

Back at the drome of the Butcher's Luftkreis, the pilots stood about the wooden table in the mess hall. When they had returned from their protection of the Junkers bombers, Generalmajor Hoffen was on hand to greet them. Hoffen was a skeleton with marbles for eyes, milk for blood, and thin strips of rubber for lips. Though they hoched him with beer, they failed to soften the grimness of his face.

"Lieber Gott, wass dumkopfs! Do you think we send you out for sport? The bombers were turned back and it was an important mission. One of the Junkers was lost. Do you think that's funny, hein? We chose you men for escort because we believed you were the best. If this happens once more. . . ."

Hoffen didn't finish with words, but the look his ghastly face gave them was warning enough.

When he had gone, one German said, "He is furious, ja, because we lost the Junkers."

Ober-leutnant Haus shrugged his slim shoulders, and remarked, "It was the Amerikaner you were going to kill, Oberst Strober, who shot down the Junkers. For once you butchered the wrong man—the Amerikaner almost killed you. You can't kill him by running . . ."

"Ruhig!" Strober cried, his fat face turning purple. It felt suddenly as though his tunic was choking him. He yanked at it desperately, tearing it

open, and in the act the double iron cross was caught on his sleeve and pulled loose. It clattered to the floor where it broke in half.

Haus looked at it and smiled. "Soon, he said softly, "they will make our planes like that—from rotten metal."

Eric Strober sucked in his breath and stood clutching the table. He didn't pick up the broken cross at once. He turned his wrath upon Haus.

"For that, Ober-leutnant Haus, I could have you shot," he snarled. "But I won't, not yet. I want you to live to see me kill the Amerikaner dog!"

But Strober didn't feel the confidence he tried to display. He was almost afraid to touch the broken cross. To his superstitious mind it was an evil omen. It reminded him of one time in his father's slaughter house when he had almost died. He had stuck a pig, but the animal had twisted around in its death throes and clamped its teeth upon his arm. It had taken a bar to pry the teeth loose, and blood-poison had set in almost killing Strober.

Strober tried to glean courage from the memory. He had lived, hadn't he? The pig had almost killed him, but after that he had killed thousands of pigs.

AND back at Ainsby Station, Pilot Officer Boothe sat with his eyes staring into a black hole of hate. It seemed incredible that but a day before Smith had been standing there wanting to share his beer. Even the beer didn't do any good now.

It was Deever's turn to try and forget and he was making a bad job of it. Somewhere he had got a bottle of Scotch and was drinking it with deadly earnestness. Boothe watched him for a while and suddenly a plan for killing Strober crept into his mind.

He went over to Deever, took the

scotch away and when Deever cursed him for the action, he told him:

"It won't help. I know because I tried it."

"Give it back, damn you!"

"Shut up and listen. You want to help kill Strober?"

"I offered to help you yesterday, and you refused. Smith's gone now . . ."

"And you'll be gone too if you go out there with a hangover blurring your eyes," Boothe told him flatly. "Listen to me. I've got a plan to trap Strober. We might have to disobey orders, might have to break a few rules, but I'm not worrying about that. I need your help."

"All right, I'm listening," Deever grunted.

"The next time we mix with the butchers, I'm going to be up in nigger heaven looking down. You stick with the flight until they attack. Then maneuver around so that Strober will jump you. Lead him away from the flight . . ."

"And what's to stop him from putting a bullet in my back?" Deever asked glumly.

"I will. I'll come down just as he gets his mind fixed on you. I'll pump him so damned full of lead he'll sink if he hits the water with his rubber shimmy inflated," Boothe said earnestly.

"It's a long chance, but if you think it'll work . . ."

"It's got to work," Boothe insisted.

But they didn't run into the butchers right away. Eric Strober had made a plan, too. He had worked it out with his comrades in such a way that the *verdammte Amerikaner* must die and Strober would get the credit for killing him. They must take the British fighters by surprise.

The surprise happened on a clear morning over the deserted beach between Eastborn and Seaford where the

white cliffs rose like sentinels behind Beachy Head. Low down roared a flight of Messerschmitt 110s with a deadly cargo of light bombs. Before they reached the spot, Boothe heard in his muff phones information from Ops at Brighton to the effect that Fighter 41 and a flight of interceptors from Croydon were heading east to help in the attack. The information also said that a fighter escort might be expected above the Schmitts at around twenty-thousand.

Boothe signalled to Deever. Boothe was on the left leg of the echelon and without warning, he gunned his Allison and headed up-stairs.

Flying officer Andrews barked into the intercom: "Boothe, stay down . . ."

Boothe didn't hear anymore for he cut the switch. He must do this on his own. He watched his altimeter wind up. Sixteen thousand—twenty—twenty-two . . .

He switched on his oxygen. Twenty-seven thousand! He was rising through little puffs of alto-cumulus now. He looked down. Suddenly he saw the attack! At first he wasn't sure the Germans were the butchers, but they had Heinkels. He started down to make sure.

Then the fight took form. Fighter 56 was assigned the job of holding off the German escort so that the 41st and the interceptors from Croydon could take care of the bombers. In the wild confusion below Boothe suddenly saw a Spitfire break away from the general mixup. That would be Deever! A Heinkel whipped around and took out after the lone Spitfire and Boothe saw the red streaks like blood painted across the top of the German's fuselage! It was Eric Strober out to make an easy kill!

All right, now was the time! Boothe shoved the column forward and spilled

the Curtiss. His eyes watched the two ships below. The Heinkel was already swinging around on the tail of the Spitter. The British ship wallowed in the groove as though expecting the batter and snarl of death.

Boothe breathed hard. He must time his attack just right. If he over shot . . .

SUDDENLY, above the whine of the tortured air which screamed through his vents, he heard a strange sound. It wasn't below him. It was above, a little to the side! He dared not look back, for if he missed his first attack by a fraction of a foot, or a pulse of time, Boothe would die!

The next instant deadly hornets exploded across his turtle back! The Curtiss shuddered but dived on down. The smash of bullets came again from Boothe's other side and swinging his head in spite of himself, he caught the flicker of Heinkels on either side of him. Eric Strober had expected just such a set-up as this, and had prepared to meet it!

To Boothe, time and space and speed seemed momentarily suspended. The Heinkels were going to get him and he dared not turn aside to fight them. If he did hesitate one second, Deever would die, for Deever was caught on the spit of hell, and only Boothe could pull him off. Deever was doing his part of the job, risking his life. Boothe must go on . . .

Boothe kept his eyes forward. The air was a blur of speed screaming past his coop. Below him, Strober was in position on Deever's tail. Strober was starting to fire. His first burst was wide but the Spitter wallowed as the slugs nipped a wingtip. His next burst would be more deadly, more in line.

Boothe started to ease out. He had to work fast. He kept his eyes rivetted to the sights, his thumb glued to the

teat. A little flatter, a little to the left—hurry—hurry!

