

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

DECEMBER

BILL BARNES

Air Adventure

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BLOOD OVER BORNEO

90 Page Air Novel

by

GEORGE L.

EATON



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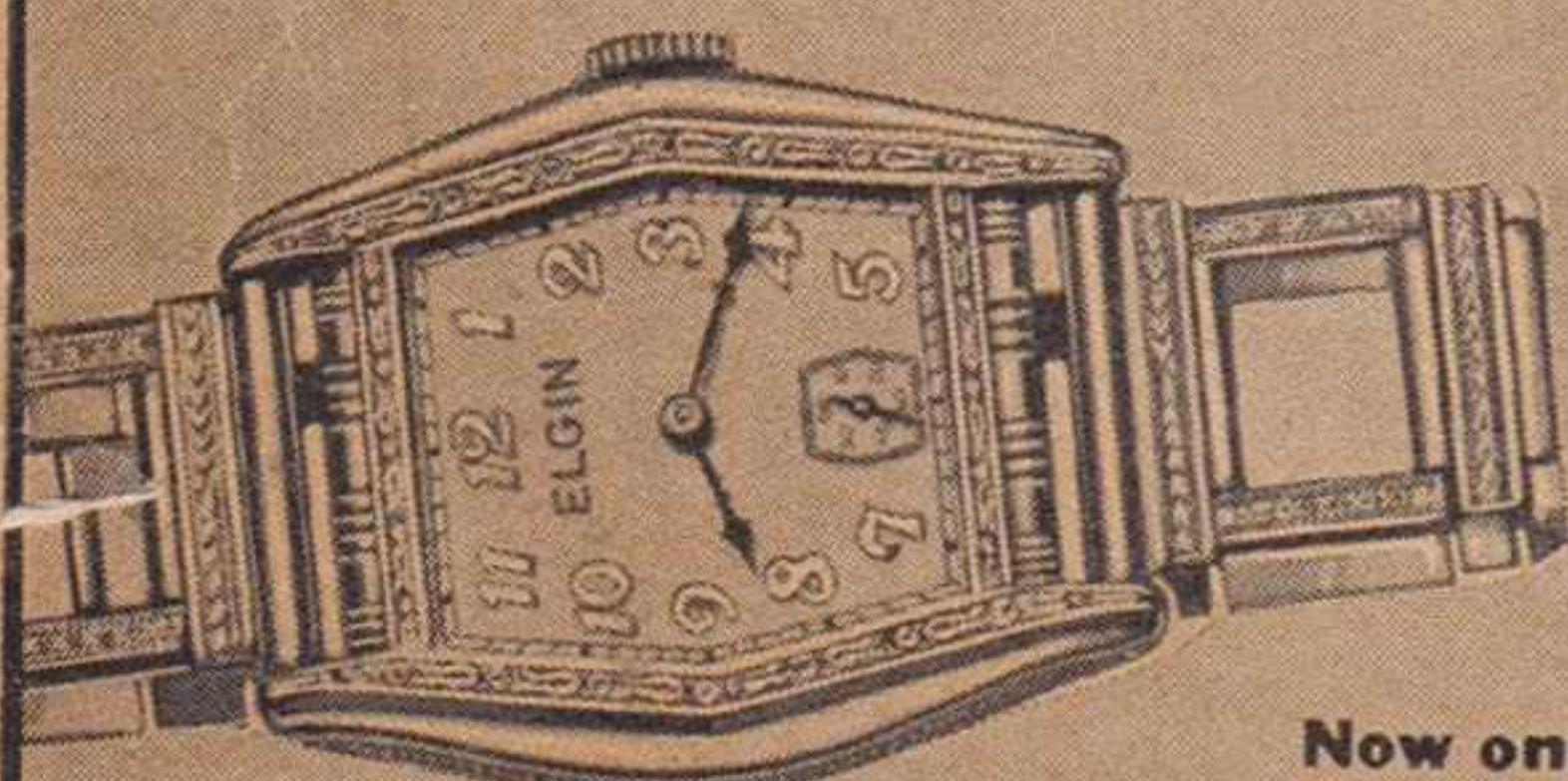
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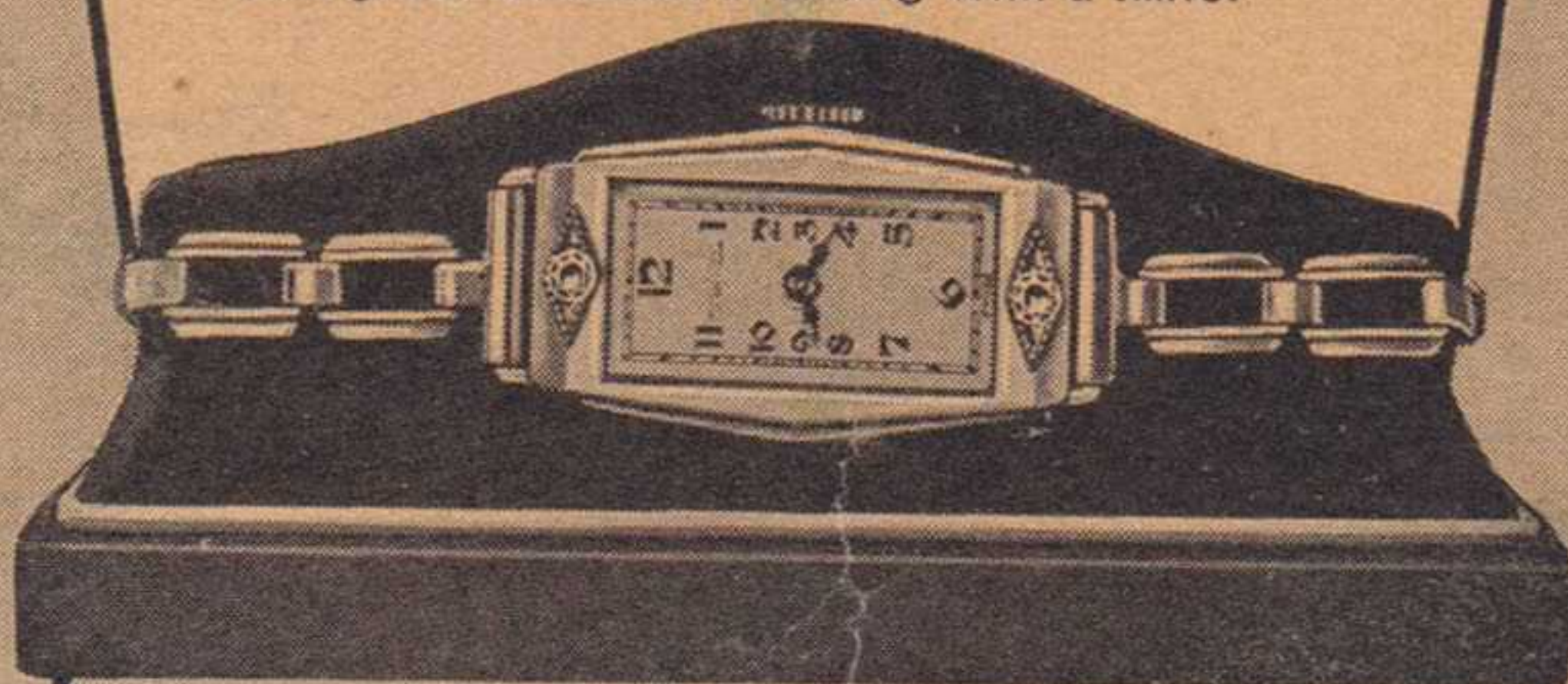


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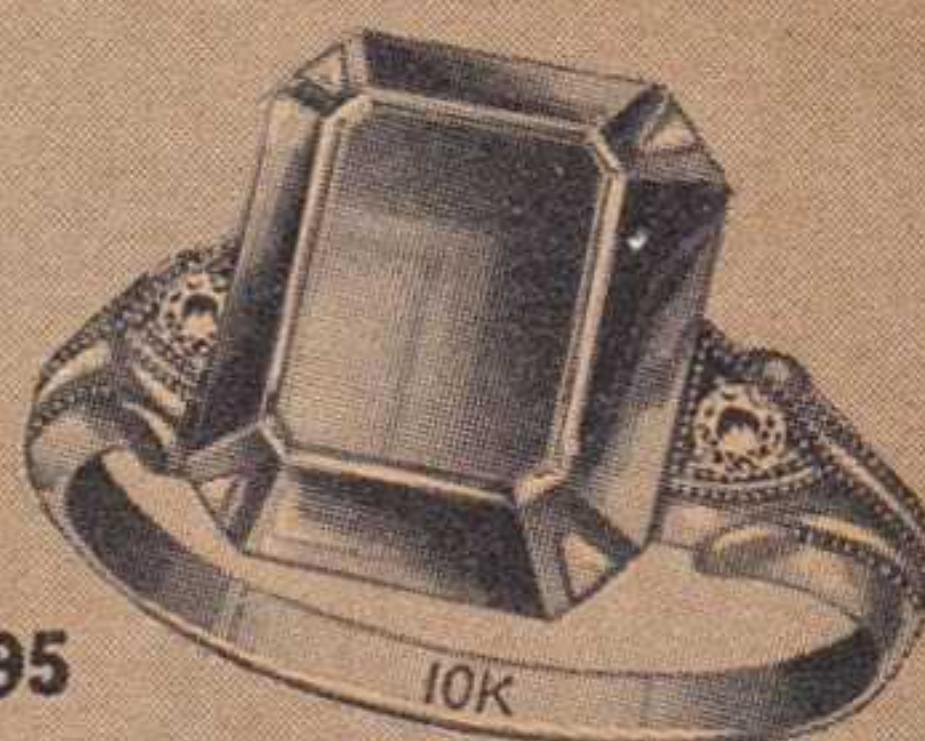


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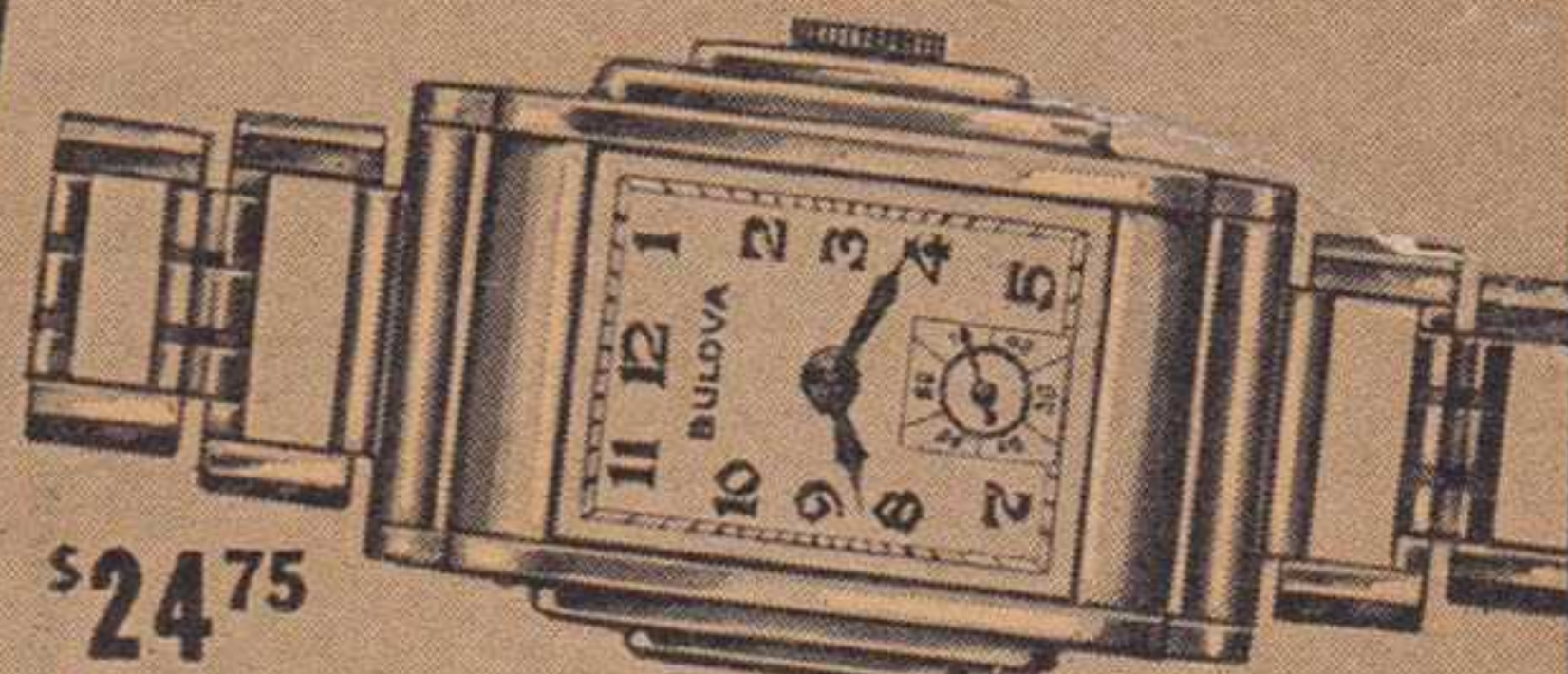
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Volume II
Number 5

BILL BARNES

December
1934

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Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

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Contents

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BLOOD OVER BORNEO . 10

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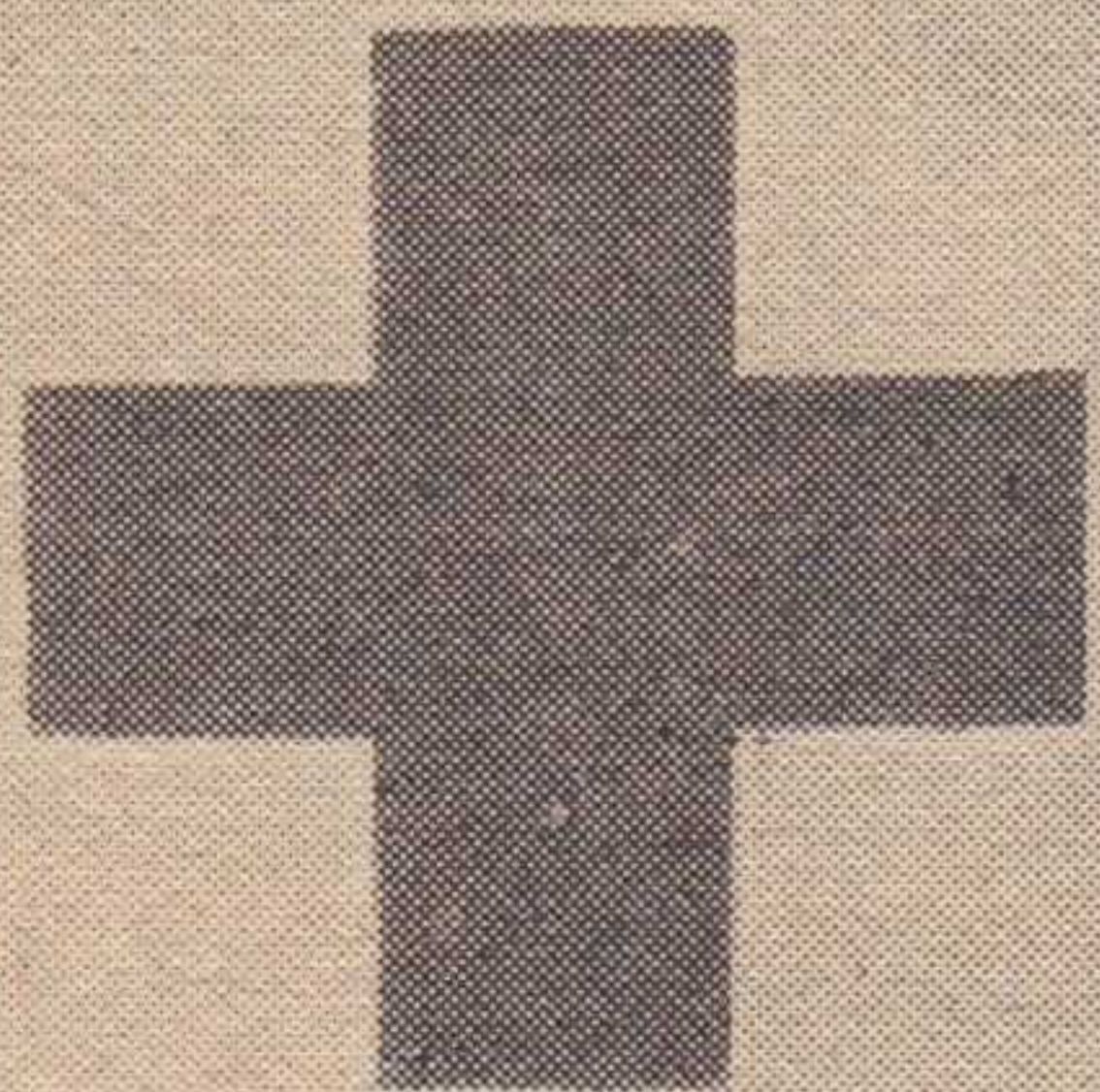
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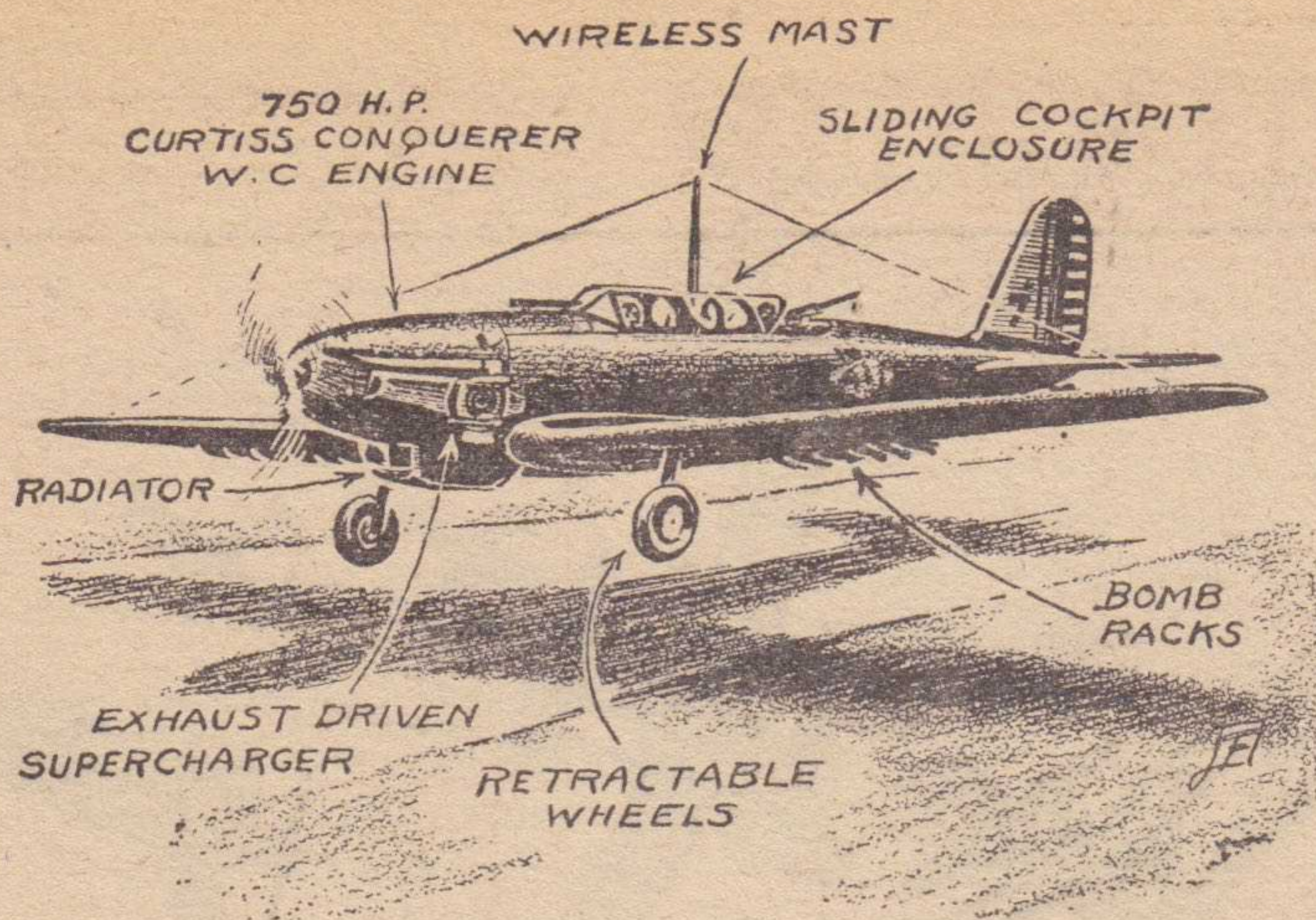
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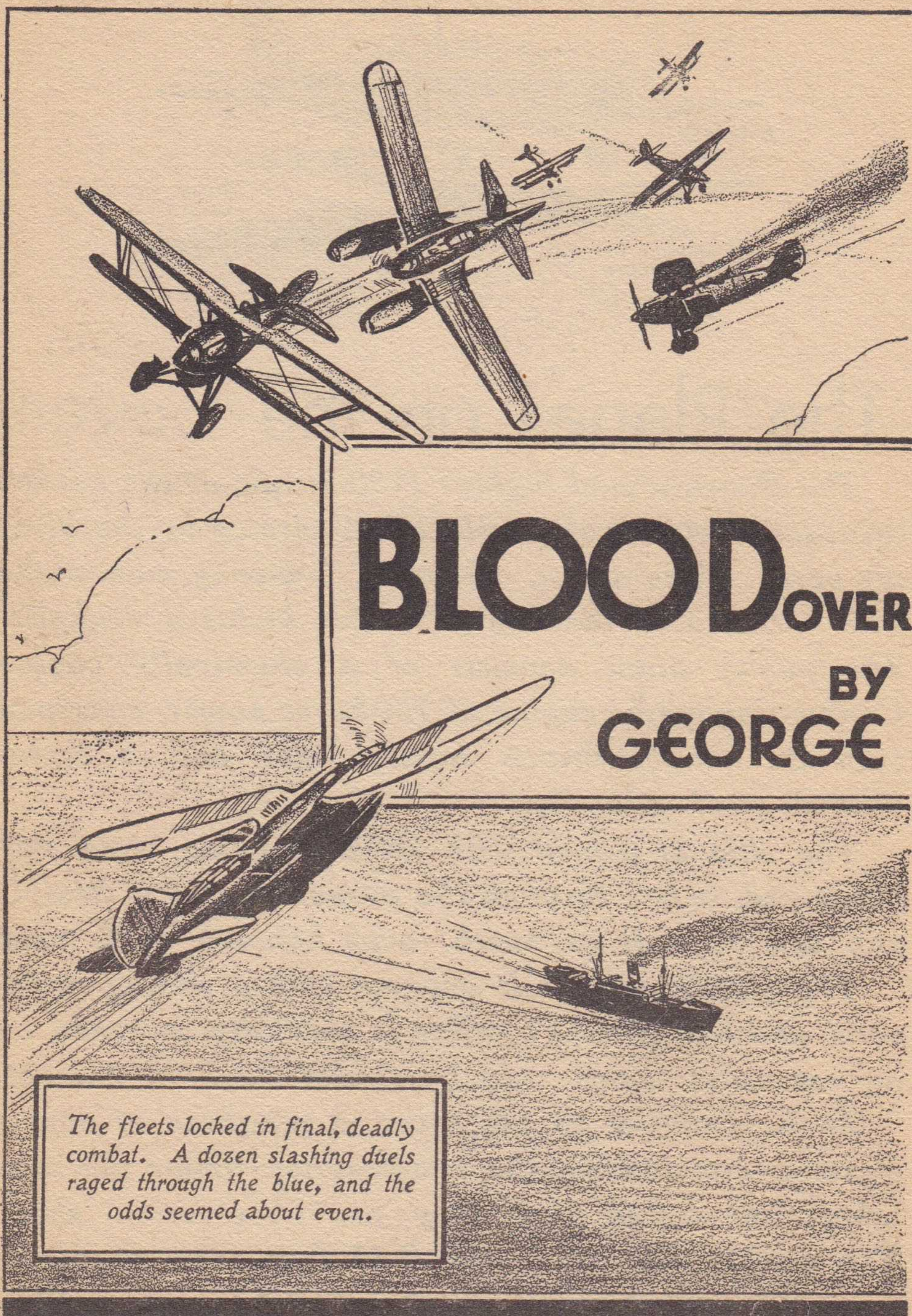
The Planes on the Cover

The Consolidated Fighter P-30 is one of the newest two-seater pursuit ships placed in service by the army air corps. It is a fast, all-metal, low-wing monoplane with retractable landing gear and inclosed cockpits. The power plant consists of a chemically cooled Curtiss Conqueror engine of 750 horse power, equipped with an exhaust-driven supercharger and a three-bladed steel propeller.

The ship is armed with fixed machine guns synchronized to fire through the propeller, and a flexible gun aft, as well as bomb racks beneath each wing.

The pilot's cockpit is covered with a sliding inclosure, and the gunner's office is partially screened by an extension which may be folded back in combat.


In the painting on the cover, a squadron of enemy biplanes has jumped the two-seaters—under the mistaken impression that they are observation ships. The speed with which the P-30 formation zooms to meet the attack will soon make the enemy fliers realize that they have picked on the wrong gang.



BLOOD_{OVER}

BY
GEORGE

The fleets locked in final, deadly combat. A dozen slashing duels raged through the blue, and the odds seemed about even.



*Caught between a savagely
primitive land below—and
hell-driven squadrons of sky
fighters above! Trapped by
the cunning of a power-
drunk warlord!*

BORNEO

L. EATON

JUST THEN "Shorty" Hassfurth was in the tightest jam he had ever experienced. Physically and mentally he was suffering tortures which seemed equal to any ground out on the wheels and racks of the Inquisition, and the maddening part of it was that it was all taking place in the cockpit of his own beloved Snorter.