Just as he reached position above and behind Strober's Heinkel, the other two Heinkels jumped him like great cats. His plexiglass exploded just over his right shoulder. Bullets whimpered past his hunched head.

The next instant the bullets were smashing into his panel. His instruments were hammered into bits of wire and glass and steel.

"No—no!" he gasped.

Von Strober was still under him pumping bullets into Deever's plane.

Boothe squeezed the teat fiercely. The whole action had been swift and uninterrupted. The dive, the attack of the Heinkels, and now his attack upon Strober. But as he squeezed the teat, cold fear swept over him. There was no response from his guns! The bullets of the Heinkel had shorted his firing circuit!

For one deadly moment Boothe felt damned. He had put Deever in a spot, and now he must get him out. Before he realized what he was doing he punched the hydraulic gear button and prayed. The gear worked! His landing wheels crawled out of the pockets. He shoved the control stick away from him and hurled the Curtiss down upon Eric Strober's Heinkel.

When Strober saw the shadow of death whip across his pit and looked up, it was too late. Boothe held the stick steady. He felt his left landing wheel smash through the coop of the Heinkel. The shock jerked the Curtiss around. Boothe fought the stick, pulled it back hard.

The belly of the Curtiss cleared the screaming prop of the D.B. motor by inches, but Boothe's tail wheel smashed low. He felt a grinding, twisting shock as the blades chopped the tail wheel from the swivel and at the same time beat themselves into a mass of junk.

Deever pulled out with his ship full of holes, but he could still fly. Boothe nosed on down below the main fight and escaped the avenging Heinkels. Then he saw Strober going down out of control.

CURIOSLY he followed the spinning wreck of the Heinkel. Strober must not escape. He must die! He must know the horror of helplessness, the grim relentlessness of revenge. He must experience the final despair of being shot dead when he should have been accorded the courtesy of defeat.

Down—down—down went the victor and the damned. The white froth of the surf whipped up toward them and Boothe wondered, idly, if Strober was going to fall into the sea.

They were close to the ground, now. The white cliffs rose up slowly, and grew in majestic proportions like a phalanx of courage defending Britain against the world. It was the cliffs which trapped Eric Strober. In trying to avoid the sea, he fought the Heinkel around. It swooped over the water, turned inland but instead of landing along the beach, it smashed head-on into the cliffs!

Boothe brought his Curtiss down on the narrow strip of sand between the water and the cliffs. The Heinkel was burning when he crawled from the cockpit of the Curtiss and started toward it. He could see Strober's head in the smashed pit of the Heinkel. Strober was still alive and the look on his face was horrible to see.

Boothe knew what had happened. The huge D.B. motor had been pushed back by the crash and now pinned Strober's legs against the floorboards under its hissing hulk of super-heated steel. Strober was helpless.

Boothe had landed for the express purpose of killing Strober with his revolver. He had gloried in the thought,

and believed that only in that way could he avenge his pals. But now Boothe discovered that he lacked the bestial lust of the true killer. He couldn't bring himself to kill a helpless man. He must save Eric Strober.

"Hang on, I'll give you a hand . . ."

But Eric Strober, trapped in the Heinkel, couldn't appreciate what was taking place. In his primitive, bestial mind, the only thought which would register was that Boothe meant to kill him. It was the only logical thing to his way of thinking. Strober was afraid to die. He would rather kill.

Strober painfully got his Luger free. His fat hand shoved above the rim of the cockpit with the gun firmly held in his impatient fingers. The Amerikaner was afraid now—he was stopping!

Eric Strober laughed wildly.

The gun jumped in Strober's fat hand. The Amerikaner fell down. That was good—good! Then Eric Strober let out a shriek of horror as the flames swept back around him. There was another report of the gun.

When Pilot Officer Boothe came to, he was in a hospital bed near Ainsby Station. He thought it might be heaven for the nurses looked like angels. Suddenly he remembered what had taken place on the beach. The pain of the bullet wound in his side, and the dull torture of the burns on his hands and arms reminded him of it.

He called over a doctor who was passing by, and asked him, "Eric Strober—how is he? Did I get him out?"

The doctor smiled. "Son, you sure took the hard way to prove that heroes can be gentlemen. Despite your bullet wound you got Eric Strober out of the fire all right. But you couldn't save him from himself. He was the kind who can dish it out but can't take it. He was dead when you saved him—dead from a bullet hole in his head which he had put there himself."

Wings for the Brave!

by
MORSE CHANDLER

This war they'd had time to get the feel of danger, this war they'd be triggering tracer hell when their enemies had gone green with fear!

IT WAS a good war, Shag Bender told himself as he tooled the P-40 through the icy air above Iceland.

There hadn't been the blind rush into conflict without preparation. They had had time to get the feel of danger. They had learned not to turn green when lead hornets whanged through the coop.