He turned every few minutes. He had tried everything he knew of from mental telepathy to rank bribery, but nothing worked. Every time he turned around to look up into his tiny rear-view mirror he saw that same tiny hole bored through that bar of blue steel.

The bar of blue steel had also been finished into a barrel of a menacing Luger.

Shorty had never realized before how large a small hole in a bar of blue steel can become through frequent inspection. By now it had taken on the proportions of a naval 16-incher. Had it not been for the long talonlike finger that curled through the trigger guard, he would have been certain it had been bored through a monstrous garrison-artillery weapon.

"I'd like to put my bicuspid into his knuckle," Shorty fumed, taking another look back.

The menacing black hole in the blue-steel barrel still put its Cyclopean eye on a point at the base of his skull.

The thundering Hurricane motor in front seemed to goad him on with its monotonous *Ber-oom-oom-oom-oom*. It seemed to be saying: "You let him down! You let him down! You let him down!"

Shorty squirmed in the bucket seat and then stiffened. The length of blue steel with the little hole bored through it was placed against the base of his skull, and there's nothing so cold anywhere in the world as a piece of blue steel.

"Gah!" snarled the man in the back seat, who held the gun.

Shorty sat still and guided the Snorter across the Gulf of Siam toward Tonle Sap, a large inland lake situated in Cambodia, French Indo-China. Why, he did not know. All he sensed now was that he was flying his own Snorter from Bangkok under the command of a human serpent who had all the sleeky attributes of a python. But the little black hole in the bar of blue steel had a lot to do with it, also.

"You will keep your eyes front, Tuan Has-s-sfurth!" the sleek Oriental in the back seat told him. His voice came over the Gosport helmet phone like teaspoons rattling about in a dish pan. "Remember," he warned, "you do not have a silken plume, and I do."

Shorty writhed under the reminder. He had no parachute, and the man who held the gun on him had. That made a lot of difference, too. That blue-black Luger might spit its venom, and the Oriental could easily step out and take refuge on one of the sampans that dotted the sponge grounds below. A dead Shorty wouldn't need a parachute then.

For ten minutes he flew on, thinking hard. He was experiencing the tortures of those who are in ignorance of what is going on. He did not know, for instance, where his chief, Bill Barnes, was, or how the great round-the-world race had ended.

He could not know what had happened to "Red" Gleason who was supposed to be at the control point in Tokyo. He was in ignorance of the activity of Beverly Bates last heard of in Lisbon. And where Cy Hawkins, the lanky Texan, might be, he had no idea.

Any or all of these questions might have been answered had he been able to plug in his radio set, but the human python in the rear cockpit had thoughtfully removed the high-tension wire—so that was out.

"If I only knew!" he fumed to him-

self, thumping his thigh with his left hand.

For his query he got another jab from that length of blue steel. That stiffened him again.

"If Bill got that message O. K.," he went on, thinking hard, "he could have finished by now and be on his way back. He could have tipped off the rest of the gang, too. Cripes! Red might be in Borneo now, for all I know."

But there was no answer to anything; nothing but frequent jabs of that length of blue steel that was slowly but surely freezing a round splotch at the base of his skull.

Physically, he was hog-tied, mentally he was free and alert. He pondered on the possibility of Barnes' not getting his message straight. That meant that Bill, too, was in the toils of Chan Lo and Otto Yahr. And streaking in from Lisbon, Tokyo, and Bombay, three more Snorters carrying Bev Bates, Red Gleason, and Cy Hawkins were hurtling on to their doom.

Shorty sensed a sickening reaction below his belt buckle and squirmed again and set himself for another jab, but, what was worse, he sat there for several seconds and nothing happened. It was ten times worse than another frigid stab of that length of blue steel.

"We will now turn due east, Tuan Has-s-sfurther," the voice at the other end of the Gosport clanked. "Dead ahead from Chantibun toward Pursat—and then you will land on the lake where the Sen River enters the blue waters of Tonle Sap. You understand?"

"I get you," growled Shorty. "But I don't understand. What then?"

"You will see. You will see."

And that was that. Shorty turned back to his instruments and figured his fuel. At least one hundred miles to go and none too much fuel left to make it.

BUT WHILE Shorty Hassfurther was flying against his will across southwestern French Indo-China, Bill Barnes was streaking back across the Pacific, satisfied that the prize of the around-the-world race was safely banked in New York, but anxious and puzzled about his No. 1 man who had disappeared so mysteriously from Bangkok.

The Barnes *Scarlet Stormer*, which had stood him in such good stead in the amazing race around the world, was still keeping up its reputation for speed and radius of action. Bill was now within two hundred miles of the Philippines on his way to look for Shorty and wondering about the telegram that had been rushed to him when he was leaving California.

It was in the leg pocket of his cover-all, and he took it out again for the tenth time and re-read it.

If possible see Admiral Montgomery Tyler, C. in C. of U. S. Asiatic Fleet at Iloilo. Important! Avoid if possible any contact with ships of Blue Funnel line, but be ready to report any activity of these vessels. (Signed) WINSLOW.

Bill puzzled over the message again. He did know that Read Admiral Winslow was the officer in charge of naval intelligence in Washington, but what he expected of him in this strange matter was beyond Bill's comprehension. He had often received calls from private concerns and individuals, but an official message from Washington was something else entirely.

He checked his instruments and saw that he was doing about three hundred and seventy-five, a fair cruising speed for the *Scarlet Stormer*.

"Blue Funnel line ships," he muttered. "What the deuce does that mean? The Blue Funnel line is a small coastal outfit that does a little freight work from New York, through the Canal, and ties up with a few Asiatic ports."

But just as he was pondering on it all, something happened.

Out of a long wispy scarf of cloud came three plunging, trim-winged biplanes. There was no mistaking their objective. It was the main cockpit of the *Scarlet Stormer*, and before Bill could make a move to dodge, the giant bullet-amphibian took a wicked lacing of lead.

"Blue Funnel, eh?" snapped Bill, acting fast. "Don't see any blue funnels, but there are three blue noses, and they're not Nova Scotians. Judas! What a reception!"

He slipped the *Scarlet Stormer* away without the use of the ailerons, and the next charge went wide. The move had fooled the attacking ships, for the *Scarlet Stormer* had slithered off into a mad side slip that left them nothing to judge its course by. Bill then slapped his port wing down and came around as the three single-seaters shot past.

"Uh! Swell! Three nice new juicy Fokker D-XVII's eh? Got the Dutch markings on them, too. How did they get so far away from the Dutch East Indies?"

The three biplanes had all the old Fokker lines, including the familiar N-strut, the tapered-chord cantilever top wing, and the ominous fuselage lines of the war-time terror. Up front was fitted a Rolls-Royce supercharged Kestrel which, if Bill remembered his aircraft well, gave the ship a speed of 234 m. p. h. at anything around eleven thousand feet. He recalled, too, that they were armed with two .5-in. Vickers guns and carried six hundred rounds in each ammo can. Two beautiful weapons—if you were on the right end of the breech.

But there was no time for reflection on the specifications of the ships. Those blue noses were coming around again. Bill sensed that he could outrun them, but there was something about them that made him stay in the game and draw

chips. He whipped up into a stall, fell off, and set his twin-propped nose on the leader. His guns sang their war song, and the leader staggered in mid-air, floundered badly, and then gave up a top wing.

The ship careened on for several seconds, like a quirted stallion fighting to get clear of the bit. Then with a great jerk, it tore through with what was left of the wings. One of the other blue-nosed brutes cleared the wreckage and shot dead on at Bill, who was watching the tragedy, fascinated.

Brat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat.

A torrent of spinning lead slashed through his wing and played the devil's tattoo on metal below him. Bill wondered about those retracted pontoons, but acted quickly enough to clear the storm. His nose came around on another blue-nosed Fokker, and he let drive again. His fifty-caliber guns forked into another set of struts, but he had to pull out to avoid a chunk of floating wing that came toward him and threatened his blades.

"There he goes!" he exclaimed, watching the twirling fuselage of the Fokker as it nosed down for the blue Pacific below. "No parachute—no escape. They are playing it to the limit in this game."

BILL turned quickly and saw a blue streak of fire creep up from one of the cockpits. Another blue angle to ponder on. Then, as Bill circled wide and waited for the next move, the two Fokkers suddenly dropped their noses and streaked down for the water below.

"We'll see how this act ends," he said to himself. "Perhaps, this may give Winslow a lead."

The *Scarlet Stormer* eased up and then dropped away after the two fleeing Fokkers. In less than a minute he was almost on them and preparing to give them something to hurry them up, when from beneath their tails came a

blinding black plume of smoke. Together they dived, wing tip to wing tip, and between them they discharged a blinding smoke screen that obliterated their movements.

Bill pulled out quickly and tried to pierce the haze. He circled for several minutes, but the smoke screen spread wider, and he had to skim away nearly a quarter of a mile. With the Fokkers still in view now, he dived again and shot after them from a new angle.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three thunderous concussions belted the welkin around him.

"What the——"

Bang! Bang!

The ear-splitting concussion of quick-fire guns was all around him. He darted back and forth to put them off and whipped around to see where they were coming from. The telltale plumes of the Fokker smoke screen gave the whole show away. Below, slashing the easy rollers of the Pacific, a long, sleek liner was heading full into the wind with a foamy bit in her teeth. Three more flashes glinted behind the bridge, and a second or so later the reports echoed around him.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Chunks of steel, the odorous stench of burned cordite, and the greasy smoke of explosive enveloped him. A splinter slashed through the cockpit and sent a spray of bakelite all around his feet.

"Damn! The radio panel!" he swore.

With a smart movement of stick and rudder Bill dashed the *Scarlet Stormer* back into the inky smoke that trickled like a great billowy blanket across the sky. He had thrown himself into a velvety nothingness and now sat and waited.

"What is *this* all about?" he demanded of himself. "Guns aboard a liner. Dutch Fokkers, miles from their base, potting at me—for no reason at all."

Outside the black pall, he could hear the concussion of shells that were feeling for him through the murk. He laughed quietly to himself as he realized that he had taken advantage of the screen the Fokkers had thrown out to protect their own tails. An unconscious move, but one characteristic of Bill Barnes.

But this could not last long. Bill Barnes had all the curiosity of a mon-goose, and below were a few winged cobras that were asking for a fight. Curiosity is the greatest asset of the mon-goose. It is the quality that makes it fearless of anything. It's too interested in what it has to fight to worry about how tough the proposition may be.

With a low chuckle, Bill darted out of the smoke.

"What the deuce are those biplanes going to do? They have no pontoons. How are they going to get down? They're miles from Java, even."

But there was a new shock waiting for him when he came out in the clear. Below, there was no trace of the Fokkers, either flying or on the water.

"Judas Priest!" gulped Bill.

He jerked out farther into the clear and risked another salvo of fire. None came. The liner below was racing away into a strip of mist that was coming up from the Japanese current. Bill took still a longer chance and shot down at 400 m.p.h. and decided to have a look for himself.

The liner almost beat him to it. With two more shots at the charging *Scarlet Stormer*, the vessel shoved its nose into the mist and made it more complete by sending out a plume of choking whiteness from its fo'c's'le that enveloped the ship from stem to stern.

Not, however, before Bill Barnes had spotted the two Fokkers nestling on the broad deck aft of the short bank of superstructure, and not before he noticed that the two squat funnels were painted a bright blue.

"Well, dash my sister's cat's aunt, as Shorty Hassfurth would say!" Bill gasped. "Now how the dickens did those two Fokkers get on board that boiler?"

But the memory of Shorty and his quaint vocabulary brought Bill out of his musings with a jerk. He swung around, gave the *Scarlet Stormer* a notch or two extra and raced away toward the Philippines.

II—THE PHANTOM

THE HARBOR at Iloilo was bathed in a soft Pacific night when Bill thundered out of the sky and sought a landing stretch in Guimaras Strait which separates Panay from Negros. A silver moon spread a natural gleam across the waters and provided a natural landing flare between the line of cruisers and destroyers of the Asiatic squadron.

All seemed calm and serene. Overhead the sky had taken the black hues of a steel vault picked out with burnished points of stars. The sea below had the surface and shimmer of an undulating piece of dark silk.

Bill's stupefied senses, pounded to a strange calm by the lulling tempo of his motor, suddenly were aroused from their lethargy. He peered about and caught the line-up of battleships, and a new glow of national pride spread through his frame.

The memories of his strange encounter out there on the Pacific were temporarily swept away as he gazed down on the guardians of America's possessions. He was ready to do anything for them now. That little slip of paper in his leg pocket was the challenge. He had taken it up, not unmindful of the debt he owed to Shorty Hassfurth and the rest of the gang.

The string of lighted portholes shone like dilated eyes as Bill swung around for a landing. He eased the retraction gear forward and let down his pontoons

that had been snuggling up in their slots built into the long bullet-fuselage.

He was proud of this ship and prouder still to use her in conditions like these. But those Fokkers crept into his mind again, and he frowned as he tried to solve the mystery of their ability to land on the small rear deck of a speeding liner.

As he swung into position, Bill caught the flashing light-blade that shot up from a heliograph signal. He read it quickly and caught the order to report to the *U. S. S. Houston*, flagship of the Asiatic fleet. He smiled again and threw off all evidences of his weariness. He was working for his country. How, or why, he could not answer, but a strange, satisfying sensation swept through him and charged his limbs, senses, and muscles with new life.

The *Scarlet Stormer* went down the chute, found an easy roller to kill her forward speed, and then threw out her twin sprays of white foam. She dropped to her step and lolled on through the water toward the *Houston* which was lying at the head of the anchorage.

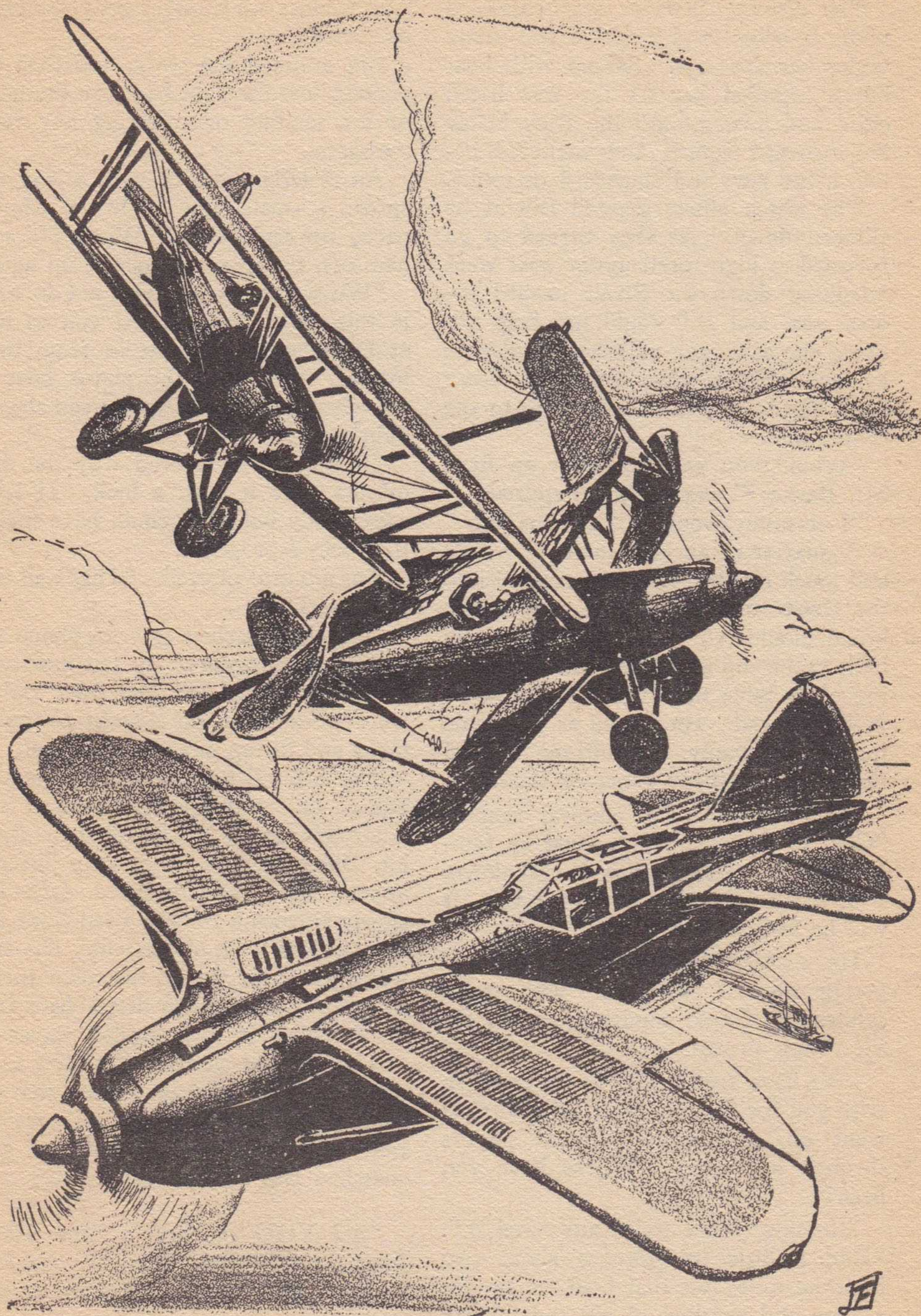
A gleaming barge raced out from the shadow of the grim cruiser and swept alongside. A young officer in white, standing in the stern sheets, raised a megaphone and barked toward Barnes' cockpit as the boat swung around and eased alongside the slowly taxiing amphibian.

"Is this Mr. Barnes?" the young flag officer bawled.

"Yes. Seeking Admiral Tyler," Bill barked back.

"The admiral's compliments, sir. Will you please run up on the port quarter and come aboard. We can take your craft on with a derrick. The admiral wishes you to report to him at once—the chart room, sir!"

"Right—at once," replied Bill, easing the throttle forward a notch and streaking along with the barge in his wake.



The ship careened on for several seconds, like a quirted stallion fighting to get clear of the bit. Then with a jerk it tore through.

The *Scarlet Stormer* was eased in under a boom, and a tackle was slung under her fuselage. Sailors with boat hooks steadied her as she was lifted clear and swung onto the deck below the forward funnel and sheltered between the port and starboard catapults.

The watch officer greeted Bill as he climbed down. As they turned to go forward, a high-speed motor boat went streaking down the Strait toward the open sea, and Bill could not help noticing the exchange of knowing glances by two officers who had come down from the bridge to take him up to the chart room.

"Would you care to wash up first, Mr. Barnes?" one of them inquired.

"I certainly would. Lead the way."

A quarter of an hour later, refreshed and much cleaner, Bill was ushered into the chart room, where he saw a tall, broad-shouldered man with iron-gray hair, pacing up and down before a folding chart table that had been let down from the wall. He turned as Bill came in, smiling wanly, and offered a hand that was molded on generous lines.

"Mr. Barnes!" The admiral beamed. "Glad to see you. You must be famished—and utterly fatigued. Sit down. I have ordered a hot supper for you. It will be served here."

He nodded knowingly to the two young officers. They left with smart salutes and frank, admiring glances for the young airman.

"We have been trying to get in touch with you for the past hour," the admiral went on, running his broad fingers through his hair. "Where have you been?"

"Coming all the way," answered Bill. "Had a little interference about two hundred miles out that held me up for a time and resulted in my radio being smashed."

The admiral gripped the arms of his chair and leaned forward anxiously.

"No wonder we couldn't get you. What happened?"

Bill outlined the story, and then explained how the fight had seen the finish of his sending or receiving any radio messages.

An orderly came in with a tray and spread a small table while the admiral paced up and down. When the man had left, the admiral opened up again:

"We wanted to tell you not to come in this way. We wanted you to land at Dumangas and come in from there by car. You saw the motor boat go out when they were hoisting you aboard, didn't you?"

"I did, and wondered why the deck officers gave it such a look. If looks were really hot, they could have melted that baby's propeller."

The admiral snorted. "That's all they do—look!"

Then he snatched at a telephone and barked some orders. In ten minutes a first-mate electrician and two ratings were working on the *Scarlet Stormer's* tanks and fitting in a new radio set.

The admiral turned back and studied Bill as he sat devouring his meal with admirable gusto. Stripped of his flying kit, Bill presented an entirely different appearance. His bronzed face was slowly throwing off the tired lines that had marked it on his arrival. His shirt was open at the throat, the collar turned up jauntily and his hair flowed back from his forehead in uncontrolled waves.

The admiral admired the man as he sat there and secretly wished that the country enjoyed some sort of conscription law. He would gladly have snatched Bill Barnes for his very own.

"SO YOU ran into a Blue Funnel liner, eh?" the admiral suddenly snapped after several minutes of concentration.

"But I haven't the slightest idea how those two Fokkers got out there or got aboard that ship," Bill returned, charg-

ing into a chunk of navy steak. "What were those Dutch ships doing way out there?"

"That's what we have been asking the Dutch government, but they claim to know nothing about them, and I'm inclined to think they are telling the truth."

Bill stopped with a forkful of beans halfway between his plate and his mouth. "What?" he gasped. "You mean to say they are in the hands of some pirate gang? What about the Blue Funnel line? Do they know anything about it?"

"My son," the admiral replied gravely, "the Blue Funnel line went out of existence two months or more ago. Their business was bought up by the International. Their vessels were sold to a shipyard in Kobe, presumably for breaking up."

"Kobe—Japan?" inquired Bill, squinting one eye.

"The same," the admiral replied. "But do not jump at conclusions. All we know is that the Blue Funnel line ships were turned over to these yards and, from all we can find out, were actually broken up. In other words, there is a ship, perhaps more, somewhere out on the Pacific that once belonged to the Blue Funnel outfit, or else some one has painted one up to look like a Blue Funnel liner."

Bill studied the admiral's face for several seconds and then gave it up and went on with his dinner.

"I suppose you are wondering why you were instructed to see me," Admiral Tyler went on, packing a massive pipe with a charge of tobacco.

Bill did not answer; he suddenly thought of Shorty Hassfurth.

"The whole situation is this," the admiral went on when he had put a match to his pipe. "Something has to be done about all this, and we—officially—can do nothing."

Bill turned suddenly and stared. His

brow wrinkled slightly, indicating that he was puzzled.

"After all, Barnes," the admiral went on, "there appears to be no precedent in a case like this. We think it is the beginning of a serious piracy business, but with all the Fokker stuff and this Blue Funnel line ship angle, we are hog-tied. You can't take chances here, blindly."

"Suppose for instance that these ships *were* Dutch machines, sent out by the Dutch government? Suppose the liners *were* under the control of some foreign power? If we interfere, in an official way, we leave ourselves open to criticism and possibly strained relations and, with things as they are, we can't afford that just now."

"What you are really trying to say, sir," Bill broke in, slashing at a healthy dessert, "is that you believe this is all a big plot, aimed at some point in the Pacific. What point?"

The admiral smiled grimly, picked up a pencil and wrote something on a small pad of paper and tossed it across to Bill.

Barnes stared at it for a minute, and then turned sharply. "But—Sin—— That's not an American base!" he exclaimed.

"Easy!" soothed the admiral. "You're right. But just now, it is most important that it be finished, for if anything happens within the next few years, the United States navy will use it—with the kind permission of a friendly government."

"Now you see what *we* are worried about," the admiral went on. "We want that work, recently started there, to be completed as soon as possible, but you can also see that we can't chip in with any money, men, or materials to help to do it. That would start a flare-up at once. And until we have completed the new naval program, we can't afford to take any chances here."

FOR ANOTHER hour the two men sat and talked. Outside, the tropical night was bathed in a breathless silence that reminded one of the ominous quiet that blankets heated atmosphere before a thunderclap. This quiet pause was attuned with the tension of elements before the break of a storm. Bill knew they were in for it, but just what was ahead, he was unable to fathom. After all, he had Shorty Hassfurth to account for.

"I'm perfectly willing to do my bit in this thing, sir," Bill remarked after the admiral had outlined the whole situation, "but I do have to think about my men. Besides, it is a matter of money. I have a little—some gained as the result of the race, but as for ships and men, I can't say just now."

"Um!" Tyler blew a new cloud from his pipe. "That's something I can't help you with right now. But I can promise you'll lose nothing for your giving us your services."

"Thanks, sir. First I'll have to get to Borneo, somehow, and find Hassfurth. There's something queer there. I have stopped Bates at Lisbon and sent him back to New York, but Hawkins will be on his way from Bombay, and Gleason probably is somewhere in Borneo now. If you really think we can get some help from the government, I can raise men and machines pretty quickly. And, from what I can see of it, we're going to need them."

"I'm beginning to see this clearer, Barnes." The admiral arose and started his pacing again. "You go on to Borneo. I have a good friend at Sandakan, the district commissioner of the British Foreign Service there. He can tell you several other angles on this thing. His name is Sir Melville Whyte, D. S. O., and all that. He can tip you off to everything in Borneo and give you the inside. That might help you find this Hassfurth chap. After that your tribe can go to work from somewhere

between there and the Philippines. I'll give you a letter to him."

"Sir Melville Whyte!" replied Bill, frowning. "That name has a familiar ring. I wonder where I have heard it before."

"Never mind. You'll straighten all that out when you see him. In the meantime, get off to roost and get some rest. You're going to need it in the next few days, I feel."

"Looking for the phantom of the Pacific?" Bill smiled.

"Phantom is right," agreed the admiral. "We're looking for ships that went to their graves months ago."

But before Bill went off to bed, he had several radiograms sent from the *Houston*. He was taking a wild chance on his bank roll and realized that something had to happen to justify his move.

III—OTTO, THE OCTOPUS

THE SNORTER, flown by Shorty Hassfurth, was thundering across Cambodia toward Tonle Sap. That length of blue steel at his neck steadied him continually, and he sensed that there was no use in fighting the inevitable. He might as well keep on and see the hand through. After all, there might be a chance of bluffing on an ace in the hole—even though Shorty knew that he was holding a deuce.