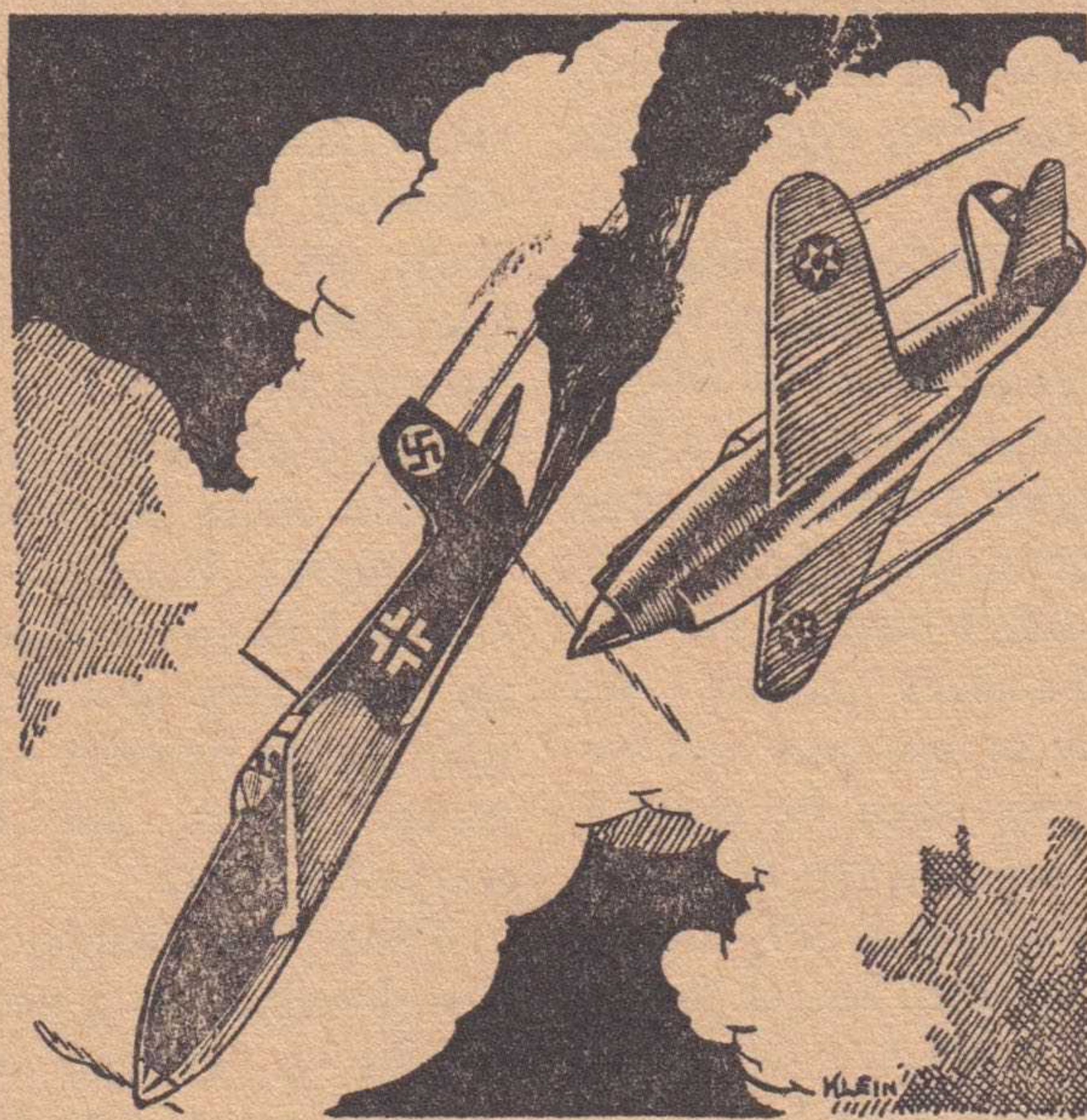
Sure, they had had some bad brushes with the Nazi sea patrols which put out from Norway, presumably, and they had given a good account of themselves. Lieutenant Bender and his buddy, Lucky Latch, had worked up a pretty good trick between them which had netted them a big Dornier bomber the week before. He was hoping to repeat the trick again.

He looked across to see Lucky's blond head ducked down as though the coop was too low for it. Lucky always looked serious like that. Shag Bender and he had come through Kelly together and were inseparable. The third man of their element was Lieutenant Tilly Tillinghast.

Tillinghast was thick, and hard, and sure of himself. He was the opposite of what the name of Tilly suggested.

He did a lot of big talking, and it irked him a lot because Bender and Latch had downed a Nazi flying boat right under his nose.

Fighter 23 was out flying down strange rumors that Nazi planes were somewhere in the region. Strange radio messages had been picked



up by G-2 but no sense could be made of them. Shag Bender hoped for nothing more than another chance at one of the long range patrol bombers which the Nazis sent out to prey on shipping in the North Atlantic.

Suddenly he saw three bombers! The Nazis must be going nuts, he told himself, to let those three ships stray so far from home. They were heavily armed, with cannon and m.gs. but they were no match for swift P-40s or Lockheed 38s.

Shag Bender was acting flight leader of the three fighters. He wished more of the squadron had come along. Not

that he was afraid of being downed, but he believed one or two of the Dorniers might slip away while they were needling the first one.

Bender grabbed the mike and reported back to base. Captain Farnsworth, squadron leader on the field near Reykjavik snapped into the muff phones that he was sending reinforcements at once. "Snap at 'em, but don't chase them home!" he finished.

"We'll do our best, cap. Over. . . ." Bender grinned. Then he chortled over the intercom, "Luck, you long-haired wolf, remember what we did that other day. The old one-two, right in the groove!"

Then Bender cursed. Tillinghast, eager to beat his two flightmates to the quarry, jammed go-grease to his Allison and shot down and forward like a bullet. Bender waggled a signal to Lucky Latch and took out after Tilly.

Lucky Latch didn't hurry. He was always like that—never excited. He went on in deadly earnestness and finished stronger than when he started. When an enemy believed the fight was over, and tried to call it off, Lucky would keep right on until he got the results he wanted.

Lucky had a brother Tom Latch who acted as Ferry pilot from Iceland to Canada. Tom was the excitable kind, always saying what he'd do when he got in a fighting ship. But he never tried to transfer to active duty.

Once, when Shag Bender asked Lucky why Tom didn't get into a fighting ship and make his talk stick, Lucky shrugged and retorted:

"He's more good where he's at. It takes another kind of nerve to tool a bomb bird across the pond like he does."

BUT right now, Shag Bender wished that Lucky would hustle a little. Tillinghast was almost to the Dorniers,

but instead of running away, the big ships began to open up with their 37mm stuff. Tilly roared right on, and his cupro was pouring out in six deadly streams.

Shag Bender saw the Dornier turn as Tillinghast raked it one way. Bender legged the stick, stood the Curtiss on a wing and snarled around on the other side of the Dornier. They had a good chance. . . .

Suddenly hell broke loose about Bender in a snarling, stinking, smoking torrent of lead! His big body froze in the bucket. The slugs were coming down from above him! They were shooting for the money. He had to duck out and let the Dornier go for the time being. He hadn't time to look up and see what was shooting at him. He did a wide skid and started to zoom. At the same time the slugs stopped hammering him and he was dumbfounded to see a Messerschmitt 109R go screaming past him on fire. The pilot of the Schmitt was clawing at the escape hatch, but the flames had warped it shut!

Then Shag Bender was moaning up the sky-skids in a vertical zoom. He caught a glimpse of three other Schmitts scrambling like hell to get out from under the pounding of Lucky Latch's guns. Good old Lucky! If he hadn't loafed into the fight he wouldn't have been above and behind the unsuspecting Germans and it might have been Shag Bender who moaned down in a burning ship instead of the German.

Bender planed off, gunned his Allison and caught the dirty gray of a Schmitt on his rings. He knuckled the button and felt the P40 shudder as the fireworks exploded. It didn't take much. You caught them in the guts, held the teaser down for a short "Take that you damned Kraut!" and they usually busted apart.

But the German ship didn't bust apart. Bender's shots were a little low. They cut a rim along the floorboards and he thought it was getting away. The next instant it went into a spin for he had smashed the controls. The German bailed out and coasted down on silk.

Bender was puzzled. What the hell were German fighter ships doing so far from home? Certainly they didn't come under their own power. The bombers could make it, yes, but bombers were so vulnerable without fighter protection. Was it possible the Germans had established a small drome on Iceland from which to operate fighters and thus increase the effectiveness of their huge flying boats?

Bender didn't get the answer to the questions just then. He half-looped and catrolled out hoping to get a shot at another fighter. But the fighters were suddenly wary and pulled off. Bender let them go. The bombers were the important meat. They must stop the bombers. . . .

Bender saw his chance. He signalled to Lucky for the old one two! Down they poured converging upon the Dornier from either side. The trick was for Lucky to go on by and come up under the belly of the ship, hosing lead into her cabin while Bender took care of the stern end from the top. They had to time the attack perfectly and keep in the groove without letting the Dornier change her course.

Then just as Lucky Latch was screaming past the bomber another ship slipped between him and the Dornier. It was Tillinghast! Bender had forgotten him and now he cursed him for a fool! Lucky had to pull off sharply to keep from crashing Tilly. It was then the German fighters struck. They had maneuvered to a spot above the bombers and as Lucky Latch pulled off at such an awkward angle they

smashed down on him with all they had!

Bender moaned, "For God's sake, Lucky—pull away—go down!" It was too late for that. Already the German guns had wiped the cowling from the rails.

Shag Bender let the bomber go and tried to save his pal. He knew it was impossible. Lucky's plane seemed to buckle in the middle and he slid down against the firewall and was pinned there. Bender caught a glimpse of Lucky Latch's white face. Lucky tried to grin, but blood oozed out with the smile and the Curtiss hit the down-draft!

BENDER knew that Lucky was going to crash, that he could never bail out of the whipping ship, that he must lie there bleeding and helpless and alive and wait for the horrible climax! Bender cursed Tillinghast for having forced Lucky out of the sky. Tillinghast went on to cripple the bomber and force it down, but that couldn't help Lucky Latch.

Bender cursed the Germans in the fighter ships. He smashed his way through a wall of bullets until he was upon the tail of another fighter. He held the button down until the guns blazed and smoked and shuddered against recoil. The German ship exploded. The pilot was hurled into the air like a forked stick. That sight relieved some of the tension within Shag Bender's arched chest, but it couldn't bring Lucky back.

The remaining fighter cut away and made a run for it. Bender was vaguely conscious of the other members of 43 arriving on the scene just as Captain Farnsworth had promised. Bender didn't stop to see the rest of the fight. He nosed down and sent his Curtiss screaming for the ground to see how badly Lucky was going to crash.

Down—down—down he screamed with the horrible pressure of air moaning in agony. Lucky seemed to fight the Curtiss out of the spin for a moment, but just as Bender reached a point a thousand feet above the earth, Lucky hit the crag ice which made of the earth a giant washboard. He hit it a glancing blow and the P40 bounced back into the air, turned around flat twice and ended up in a snowbank which huddled against a ridge.

Shag circled the wreck twice but Lucky Latch didn't crawl from the wreckage. Shag couldn't make a landing without sacrificing his ship, so headed back to the fight. The fight was over. One of the Dorniers headed back and was lost in the fogbank to the east. The other two had been downed.

Shag was first back on the field. He corked down at the end of the bleak runway, turned his ship over to his mech and headed for the beer-barrel barracks which housed the marines. They were like prairie dog mounds, those round-roofed sheds. He sought out the commanding officer and asked him to radio a patrol ship to go to the coast south of Mt. Hekla and pick up what was left of Lucky Latch.

When Shag Bender got back to the airfield, the others had come in. It looked so empty, so futile, that line of ships from which Lucky Latch was missing. Shag caught Tilly by the arm as he swung toward the lounge and faced him with clenched fists.

"I guess you know, Tilly, that you forced Lucky into the hell spot?" he said evenly, trying not to lose control.

Tilly tensed a little and for a minute silence whipped the space. "What did you expect me to do, pick him up and put him in my pocket? I figured I was entitled to one victory."

"Not at Lucky's expense you weren't. You forced him into the path of the Madsen slugs. . . ."

"That's a lie! He could have gone some other way!"

Shag saw red and hit him. Tilly was heavy, and smart with his fists. He rolled with the blow and came in snarling. Shag didn't give ground. He was in no mood for boxing. Latch was dead, and he had to smash this thing which had caused him to die. He caught two stunning blows on the shoulders and neck, lunged around a little and then shot his fist across with a deadly one-two which put Tilly on his back.

Captain Farnsworth stormed in, and shouted, "What goes on here? This is an army, not a hoodlum hotel. Get that man up and straighten him out. As for you, Lieutenant Bender . . ."

"I'm sorry, sir," Bender said softly. "I forgot myself."

Farnsworth nodded. "I know how you feel, but don't let it happen again."

BENDER staggered to his quarters which he had shared with Lucky Latch. The place seemed cold, empty, lifeless. Who could he find to take Latch's place?

Latch decided that himself. The marines found him pinned in the pit of the Curtiss but still breathing. He was in a bad way when they got him to Reykjavik and the doctor agreed that his condition was almost hopeless. The Allison engine had shoved back on his legs, and now they were smashed, useless, paralyzed. Shag knew what the realization that he could never fly again would do to Lucky. He almost wished that Lucky had died in the crash.

But Lucky came around enough and asked for Shag, so the doctor permitted him to visit the stricken man. Lucky tried to grin when Shag entered the room, but the bandages hid everything but his mouth and eyes.

"Don't look so glum, pal," he chided Shag Bender. "I'll get all right again

and win back all the skin I lost."

"It's going to be damned lonesome waiting," Shag assured him.

"You won't be alone, Shag," Lucky Latch said definitely. "That's why I sent for you. Tom's coming in with a ferry plane tonight. I want you to bring him to me. It was I who kept him out of the fighting in the air. He's going to get in someday and I'd rather have him fighting alongside of you than anybody else. He's a great kid. He can take up where I left off and do a better job of it."

The expression in Lucky's eyes tugged at Shag Bender's heart. Lucky sure was proud of Tom, but Shag felt sure that no one could fill the place Lucky was vacating no matter how brave they were.

But that night Tom Latch roared down in a Hudson. Shag met him and took him to see Lucky. Tom was slim, and dark, with curly hair and eyes which seemed to always ask a question. He was a good kid, steady, but talked bigger than his record warranted. He was noticeably affected by Lucky's condition.

Because it was hard for Lucky to talk, Shag told of the fight that day, of the fighter ships which must be based upon Iceland in some hidden cave. He told of the destruction of the Messerschmitts and about the German who had bailed out of his doomed ship. At the end, Lucky said:

"It's time for you to go out there, now, Tom. Shag will show you the ropes. I want you to promise me that you'll never let Shag down—not until I get back at least."

"I promise, Lucky. I'll do my best," Tom agreed, but Shag was disturbed by the pallor of the younger man's face and the way he kept his eyes averted as he made that promise.

As they left the infirmary, Shag said, "Come on, I'll take you over to Cap-

tain Farnsworth and see if he can fix up your transfer."

To Shag's amazement, Tom said in a tense, whispery voice, "I'm not going to transfer. I'd be no good in a fighting ship—I'd be—be . . ."

"Scared?" Shag supplied the word with a sneer.