The sleek individual in the back seat continued his vigil and took no chances. The Snorter roared across jungles, morasses and tangled vegetation until the shapeless outline of Tonle Sap appeared over his prop-boss. Then with a jerk he felt the cold steel barrel again, and the man behind croaked:

"You will land across there among those vintas—just off to your right. You will make the machine taxi up to that open dock and, once there, sit with your arms over the sides of the cockpit. Understand?"

"I get you," growled Shorty back through the Gosport.

In five minutes they were S-turning down gently and picking up wind from a weak plume of smoke that crept up from a circle of kampongs which scowled out from the nipa palms. Shorty flew beautifully, in spite of the cold steel Luger that menaced his spine. Down the plane went in an easy glide, and the pontoons hit neatly with a minimum of shock. The machine was turned and eased through a jumble of proas that crept out from the rotting dock.

On the stringer stood a tall, fair-haired man dressed in well-cut jodhpurs and a pale-yellow Indian tunic that reached to his knees. He was a striking figure in his strange make-up, but more striking as the Snorter drew up closer when natives with boat hooks steadied the ship and eased her into the slipway.

His eyes, cut on the Oriental slant, and with a trace of the Mongol fold, indicated a strange mixture of European and Far East paternity. He stood proudly erect, and yet a sickening revulsion was felt when one caught the oiled sleekness of his whole frame. The eyes, Shorty noticed, were a weird light blue, that seemed to be charged with the flashing color of a radio spark.

As the Snorter eased in and was tied up, and Shorty had dropped his hands over the edge of the coaming, the man raised the delicately drawn eyebrows slightly and nodded as if perfectly satisfied.

"Splendid! Right on time, Duhlap Sing. Has he behaved?" He spoke in clipped English that had a university intonation.

"Most tractable, sahib," the man in the back seat replied, still balancing the Luger with his long, delicate fingers. "He will come down?"

"Most certainly. Let the poor beggar stretch his legs. He'll be stretching

his neck soon, and he might as well be broken in gradually. Come," he ordered directing his steely gaze up toward Shorty. "You may step down for a few minutes, while we refuel your craft."

Shorty said nothing. He was thinking fast, but none of his thoughts would turn into anything worth considering. He clambered down, somewhat thankful that the man had allowed him a chance to stretch his legs.

"What is the idea?" demanded Shorty at last.

"Hold your tongue!" snapped the tall man in the jodhpurs, icily. "Be thankful you have not already been tossed to the vultures. Were it not for the fact that we require you for man-bait, you would have sensed the blade of a parang, slitting your gullet."

That phrase about "man-bait" caught Shorty unawares, and it left him gulping at a parched throat. But he fought on:

"If you think you are going to use me to bring Bill Barnes back here," he said, while a native laced his hands behind his back, "you've got another guess coming."

"Nothing of the kind. Your friend Barnes is already on his way back. We hope to pick him up in Borneo—if he gets that far. What we are interested in now is his fleet, which will be on the way also, within a few days."

A sudden surge swept through Shorty. He could see himself flailing his way through a forest of steel sabers—and he acted. With a jerk he ripped his hands free, for the rawhide thongs were not yet fastened. He back-kicked and sent a native spinning off the dock. A shot rang out, and something hissed past him. With a wild leap he was on the tall Otto Yahr, his fingers outstretched for the well-molded neck.

The big Eurasian flexed gently and waited. Then, recoiling sharply, he twisted quickly, and Shorty went hur-

ting over his hip. A sudden jerk and the tall man chopped downward and caught Shorty just behind the ear, and he hit full on his face on the hard teak planking of the dock.

Again a shot rang out, but Otto Yahr barked quickly. The man named Duhlap Sing eased his trigger finger. Shorty rolled over, kicking, and came to his knees. Then in a crouching position he leaped again and caught Yahr full in the groin with his shoulder. Together they went down and rolled toward the edge of the dock.

Shorty brought all his fighting defense into action now. His face streamed with gore and half blinded him.

"Damn you!" the twisting Eurasian exploded, jamming two forked fingers at Shorty's eyes. "I'll teach you to respect me!"

Shorty lunged and pawed for the man's throat, but it was like clutching at a ferret. The man was made of rubber. A cruel blow from below caught Shorty full in the stomach and doubled him up. A dozen natives were dancing in and out, armed with parangs, filed to saw-tooth edges along the back.

As he curled up, Shorty grabbed for the man's legs and tried to hug them. The pain of the blow in the stomach was so intense that he was glad to clutch at anything.

"Back! Back, you devils!" stormed Otto Yahr, who was now enjoying the tussle. "Leave him to me!"

He rolled to his back, arched, and suddenly sprang, throwing Shorty off like a man on the end of a snap-the-whip line. Shorty went across the dock like a sack of grain and only missed rolling over the stringpiece.

Before he could arise, the tall Eurasian hurtled across the dock and landed with his knees full on Shorty's chest. The breath went out of the stocky American and, before he could recover,

his head was being snapped back and forth with trip-hammer blows, left and right, from the clenched fists of the tall man on top of him.

Shorty gasped, gulped, and felt his senses trickling out through the soles of his boots. He struggled once to grab those cruel fists, but the pace only increased, and he passed out, more like a butcher's exhibit than a man. His face was battered to a pulp; blood streamed from his nose. One eye was completely closed, and a scarlet stream trickled out of the corner of his distorted mouth.

Then Otto Yahr got up, turned Shorty over, and barked an order to a native, who crawled over and laced his hands securely behind him. With a last glance at the plucky American, the lancelike Eurasian clapped his hands, nodded to Duhlap Sing and strode away up the rotting planks of the dock.

In half an hour, he was back, completely re-outfitted in smart silk-gaberdine breeches, cordovan riding boots that had a Bond Street sheen, a white-silk polo shirt, and an antelope-leather golf jacket. On his arm he carried a gaberdine coverall. He was adjusting a neat flying helmet fitted with Luxor goggles, earphones, and a Gosport speaking tube.

SHORTY lay helpless, blinking strangely at the activity all around him. Natives were trundling drums of gasoline and oil toward the Snorter. Others were scrambling all over the ship, refueling, checking, and preparing the Barnes ship for another long flight. Wrenches clanked, drums rumbled hollowly, and tank caps squealed under the screwing.

The tall Eurasian stepped into his coverall expertly, buttoned the front, buckled the wrists and legs, and belted on a holster belt from which hung a wicked-looking Mauser. Then he drew on an Irvin parachute, the straps of

which were stamped with the official broad arrow of the British service.

Satisfied that he not only presented an attractive appearance, but that everything was efficiently adjusted, he sauntered over and kicked Shorty none too gently in the ribs.

"You ready for another jaunt?" he asked jeeringly.

Shorty tried to answer, but his mouth was swollen, and his tongue seemed to be made of dried leather. So for an answer he tried to get to his knees. Yahr jerked an order, and two natives came, seized him under the arms, and got him to his feet.

The Eurasian took a silver flask from his pocket, unscrewed the top, and rammed the short neck into Shorty's mouth. He took two gulps of the reviving fluid, winced as it burned into gashes cut in his tongue, and swallowed. Shorty was not a drinking man, but he appreciated that gesture.

The Eurasian smiled—but it was the smile of a viper.

They lifted Shorty into the back pit, bolted him in, still tied up, and made him as comfortable as possible, but making certain that there was nothing within reach that might assist in his escape. Once everything was trim and shipshape, Yahr had a last-minute conference with Duhlap Sing and climbed into the front seat of the Snorter. Shorty fumed under this indignity, but there was nothing he could do about it.

The natives eased the Snorter away from the dock, turned it toward the middle of the great lake, and Yahr snapped the starter. The Hurricane responded nobly and thundered into a bellowing roar. For several minutes the Eurasian let the Snorter ease along to warm up. Then, with a wave to the gang on the dock, he gave her the gun and twisted her into the wind.

"You need not be afraid," he said into the speaking tube, which had been run

through to Shorty's helmet. "I can fly your pet mount."

"I hope she throws a wing and smashes that motor smack into your lap," Shorty retorted.

There was an answering chuckle from the front, and the Snorter was in the air, climbing beautifully, and well-handled, at that. Even Shorty had to admit that this devil could fly.

They circled easily twice and then headed southeast and picked up the swirling waters of the Mekong River that wound its course down toward Vinhlong where it opened into its many mouths and flowed into the South China Sea south of Cape St. Jacques. Shorty knew now that they were heading for Borneo, five hundred miles away. Five hundred miles, fully two and a half hours of flight. Shorty wondered whether there would be a break in that time.

Otto Yahr shot the Snorter up to four thousand feet and then sent her through well over 200 m.p.h. The Hurricane settled down to a monotonous drone, and there was a complete lulling sensation creeping through the steel skeleton of the craft that threatened to attune itself to Shorty's vibrations and put him to sleep. He decided to bow to the sensation and relax. He felt that he was in the toils of an octopus, but realized that, if he was to accomplish anything, sleep and rest would be necessary to regain his strength and judgment.

IV—DOOM OF A SPARTAN

IT WAS getting toward late afternoon when Shorty awoke. The sun was setting, and a new refreshing air swirled around his blood-clogged nostrils. He sensed that he was painfully stiff and cramped.

With it all, however, there was a new sense of relaxation in his frame. His mind was clearer, and as they roared

on he eased his head beyond the shelter of the windshield and drank in great gulps of cool reviving air. He twisted and worked up a new circulation that at first brought tingling sensations of pins and needles, but he carried on and eventually felt new life and energy in his muscles.

Ahead, through the surface mist, loomed the fringe of a shore line. Shorty peered at the compass in the back seat and saw that they were still flying southeast, and he made a guess that they were approaching the coast of Sarawak, a British protectorate. His movements were caught by the Eurasian pilot in front who greeted him with:

"Feeling better, my friend?"

"Soon be well enough to slap you down, bozo!" Shorty snarled back.

"I would be careful, were I you," the man replied evenly. "We have much to do yet, you know. One or two of your friends to be greeted—later on."

"If you think any of them will fall for any gag you might try, you're softer than I give you credit for," Shorty answered, but he was not feeling so cocky.

"That remains to be seen," the pilot snapped back. "If he won't come by persuasion, we shall have to try a little harsher method. Your chief, Bill Barnes would hate to think that his men were undergoing the tortures of *M'dunu* in the Valley of the Moaning Giants, wouldn't he?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" demanded Shorty.

"So? You have never heard of the famous ceremony of *M'dunu* as practiced by Chief Laki Saleh of the Borneo Dusans, eh? Well, you are in for an unforgettable experience."

This dubious explanation ended with a harsh cackling laugh.

"Valley of the Moaning Giants?" queried Shorty to himself. "What the devil is that? Dusans? Those tribes the British are always having so much trouble with? What's the connection?"

But there was no answer, and by now they were crossing the coast line, and Shorty peered over and recognized the mouth of the Rejang River, a slimy, curling waterway that crept out of the Klingkang Mountains and wandered through the reaches of Sibul and the foothills of Ulu Bulu to split, forklike, into Rejang, Cape Sirik, and the little coastal trading town of Egan.

Otto Yahr eased the ship around over Rejang, turned northeast, and skirted along well inside the coast line. Below lay a tangle of nipa palms and tapangs that sucked an existence out of the lava deposits spread years before from a string of volcanoes now long extinct. Greasy streams surged through the jungle, irrigated small rubber plantations, sago paddies, and more stretches of nipa palms. Heavier foliage crept in with its tapangs and ironwood trees.

Below there roamed the frowning, barrel-chested orang-utangs, gibbons, rhinoceroses, crocodiles, lizards, pythons, and strange turtles. Native villages peeped out, here and there huddled with their patches of sugar cane, rice fields, and their long huts that stood aloft on piles fifteen feet above the ground.

There the brown men worshiped *Bal-lango*, the toh-god of thunder, and *Laki Pesong*, the toh-god of fire. There gaudily garbed Penghulus recited the clacking rituals of the Kayan and gloated over the dried heads of enemies which graced their kampongs.

Then Yahr suddenly turned, headed toward Cape Sirik, and peered forward to a point twenty miles inland where the river played a strange geographical prank and by forming the letter Y created a mysterious triangular island.

With a jerk the Snorter suddenly leaped forward. The gun was answered by a howl from the steel prop, and the Snorter nosed down.

"Hello!" Shorty growled. "What's up now?"

He soon saw. Below, streaking along over the jungle, was a scarlet-and-white biplane fitted with two narrow pontoons. The cowling indicated a small motor such as a Gipsy or a Cirrus-Hermes, and Shorty knew that it was a British machine. A closer glance and he saw that it was a Spartan biplane, carrying British insignia and the additional markings of the British Foreign Service.

Otto Yahr turned and grinned. Shorty wanted to reach over and punch him in the nose. He sensed what was up. Yahr reached down, set the interrupter gear of the guns and fired a test burst.

"We'll see how your American speeder acts under fire," the Eurasian pilot gloated.

"If you fire on that ship," Shorty blazed, "you're yellower even than you look!"

A taunting cackle came back over the Gosport. Down went the Snorter with a roar. Her nose was dead on the little Spartan and the guns flamed. Shorty clenched his hands which were still tied behind his back and swore. The Spartan darted to one side and cleared. Around swept the Snorter, now in fiendish hands, and came in from the rear quarter. A Lewis gun chattered from the open cockpit, but the fire was erratic, and the Snorter swept out of the burst, to swing sharply and let out another torrent of hail.

The little Spartan jerked, wobbled, and then fell off in a slow spin. Then she leaped out and tried to climb back. The prop stopped and hung dismally at a forty-five degree angle.

Shorty moaned and foresaw tragedy. "You dirty rat!" he bellowed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the pilot laughed, letting another burst surge out from the rear that battered into the tail assembly.

Down went the Spartan again, spinning erratically. Shorty expected to see her rip apart, but the pilot steadied her,

eased out into a curling glide, and set her down on the water of the river, so well-timed and paced that she ran along on her own momentum and edged her pontoons into the rushes that lined the bank.

"Of all the dirty bits of business," Shorty snarled helplessly, "that's the foulest!"

They looked over and saw a young officer in whites leap out and drag the ship in closer. Then a native ran along the wing and swung it in so that they could clamber along and get ashore. For several minutes Yahr circled and then smiled. Out of the tangle of palms and ironwood swarmed a dozen natives, armed with spears, long rifles, and glinting parangs.

"Splendid!" Yahr beamed. "Now we can go down and see that they are taken care of—properly."

And with that he eased the throttle back, set the Snorter down within twenty yards of the Spartan, and rubbed his pontoons into a friendly stretch of sandy shore.

WHAT happened next took place so fast that Shorty, still trussed up in the Snorter, was unable to comprehend it for some time. There was a scuffle of brown-skinned natives in gaudy *sarongs* and two men in white were captured, bound, and drawn to one side. With them was a small blank-faced individual swathed in a neat loin cloth and wearing a massive pith helmet. Across his face, as Shorty saw later, were tattooed tribal *nagahs* which added considerably to his air of the grotesque. Down his cheeks and his scrawny neck trickled a trail of scar of *kurap* or Borneo ringworm. His legs had been bloated with that terrible native disease—elephantiasis.

This little Dyak appeared to be in the white party, for he, too, was bound and stood with the white men, while the Penghulu in charge turned and directed

a greeting to Otto Yahr who was crawling across his Snorter pontoon.

"Greetings, Laki Tutong!" Yahr said, in answer to the big Dusan's Malay sa-

lute. "You have quite a capture here, eh?"

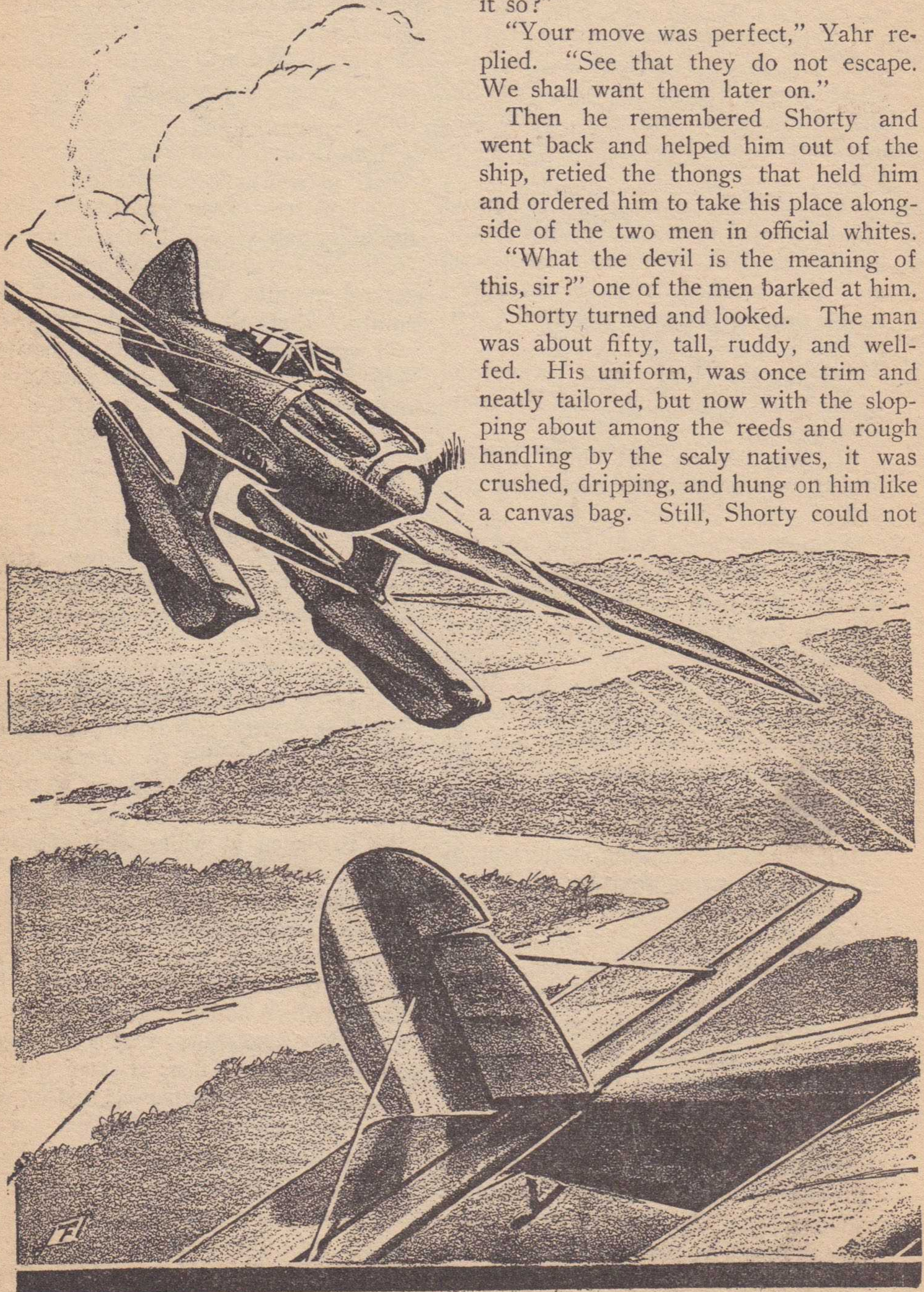
"*Magunda sakin* (I am pleased)" the tall Dusan replied. "You would have it so?"

"Your move was perfect," Yahr replied. "See that they do not escape. We shall want them later on."

Then he remembered Shorty and went back and helped him out of the ship, retied the thongs that held him and ordered him to take his place alongside of the two men in official whites.

"What the devil is the meaning of this, sir?" one of the men barked at him.

Shorty turned and looked. The man was about fifty, tall, ruddy, and well-fed. His uniform, was once trim and neatly tailored, but now with the sloping about among the reeds and rough handling by the scaly natives, it was crushed, dripping, and hung on him like a canvas bag. Still, Shorty could not



help noticing that he wore two rows of ribbons that would have been the envy of any fighting man.

"Yes; what is this all about?" demanded the other man in white.

He was also tall, but lean and athletic. His face was a perfect model of Anglo-Saxon manhood. He had fair hair that refused to have a wave combed out of it. His mouth was clean and well-cut. The head rested jauntily on a well-molded neck, and the eyes snapped a cold-blue fire.

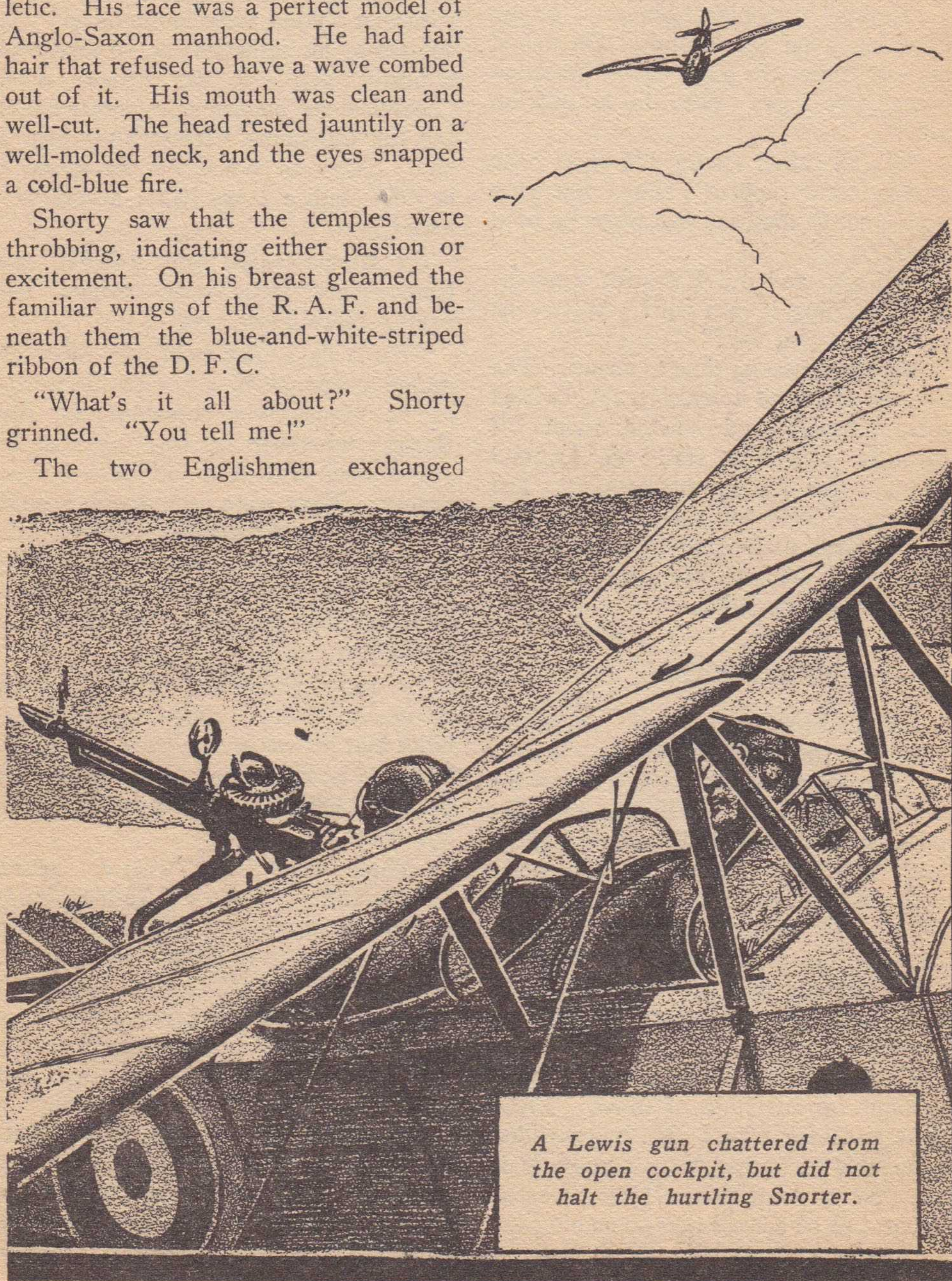
Shorty saw that the temples were throbbing, indicating either passion or excitement. On his breast gleamed the familiar wings of the R. A. F. and beneath them the blue-and-white-striped ribbon of the D. F. C.

"What's it all about?" Shorty grinned. "You tell me!"

The two Englishmen exchanged

glances and then watched the movements of Otto Yahr who was now in confidential conversation with the big Dusan chief.

"But look here," the older Englishman urged. "You came out of that



A Lewis gun chattered from the open cockpit, but did not halt the hurtling Snorter.

ship. How do you—— I mean—who's that chap?"

"Yeh! I came out of that plane, and it's mine, by right, but Otto Yahr over there——"

"Otto Yahr? Is that Otto Yahr?" gulped the beefy Englishman.

"Right!" snapped Shorty. "Know anything good about him? He nailed me—or rather the gang did in Bangkok—and here I am. Why did he pick on you?"

"It's all rather spotty, old chap," the young fellow replied. "Then you were a prisoner in the back seat when he fired on us?"

"I'll say, and did I squirm when he was pounding it into you? What's he picking on you for?"

But there was no time to answer. The natives swarmed toward them, twirled them around, and started them off through a jungle trail that wound through the heavy vegetation. The two ships were left on the bank, and half a dozen natives remained behind to drag them farther into the shelter of the overhanging palms.

V—A COSTLY MOVE

MEANTIME another Snorter, gleaming and flaunting the Barnes markings B. B. 3, was hurtling across the South China Sea from Singapore. The pilot, the tall, lanky Texan, Cy Hawkins, had been pushing his Hurricane with all the recklessness of a range rider. He huddled over his controls, checking his instruments and fuel, his fingers itching to press Bowden controls that would release a torrent of lead—on some one.

Cy was three days late, which might account for his state of mind. Three days late—for what? He had no idea. Like Shorty, he had been completely in the dark as to what everything was all about, but he sensed that something unusual was in the wind. Right now, he

was flying in something of a blind panic, his frame vibrating with the same surging berserk fury that he had seen many a time in a stampeding herd of cattle.