Tom's chin went up, but his eyes wavered. "Yes—I can't bear the thought of being cooped up in a small ship with guns blazing at my back. I want to see it coming when I get mine."

"But you promised Lucky—he believes in you. Now you turn yellow."

"I'm not yellow—it's just something inside of me. I do dangerous things . . ."

"Ferrying a boat is kid's play compared to manning a fighting ship, Tom. For God's sake don't let Lucky know you're flunking. They'll move him out of here to the States for treatment. Then you can do as you damned please."

Tom moved away to the quarters he always used in his stops on the island. Shag felt a little sick over the incident. He was going to have to lie to Lucky Latch and the lying would come hard. Shag tried to drown his troubles, but it wouldn't work.

The next morning he awoke to discover that Tom had left camp. Tilly brought him the news. Tilly's loud voice was broadcasting:

"Yes, sir, I saw Tom Latch sneaking out of camp during the night. The damned fool don't know what he's running into. He had snowshoes with him. . . ."

SHAG confronted Tilly, and snapped, "If you breathe one word of this so that Lucky Latch hears it, I'll smash your big teeth down your throat, Tilly."

Tilly just sneered and sauntered off. Shag went to see the captain and ex-

plained the situation.

"I want to go after him, sir," Shag finished.

"I can't let you go, Bender. I'm shorthanded. We've got to send out patrols to find where those German fighters came from, and it's going to be a hard thing to find. Furthermore they're transferring Lucky Latch and a couple of other bad cases to the States for treatment. A boat is leaving unexpectedly this morning and we are short of convoy ships. We'll have to give them air protection until they get past the Nazi sharks which lie in wait off the shore," Farnsworth explained.

Shag got to see Lucky Latch for a few moments before they moved him. He had to lie about Tom, explaining that Tom was busy getting their ship ready for the convoy duty. If Lucky doubted the yarn, he gave no sign.

Shag sought out Tilly, and explained, "It's your fault that Lucky is where he is. I don't want him to hear about Tom running away. He thinks Tom is going out with me to convoy the ship. I want you to ride the rear bucket of the SBC4 dive bomber and he will think you're Tom if he sees me take off."

"I think you're crazy as hell, but I'll do it," Tilly agreed.

At daylight the small freighter swung out into the open sea. The surface of the ocean was whipped with white-caps which made detection of subs below the surface hard for the men in the plane. In addition, there was a thin mist sweeping across the water which almost hid the freighter.

Shag was glad that Lucky was getting away. He'd be safe in the States and get the best of care. Perhaps he would never learn of Tom's cowardice. Shag pulled the Curtiss up a little. Soon the small freighter would be lost in the vast ocean and Lucky would be safe from the Nazis who had almost

killed him. . . .

It was then that Tilly cried, "There's a torp screwing toward the boat! See the ribbon?"

Shag tensed. Doom had followed Lucky out here to complete the job of destroying him!

"I'm going down!" Shag screamed, but so far he couldn't see the shape of the sub. He circled warily before nosing over. Then he saw the iron fish in a pocket of the fog. Over he went with the throttle crowding the stop and his head against the dive bar!

Down he screamed like a bird of prey launched from the den of eternity. The ocean smashed up toward him. The gray hull of the U-boat grew in size like a bloating pig.

The ack-ack gun on the deck of the sub let go a burst of shrapnel which barely missed the left wing of the biplane.

Ordinarily the gun couldn't have come so close to them, but coming down the groove as they were, made it easy for the gunners to get a bearing.

Lieutenant Bender caught a glimpse of the five-inch gun on the forward deck of the sub hurling shells into the freighter. Had the torpedo hit? He didn't dare look back to see. He was almost on the sub now.

The captain of the pig boat believed the Curtiss carried a bomb and was taking a chance that the bomb would miss.

He didn't know the truth. He didn't know that the Curtiss had a depth charge swung in the brackets.

Shag Bender gritted his teeth. Now was the time—now! The Curtiss jerked as the depth charge cut loose. Then a strange thing happened. Bender couldn't pull his nose up. A burst of shrap from the sub had mangled his empennage and the Curtiss moaned on down toward the green water lashing below.

THERE was no time to think. Action alone could save them. He blipped the engine then cut it in fast and the nose jerked up impatiently. The next instant they hit. There was a numbing shock. Bender didn't know that he had opened the hatch until the force of the impact with the water hurled him clear.

He fought his dazed mind back to normal. One wing of the Curtiss still protruded from the water and he grabbed at it instinctively. One swift look about showed him that the sub was gone. But the freighter was gone, too. Through the mist he saw men struggling in the water, evidently members of the submarine crew.

Then someone was clawing at his back. He twisted over and caught his breath. Tillinghast clung to him. Tilly's face was frothy with blood, and his eyes burned with rage and pain and hatred. He struck at Shag Bender with his fist, and cried in a choked, gasping voice:

"Damn you, Bender, you dumped me on purpose because you think I caused Lucky to die!"

Bender shook off the blow which Tilly threw at his head. It was a weak try and immediately thereafter Tilly went limp. Bender caught him and held him up. There passed an eternity of cold, wet, hopeless hours.

The Curtiss slipped under and Bender struck out with his burden, conserving his strength, telling himself that a boat would come. A boat did come, five hours later, and took them back to Reykjavik.

With warmth and food Bender regained his strength quickly. But he wasn't sure of things until he awoke sometime during the night. Then it all flooded back to him. Lucky Latch was gone for good. Tom, who had promised to take his place in a fighting ship, was out hiding in the snow. Tom

was a fool, as well as a coward. He couldn't last long alone in the barren wilderness.

Lieutenant Bender felt responsible for the whole rotten business. He must save Tom—must show him that you can't run away from yourself. This thought preyed on Bender's mind, and just before dawn he crept from his bunk, slipped on some clothes and made his way to the flying field unnoticed.

He explained to the mechanics at the field that he wished to test out his P-40 to see if it was in condition after the fight with the Messerschmitts two days before. He warmed up the Allison and got it going. Then he examined his guns. They had been loaded and cleaned.

Grimly he slid into the bucket and when nobody was near he kicked off the brakes, zoomed the Allison and shot down the white strip of the runway. He didn't look back at the commotion he had left behind him. He looked ahead. He had to find Tom—he owed Lucky that much!

He shot up toward the thin, gray line of dawn. He didn't go high for he must search the ground. He flew east and north, skirting Mt. Hekla, and circled over the spot where Lucky had crashed. He saw the tracks left by the rescue party. And then, some distance away, he saw other tracks which were leading north.

He remembered the German who had parachuted to safety during the fight two days before. The German would know which way to go to reach his base. Bender started to fly north, even though he couldn't see the tracks all the time.