Three days late—and why?

"Bet the best rifle in Texas, that chink, Chan Lo, had something to do with that holdup there in Bombay." He snorted at his reflection in the air-speed indicator dial for the fiftieth time. "Searched the blamed ship twenty times for the Cawnpore Circlet, they said I had. Crazy as loons! What would I be doin' with a fancy halter around my neck?"

Cy fumed again and watched the tropic night settle over Borneo, not twenty miles away now.

"Three days they held me, Bill," he ranted as though he expected his words to be transmitted somehow to Bill Barnes, wherever he was. "Tried to get in touch with Red and Bev—but no answer. Must have been worth a buck or two, that Cawnpore Circlet, Bill, since they held me three days lookin' for it. Like to get my hooks on some-thing like that, eh, Bill? We could use that dough, eh?"

Cy peered ahead and switched on his navigation lights. There was a possibility that he was on the Dutch K. L. M. line, and he wanted no more setbacks or chance crashes that would hold him up any more.

"Three days," he worried again. "Those Indian cops are pure loco, holding me up thataway. Bill said for me to go on through to Borneo and look for Shorty. What for? I don't know, but there's a lot of queer critters mixed up in this stampede. Three days! Wonder what Bill will think of me. Not only that, I had to go and wrench a wheel at Madras and take another half day there. Then at Penang some one watered the gas, and we used up another half day strainin' that and figgerin' what had happened. 'Bout six days to

do a trip what should 'a' taken less than two. Bah!"

He turned back to his muzzle-mike again and tried to reach any of the Barnes ships, but all he got was static and a few desultory signals from the Dutch air base at Batavia.

The tropic night falls fast, and a gloomy drapery was spread across the water like a threatening storm of swift destruction. Still Cy pounded on like a winged steed and left his set tuned in. Mile after mile swept under his pontoons, and he listened in gravely for any signal that might find its way into his earphones.

As he approached the creepy shore of Cape Api, with the looming Mt. Pu snarling behind it, he caught a line of conversation that made him leap. He tuned in sharper and caught:

"—hope he can get here quickly. We can gather at Rejang and make a real search."

He listened further intently, but there was no more. Cy checked the wave length and sensed that it agreed with the length used on the Snorter sets. A broad, homely smile swept across his face, and he eased down on the left rudder and turned up the coast toward the broken estuary of the Rejang River.

"So they're at Rejang, eh?" he beamed. "Waal, it'll be great to meet the boys again, but it shore looks bad for Shorty. Must still have him hog-tied."

He gave the Hurricane an extra notch or two and raced away for another hour, still fuming about the loss of the three days.

THE NIGHT was inky by now, but the ground below was well marked by the easy rollers that swept up the sandy shore of Sariki, south of Rejang. Cy was strangely relaxed now, for he had been poring over all the incidents leading up to his present situation.

There were many points to worry

about, but somehow he had worked out an idea that perhaps it was he, and not Shorty, they were searching for. And no wonder, with Cy three days late.

The relaxation turned out to be a godsend. As the Snorter lanced through the night sky, it suddenly came upon a curling winged thing that slipped across the gleam of the stars like a vulture. Cy drew up sharply, swung over to clear, and then jerked against his safety belt.

The ship ahead was a Snorter.

With a low cry of joy he tore on and caught the cheery blink of the navigation lights. Some one had come out to meet him and show him the way down to the field they were using. Cy allowed a broad grin to slip across his face again and he headed in to join the black ship.

He switched in the radio set, tuned for a Snorter wave length again, and bellowed into the muzzle-mike:

"Hello, there! Glad to see you, fella! Who is it, anyway?"

But there was no answer.

"Come on, guy!" Cy pleaded cheerfully. "Speak up! Ah cain't wait fo' the good news. How's Bill? Is he here yet?"

Still no answer. Cy frowned and became suspicious. Then out of the warm night came a low response:

"Follow me. Do not ask any more questions."

Cy frowned and tried to look into the muzzle-mike as if uncertain about the instructions. The voice was strange. It might have been Bev Bates'—there was a clipped style to it—and yet it was not quite so clear and pleasant as the Bostonian's. It worried Cy no end, and he decided to watch closely.

"Ah think Ah'll have a look at that critter," he observed, giving the throttle a notch more.

The Snorter eased forward so that he could now distinguish the letters on the side of the monocoque fuselage. It read B. B. 2.

"That's Shorty's bus!" he exclaimed. "Why won't he speak to me? But that was not Shorty's voice."

Something made Cy turn slightly as he looked over the edge of the cockpit and made out the indistinct outline of a helmeted head. That helmet did not belong to any member of the Barnes tribe. As the Snorter flown by Cy turned out toward the open sea, the other whipped over quickly and pounced with talons of fire.

Ber-ip-pip-pip-pip-pip-pip!

The Hawkins Snorter leaped like a stag under the flailing, and Cy went to work. He darted around on one wing tip and, dragging the stick back to his belt buckle, he coiled sharply like a viper. His nose came around on the other Snorter, and he let drive with two guns.

The black night was battered with the thunder of two Hurricanes and the bitter-cold dry rattle of gunfire. Streaks of lemon-yellow death slashed across the velvety curtain and went zipping away into a vague nothingness.

The instant he had started, Cy knew that no Barnes crew hand was on the other stick. The man flew well, but not with the ease or smoothness that marked a Barnes man. But his strange style of attack made it harder, and Cy sensed that he was in for a tough time.

"That hombre has a queer stick-hand," observed Cy, peering across his coaming as the other Snorter zipped into a curling turn that took it out of Cy's line of fire.

The two Snorters went to it with a vigor now. Neither could get a real burst in, but both were throwing lead like madmen. Once, Cy lost all sense of direction and let the Snorter get away from him and fall into a bad side slip. Over slammed the other ship with a vengeance, and a torrent of lead battered his tail-assembly. Cy swore lustily and ripped her out, risking an open

broadside. It had to be done to get the ship answering the controls again.

The move cost him dearly. The other Snorter, jerked madly, cracked over in a short dive, and came up under Cy's tail. That few seconds spelled defeat, for a terrible storm of lead came up from below, rattled a mad tattoo on his pontoons, and belted up into the body of the Hurricane.

That ended it, as far as Cy was concerned, but with a snarling twist he ripped his ship around wildly and poured a burst into the Snorter which had just reached the stalling point after the zoom. The burst flashed a strange design against the sleek sides of the Snorter marked B. B. 2., and then it, too, fell away and disappeared into the wisps of mist that were swirling out of the estuary of the Rejang.

Cy swore, fought his ship out, and peered toward the southeast. Then, with a last glance around, he headed the clanking Snorter toward the rugged shore line as his Hurricane dropped down to a zephyr. The prop ceased its flashing. The Snorter dropped dismally away and headed for the bleak outline of the rocky shore.

"Well, this about brands me as a dumb cayuse!" Cy growled, trying to stretch his glide. He went on and was lost in the streaky mist that fingered out from the marshes and draped the treacherous shore with diaphanous folds.

VI—SECRET OF SANDAKAN

SANDAKAN lies on the northern tip of British North Borneo, fully five hundred miles from Rejang, but it was the best Bill Barnes could do by night-fall the next day. There had been considerable business to transact by radiogram to start with. Then there was another long interview with Admiral Tyler.

The radio they had placed in the *Scarlet Stormer* had not worked at first,

and, what with one thing or another, it was well into the afternoon before Bill could roar out of Guimaras Strait and head south for Borneo. The Lubuk field was the nearest to the British colony town, and Bill had to make the best of it. There he was met by a young, anxious-eyed lieutenant of the British Foreign Service, natty in white coat and breeches and pith helmet.

"I'm Lieutenant Woolsey," the young officer explained when he had cantered up to Bill's ship. "Have you come through from Iloilo? We had a wireless on you, sir?"

"I'm Barnes. Yes; through from the *Houston*. You had a wire from Admiral Tyler? Fine! What about my ship?"

"You can run it into that hangar. We have mechanics here who can take care of it for you—all R. A. F. men. They will give it the best of attention."

"I want it fueled and checked at once," Bill said. "Can't say when I'll be off again. Where's Sir Melville Whyte? I have a letter of introduction to him."

"Well, you see, I really can't say. They've been gone twenty-four hours, nearly, now. No word of them."

Bill stared at the man, puzzled. At last he got out and walked over closer to the man's stirrup. "Something wrong?" he asked quietly.

"Rather! They went out yesterday and haven't returned. Gun runners, you know," explained the young officer cryptically.

Bill nodded and turned around to watch the progress of the *Scarlet Stormer* as it was drawn into the hangar.

"We'd better go into Sandakan, hadn't we?" Bill asked.

"I'll get the car and run you in," Woolsey answered, dismounting and throwing the reins to a native near by. "No use talking here. Too many ears, you know."

They got into a trim car and rolled

away toward Sandakan without exchanging another word. Sandakan is at times a scurvy wound of tropical treachery. To-night it was shrouded in a cloak of sinister darkness. The white houses of the European sector were apparently asleep in the motionless heat and yet seemingly throbbed with an internal nightmare. They stared out through their streaked panes with no emotion upon the slimy, crawling streets across at the native quarter, like eyes that condemn and curse. One half-expected them to raise their nostrils repulsively against the unsavory smells that reeked up from the murky alleys. The gutters ran with the stench of rotting copra, stagnant water, and decaying offal.

Two men stepped out of a trim staff car and turned the wheel over to a young Dyak in the dickey. Lieutenant Neville Woolsey guided Bill Barnes across the end of a wharf and headed him along a narrow street banked on each side with rickety hovels and human rat holes.

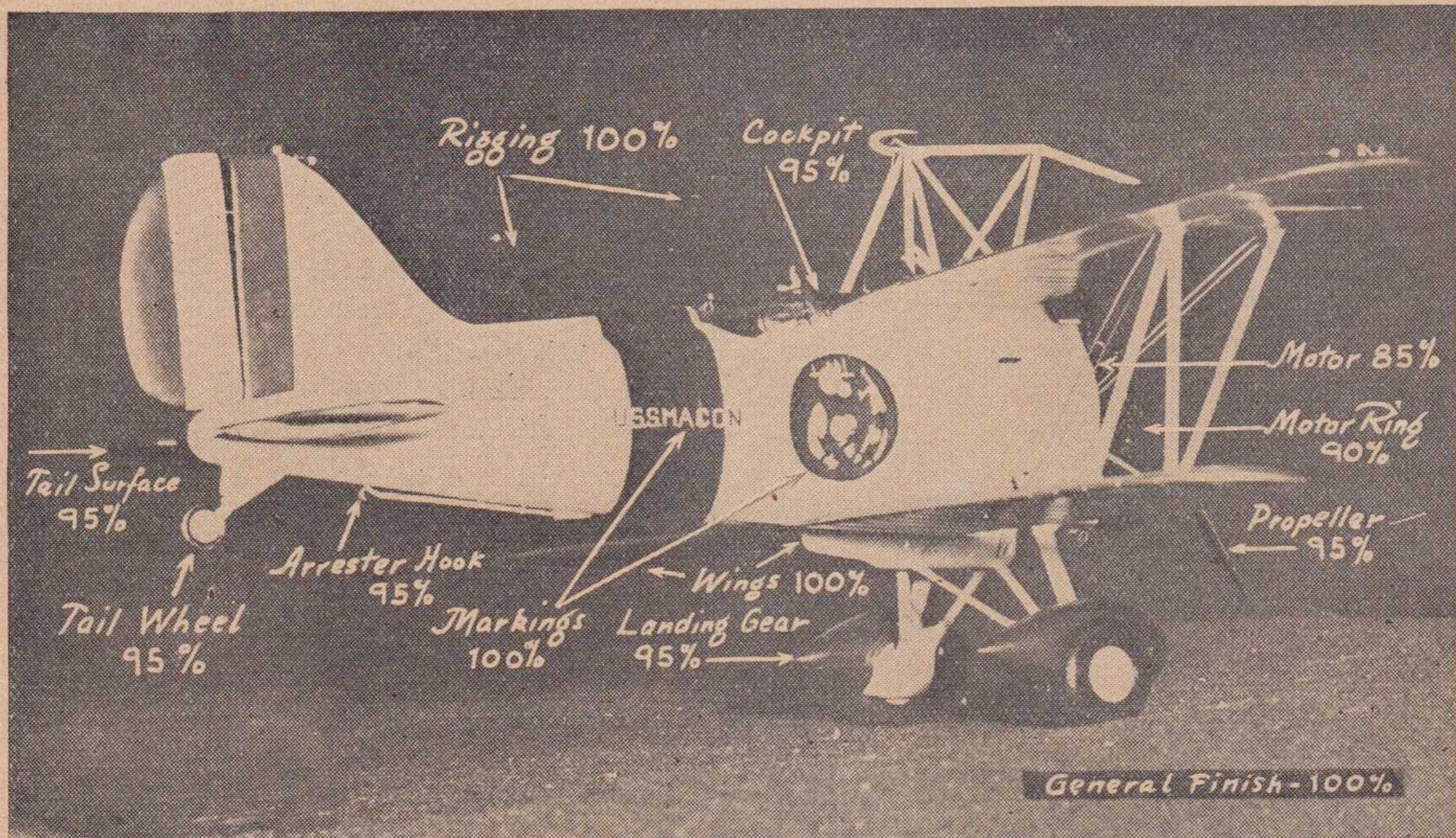
There were treacherous corners and flickering lights to pass. Woolsey was walking on his solid field boot soles with a tread that would have done justice to a cat. Without realizing it, Bill copied his glide and followed—puzzled, excited, but outwardly calm.

Doorways, forbidding and grim, trickled past. Gaunt, spider-shaped buildings threw their shadows before them, as if to trip them up, but the two men, glancing neither to the left nor the right, passed along. At last the cheering gleam of the British Foreign Service headquarters fell at their feet with a mellow warmth of welcome.

"Come in," ushered Woolsey. "We can talk better here. Too many blasted ears sticking out everywhere in this place. Take a seat and help yourself to anything you see handy."

He tossed his helmet onto a table littered with buff papers. His polished Sam Browne, the British hall mark of

The Contest Rating



"Sparrowhawk," made by James W. Barry, Washington, D. C. Winner of the National Prize, the Gold Medal and \$200.00.

Here is big news for the Air Adventurers and every one else who entered the great model contest. I am sorry for the many boys whose planes did not quite make the prize-winning class. Many of them spent long, hard hours of painstaking work, preparing, building and other long hours hoping. But the Air Adventurers are hardy sportsmen. Every one of you, I know, joins with me in giving to those whose names are listed on these pages our heartiest congratulations. Win or lose, we are all proud to know that such an imposing list of planes was placed in the medal group.

—The Editor.

NATIONAL FIRST PRIZE—Gold Medal

James W. Barry, Washington, D. C. (\$200.00)

SECOND PRIZE CLASS—Silver Medals

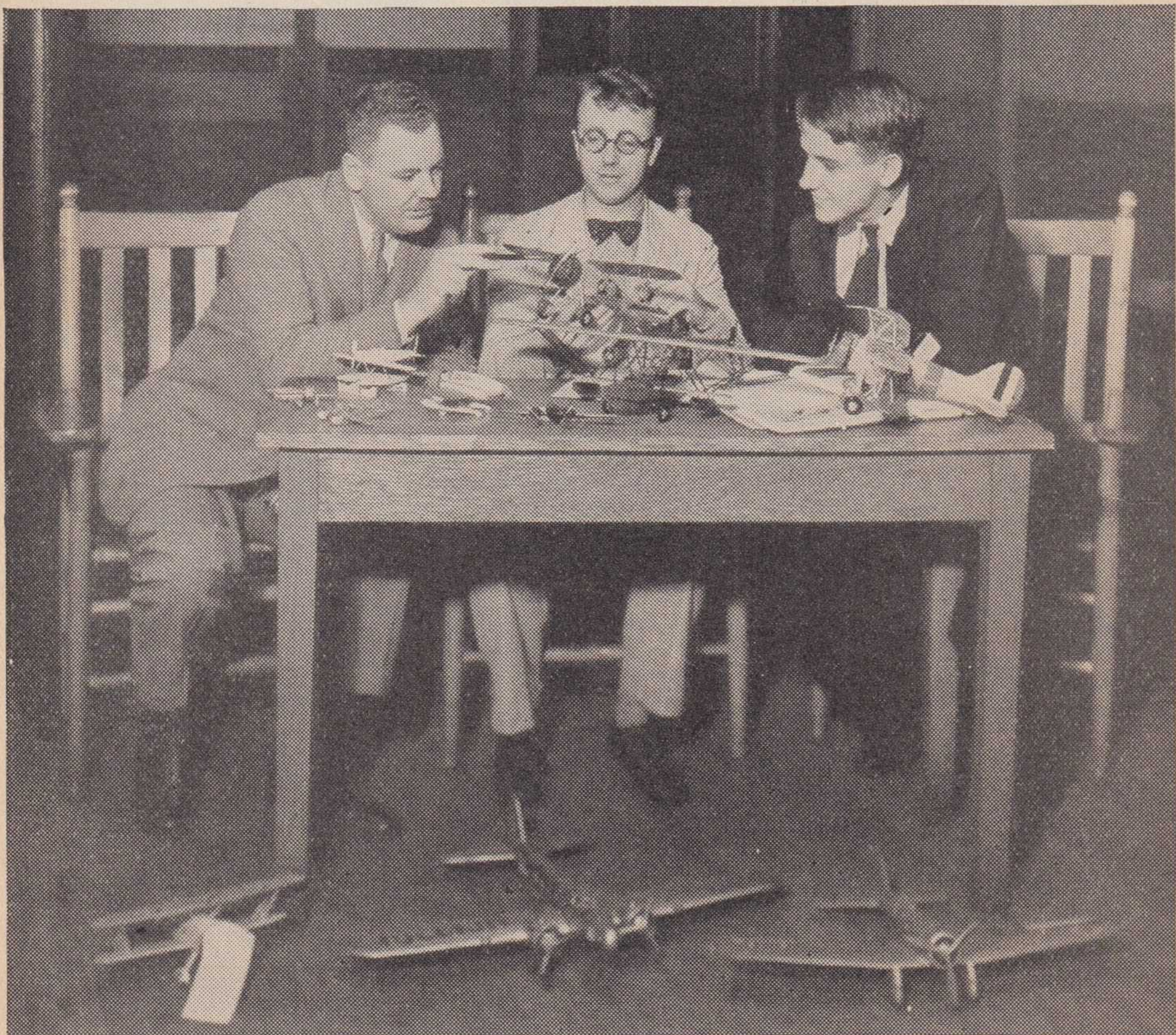
Thomas A. Naylor, New York.....	(\$100.00)
J. Edward Reeves, Washington, D. C.....	(\$100.00)
Edmund D. Myers, Delaware.....	(\$100.00)
Philip Chandler, Tennessee.....	(\$100.00)
Bill Sully, California.....	(\$100.00)
Hugh Smith, Illinois.....	(\$ 50.00)
William Griswold, Illinois.....	(\$ 50.00)
Herman Hahn, Michigan.....	(\$ 50.00)
Laurence Eccleston, Rhode Island.....	(\$ 50.00)
William Hewitt, Oklahoma.....	(\$ 50.00)
Ralph Krashy, Minnesota.....	(\$ 50.00)

SECOND PRIZE CLASS—Silver Medals (Cont'd)

William S. Harrison, Jr., New York
 Robert H. Gibbs, Louisiana
 Ralph Evans, Kansas
 Bob Chapman, California
 John Jeschko, Wisconsin
 Russell G. Selmer, New York
 A. Zecca, New York
 W. L. Stewart, Pennsylvania
 Richard Wenner, Pennsylvania
 Howard J. Muller, New Jersey
 Herbert M. Golby, New Jersey
 Lee Brookman, Colorado
 N. Chesta, Illinois
 Sol Youngwirth, New York
 Donald S. Hope, New Jersey
 Robert Teshima, New Jersey
 Kathleen Burks, Texas
 Willard Flynn, New York

Dennis Stone, Canada
 S. F. Block, Maryland
 August Swyka, New York
 Lester C. Gates, Michigan
 Joseph Bolden, Ohio
 Louis Sins, Pennsylvania
 Robert Youngman, Kansas
 Marcus Wolfe, Ohio
 Dick Brisbin, Kansas
 Thomas Horeseo, New York
 William Ronaghan, New York
 Leslie Paul, Pennsylvania
 Charles A. Glock, New York
 Joseph J. Dwyer, Indiana
 J. R. Reynolds, Rhode Island
 Heighton James, New York
 Clifford Pocklington, Virginia
 Rudolf Garbien, Pennsylvania

Philip Chandler, Tennessee

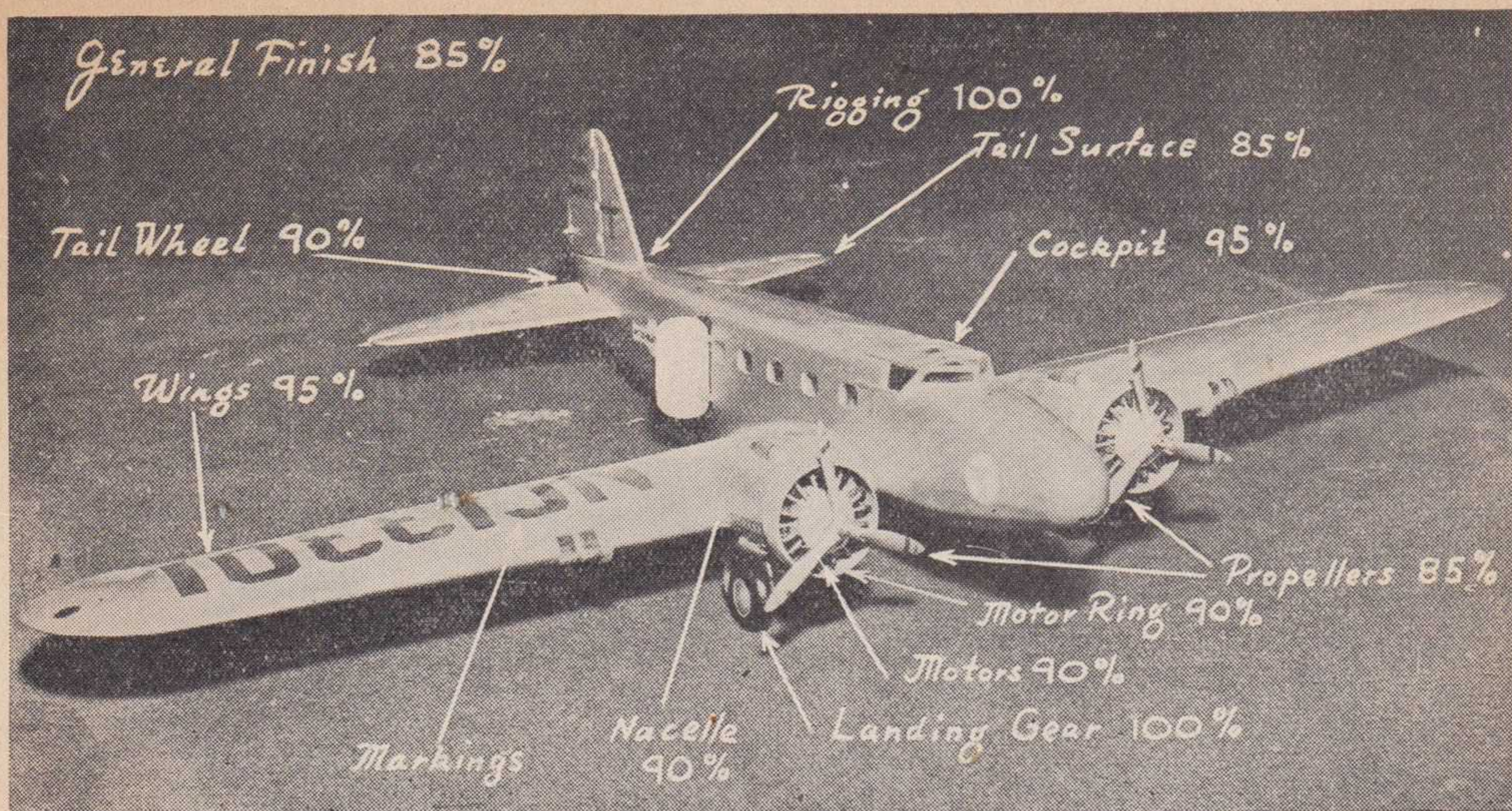


The Judges at Work

Frank Tinsley

Richard I. A'merie

Gordon S. Light

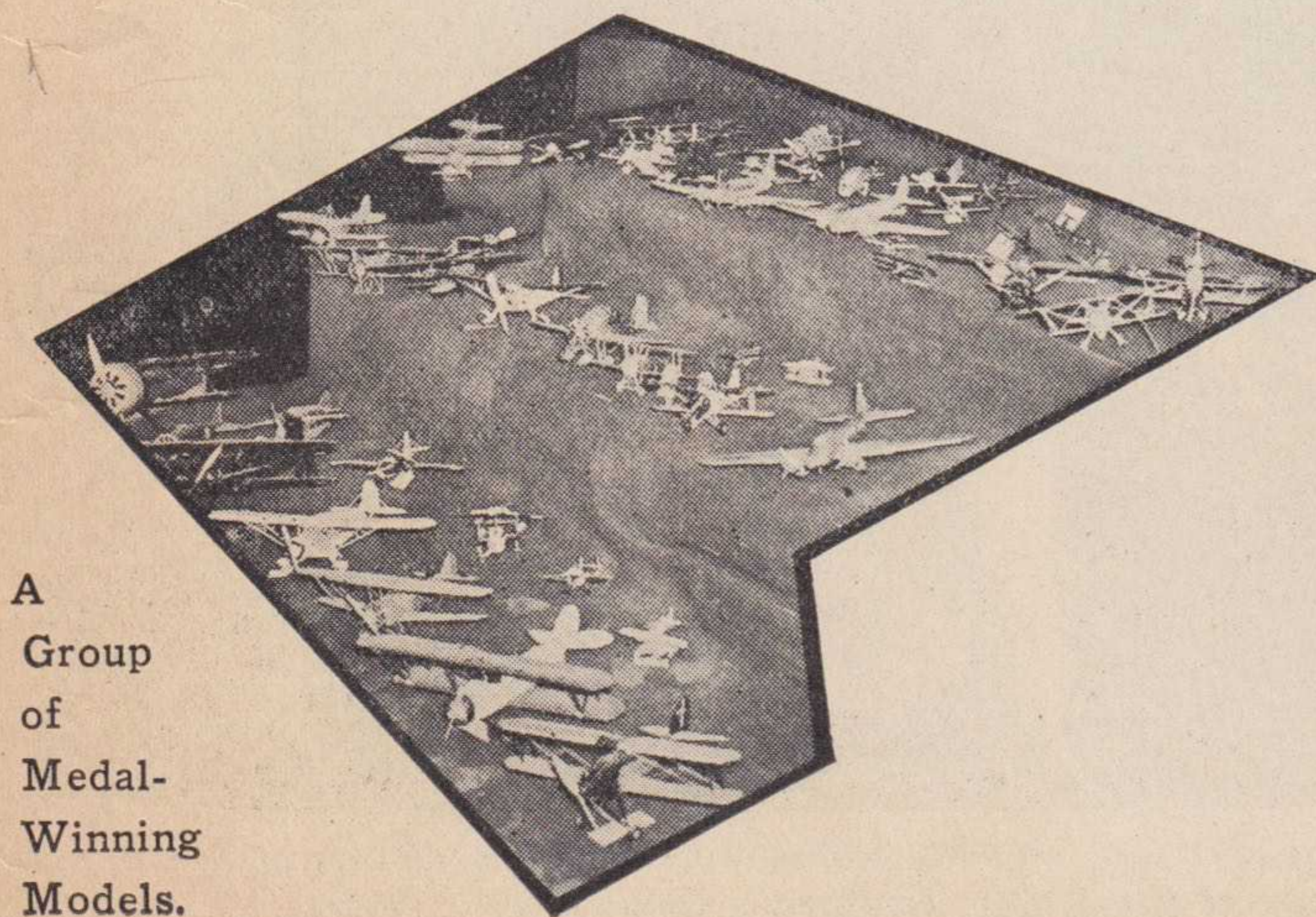


Boeing Transport entered by Edmund D. Myers, Wilmington, Delaware, placed first in its group.

THIRD PRIZE CLASS—Bronze Medals

Morton Blitzler, New York
 Paul Haertel, New York
 Abner Rasumoff, New York
 R. Zecca, New York
 E. Petito, New York
 Stanley Laske, New York
 John B. Emanuele, New York
 Edward J. Zatz, New York
 Robert Cohen, New York
 L. Harrison, New York
 Edward Reinhard, New York
 Clinton West, Pennsylvania

Michael Markovich, Pennsylvania
 Fred Brice Faller, Pennsylvania
 Robert Fitzpatrick, Missouri
 Carl Brinke, New York
 Alexander Bohr, New York
 Stanley Jala, New Jersey
 William Triller, New Jersey
 Tony Noto, New Jersey
 Griffith Sechler, Pennsylvania
 James Alexander, Pennsylvania
 Robert Davis, Pennsylvania
 Joseph Freeman, Pennsylvania



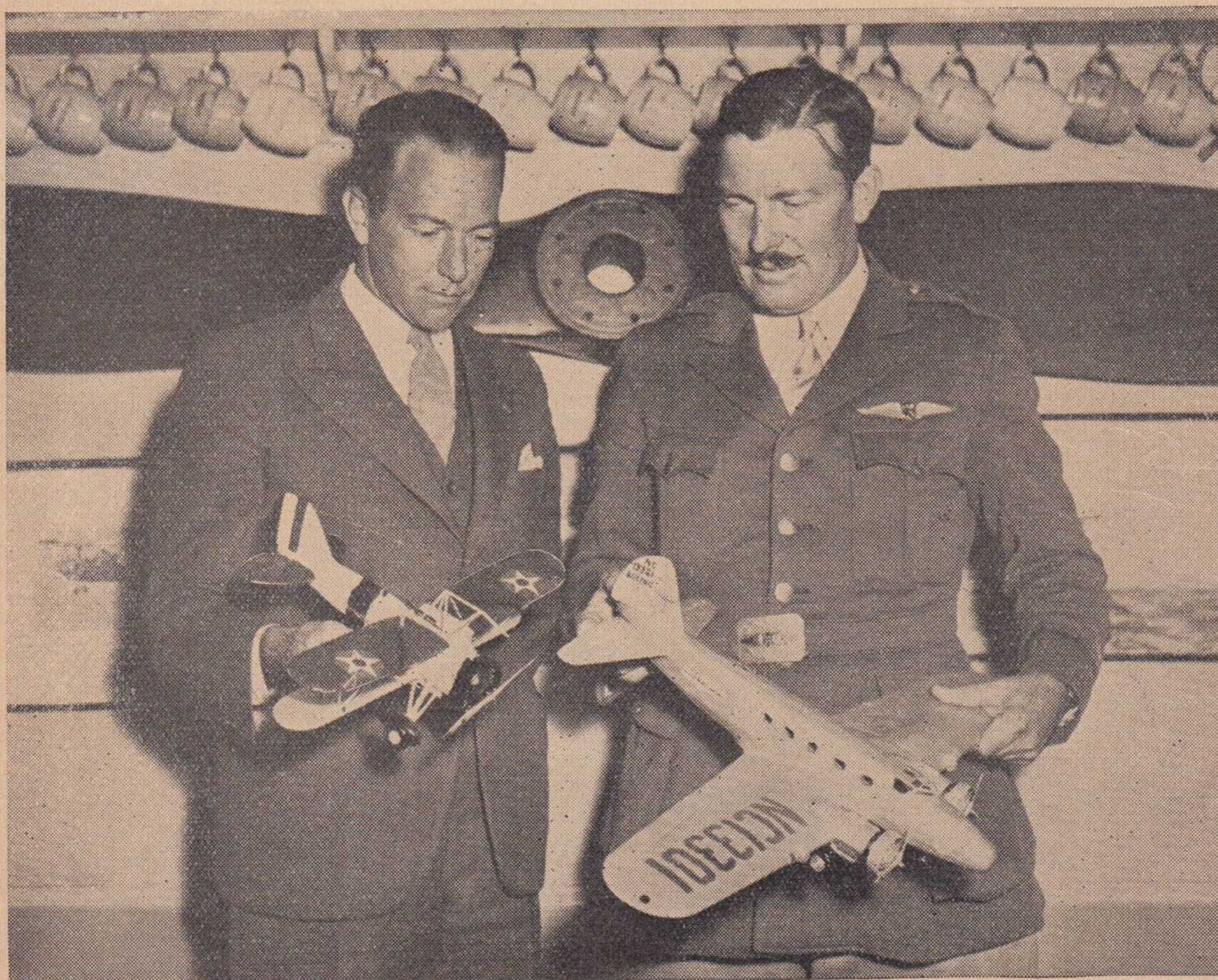
A
 Group
 of
 Medal-
 Winning
 Models.



THIRD PRIZE CLASS—Bronze Medals (Cont'd)

Nicholas Uhorczyk, Pennsylvania
Albert Vigadis, Pennsylvania
James Mahan, Pennsylvania
William Hohe, Pennsylvania
Louis Garvin, Virginia
Ed Klein, Missouri
Jerry McLure, Texas
Cecil Ammons, Alabama
Theodore Adler, Wisconsin
Steve Kovac, Illinois
Frank H. Gosse, Newfoundland
E. Guimond, Canada
J. Burtwell, Canada
Robert Rankin, Massachusetts
James Douglas Scott, Massachusetts
David Score, Massachusetts
Lester Riley, Kansas
G. Martin, Minnesota
La Verne Flynn, New York
Billy Robertson, Texas
Leon Vaught, Tennessee

Norman V. Hoeh, Illinois
William H. Townsend, Illinois
Joe Simard, Canada
Kenneth Clifton, Canada
Garrison W. Lee, Maine
Dave Score, Massachusetts
Willard Jones, Rhode Island
Wilbur Steed, Kansas
Joseph Vanderberg, Ohio
Miles Radigan, Michigan



Clyde Pangborn and Roscoe Turner, famous aviators, examine prize-winning models at the Quiet Birdmen's club in New York.

officialdom, followed. Then the young Englishman relaxed and sat down, lighting a cheroot.

"So Sir Melville Whyte is missing?" started Bill. "What's the story?"

"Yesterday, early in the morning," the young Englishman explained, "Sir Melville and Captain Craig Crispen, an R. A. F. bloke attached to the Foreign Service, took a Spartan three-seater to have a look-see over Sarawak. We've had a lot of trouble with the Dusans lately. A lot of queer gun running going on down that way, and we can't seem to trace the stuff, or where it is being hidden."

"Gun running—by natives?" asked Bill. "What for?"

"We'd like to know, too. If they have much stuff, though, they can make things hot for us. Not for a long time have we been sitting on such a possible eruption. We have discovered that several shiploads of Mauser rifles—the very latest—have been discharged somewhere around Rejang. From there we have no idea what happens to them."

BILL got up and walked over to a wall map and stood studying it for several minutes. He realized that material of this kind slipped overboard into native proas could be speedily rushed into the poisonous jungles of the Rejang estuary and disappear forever—or at least until they were wanted.

"Know anything about that country?" Bill asked.

Woolsey got up and pointed out the delta of the Rejang and said: "This is the stamping ground of Laki Saleh, believed to be a grandson of Mat Saleh, who almost tossed us out on our collective ears a couple of decades ago. Old Mat was shipped off quietly and left somewhere in Africa. No one knows what happened to him, but this blighter, Laki Saleh, has all the same tricks."

Bill nodded with interest.

"Did you ever hear of the Valley of

Moaning Giants?" Woolsey asked suddenly.

Bill looked at the Foreign Service man, puzzled.

"No, you wouldn't," went on Woolsey. "It's up here in this bend of the Rejang. I have never been there, but have seen it from the air. Queer spot, and I'm afraid Sir Melville may have been nailed there."

"What's that story?" asked Bill.

"It's hard to explain. But that's where Laki Saleh and his Dusans put on their little show every once in a while. You see, the Dusans are always picking on the little Punans and are trying to absorb them and their lands so that they can have a whack at the Dyaks. To do this old Laki Saleh stages interesting torture ceremonies, whenever he can get a victim, to show the invited Punans how hot they are."

Bill winced, and remembered Shorty Hassfurth again.

"This Moaning Giants business is somewhat balmy," the young Englishman went on. "From what I have heard, they have a crazy temple situated somewhere in this Moaning Giant Valley, where they stage all sorts of sacrifices to toh-gods, and the bloke in charge does all his cutting up with a damn great knife which is reputed to have a handle carved out of a monstrous emerald. This emerald knife is the talk of the area, but of course no white man has ever seen it. There's a lot more to it, but I do not believe it all."

"What do you mean?" asked Bill. "Something I should know if I went up there?"

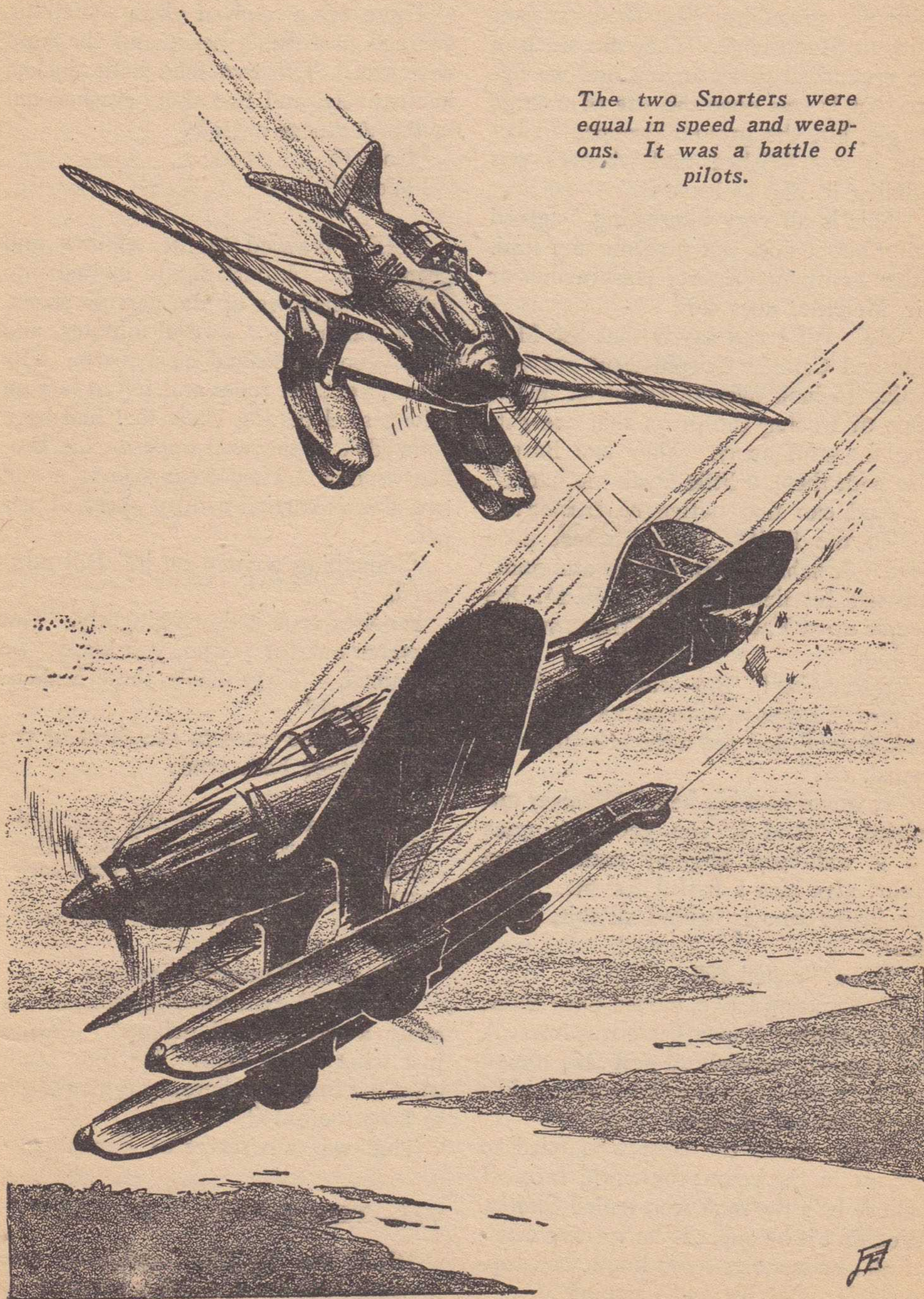
The young Britisher turned white. "You—you're not going up there—in the Valley of Moaning Giants, are you? Keep away from there—bad *Goena-goena* for a white man, Mr. Barnes. Why, they say that no one but Laki Saleh can walk across that valley to the open altar of the temple and live.

Something gets them if they try it. A few whites have tried, I understand, but they take only a few steps and die."

"Um!" mused Bill. "Do they have to cross this valley to get to it?"

"Yes. You see the temple is set on a promontory that juts into this part of the river. The banks there are so steep, no one could get up from the river side."

The two Snorters were equal in speed and weapons. It was a battle of pilots.



"Well, how did they build the temple?" Bill argued.

"That's something we can't figure out, but the whole valley, which is not very big, is studded with strange old broken columns, something like those ancient ruins at Stonehenge. They are stuck in the ground, at dizzy angles, and we figure that it was once the site of a large temple, but the ground dropped in before it was finished, and whoever was building it, had to leave it."

"This is all very interesting," agreed Bill, "but it does not give me any lead, either to my man Shorty Hassfurth or Sir Melville, does it?"

"No. All I can say is that Sir Melville and Captain Crispin went out yesterday to look over that district in the hope of tracing the proas that are getting the stuff away. They had Barum Jim with them, a little Dyak mechanic."

"And can that native be trusted?"

"To the limit! He's a smart little devil. A dabster with motors and guns. Learned his line with the L. K. M. line people up at Palembang. Crispin swears by him."

"Interesting! But what I ought to do now, I suppose, is to go out there and look around and see what actually happened, eh?"

"It would be a big help," Woolsey admitted. "And if you get your guns on a wall-eyed blighter named Otto Yahr, give him a fistful for me. He's the josser who is behind all this, I believe."

"Who?" asked Bill.

"A Eurasian bloke, named Otto Yahr. He's a stinker if ever there was one. A bit tapped somewhere—off his onion and is trying to get the Orientals to blow the whites out of Asia."

"Why, that's the man who tried to get me in the round-the-world race. I believe he's the man who nailed Shorty. Wouldn't it be queer if he was the cause of all our troubles—you know, had captured Sir Melville and Crispin?"

"Queer? I'm almost certain I see his fine Asiatic hand in all this," Woolsey declared. "If we can get him, I'm certain we can clear up a lot of problems and——"

There was a crash of glass, something swished past Bill's head, and the light went out. The two men both ducked instinctively, and two shots crashed out in the darkness outside.

"Golly!"

"Wow!"

THEY crawled to the window and peered out. A dark figure melted into the inky shadows up the narrow street. They watched for several minutes, and then Woolsey flashed on a torch. The beam swept the room and fell at last on a long steel parang blade that had been embedded in the wall opposite the broken window. They crept over to it and saw that it carried a dirty sheet of paper.

"Something written on it," Bill muttered.

Woolsey took it down gingerly. "Got to watch out for poison, you know," he explained. "Dirty devils, these Malays. Look here?"

He held the torch to the sheet of paper and they both read:

If you value your life, this time, Bill Barnes, you will stay out of the Valley of Moaning Giants. No wings can save you from the wrath of *M'dunu*.

THE CREESE OF REJANG.

"My word!" gulped Woolsey.

"Well, I'll remember Sandakan for many a day." Bill grinned. "Now just what is the idea? Do they really want me to go up there, or is that a gag to keep me out?"

That was the secret of Sandakan.

VII—THE BATTEN BULLET

BILL was up bright and early next morning, but there was no news of Sir

Melville Whyte or his pilot Captain Crispin. News was pounded out over the service telegraphs to the various district commissioners to search for them, but Woolsey knew that, with the conditions to be faced and the time required to gather a search party, little could be done. Miles of jungle had to be traversed, dozens of uncharted waterways had to be thoroughly traced. It might be weeks before any news of the lost Spartan could be uncovered—unless Bill Barnes could solve the mystery from the cockpit of his *Scarlet Stormer*.

The ship was brought out early, and Bill was frankly delighted with its appearance. The R. A. F. mechanics had worked like beavers all night, and the *Scarlet Stormer* was clean, tuned, and refueled for her next adventure. For an hour more, Bill studied the map of the area and pinned a clipped section to his dashboard before giving the racing Diesel her last personal check-over.

"Well," he said, smiling, shaking Woolsey's hand, "you stay here and hold the fort. If anything happens I'll try to let you know. I may be back tonight, but if not, don't worry for a few days. I'll be O. K."

Woolsey offered a weak grin and asked if he might go along.

"No. You'd better stay here. I may need some one to do a lot of paper work for me later on."

Woolsey nodded with resignation and swore quietly under his breath. The Diesel opened with a dull numbing roar and settled back for a warm-up. Then, closing his cockpit, Bill set her into the wind and raced away. The *Scarlet Stormer* shot up the chute like a scarlet lance and headed southwest to follow the coast line down to Rejang.

"The Creese of Rejang, eh?" He smiled. "Tell me to stay out, and I barge straight in, but something has to be done to get Shorty. He must be in Borneo—somewhere. And old Otto is the gentleman in the kindling, eh? This

gets better. Now all we want is to have that chink, Chan Lo, appear again, and the picture will be perfect."

For an hour he thundered on at about three-quarter throttle, which gave him a speed of about three hundred miles an hour, peering over and looking down on the weird Malay landscape below. The small rivers appeared to be deep, but not swift. Trees had fallen into the water at odd intervals, collecting matted grasses, vegetation, and the usual flotsam of tropical growth, which slowed the current up considerably.

The jungle itself, stretching back from the river banks, was a blot of differing shades of green. Faint gusts of wind turned the big flat leaves over gently and displayed backs of greenish-white, and Bill thought of schools of sharks that turned their sleek bellies up to attack.

Gigantic ferns nodded and bowed their heads over the water as though admiring their fringes and perfect curves. The brilliant orange of the *Pohon biyou* flower emerged from dense bank growths and reflected their beauty in the inky blackness of the waters. Had there been time, Bill would have been tempted to go down to make a closer inspection of the foliage, but there were more important things to think of.

He would have seen the banks slashed with silver sand bars in which schools of crawfish basked in the sunlight. Great turtles crawled across the sandy sheen, and giant freshwater shrimp scurried back and forth, while hostile-faced monkeys hung from scraggy limbs and barked at snake-darters that hung like the letter S and seemed not to live.

All this gaunt beauty and grandeur was interesting in its place, but it had no place in Bill Barnes' plans of action. It was as well, for just as he shot up for safer altitude he leaped to see a glinting center-wing monoplane come hurtling out of a long natural runway, slashed

out of the vegetation, and come slamming at him.

"Say!" he gulped, twisting the *Scarlet Stormer* clear. "What's that?"

The trim center-wing speeder flashed over and showed the markings "VM-RM" and came around with a mighty roar. Bill studied it and watched the maneuvers of the pilot who was hidden under a glassed-in cupola well down the fuselage. In front was a British Napier "Dagger" motor that hurtled the ship through the air at terrific speed.

"VM-RM?" Bill queried. "That's an Australian marking. What the devil is it?"

Then it suddenly came to him. This was the entry piloted by Don Batten, the Australian, who had disappeared several weeks before while flying from Brisbane to England. This was the much-talked-of *Batten Bullet*. But what was it doing over Borneo?

The answer came quickly in tongues of flame. Two guns hidden in troughs mounted in the roots of the wing burst out and splashed the air with lemon-yellow tracers. Smoke from the phosphorous missiles streaked across the space and drew strange futuristic designs. Bill pondered on it as he drew out of the line of fire and set his own guns for action.

"What the devil is he firing on me for?" Bill demanded of himself.

There was no answer.

Again the Australian ship shot over and came tearing at him at three hundred and fifty miles per hour. One has to work fast and execute one's maneuvers to the inch to handle ships like this. Together they flew in and out, parrying bursts and feinting for position. Bill could not see the man in the cockpit, owing to his wearing a heavy earphone helmet that muffled up most of his face.

He watched the *Batten Bullet* turn over on one wing tip until the wings were vertical and then, with the controls

reversed, the pilot snapped the stick back and turned sharply on his elevators. There was a distinct timing in this that made Bill wonder.

Like a fiend he slammed the *Scarlet Stormer* at the *Batten Bullet* and poured a terrible burst of lead at it from all four guns. The *Batten Bullet* staggered and jerked its massive whalelike head. Bill tore in again and emptied half a belt at the Australian craft.

"I hate to do this," he said to himself, "but you started it, baby, and some one has to finish it, so here goes!"

Then, before he could drive the coup de grâce, something crashed behind him and the *Scarlet Stormer* was enveloped in a new torrent of death. She thundered under the pounding and shook her head like a quirted stallion. Bill knew something had happened and nosed down and shut off the motor. The double props whistled and sang wildly and then suddenly appeared with no blades at all.

"Judas Priest!" he gasped. "What did that?"

He turned an instant and looked back. Behind him, blasting down out of the sun, was a Snorter, flaunting the markings B. B. 2.

"Holy mackerel! That's Shorty's bus!" he growled. "What the devil did he fire on me for—or did he?"

Then began a wild scramble. The two ships above him did not attack any more. They hung back and circled like great vultures, their talons itching for carrion. Bill sensed now what had happened. They had tried to get him, ship and all, and certainly it looked as if they were succeeding.

BILL, satisfied that he was not to be fired on again, put his attention on getting down safely. Below lay a sluggish tidal river mouth which he marked as one emptying into the sea about twenty miles east of Egan. But that was no

satisfaction. He was miles from anywhere.

The *Scarlet Stormer* stumbled down, a winged bird, and Bill felt hurt in pride and mind. He had let them pull that old trick on him—using one of his own ships and attacking him from the sun side. He realized that he had no one to blame but himself. He swore quietly under his breath as he jockeyed the *Scarlet Stormer* down, made a sloshy landing, and ran it under its own inertia to the sandy fringe of the bank.

Before he could get out, however, the Snorter was alongside, and a man stood up with a short Hotchkiss gun cradled in his arms. It was Otto Yahr, the Eurasian, suave, smiling, and grimly taunting. Then behind him slashed the racing pontoons of the *Batten Bullet*, and it, too, rolled up and took a position behind the grounded *Scarlet Stormer*.

"Our best regards, Mr. Barnes," Yahr called out. "We have been expecting you, and, of course, you did not fail us."

"What have you done with Hassfurther?" Bill demanded at once.

"I know nothing about him," replied Yahr with an oily smile.

"That's his Snorter."

"Agreed! Perhaps he abandoned it somewhere. I know nothing about it."

"You lie!" ranted Bill, watching the pilot get out of the *Batten Bullet*. "Who's that? Your yellow friend Chan Lo?"

"We have no time to waste with you, Barnes," Yahr bawled. "Get out of that ship. Pull it clear onto the sand and then stand aside until we come to you. Toss your gun away. You won't need it after to-day—never."

The menacing muzzle of the Hotchkiss made Bill's mind up for him. There was no argument now, even though he did have an automatic strapped to his hip.

He got down, clambered along the pontoons, and waded ashore. They yelled at him to throw the gun away, and he took it out and tossed it through the struts of the landing gear so that it dropped into the water with a splash.