Suddenly he saw something else. From a shamble of low hills, rolled a thick billow of black smoke! That was something to go by! He knew there was no reason for smoke rising

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in that vicinity, but he likewise realized that the Germans, if they did have a base there, surely wouldn't advertise the fact in such a bold manner.

He bit off another chunk of sky in order to get high enough to see the source of the smoke. So intent was he upon the black plume that he failed to watch the danger spot above him. The whine of a diving ship, and the sharp yap of snarling Madsens jarred him out of his complacency.

Tracer whimpered across his greenhouse and he gutted the stick to climb above the danger. He stood on his tail and lobbed off flat. Then he screwed over to go down. His enemy should be below him—an easy mark!

THERE was nothing below him. The German, as though reading his thoughts, had climbed with the P-40, had cat-rolled out of the stall and now punched holes in Bender's left wing with the precision of a machine.

Bender tensed and a cold shiver went up his back. He didn't know whether it was fear or not. He was unfamiliar with fear. He knew only that he was matched against a master killer, and that the German meant to stop him from reaching the smoke plume at all costs.

Grimly Bender threw the P-40 into as tight a circle as he could at 400 per, but the German circled tighter, he cut the corners. Bender felt the impact of bullets against the armor plate at his back. He had a vague thought that perhaps this was it. Perhaps he was going to meet Lucky in that special heaven reserved for men with wings, and nobody would be left to redeem Tom Latch!

But even as he thought this, the fighter instincts which he had developed were working overtime. He couldn't die until he found out the meaning of the black smoke. He

shoved the stick away from him, stood the Curtiss on its nose and screamed down.

He didn't go down far. He flattened suddenly, cut the prop pitch and stalled his speed. The German, taken by surprise, slid over him. Timing the maneuver precisely, Bender nosed up just a little. His six guns let go with yammering, smoking, clawing lead!

He carved the pit out of the Messerschmitt and a bloody, flailing body fell through the hole.

Bender breathed a prayer of thanks. He didn't stop to watch the Schmitt crash. He made a diving turn and headed toward the smoke plume. He kept low, now, so that he would not be sighted from the ground until he was across the low hills.

Then the hills were sweeping under him. He caught his breath. The cloud of smoke seemed to be pouring right out of the earth itself. But he knew it wasn't. From his low altitude he could see the brow of an overhanging cliff with huge caves below it. From one of the caves poured the smoke.

He saw no marks of landing wheels or skids on the cleared ground before the caves. Suddenly, from the cave which vomited smoke, ran the figure of a man. Bender tensed. There was no mistaking that figure. It was Tom Latch!

Lieutenant Bender circled and headed back across the field. Guns were firing from one of the caves. Tom fell, turned on his knees and shook his fist at the hiding Germans. Bender felt his heart jump into his throat. Tom Latch was no coward—he had to be saved!

Bender made a short landing on the smooth, white surface below him. Then he knew why he hadn't seen tracks. Strips of canvas covered the tracks and from the air blended with the snow. He corked down, piled out and ran to



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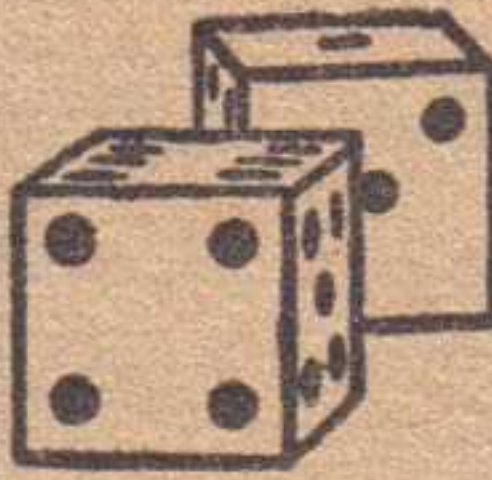
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Tom's side.

Tom had been hit in the leg. Bender had his revolver and he fired back at the cave as Tom talked fast.

"I was afraid to fly a fighting ship, but I wanted to do something to make up for that. I remembered you telling about the German who had jumped. I walked out and found his tracks, followed them to this place and they jumped me. I managed to set their supply of fuel oil on fire and hide behind the smoke. When I saw your ship I made a run for it. There are two Schmitts out scouting, trying to keep any Yanks from spotting this place until the smoke dies down."

"I got one of those ships," Bender nodded. "Come on, buddy. I'll give you a hand up into my Curtiss. You handle the controls. I'll hang on."

But when the Curtiss took off, Shag Bender wasn't hanging on nohow. He knew how much chance the overloaded P-40 would have in a fight.

Lying on his stomach, he tried to make every bullet count. It wasn't long until he heard planes. He looked up to see three ships of Fighter 23 circling the field. Far to the east, and much higher were two other ships diving, zooming, shuddering under the recoil of guns! Tom Latch was winning his fighting spurs! He had run into the other Schmitt!

SO ENGROSSED in watching the dogfight was Shag Bender that he failed to notice a P-40 landing near him. He did see the other two P-40s zoom up to help Tom Latch, but Tom didn't need any help for just then the Messerschmitt vomited flame and smoke and pinwheeled from the sky!

It wasn't until then that Bender noticed the man crouching in the pit of the P-40 which had just landed. It was Tillinghast! He taxied slowly toward the cave, his six guns answering the fire

of the hidden Germans!

Bender let out a whoop and ran along with the ship, firing no more of his shots for he believed he might need them. The Germans had evidently seen the destruction of their last plane, for now they came out, their hands up.

Bender rounded them up, six of them. The Germans had evidently forgotten that they were fighting Yanks in Iceland, or they would never have sent so few men and planes so far from home. Tilly crawled out.

Bender looked at him, puzzled. "I thought you were nearly dead, Tilly. I don't see why you came out here to save me after you claimed I dumped you into the ocean on purpose . . ."

Tilly grinned. "I only had a bump on the head which put me out. I found out my mistake about you, Shag, and how you almost lost your own life keeping me afloat. When I heard you were missing this morning, I knew you'd be fool enough to go after Tom. I insisted on coming along. You know the rest."

But they didn't know the rest until they returned to Reykjavik. Captain Farnsworth greeted them with, "We got in some more survivors from the freighter. Found them in a lifeboat, lieutenant. I believe a friend of yours was among them."

Bender couldn't trust himself to talk as he and Tom stood over the cot in which Lucky's form lay so grimly white and straight. Bender just stood there holding Lucky's hand, and let Tom do the talking.

"It'll be a tough grind, but you'll pull through, old man. You're made that way. In the meantime don't worry about your fighting ship. I think I'll do all right in it if I can find enough room for notches," Tom said definitely.

Lucky managed a grin, and Shag Bender, trying to hide the mist in his eyes, winked broadly.

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He claims, "The power to get what you want revealed at last, for the first time since the dawn of creation. The very same power which the ancient Chaldeans, Cuthic, Priests, Egyptians, Babylonians, and Sumerians used is at our disposal today."

He says, "Follow the simple directions, and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these Master Forces are used without knowing about this book, but with it you can mold anyone to your will."

From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science

as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book," Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them." He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life; MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

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| Obtain property. | Get people out of law suits, courts or prison. |
| Make people do your bidding. | Banish all misery. |
| Make any person love you. | Gain the mastery of all things. |
| Make people bring backstolen goods. | Regain your youth and vigor. |
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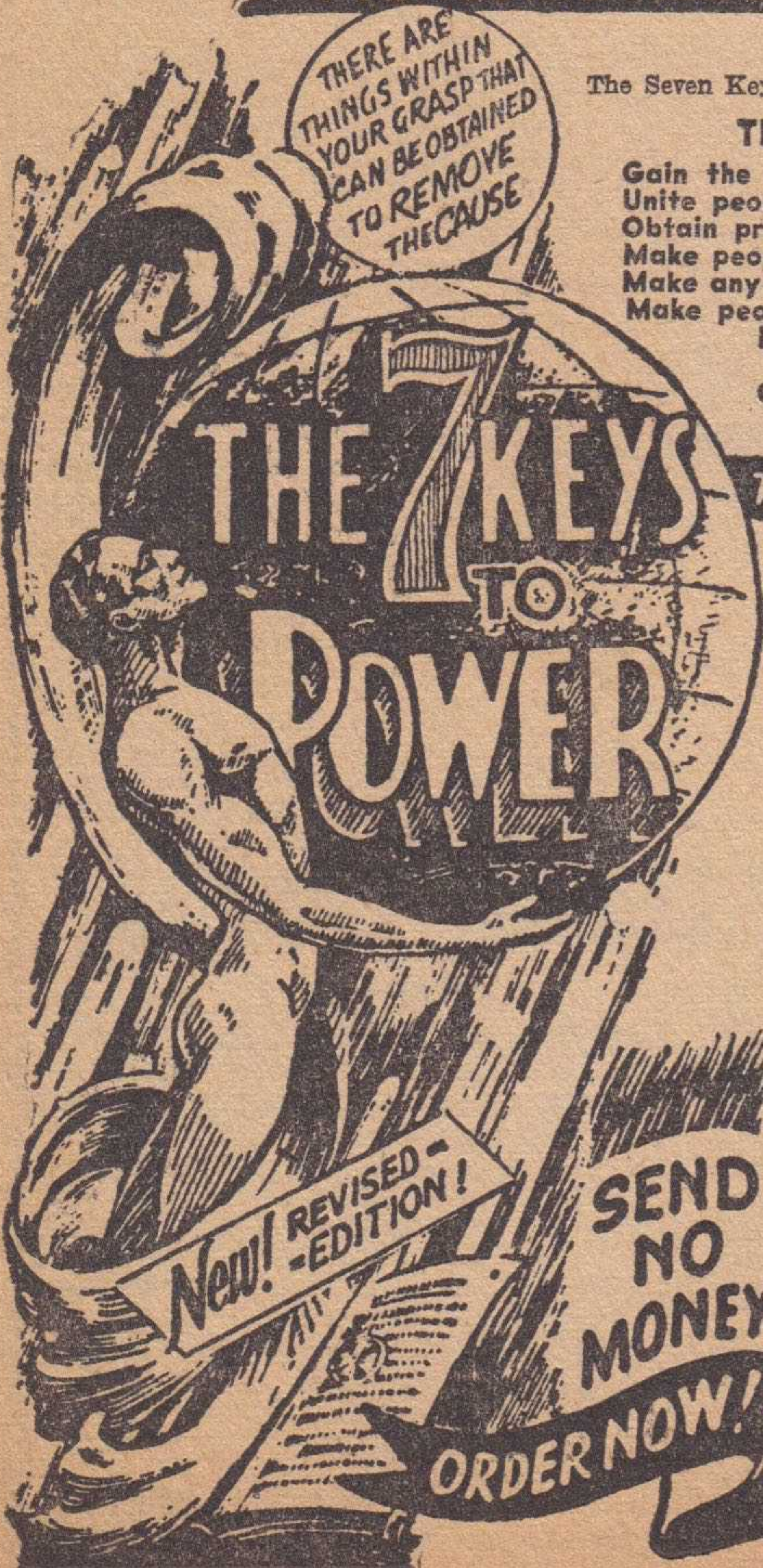
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WHEN you stand before your mirror, stripped to the skin, what do you see? A body you can be really proud of? A build that others admire and talk about? OR—are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are your arms and legs like rails—when they should and CAN be driving pistons of power? If you're honest enough with yourself to admit that physically you're only half a man now—then I want to prove I can make you a SUPERMAN in double-quick time!

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My Discovery

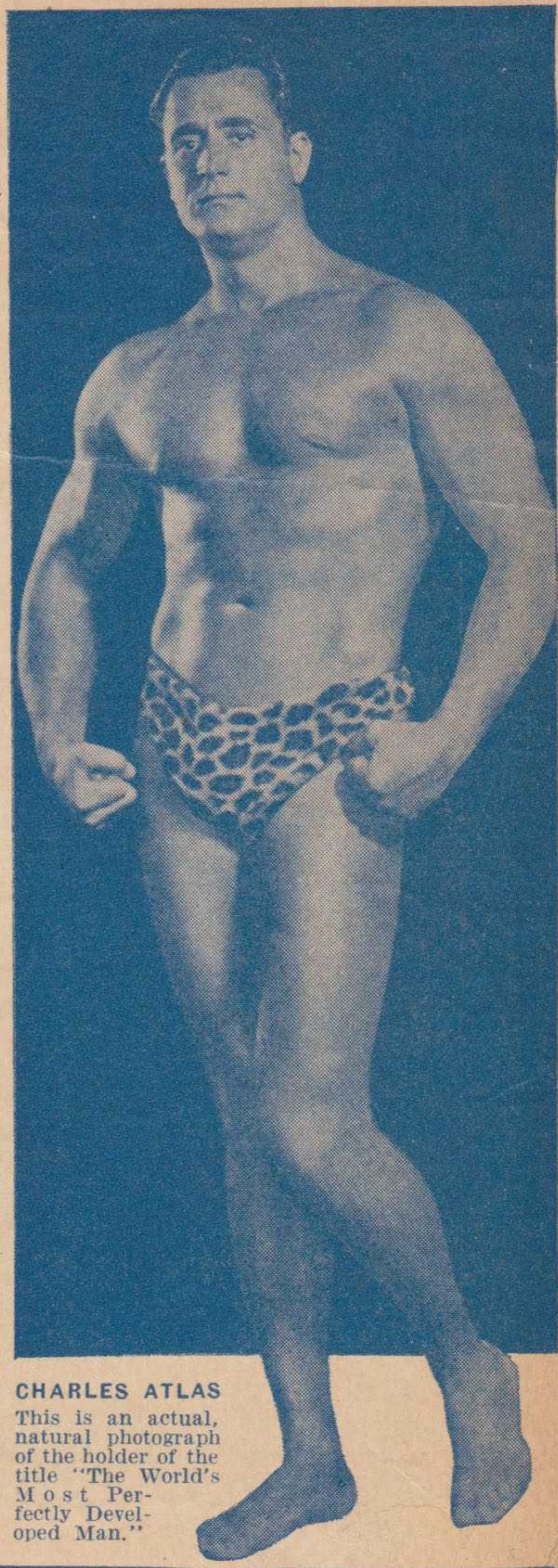
Then I discovered "Dynamic Tension." In record time it built my body to such ideal proportions that when I faced all comers in open competition the judges awarded me the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." "Dynamic Tension" is the NATURAL method for building your body into the physical perfection every man wants. I've seen it work wonders for other men. I'll show you photographs of them so you can see for yourself!