"I wanted you to throw it farther out, but never mind," Yahr yelled. "Now wait there."

Bill was forced to stand well off from the *Scarlet Stormer* while the Chinaman leaped clear of his own ship, dragged it alongside, and then walked over and deliberately spat in Bill's face.

"That—that ees for your interference with me, you white pig!" he fumed. His voice was clacky and tinged with the Mongolian coldness of expression.

Barnes recoiled and started to wind up a juicy hook, but a glance at Yahr indicated that the Eurasian was only waiting for a chance—an excuse—to open fire. Chan Lo backed away expectantly.

"No; you can have the honor," Yahr beamed. "The tide is running well now, eh?"

The Chinese pilot glanced out at the water and then at an elaborate wrist watch. "Yes, it will do—perfectly."

Bill wondered what their game was, and his mind raced through several situations that might arise. But none seemed to answer his question. Then he saw Chan Lo peer about and suddenly start toward a tangle of driftwood that lay partly covered with sand about twenty yards away.

He went over and drew out three heavy lengths, all about twelve feet long, and dragged them to the water's edge. Then, with a quick glance around again, he went over to the heavy foliage and slashed away and came back with several lengths of Borneo rattan with which he bound the three heavy logs together and formed a raft.

Bill watched, puzzled, while the Eurasian eyed him with a glint-eyed smile that had all the acidity of a poison po-

tion. At last the Chinaman was satisfied with his work and turned to Yahr.

"I am ready," he said. "You will help me with our American friend. We have four hours to go. We must hurry. Now?"

The Eurasian answered the questioning "Now?" by moving over and jerking Bill around and making him drag his hands behind him. Bill made one last effort and jerked his shoulder so quickly that he caught Yahr flush on the chin, and the big Eurasian went down like a boxer caught on the button. Bill whirled fast and faced the astonished Chinaman, who tried to jerk a gun out, but his hands were still wet, and his fingers just slipped about above the holster.

"Got you!" snapped Bill.

The Chinaman saw his finish as Barnes leaped toward him, but he gamely stood his ground, spread his feet apart, and took a half-squatting position. Bill came on and threw a short curling left hook at the Chinaman which caught him flush in the mouth. The chink's head went back with a jerk, but he stood stock-still, and waited, still trying to get his gun clear.

THE RUSH had carried Bill past the Chan Lo bird, and he had to whirl fast to get in another. This time his right curled around and caught Chan at the base of the skull and sent him to his knees. Bill was somewhat flustered now. Everything had happened so quickly and with such astonishing success that he hardly knew where to turn next.

His mind ran riot and flashed a wild kaleidoscopic torrent of memories. There was the missing Shorty, and with him somehow was mixed up a crazy causeway composed of Blue Funnels. Then came a covey of Dutch Fokkers and a helpless Spartan which was all being stirred together by a *Batten Bullet*. Sir Melville Whyte and Admiral

Tyler were looping the loop in a Snorter, and a Dyak mechanic was wielding a long knife that gleamed greenly about the handle. Stormers, Snorters, Fokkers, and Spartans zoomed through his mind as he stood there and hesitated as to what to do next. The delay finished him.

Turning back to look for Yahr, Bill discovered that he was not there. So he darted toward the Chinaman who was attempting to crawl to his knees. The gun was what Bill wanted. As he reached over for it, a thunderous explosion broke over his head somewhere. Weird streaky lights blinded him, and he fell forward. Then oblivion.

Otto Yahr stood over Bill with a reversed Luger in his hand.

"You are too fast to take any chances with, Mr. Barnes," he cooed. "Come, Lo, you are not as quick as you once were. Let us take care of our active friend."

"I seem to remember you on your shoulder blades, Yahr," remonstrated the Chinaman, getting up and rubbing his neck. "What a blow these Americans deliver, with nothing but their brawn!"

But Otto was binding Bill's hands behind his back now. Then they laced his feet with rawhide thongs and carried him out to the raft. Bill came back to consciousness when water sloshed up around his neck, and he struggled to get free. Yahr rammed his head back with a cruel shove, and Bill saw stars again. By the time he had recovered from this he was securely bound to the crude raft.

"Four hours," Yahr cackled, reverting to the cold, cruel type he really was. "Four hours floating upstream with the tide. A nice little ride, eh? On the way you will probably meet a wild boar or two. Perhaps a red-and-black water snake. Then you will, no doubt, be entertained by various scorpions, tarantulas, and the famous Borneo mos-

quitos, which, I understand, are almost as deadly as a viper."

"And," chimed in Chan Lo, "should you enjoy the upstream trip and are still in sound mind, there will be another four-hour journey back with the tide, which if you are lucky will take you well out to sea. Anything may happen there. But, here, we are wasting good and valuable time. Off you go!"

And with that treacherous gleam, which only the Oriental can display, they shoved the raft out into the inky current. Bill lay back, helpless, trying to figure it all out. His head throbbed and his eyes seemed to have lost their focus, but, gradually, it all began to dawn on him—he was being shoved out to die.

The flood of realization caught Bill in an icy grip. He tried the bonds that held him and realized that there was no possible chance of slipping them. His fate was in the hands of the gods.

What his end would be, he had no idea, but there were many ways in which he might come to a ghastly and terrible finish. He thought of water snakes, prowling wild dogs, and a million venomous insects.

As the raft floated away and began to make headway, Otto Yahr went over and inspected the damaged *Scarlet Stormer*. A quick glance showed him that the rear prop had been banged out of line by bullets, and it had fouled the forward blades. A new set would be necessary, and it would be ready for flight again. He went back to the Snorter, tuned in on the two-way short-wave set, and called a base somewhere near the mouth of the Rejang.

Yahr and Chan Lo both smiled oily beams of satisfaction as they glanced up at the noonday sun. It was beaming down pitilessly on the man a quarter of a mile up the river. Unless he could turn his head slightly, the blinding rays would burn the sight from his eyes forever.

VIII—DEVIL POTION

THAT NIGHT four men sat huddled against the log walls of a Dusan kampong exchanging whispered conferences. Two were in dirty whites, one in neat khaki breeches, flannel shirt, and laced field boots; the third, a ragged, disreputable little Dyak with a *tjawat*, or bark loin cloth.

The heavy district commissioner was talking, his hands and ankles tied with strips of wild-boar hide.

"So this man Barnes was in the big race, eh?" he queried, addressing Shorty Hassfurther. "You know, we began to sense that something was wrong from the time we kept seeing that Swedish Jatkfalk and a French Bernard monoplane over Sandakan. We wondered why we saw them several times."

"But the Jatkfalk and the Bernard were in the race!" Shorty fumed.

"Perhaps. But why were they flying together over Sandakan days after your chaps and the other racing ships had left Tokyo?"

"That's queer," agreed Shorty. "And you say that the Barnes ship won?"

"Yes; we learned that by radio, just before we started. And we also heard that the Jatkfalk and the Bernard were missing. Let's see, there was another ship, that Batten thing, that failed to turn up for the start of the race too, wasn't there?" asked Crispin.

"Whew!" whewed Shorty. "Wouldn't it be a pip if these eggs have all those ships? That would give them my Snorter, the *Batten Bullet*, the Jatkfalk, and the Bernard. There's a young air force in itself."

"And that's not all," broke in Sir Melville. "We have every reason to believe that there are a number of Dutch Fokker fighters somewhere in the Indian Archipelago that no one seems to be able to account for."

They sat and pondered on all this,

and then suddenly Sir Melville turned on Shorty with:

"Look here! This Barnes chap. Who is he?"

Hassfurth proudly gave the Britisher a short outline of Bill and his background.

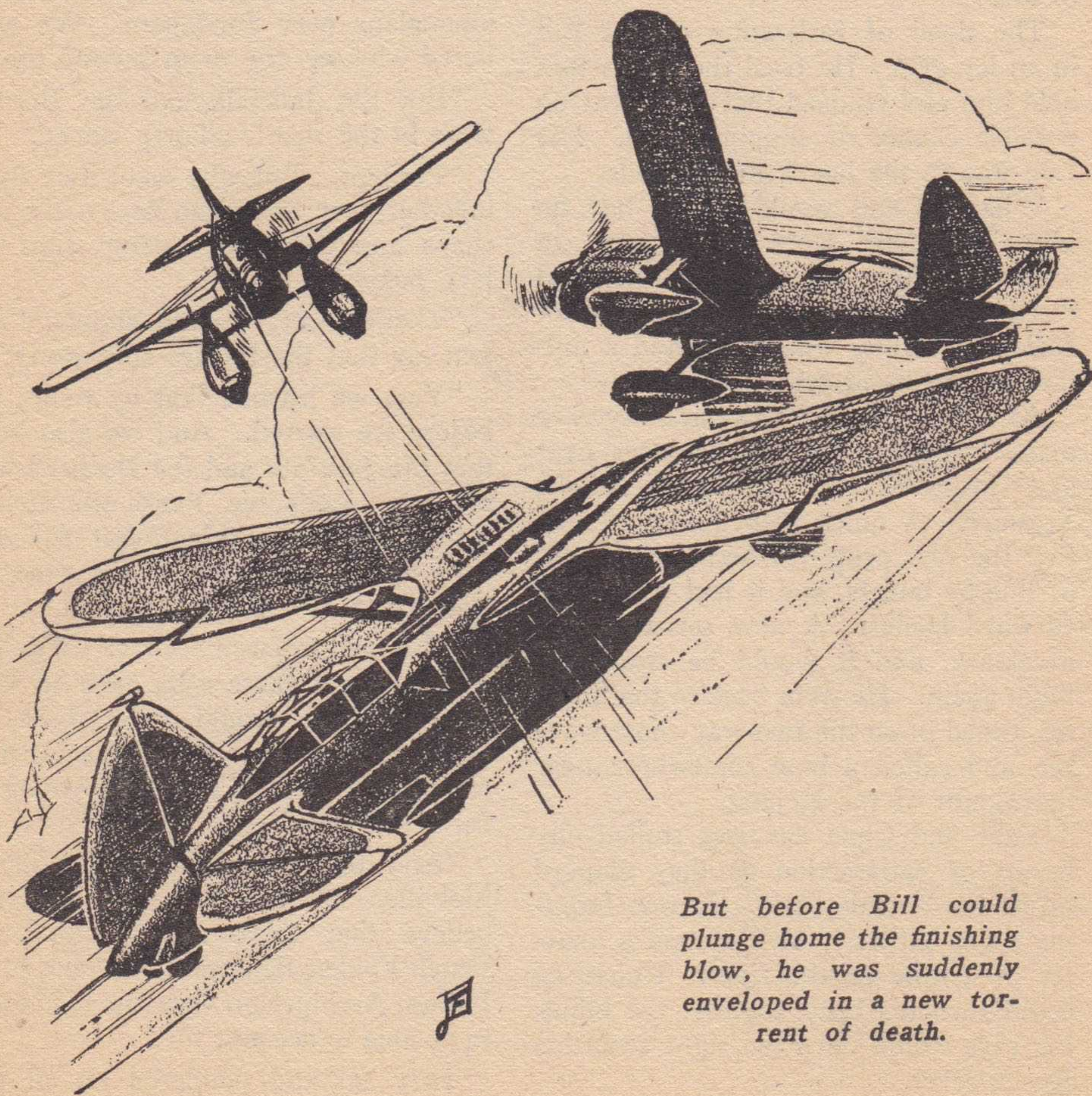
"By George!" Sir Melville gasped. "I'll bet it's the same family. I used to know an American—a tartar of a fighter in China, years ago. Worked with him in the Boxer Rebellion. He was a fighter, too. We were ambushed together, and he fought his way out and brought relief. I'd give half my life to see him, or his son again. I'll bet this Barnes lad is just the chap we're

after. He'd help us get out of this, if he's anything like his dad."

"I don't know what his dad was like," Shorty returned, "but you can bet your last dollar that if there's any way of getting us out of this mess, Bill Barnes will do it. He's the greatest guy in the world!"

But they could not know of the plight that Bill Barnes was in at that time.

"I'm beginning to see all this, now," the ruddy Englishman said quietly. "This blighter, Otto Yahr, is behind all this—somehow. He was mixed up with a mad Chinese war lord, a rotter with a strain of wild Mongol in him. Another Genghis Khan, if you see what I



But before Bill could plunge home the finishing blow, he was suddenly enveloped in a new torrent of death.

mean. They might be behind this gun-running mess, and, if they are, I'm beginning to see why they have selected this spot to work from. They can get to Singapore in a couple of hours from here."

"Singapore?" inquired Shorty, somewhat puzzled. "What's that got to do with it?"

The two Englishmen exchanged glances. At last the flying man nodded.

"Singapore," Sir Melville explained, "is the key to the Pacific, and these gun runners may attempt to seize it before the new naval base is completed. Of course they would have little chance of success, but they could do a lot of damage."

Outside, a low throb of native music began to roll out of the clearing before the kampongs—low and rumbling at first. A *tugal* or rice feast was in progress—the opening of the *M'dunu* ceremony.

The *baliangs*, or medicine men, were beating the first, low rhythmical beats on their drums. The *puri-puri* doctors were putting on their *bérets* of chicken skin and their short *slendang* shawls and gaudy sarongs. They wielded their *sumpitans* or blowpipes and flashed ceremonial spears and swords.

The fires blazed up, and men drunk from *toewak* or palm wine staggered about chanting guttural war songs. More men came out of the kampongs and lined up for the ceremonies.

The little Dyak stirred and muttered: "Tuan, master," he addressed Sir Melville solemnly. "Your No. 1 boy of winged ship fears for the future. One of us must be prepared for *M'dunu*."

"Are they going to hold ceremony of *M'dunu*, Barum Jim?" asked Sir Melville.

"Yes, tuan; but trust in Barum Jim, if we can learn who is to be sacrificed. My honorable father taught me the potions that destroy the fangs of *M'dunu*.

After that we must hope for the smile of the gods."

"What's he clacking about?" Shorty asked.

But there was no chance to answer. Three tall Dusans came in with food spread on palm leaves. They were dressed in the short sarong or *salois*, and their faces were painted for the grim ceremony. One released Barum Jim to act as the servant. The little Dyak, with a face as calm and unemotional as a mask, released their hands and handed out the *tambilok* and *kudjang*. The latter, Shorty saw, was something well-spiced and floated in an egg sauce which had been mixed with vinegar. The Dusans did not take much notice of what was going on, and they did not see Barum Jim pour most of the liquid away into a small flat bottle he had secreted in his *tjawat*.

They ate in silence and shrugged their muscles into new flexibility. Then the Dusans tied them up again and left.

A FEW minutes later, Yahr came in, preened and strutting. "Ah!" he beamed. "So you have all been fed for the killing, eh?"

"Get out of here, you slant-eyed rat!" raged Shorty.

"I presume you realize the seriousness of your crime," the district commissioner broke in. "You have interfered with British authority, and the penalty, especially in the matter of foreigners, is usually severe."

"Bah!" Yahr snorted. "British Foreign Service! Pretty neat uniforms and a Sam Browne belt! At times they allow a swagger stick! What can you do? British authority! British justice! Beautiful in theory, but no good where Asiatic intrigue and ambition is concerned.

"You may cower the little Dyaks, but now you are dealing with Dusans and the tribes they are gathering under the war banners of Laki Saleh. Your pretty

uniforms and swagger sticks no longer rule in British Borneo, and if things go as we plan, you will soon all be driven out of the Pacific."

Sir Melville realized that much that Yahr had said was perfectly right. He cringed under the throaty gibes. He would have given his left arm for a gun and wondered what result would take place could he plant a lead pill, two inches above Yahr's belt buckle.

"Why don't you get the hell out of here and kid your dumb natives?" stormed Shorty. "Think you can scare us?"

"I do not think, Mr. Hassfurth. I know!" the Eurasian snarled. "You will know, too, in a short while. You—you of all people have been selected to play the chief part in a *M'dunu* ceremony. I wonder how your stomach is."

The little Dyak at the end of the line gave a convulsive jerk that caught Yahr's eye.

"Oh, yes!" He smiled with a glinting eye. "You—you piano-legged devil! You were with the K. L. M., weren't you? I can use you and save your scaly hide, if you agree to work with me. I need a mechanic to replace a couple of props on a Diesel. You know that arrangement?"

Shorty jerked against his bonds. The mention of a Diesel and two props twanged a strange chord somewhere within him. He was about to yell at the little Dyak when he saw the native jerking his head enthusiastically.

"*Magunda sakin* (I am pleased)" Barum Jim beamed. "Barum Jim glad to avoid poison of *M'dunu*. It is with much pleasure I work for you, tuan. Of the Diesel I know verrr-r-y much. I shall work gladly and with considerable pleasure."

Sir Melville turned and stared at the Dyak. Crispin started to swear, but something made him choke it back. Yahr leaned down and released the heavy-legged native and poured a thou-

sand curses on his scaly head if he so much as made one false move.

"You need not fear, tuan," Barum Jim replied. "I shall not risk my valuable blood on your wrath."

He arose and backed away to the farther side of the hut and waited.

"You see, *M'dunu* has them all scared," Yahr gloated. "It is a wicked potion, composed, I believe, of the sap of the upas tree, juice of henbane, and an extract of python venom. A rare concoction to make brave men writhe, eh?"

"Just what is your idea, Yahr?" Sir Melville inquired, ever the cold unemotional Britisher.

"Simple! We require the assistance of Laki Saleh and his tribe. Not only that, we require more men. We shall have several hundred fighting men, fully armed. To do this we hope to induce the Punans from the reaches of the Lupar River to join us."

"Bah!" snorted Sir Melville. "The Punans are not fighting men and never will be. We police them with mere official announcements. Hardly ever have to send a man up there."

"True!" agreed Yahr. "But after to-night they will see the strength and fighting spirit of the Dusans. They will see them stage a *M'dunu* ceremony where British Foreign Service men will be slaughtered. That will give them new courage."

"Then we are to be sacrificed to attract new tribes to your mad gang? The most cowardly thing I have ever heard of, but Britain—and America—will see that we are revenged. Don't forget, you have an American citizen here, too. You cannot flaunt your devilish aims in the faces of America and Britain!"

"So you say." The Eurasian grinned, not noticing Barum Jim sitting on the floor rubbing two pieces of stone together, nervously. "But when we are through, your great American and British nations will be beaten to their knees

and will crawl back to their so-called centers of civilization licking their wounds, only to await the complete destruction of their far-flung empires."

BARUM JIM sat back in the shadows, trying to catch the eye of Shorty Hassfurth, but the American was pouring out his wrath through blazing eyes at the cocky Eurasian.

"You know *M'dunu*?" asked Yahr. "It is a pleasant ceremony. You will all kneel in a proa anchored at the water's edge. Behind you will stand fighting men armed with long sharp *mandaus*, as keen as any creese. One of you, in this case, your American citizen, will be given a draft of *M'dunu*. The drums will beat, the *puri-puri* doctors and Penghulus will chant the ceremony.

"If the toh-gods of the tribe will it, he will survive the potion, and you will all be spared—to try to walk across the Valley of Moaning Giants. If not, the instant his spirit leaves under the gnashing fangs of *M'dunu*, the *mandaus* will slash and your heads will drop to the bank. Then the fighting men will carry your heads up to the causeway and present them to Laki Saleh, who will turn them over to the high priest to satisfy the toh-gods of the Valley of Moaning Giants."

"You sound like a medicine-wagon barker, Yahr," snorted Shorty. "Why don't you get a case of snake oil and go into the business in a big way?"

"Your attempt at coolness is laudable, Mr. Hassfurth." The tall Eurasian smiled. "But it is useless. You have about as much chance of overcoming the potion of *M'dunu* as I have."

"Of what?"

"Well—of failing in my great enterprise."

"You can put four bucks on Shorty Hassfurth—for me." The stocky little American grinned. But cold talons were already gripping at his vitals.

He caught at last the eye of Barum

Jim. The little Dyak was holding up a small round bottle and pantomiming the placing of it to his lips. Shorty blinked and stared again. Yahr whipped around to see what he was staring at, but the little Dyak had suddenly assumed a mien of pious innocence.

"You have five minutes before the guards come," he sputtered at last, sensing that he had been foiled in something. Then, calling to Barum Jim, he started out.

"But tuan," pleaded the little Dyak, "not one word of farewell may I have with my former master?"

"You want to say good-by? Go ahead and get it over. He'll never be able to say another."

Otto Yahr went to the door and stared out on the fantastic scene that was being staged outside.

Barum Jim shuffled across the floor and shook hands, first with Sir Melville, then with Captain Crispin, and then he took Shorty's hand and palmed the small round bottle.

"Trust in Barum Jim," he whispered. "Just before you take *M'dunu*, make a prayer to your gods. Place hands near lips, eh? Will then destroy the fangs of *M'dunu*. This devil potion will fight it."

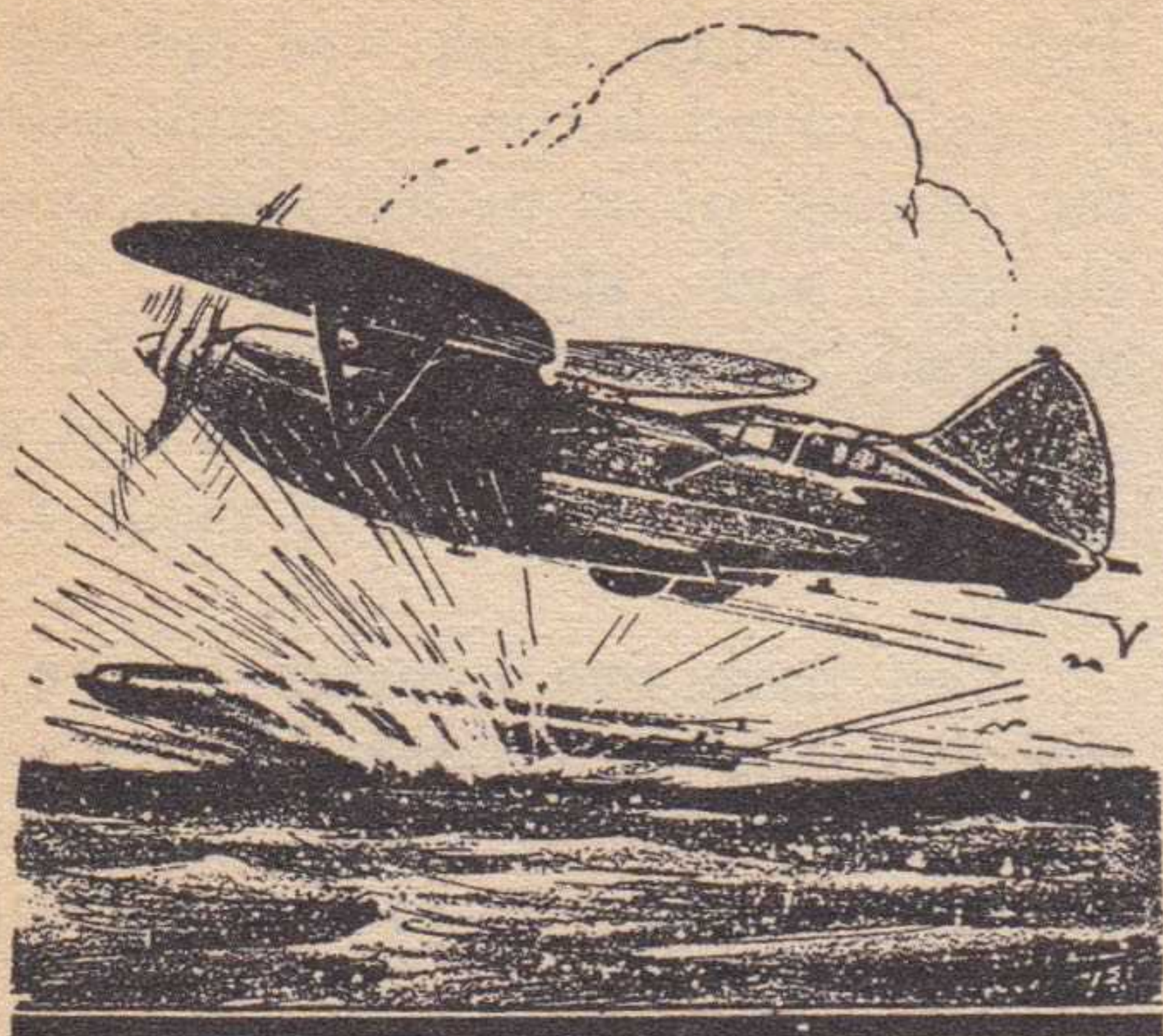
"Right Pool-Table!" Shorty grinned. "I'll do a lot of praying."

With that Barum Jim went out with Otto Yahr.

IX—THE WRATH OF M'DUNU

OUTSIDE, the *balian*s were bringing their harsh discordant music to a new and terrifying tempo. The fires were glaring against the inky tropical night, and the medicine men were striding out of the kampongs dressed in their ceremonials. Fervor-mad warriors waved befeathered spears and flashed glistening parangs.

Gigantic war clubs, decorated with



snake bones, thundered against the hard earth of the clearing. Their bearers leaped up and down, screeching and wailing. A *puri-puri* doctor led the way for Laki Saleh and his officiating Penghulus. The former Bajau was dressed in a bright-scarlet silk sarong, a brilliantly feathered headdress, and carried his carved mace of office. He screwed his tattooed face into its fiercest scowl as he swept the ranks of the awe-inspired Punans who were his guests for the ceremony that was to display the might of the Dusans.

The *puri-puri* doctors presented the most terrifying aspect of the lot. Around their waists they wore flamboyant belts made from the skin of an orang-utang. At the neck of each dangled the horn of a rhinoceros, hollowed out and filled with charm powder. Their faces were painted red, the eyebrows white, and about their dirty bodies were streaks of scarlet and yellow. Their teeth were filed to points and stained with the juice of a greenish nut.

Tom-toms boomed and echoed back and forth across the opening that led down to the water. The forest seemed to tremble with the noise. In the dim background outlined against the sky loomed the shapeless silhouette of the temple, huddled behind the mysterious Valley of Moaning Giants. Could one have marched to the edge, he would have seen the oozing area studded with

the weird stone columns that stood in strange attitudes like drunken sentinels.

The Temple of Death, as the Dusans had named it, was at the end of a narrow path that wound its way through the rotting sandstone columns from the watch-fire platform of the clearing. It was strewn with dozens of greenish-white skeletons of men who had tried to reach the frowning, forbidding temple squatting in the valley.

But there was another path to the temple known as the toh-god's causeway, used only by High Chief Laki Saleh, when he went to the open altar and wielded the emerald-handled sacrificial knife on the sacred pigs that were offered up to the *hantu* gods when they would have Ballango, the god of thunder, smile on their periodic raids against the Dyaks. This path went over the few steady and upright columns that was reserved for the feet of Laki Saleh only.

TEN GIANT Dusans, bearing flaming torches, came and led the victims away. The proas out on the river were alive with Dusan warriors bedecked in paint, bone necklaces, amulets from which fluttered the feathers of hornbills, fireback, and peacock pheasants. Their cries rattled against the welkin as the boats were maneuvered behind the sacrificial proa in which Sir Melville, Shorty and Captain Crispin were to kneel. The two tribal headsmen were in the water behind the longboat, their gleaming *mandaus* shouldered for action.

Off to one side stood Otto Yahr and Chan Lo, sensing that something unusual was in the air. Even their background of Oriental psychology and knowledge of organized torture could not overcome their awe and fear of this amazing spectacle. More torches flamed out, more tom-toms were added to the din, and fanatic women, surging with tribal ritual, danced and wound in and

out of the groups with their rhythmical contortions.

Sir Melville was hurried along first, while he bristled and fumed against the indignity. Crispin went next, cold and inwardly blazing at their helplessness. Shorty followed, sauntering and flaunting his contempt with snatches of stevedore derision. For his trouble he got several pokes in the ribs with a spear.

"You monkeys are in for a surprise," he taunted. "I'll spit that bug juice straight in your eye, Sour-puss!"

The Dusan guard recoiled at this threat and jabbed again, but Shorty side-stepped.

"Look!" he grinned. "You can't even touch me. What's the matter? Losing your nerve?"

Then he caught Otto Yahr's eye and bellowed across to him: "Hey, Yahr. You'd better be making tracks for the river. If I get away with this I'm gonna take over the joint and have them boil your stinking hide in skunk grease."

Yahr would have drawn his Luger and finished Shorty then and there had he dared. But it was out of his hand now. Laki Saleh was in charge from now on, and any move to interfere with the ceremony would have brought the wrath of the Dusans down on Yahr's shoulders. Shorty saw the Eurasian's face go white and continued the blasphemy.

"You'd better start now, Yahr!" he yelled. "We've put it over on you, bozo. I'll chase you across the swamp and bash your brains out on the temple steps."

Yahr sensed a cold shiver trickle across his shoulders, and something told him that he had better watch his step. Above all, Shorty must not get to that temple. There was too much hanging on the sanctity of that mysterious building frowning down from the steep cliff that came up from the river beyond and formed the Y of the Rejang River.

But they were being bundled into the

proa now, and their headsmen were standing straddle-legged behind them.

The drums rumbled again and howled their war chant. The *puri-puri* doctors circled and cackled their dirges and told of the myriad crimes that had been credited to the accused.

The daughter of a chief had been taken suddenly ill with a demon in her breast. A rice paddie had suddenly failed to display its usual verdant shoots. A small kampong had been mysteriously burned. Two war proas had disappeared. All these and many more were charged against the white devils who flew in winged chariots. Some one had to stand for their justice. The toh-gods wanted revenge. Now was the time to find out who had perpetrated these crimes.

LAKI SALEH sat back in his litter throne which had been carried to the center of the throng. A strange silence shrouded the clearing. Only a slight wind moaned through the trees. The tranquil river glided by—a river whose waters were soon to be stained with blood. The retinue of Penghulus took up their posts on either side. The ranks of the Dusans faced those of the Punans.

The chief clacked away and outlined these crimes while the victims squirmed on the hard planking of the proa.

"Bewitched, I say!" roared Laki Saleh. "By the might of the white men who live in stone kampongs in the great village toward the rising sun. We know not who, but the great god of *M'dunu* will select. If he who has been selected to quaff of the potion survives, we shall know that none of these is the one, and they shall be called upon to assist at the sacrifice on the altar of the Temple of Death. That will wipe out the stain—if they succeed in passing across the Valley of Moaning Giants. They have bewitched Olenadik, daughter of your

chief; the god of *M'dunu* will decide on that."

Shorty was getting restless again and peered about. He spotted little Barum Jim in the gathering. He was placing his hands together and making the motions of praying. Shorty caught the move and took out the small bottle.

"You may ask your blasphemous gods before you take *M'dunu*," a *puri-puri* doctor ranted, "if they have the powers to overthrow the potion of the Dusans."

"Yes," growled Sir Melville. "Give him a chance to speak to the white man's god."

Both Sir Melville and Crispin exchanged pained glances. They knew their lives hinged on Shorty now. Could he take it?

Shorty nodded and placed his hands together piously. Then he drew the cork carefully with his teeth while the chanting warriors broke out anew. He slipped the cork down into the palm of his hand and sucked at the neck of the bottle. A bitter acidic liquid hit the back of his palate, but he swallowed. Then struggling to keep down the nauseating fluid, he nodded to the witch doctor that he was ready.

The jungle men began a new chant.

"If they are directors of demons,
May *M'dunu* devour them.
If they are innocent,
Let *M'dunu* go out."

The tom-toms boomed again and shrill voices pierced the night air. The flames of the refueled fires leaped up as if to bite at the nipa palms. The executioners steadied themselves as Shorty took the hollow gourd from the *puri-puri* doctor. Then with an oath that seemed to make the proa tremble, he raised it to his lips. The odor of the potion was oily and sickly sweet. He gulped it down and tossed the gourd behind him—and with it the small bottle.

Something strained at his stomach and seemed to drive a red-hot spike up

into his chest. He turned slowly and stared at Sir Melville who was now chalky white. The big Dusans drew back their blades and prepared to strike. A new stillness fell upon the gathering as Shorty strained and pawed wildly at the thwarts of the proa.

He steadied himself and threw a mad grin at the chief. He held his breath until his lungs threatened to burst. A new tremor trickled through the ranks of the fighting men as they watched with unbelieving eyes. Even the painted face of the *puri-puri* doctor responded to the amazement of the scene.

Across the clearing Chan Lo gripped Otto Yahr's wrist, his long nails almost drawing blood. They knew that something had gone awry and that the stocky little American had turned the tables.

Shorty hung on, fighting the poison that threatened to burn out his vitals, and the victory was coming. He knew it. New screams ranted out as nerve-weary witch doctors sensed that they were seeing a miracle. Shorty gulped, wriggled again, and then as the crowd roared and knew that *M'dunu* had failed, he jerked and threw up the full dose of *M'dunu*, across the thwart and right at the feet of the *puri-puri* doctor who leaped as though a viper had struck.

Barum Jim's antidote had saved Shorty—and the two British Foreign Service men.

For an instant, a hush clapped down on the throng. Shorty grinned and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Garbled war cries went up again, and the Punans exchanged smirks of derision. The Dusans, stupefied by the sight and realizing that the power of *M'dunu* had been overcome for once, staggered and steadied themselves with their spears.

"*Salamat—Salamat—Salamat!* (It shall be)" screamed the *puri-puri* doctors. "He who has resisted the powers of *M'dunu* shall now test his linings on

the breath of the gods that rest in the Valley of Moaning Giants."

They were jerked out of the proa and guided up the path toward the watch-fire platform that overlooked the path through the misty swamp. Shorty staggered as though he had received a stiff blow in the stomach. His brain reeled, and he stumbled on through the gibbering ranks of Dusans. But, with it all, he sensed a new tone—the hum of a Hurricane engine.

Could it be Red, Cy, Bev Bates or Bill Barnes? Or was it the tortured twist of a mind that had experienced all the terrors of Hades, giving off false hopes?

X—CHEATING CHEETAHS

THE CRUDE raft that Bill had been laced to early that afternoon floated away placidly at first and then for some unknown reason increased its speed. He floated on under wide overhanging branches of great fern trees that were festooned together tightly by long strips of rattan. Gay flowers appeared among the leaves, and had his position been less dangerous Bill might have enjoyed the jungle spectacle.

Half an hour of floating took him around an easy bend and into a new grouping of vegetation. Here the trees were stunted and black like skeletons as the result of a drought the year before which had pinched all life from them. But their gaunt bony branches were garlanded with strange creepers—creepers more deadly than any poisonous vine known to Europeans or Americans. These creepers were the famous snake darters which hung in strange glinting S shapes.

Bill lay back, his rawhide bonds breaking into his wrists, and stared up at them, his eyes ablaze with fear. Now and then one of these darters would drop, venomous and glinting, into the

water or upon the muddy banks of the river. Bill let out a deep sigh of relief when the current cleared him and sent him well out to the middle of the river.

The country was changing now. The growth along the banks became less ponderous, and as the minutes passed by the trees took on the aspect of the stunted hodgepodge of a country garden. Here and there great clusters of lilac-orchids blossomed out of the dense curtain of green. Then there were the rich orange heads of the Pohon biyou flower, a strange fan-shaped affair, that swayed back and forth in the breeze. Another hour passed in this manner, with Bill fretting and fuming. Once he thought he could hear an airplane motor and lay back quietly to get a better adjustment of his hearing, but the waters lapping against the logs of his death barge were too close to his ears. The sound would not come through, but Bill knew that something was happening down the river and that in all probability they had repaired the double props of the *Scarlet Stormer* and were flying away.

"It would be just like those eggs to come along just now and get a little gunnery practice on this floating target," he stormed. "But how the devil am I going to get off this thing?"

The country beyond the banks had taken on a new picture now. The land was broad and open. Short stubby grass and reeds marked the fringes of the water's edge, and with this new landscape, seen from the uncomfortable position in which he had been laced, came a new sensation. Bill lay back and tried to place the strange vibrations and light sounds that continued to tingle against his eardrums.

"What the deuce is that?" he asked himself.

All around him the water was being churned up in a tiny tempest.

He listened and tried to peer over the

slimy edges of the raft, but could see nothing except the unusual disturbance of the water.

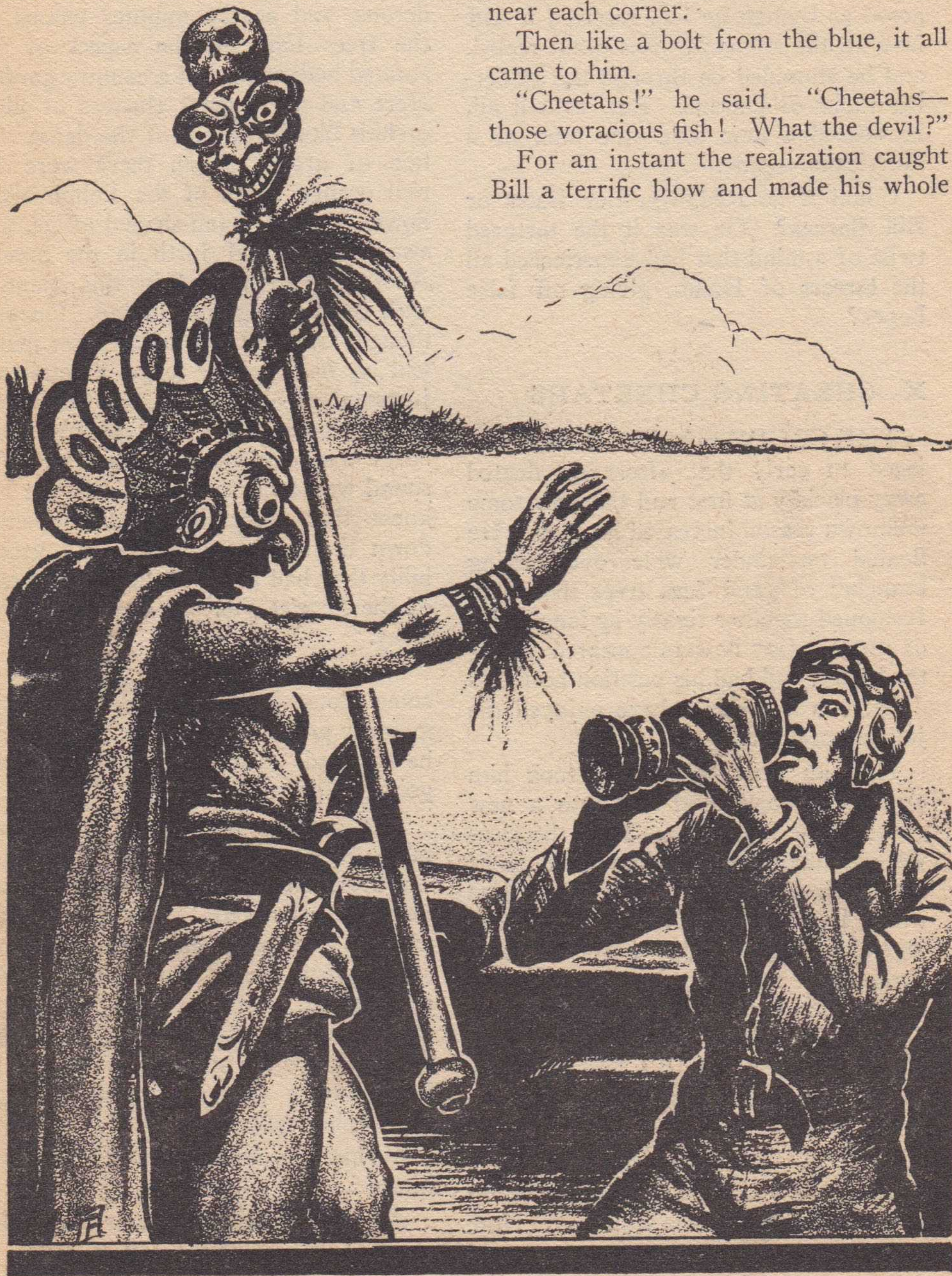
"Something under the raft—somewhere," he mused, trying to explain it. "Feels like fish of some kind."

The disturbance continued for several minutes more, and Bill tried again to solve the mystery. As the raft floated on, the surging waters took on new activity, and then he noticed that the greater disturbances were taking place near each corner.

Then like a bolt from the blue, it all came to him.

"Cheetahs!" he said. "Cheetahs—those voracious fish! What the devil?"

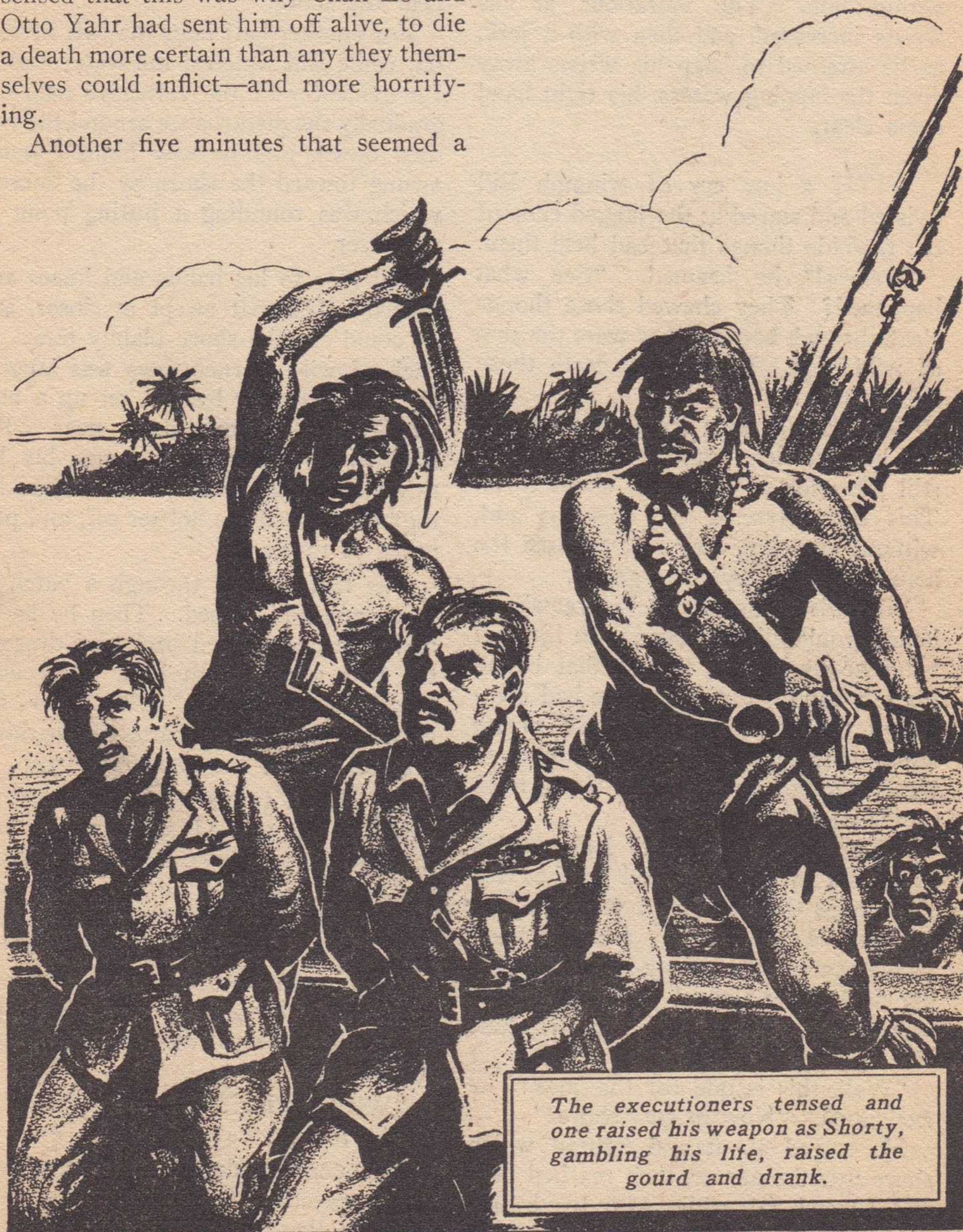
For an instant the realization caught Bill a terrific blow and made his whole



frame recoil. These fish, hardly six inches long, had the reputation of being one of the most ferocious of any known species of the finny tribe. They attacked, in swarms, any living thing, and Bill laced to that loosely built raft sensed that this was why Chan Lo and Otto Yahr had sent him off alive, to die a death more certain than any they themselves could inflict—and more horrifying.

Another five minutes that seemed a

year passed, and the disturbance at each corner increased. The water now took on the bubbling seething of a cauldron. How soon would they find their way through the cracks in the logs and get to his flesh?



The executioners tensed and one raised his weapon as Shorty, gambling his life, raised the gourd and drank.

Bill groaned. "They're getting up toward my hands!"

New vibrations like those in a nickel electric shocker began to trickle into his wrists. Bill frowned and began to think hard. Then suddenly a new hope sprang within him. The vibrations at his wrists increased, and then with a jerk, as he strained to keep his wrists away from the lapping waters, his right hand came clear.

WITH a low cry of triumph Bill twisted and stared at the jagged ends of the rawhide thongs that had held them.

"Cripes!" he beamed. "See what happened? They chewed those thongs clean through because they were the skin of wild pigs. Wow, what teeth those babies have!"

The strips of hide from the wild pigs had been crudely tanned, and there was still the odor of live flesh about them. This had attracted the cheetahs and, without knowing, they had released the man they were trying to get at.

Bill twisted as far as his remaining bonds would allow. Then with his free hand he untied the thongs that bound his left hand. But before he had completed the untying of the stiff greasy knots these, too, came away, chewed clean through by the razor-sharp teeth of the cheetahs.

"Golly, what a break!" Bill gurgled as he sat up gingerly and reached for the thongs that held his feet. In a few minutes he was entirely free, kneeling in the center of the tipsy raft, and staring down at the shoal of cheetahs that was attacking the strips of rawhide Bill tossed overboard.

"Well, this is one for the book!" he exclaimed. "Now to get ashore!"

He stared about and figured which shore was the nearer, then reached over and started to paddle with his hands. He soon got a shock for that effort. A swarm of cheetahs leaped at him, and he drew his hand out, pin-pointed with

blood where their twin snout teeth had sunk in, ravenous for blood and flesh.

"That won't do," he observed, wiping his hand off with a handkerchief. "Have to let things take their course and take a chance on swimming in when we drift near the shore."

For another half hour the raft drifted on, while Bill watched the water closely for evidences of the voracious fish, but gradually the disturbance around the raft died down, and he saw himself being swung toward the shore by the current which was rounding a jutting point in the river.

Bill rose to his hands and knees and waited. The raft swept in closer, and he could see the shore plainly now. A pack of wild Borneo dogs was lapping at the water near by and set up a mad yapping as the raft drew near. Bill instinctively reached for a gun, but his thigh holster was empty. He unbuckled the belt, slipped the holster off, and prepared to throw it.

The raft slushed through a patch of reeds and Bill leaped. Then he had a new idea and turned back and dragged the raft ashore with him. The dogs yapped and circled. Bill threw the holster, and they scattered, barking, frightened into the low underbrush.

He strode toward them, picking up rocks as he walked and hurled them into the dense foliage with loud bellows that were calculated to drive the dogs into the jungle. The rocks were hurled with vigor and precision, and they crashed into the dense undergrowth with the crackling of splintered branches and loud swishes through the heavy leaves.

"What the hell?" a voice growled out of the foliage.

Bill stood stock-still for several seconds, speechless. There was a decided twang to that voice that seemed familiar. Puzzled, Bill edged forward and crept up to a matted wall composed of weedy

creepers and parasitical climbers and peered through.

There on the other side of the point, drawn up on a stretch of sandy beach stood a Snorter, and sitting on the pontoons were two men who were peering into the dense undergrowth. On the sides of the Snorter were painted the markings B. B. 5.

"Red!" roared Bill.

"Bill!" answered Red Gleason. "Where the—— Gosh, Bill, how did you get here?"

But there was no answer. With a low cry, Bill tore through the matted vegetation and rammed his hand forward with a choking sob.

"I was never so glad to see any one in all my life," Bill groaned.

XI—THE MISSING RACER

THE TWO American adventurers gripped their right hands and placed their lefts on each other's shoulders and pressed. Only men who have faced death together and been through a long program of defeats and victories can realize what uselessness there is in mere words and what the language of the eyes can tell. For nearly a minute they stood thus and then pushed each other sheepishly away as though afraid they were letting their emotions get the better of them.

Then Bill stared past Red's shoulder and spotted the other man who continued to sit as though nothing had happened. He was a tall, lean individual with a hatchet face which, had it been shaved, would have been strikingly good-looking. He wore battered field boots, ragged riding breeches of what had once been smart material. His throat was bare and brown. His head was covered with a matted thatch of creamy yellow hair. He smoked a handmade cheroot manufactured from some dried leaves with which he was evidently familiar.

"And who is this?" asked Bill, walking toward the Snorter.

"You'll never guess," Red returned. "It's none other than our missing friend Don Batten, the Australian pilot, who was supposed to turn up for the race."

"Batten?" asked Bill. "What the devil? Where have you been?"

"I'm right glad to know you, Barnes." The Australian unwound his length and stood up, offering a long, lean hand. "They tell me you put it over, good! Congrats!"

"Thanks!" Bill smiled, taking the long and steel-sinewed hand. "We managed it, somehow. A lot of luck, but we managed. Sorry we were not racing you. But where have you been? Do you know? I had a brush with your ship this morning."

"The chink still have it?" Batten asked with a wry smile.

"Yes. Chan Lo and Otto Yahr plunked down on me while I was on my way toward Rejang."

Then Bill gave them a brief outline of the fight and his resultant escape with the aid of the voracious cheetahs. Batten and Red listened intently.

"You see," the Aussie explained, "I was on my way across from Victoria to Singapore—on my way to the old country, you know—when somewhere over the Borneo coast, well outside of Kuching, three Dutch Fokkers came down on me and forced me to land. This chink, Chan Lo, came aboard from somewhere and took off with me laced up in the back compartment."

"Where did they take you?"

"Not quite sure; but they landed on a river in the Dusan country and the chink cove took me off and stuck me in a boob jug that seemed to be cut out of the side of a cliff which ran down to the water."

"How long were you there?"

"Long enough to find out that unless some one puts the copper on that dive, some one is going to be wiped off—and

a lot of Britishers are gonner come a gutzer."

Bill looked at Red, puzzled by this strange Australian slang.

"He means," explained Gleason, "that he found a neat hide-out for a gang of gun runners, but he's not sure where it is now, but he'd know it if he ever saw it again. He's been floundering through these jungles for several days. I spotted him this morning giving me the high sign with a pocket mirror. I came down, landed on the river, and wrenched a pontoon strut. We worked like mad together and straightened the socket and she's all set to go again."

"Where?" asked Bill.

"Well, I was on my way out to this joint, the Valley of Moaning Giants. I saw that chap Woolsey at Sandakan this noon, a short time after you had left. He told me about the resident commissioner, or whatever they call 'em. They told me you'd gone out there, and I expected to find you. Where's the rest of the gang?"

"I don't know where Cy Hawkins is. Bev Bates has gone back to New York. I intercepted him by radio from the Philippines, to go back to get the rest of the gang and rush them down here. We're in for a job of work, as the British put it. But it's Shorty I am worrying about. He must be around somewhere. They have his Snorter as well as my *Scarlet Stormer* now. What with those ships, Batten's job, and these mysterious Fokkers, they must have a young air force by now. We'll have to get every machine available."

"Everybody coming? You must have made some dough, Bill," Red beamed.

"Some—but not enough. We'll need all we can get, but I took a chance on getting a break out of this mess after I had a long talk with Admiral Tyler at Iloilo. We've got to make good, this time Red!"