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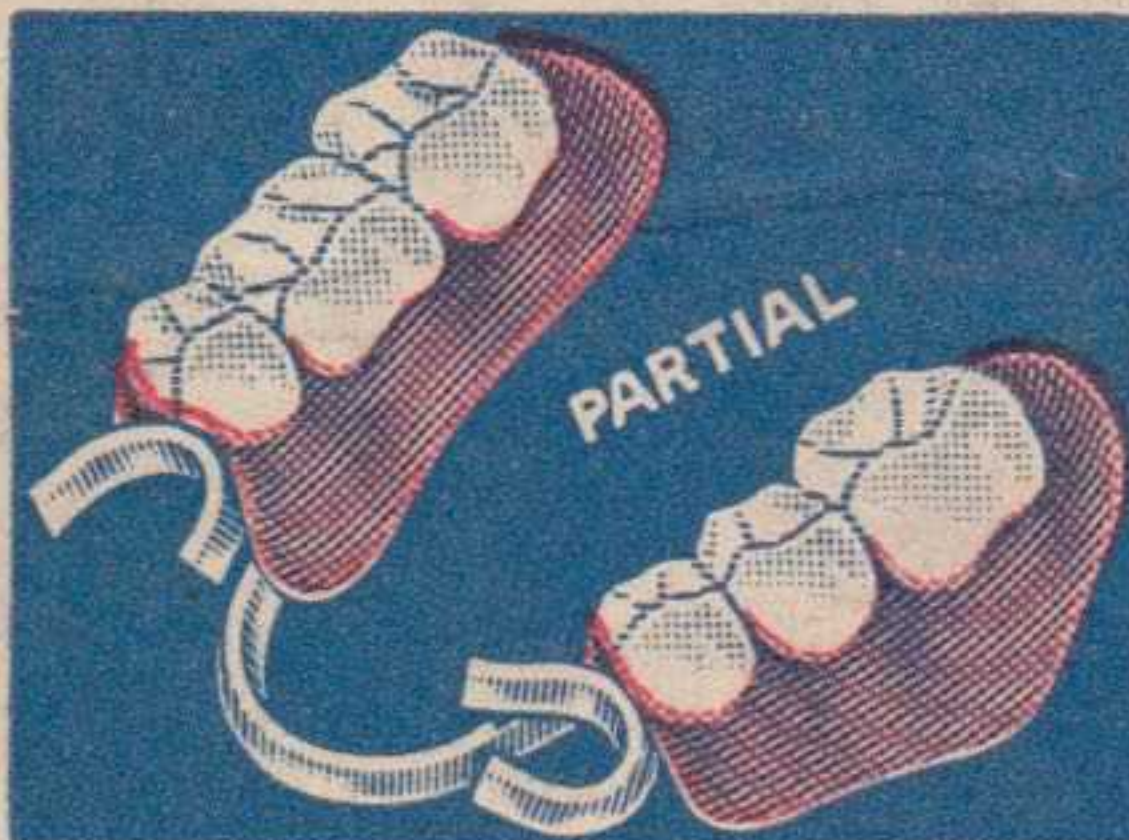
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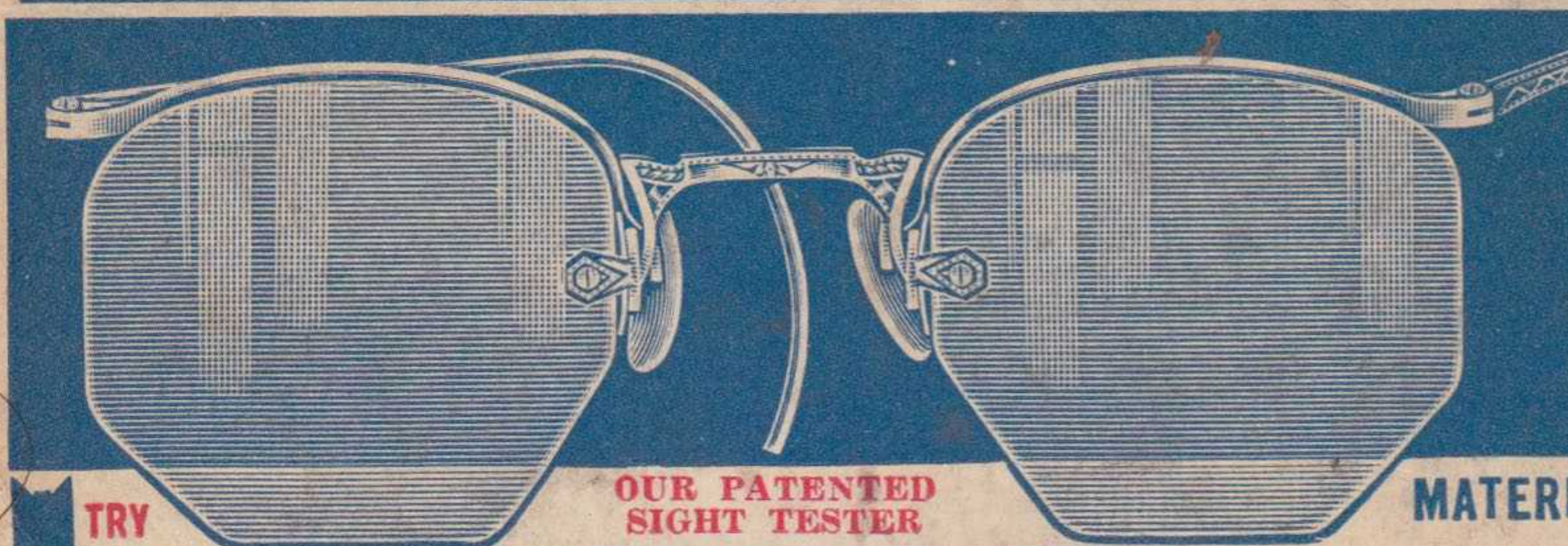
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