"Whew!" breezed Gleason. "You have bitten off quite a chunk. But we

can't sit here all day gabbing. We've got to do something and darned quick. What do you say, Batten?"

The long Australian sat down again and relaxed. He blew a puff of pale blue smoke and stared into the wilderness that had shielded them.

"You cockies don't seem to get the idea at all," he said at last in his strange bush drawl. "I can tell you where this man Shorty, as you call him, might be. I saw him shoot down a British Foreign Service ship, at least I saw one of these Snorters marked B. B. 2 nail a Spartan and bring it down. It's quite a way from here—if we try the Irish Tandems——"

"What?" gulped Bill.

"I mean, if we try walking, as I did to get here," went on the Aussie. "If you say this bloke Shorty was lifted, he probably had nothing to do with the shooting, but there were two men in the ship."

"I get it," Bill snapped. "They had Shorty in the back seat. That means he's tied up somewhere with these British Foreign Service lads, the whole crowd of them—used to lure me down. Now they're sitting back, waiting for the rest of them. I wonder where Cy Hawkins is. He's supposed to be down here, too."

Batten laughed. "This is woolly," he went on. "Chaps in Snorters all over Borneo, but no one knows where they are. But there's one thing I'm afraid of: There's something queer going on up there in the Dusan country. I know these blighters. They're boiling for some sort of a blood ceremony, and it wouldn't be past Chan Lo and that chippie, Otto Yahr, to stir 'em up to get rid of your men. They could offer them for torture in return for help."

"You know that cache of rifles in that booby jug they had me in—until I crashed out during a flare-up they had over a burial—has all the earmarks of a spot of trouble. I believe, now that I have heard your story, that these Dusans

are all tied up with Chan Lo and Yahr. The quicker we get up there and get those chaps out, the better for every one. I don't trust 'em. They have several nasty ways of putting a bloke away."

Bill sat pondering on it all, staring out at the Snorter.

"Fine!" he said at last. "What can we do?"

"Give 'em some of their own stuff," snapped Red. "Look here, this is my idea."

And for half an hour they sat and planned a daring coup. Each had his own views, but gradually they began to agree, and Batten, who was more familiar with the vegetation in that section, went out and started to collect weeds, roots, and colored clay. When he came back they built a fire and began boiling various leaves and stalks and concocting a rare assortment of brilliant bubbling liquids.

By nightfall they were ready. The Snorter was started up, and Bill took the control pit while Red rode the wing and Batten made himself comfortable in the back seat.

"Now, remember," warned Bill. "It's neck or nothing now. We've got to get those ships and those men out of there."

"Leave it to us," replied the others.

XII—DEVILS IN THE SKY

THE THREE white men stumbling up through the line of Dusans and Punans were carrying on through sheer nerve alone. They ran fingers under their collars and struggled for breath. Everything had happened so suddenly that they were not certain that they were not experiencing a mad nightmare.

Perspiration trickled down their foreheads and across the backs of their hands. They blinked at the watch-fires that blazed on every side. They cringed at the yowling, flailing mobs of paint-streaked warriors. They cowered under the flashing steel of parangs and spears, but

they staggered on, not knowing why or where.

They were men who had been snatched from the brink of the grave, and what lay ahead did not matter. They sensed that a gruesome end had only been delayed, for no man ever foiled the acid fangs of the Valley of Moaning Giants.

They were herded together and shoved along again while the *puri-puri* doctors and priests tried to satisfy the ravings of the fighting men. Never before had they seen the might of *M'dunu* overthrown, and they were blaming their headmen.

"They must cross the valley," the Dusan chiefs continued to wail in high clacky voices. "They are bewitchers. They have now cast a spell on the god of *M'dunu*. They must prove their innocence by treading the sacred path across Moaning Valley."

The warriors listened, but their eyes betrayed their belief. Something told them that the might of Laki Saleh had been questioned. The Punans spoke in low tones and smirked over the greatness of the Dusan gods.

Otto Yahr sensed all this from the shadows, and when Chan Lo's back was turned he slipped away toward the sacred causeway that led to the altar, over which none but the chief might pass. Then he, too, caught the hum of a Hurricane motor, and he darted into the night.

SHORTY, still gulping and fighting for breath, huddled near Sir Melville and Crispin. "I'm wise to this," he gasped.

"What do you mean?" the ruddy Englishman asked.

"Find 'em in several places in the world—these poison valleys. Caused by decayed vegetation. A chemical change takes place when the stuff rots and a poison gas is formed which lies in the valley. As soon as you try to walk

through it, you breathe the stuff in, and it finishes you off."

"Cheerful!" agreed Sir Melville.

"Can we hold our breath that long?" asked Crispin.

"We probably could, but they no doubt have some gag to beat that. Hello, here they come!"

From the circle of consulting *puri-puri* doctors came the high chief. In his arms he cradled three gruesome objects. The white men stared and caught the drawn outlines of human heads. Shorty knew they were cooked.

"You men of the great white stone villages," began the high chief, "have overcome the potion of *M'dunu*, and we are much astonished. To you who have accomplished this great feat we offer the chance to take the sacrificial pig across to the Temple of Death."

"We would rather dispense with the honor. Your gods are not the white man's gods," Sir Melville snorted.

"You will do as we ask, if you expect your liberty," the high chief ranted back, grim and defiant.

"Let's have it." Shorty grinned. "What's the idea?"

"You will each carry a head, taken from our Bajū foemen. Then you will carry the sacrificial pig to the altar and present it to Laki Saleh who will offer it to the toh-gods. Then you may return, and you will be allowed to return to your stone kampongs. Is that clear?"

"Do you get it?" whispered Shorty. "We can't carry that damn thing all that way, struggling and squealing, without taking a breath. That's the gag."

They stood quiet while the fighting men closed in again to watch this strange ritual. The sound of the Hurricane motor had died out, but in its place had come a low, pitiful moaning sound. Only the leaves of the trees moved. The Punans and Dusans stood stock-still, as if entranced. The sound increased in tone and power until it swept across the valley like a troop of phan-

toms, invisible but crying out to be released.

The three white men exchanged glances and listened. Behind them came the low squeals of a netted pig which was being brought into the gleam of the watch-fire. Then before another move could be made, the thunderous clangor of an airplane motor battered their eardrums.

"I KNEW IT! I knew it!" screamed Shorty. "They wouldn't let us take this."

Sir Melville started and stared at Shorty, amazed. Crispin crouched like a tiger and waited. The Dusans let out a loud scream that tore at the eardrums of the white men. Then out of the blackness beyond the Temple of Death screeched a black, low-wing monoplane.

"A Snorter!" bellowed Shorty.

It came on, screaming and throwing flame. Then, as it slashed across the bowl of Moaning Valley, something—two somethings—appeared dangling from the forward struts of the pontoons. Two screeching, ranting figures, with horrible faces and brilliantly decorated garb, swung by one hand from the pontoon strut.

They had garish countenances, lined in with white around the eyes, and bloody scarlet gashes for mouths. Their limbs were fringed with highly colored feathers that were tied about their knees and ankles. But it was their breathtaking screams that did the damage.

They came on and swept over the amazed group that stood on the watch-fire platform. Then something hit the ground near Shorty who darted for it. Everything happened so quickly after that, no one knew who had made the first move or why.

The Dusans and Punans fell back, covering their eyes. Out of the darkness little Barum Jim leaped and shouted something at Crispin. Shorty fell on the bundle and ripped it open. It was

a pair of coveralls and inside it were four automatics. He tossed one to each of the two Foreign Service men and screamed.

The Dusans had turned as a man to watch the strange ship and the two devils that hung from the pontoon struts. Shorty let drive at a big native who started for him with a parang.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Warriors in war paint turned, saw three fighting chiefs go down, and they started forward once more, but that screeching machine came down on them again. This time bullets spattered into their ranks from above, and screeching Dusans went down in heaps and struggled to crawl away into the darkness.

"This way!" little Barum Jim was bellowing. "This way, tuan!"

Shorty turned and caught the little Dyak and darted after him. Sir Melville was having the time of his life potting Dusans who were running around in circles.

"Come on!" yelled Shorty.

Crispin rushed up and grabbed his chief by the arm and dragged him out of the gleam of the watch-fire.

"This way," begged the little Dyak again. "I have the ships."

He led the way through a tangle of vines and stumpy trees until they came to a path that appeared to lead around Moaning Valley. They trotted on after him leaving a madhouse of fighting men who were now scrambling madly about the clearing, seeking the white men.

Above, the Snorter was again sweeping the clearing with gunfire while the two devils, who had now crawled back to a safer position on the pontoons, continued to screech down at them. The Dusans and their allies the Punans scattered for their proas, charging headlong into the water where they had once hoped to see the wrath of *M'dunu* displayed.

But Bill Barnes and his men were fighting them with weapons much more

effective than any man-made lead-thrower. They had used the power of fear, instilled by grotesque make-up and the old stand-by, surprise.

Down a steep declivity the three white men clambered after the loyal little Dyak. Ahead and below they could see the waters of a river they had not known was there. But at the same time they caught the telltale thunder of another engine, and they halted a second and listened.

"Damn!" snorted Shorty. "That's a Diesel, or I don't know my engines. Can that be Bill's *Scarlet Stormer*?"

It was, but it was being flown by Otto Yahr, though Shorty could not know that. On they stumbled and came out on a clearing where a Snorter and a Spartan bobbed on the waves left by the thundering *Scarlet Stormer*.

XIII—THE GANG COLLECTS

SHOTS RANG out from all sides, but they managed to get to the ships, Crispin into the Spartan and Shorty to his beloved B. B. 2. Snorter.

"Get away to Sandakan, somehow!" Shorty yelled. "We'll see you there in a short time. Beat it, I'll cover you. Come on, Jim, you act as my gunner. Get in there, you piano-legged devil!"

More shots rang out from the cliff path above them and the slugs slashed into the water near by. They clambered aboard and jerked on the motors. Above them a battle was taking place that made Shorty's eyes pop out. The Barnes *Scarlet Stormer* was attacking the other Snorter and there was nothing he could do until his Hurricane motor warmed up a little.

He sat and watched a few minutes and saw Sir Melville clambering up into the cabin of the Spartan. Behind him Barum Jim had broken out a high-speed Browning and was pouring lead into the *Scarlet Stormer* as it slashed around after the Snorter. He was help-

less until that thermometer needle climbed a trifle.

The Spartan chugged away and sought a clear take-off in the center of the river. With a blinking good-bye with his navigation lights, Crispin raced away into the night and went into the sky. It was no place for a slow cabin ship, and the R. A. F. man had done the wisest thing.

At last Shorty saw that he could take a chance, and he, too, moved out for a take-off under a flurry of lead from above. The Dusans were trying to stop him now, but Barum Jim was answering the fire like a regular.

Then as Shorty looked up for the last time he gulped with amazement, for the tide had turned completely. Above him now were two Snorters and they were ganging up on the speedy *Scarlet Stormer* from all angles, and the Diesel-powered job was seen diving to clear and, under a battering fire from the two black monoplanes, raced away under full power.

With a low cry of joy, Shorty shot away, climbed madly, and fought the stick to get upstairs with his pals. As they swept past him once, he saw one of the masqueraded men on the pontoon clamber up and tumble into the rear cockpit while the other lay flat on the wing-root and held on with the leading edge and a guy wire. Then in triumph they swept in together and formed their habitual V.

On the side of one, gleaming in the glare of the exhaust flare, Shorty read "B. B. 3."—on the other "B. B. 5."

"WOW!" gloated Shorty, stirring his stick in glee. "Here we are! All together again! There's Cy Hawkins' ship, though where he came from, the Lord only knows. Then there's Red's crafty craft, so he must be in the play somewhere. Golly those guys, whoever they were, certainly had all the earmarks of some *hantu* ghosts the Dusans cackle

about. I'll bet my last buck, Bill was in that—somewhere."

There was no time to tune in the radio or ram on the earphone helmet, so Shorty did not attempt to get in touch with the other ships.

Then there was a new item of interest to attend to. Up ahead they could see the telltale streaks of tracers again, and they knew something was in the wind. Shorty rammed his throttle forward and rushed to the front, signaling madly with his arms.

The man flying the Snorter marked B. B. 5. nodded and moved his hand forward as if to say: "You lead. You seem to know what it is all about."

Shorty went ahead, and the two others sat behind his wing tips in the old fighting formation. On they thundered with the steely blue waters of the South China Sea on their left and the mysterious foothills of the Ular Bulu Mountains frowning up from their right.

"Looks as if the Spartan got into a jam again," Shorty mused. "They seem to be spilling plenty of lead. Let's go, gang!"

They raced on and gradually tore into the fray, which to Shorty's surprise was being staged by the Spartan, mainly by a sputtering gun mounted on a cabin window, and a sleek, dart-winged monoplane with Australian markings on it:

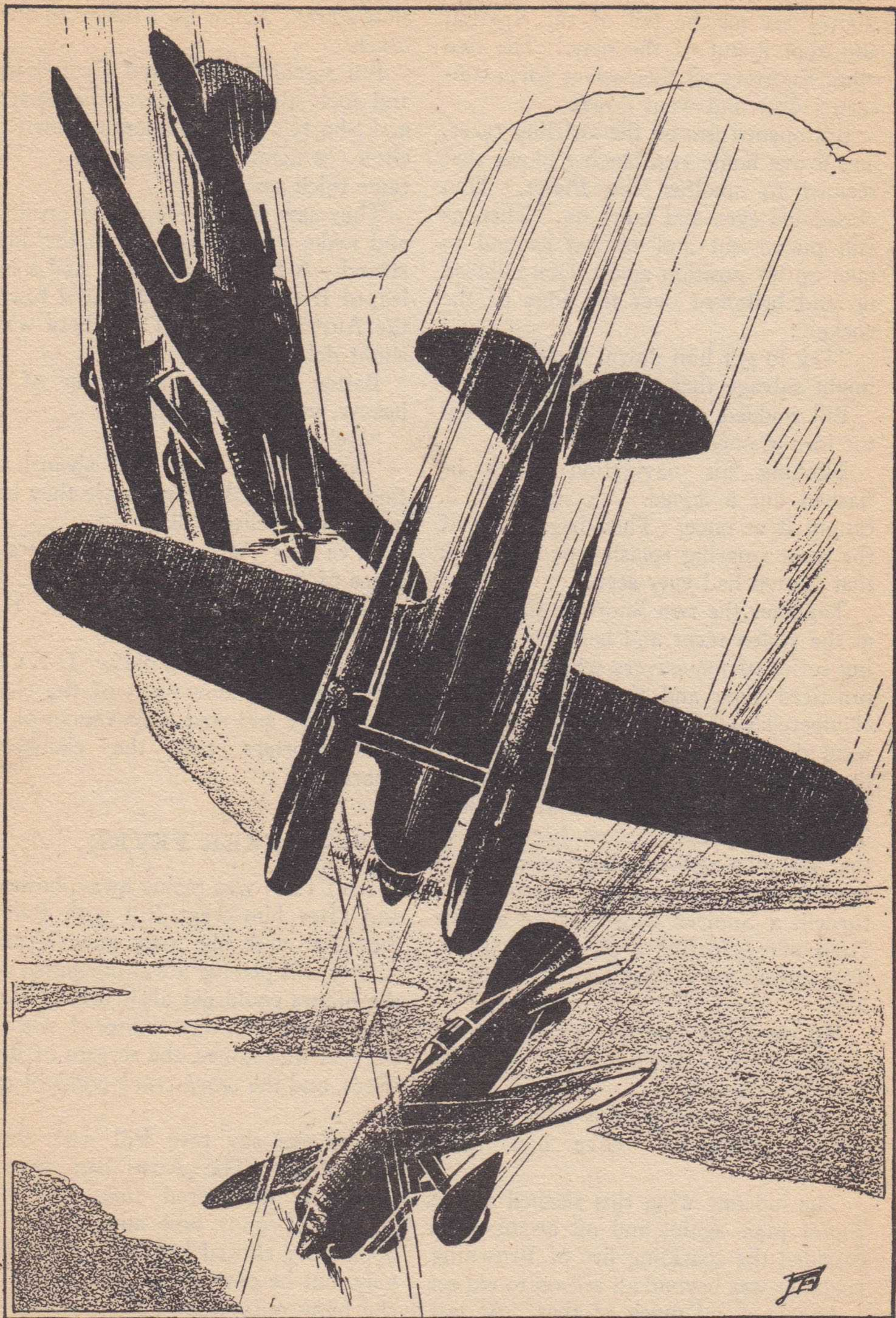
(VM-RM) The Batten Bullet!

This was a new one on Shorty, and he circled wildly for a second or two; then he saw one of the other Snorters go pell-mell into the fray with its front guns spewing lemon-colored death.

"What the devil?" Shorty exclaimed.

But in another Snorter, one of the men dressed in a grotesque costume hung to a wing wire and swallowed hard. His own beautiful ship was being fired on by the man piloting the ship he was now riding. It was a tough situation for Don Batten, but he was a good soldier and gritted his teeth—and hoped.

Around and around they went.



Down came the two Snorters in a terrifying maneuver that poured streams of fire directly in front of the racing ship.

Shorty sat on the tail of the Spartan and kept it out of the play. The two other Snorters set themselves for a concerted dive and went down.

Bill opened fire on the swirling racer, and drove home two lancing blows that seemed to smother the *Bullet*. Don closed his eyes and hung on. Then as Bill pulled out and fanned around to take up his position again, Don climbed up and bellowed over the edge of the cockpit:

"Try to get him down, Barnes! We might salvage that cheddar-cutter yet!"

Bill nodded and grinned. He liked the idea at once.

Blinking his navigation lights he flashed out a signal. Cy in B. B. 3. caught it at once. Then began one of the most amazing splashes of air attack that Batten had ever seen.

Together the two Snorters slashed in at the stolen racer and began a terrifying series of maneuvers which they had practiced time and time again. They clambered well over the *Bullet* and then went down, one ship slightly ahead of the other. Their guns chattered madly, but no bullets were directed at the ship. They were poured across her nose so that the pilot saw nothing but converging fire into which to fly. Then, as he turned, a Snorter wing slashed at him from one side like a gigantic war ax. The instant he turned another came at him.

Up went the Snorters again and set themselves for another effort. But the first was enough.

"He's chuckin' it, the mug aleck!" Batten bellowed. "Give him some more!"

The hideous wing tips slashed at the *Bullet* pilot again, and all around him crackled the sparkling fire of Browning lead. It was beyond all reason to expect a man to stand much of that. At last he drew up, and two forked arms were seen above the cockpit. They settled down again, and the *Bullet* went into a

slow spiral. Below lay a length of silver beach.

Bill signaled again, and Cy fell back and took his tail. Above, the Spartan and Shorty's ship hummed in a swirling circle, watching developments. They came thick and fast.

They saw the *Batten Bullet* go down and make a good landing on the silver strand. A Snorter followed, and a man leaped from the wing and raced toward the Australian ship. Then there was a slight delay.

Batten was on the stirrup of his beauty, yelling his head off.

"He's gone!"

"Never mind him. Get aboard and find out where those guns are they have mounted!" yelled Bill.

"I've got 'em, British Vickers—a brace of 'em!" Batten yelled back.

"Well, come on, get off! Holy mackerel! Look upstairs!"

A formation of Fokker D-XVII's were streaking down out of the cloud-flecked sky and spat their venom on the two Snorters and the clambering Spartan!

XIV—FOKKER FEVER

BATTEN was racing away, however, and after him went Bill with Red on the alert with the rear gun. Upstairs Shorty was playing a waiting game, until the others could get aloft and help out. The tropic sky was shattered with the thunder of engines, the scream of flying wires, and the *crack-crack-crack* of gunfire.

Into the sky tore Bill with Batten after him. The Australian frowned when he discovered that the added weight of guns and ammo cans had apparently slowed his ship up considerably, but he gave the Rapier plenty and she hung onto Bill's tail. Cy had seen what was happening and was now standing full on his tail with both front guns spitting in maddening jerks. Fire

streaked across the sky weaving weird patterns.

Now the Fokkers charged in two three-ship V's and poured their wrath on Shorty. The Spartan curled in and played close to the board. Crispin, an old war pilot, knew that the safest place was smack in the middle of trouble like this.

Shorty raged across the sky and split up one three-ship formation by charging through them like a madman. Barum Jim completed the job by blasting the tail off the leader, and the silver-and-scarlet Fokker went over on its back and fought to right itself on clean rigging. Nothing doing! The heavy motor snarled and ripped its way into the lead, and the whole mess somehow jumbled into a ball of silver, flame, and dural. There was a loud explosion, and it went to pieces in mid-air.

Cy came into the play now and bashed his lead at a Fokker that was taking a wild long shot across the mêlée into the Spartan. Sir Melville, game to the core, answered the fire, and while the Fokker guy tried to concentrate on this game little cabin job, Cy blanketed it with Browning brew that knocked it silly. It jerked up into a mad sprawling zoom, hung there for several seconds, clawing at the sky with its wheels, and then fell back with a dismal wail into a reverse tail spin. Cy gave her another dose to make certain, and she went down, flinging away spare parts and wing sections.

Four to go!

Into the fray came Batten, riding his wings for the first time in weeks and glorying in it. Bill watched him closely and saw a fighter of a new type. Batten took on two Fokkers with daring and dispatch. He feinted at one and danced before it as though drawing its fire. Then, with a quick move, he suddenly shot out over on one wing tip, and his guns blazed with astonishing swiftness. A Fokker that had been trying to get at him while he engaged the former

D-XVII took a double-burst full in the breastplate and sagged ominously.

"Wow!" gloated Bill. "Here's a baby worth looking at!"

With a lightning swerve and a dizzy whip-stall, Batten was charging suddenly at another that had been dead behind him. Again those guns flamed, and another Fokker, caught napping, suffered a side-swiping blow that took out a set of struts. Batten charged in and ran into a tumbling ball of fire—green and red fire.

Some one had fired a signal rocket, and the three remaining Fokkers swept into a fighting V and shot away toward the sea.

The danger of the rocket had put Batten off for an instant, and he was swept out of the play. He came back well behind the Spartan and stayed there while Bill led Cy and Shorty out after the retreating Fokkers.

"There's no use trying to get them," Bill said to Red in the back seat. "These babies have a hide-out that has me groggy. See! There they go, down to that Blue Funnel line ship. No use trying to get them. That vessel is itchy with antiaircraft guns. You watch!"

They shot after the Fokkers who went down like winged darts. Then came the usual smoke screen that enveloped them, and it was useless to try to break through in formation, so Bill led them wide and watched.

Before they could get anywhere near the surface vessel, the three Fokkers had disappeared. Guns rang out below, and shells battered the sky all around them.

"What the devil happened there?" Red growled through his helmet tube.

"Just the same as before. They get onto that ship—somehow. And there isn't a chance to do anything about it."

"Yes. Let's barge off and pick up the rest before we run into something else phony. Cripes! What a night! I want a bath—and damn quick. I feel

like something tossed out of a Halloween party."

"I hate to tell you what you look like." Bill laughed. It was the first time he had laughed in days.

THEY re-formed somewhere over Balinsan, and Bill tried the two-way radio set and talked to Shorty and Cy.

"We'll go back to Sandakan," he explained carefully. "Have to land at the Lubuk field a short distance outside. Stay back with the Spartan. Nice work, boys!"

"What you guys a-talking about?" demanded Cy, cutting in.

"You're jamming the ether, you lonesome cowboy, you," Bill blurted back. "That was Red and Don Batten, the Australian, we picked up down there. Nice little party, eh? How did you like the costumes, Shorty?"

"If they had been in full dress for a West Point parade, they couldn't have looked better to me." Shorty laughed. "Anybody got a toothbrush? I can still taste that Dusan cocktail they fed me."

"Ah shore would like to get the drift of what you mavericks are clacking about," Cy broke in again.

"Where's the *Scarlet Stormer*?" demanded Shorty.

"That's what I would like to know. A chap by the name of Otto Yahr has it at present. Ever hear of him?"

"That parboiled skunk!" Shorty rasped back. "He's the guy who nailed me in Bangkok and brought me down here."

"What does a mere hand have to do to get in on this confab?" demanded Cy, crashing through again.

"Wait till we get in, we'll give it to you with illustrations," Bill replied. "Sign off and stick to your knitting. You got enough juice to make it?"

They all checked and answered O. K. Then with the little Spartan in the lead they all eased into position and roared on toward Sandakan.

TWO long weary hours later they dropped down on the Lubuk field and rolled the ships to a cab-rank line and crawled out, to greet one another in the flesh and batter the early-morning air with their torrent of questions.

Sir Melville herded them together in the shadow of the Spartan and passed out hot coffee that Lieutenant Woolsey had kept steaming for them.

"Whew! This certainly tastes like manna from heaven!" exclaimed Shorty. "After that dose of Dusan dew, anything would go down like nectar!"

Crispin reached out and dragged Barum Jim into the fold. "What the devil was that you gave him?" he demanded of the little Dyak.

"Please, Tuan Crispin," Barum Jim replied smiling, "it was nothing but an old Dyak potion to fight the fangs of enemy poison."

"I know, but what was it? That's a dose we should all know about if we are going to have this sort of thing again."

"It was nothing but plain vinegar in which was mixed powdered pumice," Barum Jim explained.

"Good Lord, yes!" Sir Melville exclaimed. "I remember that now. It's a marvelous antidote! You see, he took the vinegar from that egg sauce they served us and got the pumice by rubbing two pieces of volcanic stone together. There's lots of it in that section. It is all volcanic country up there. A number of tribes in Borneo know of it."

"Well, whatever it was, it certainly worked." Shorty grinned. "But for a few minutes I thought I was gonner lose my belt buckle."

"Will you please tell me what you Injuns are gabbin' about?" demanded Cy for the tenth time. "Ah'd shore like to get in on the conversation."

"There's too many things to talk about first that mean something," growled Bill. "That can wait."

"What, for instance?" asked Shorty,

ramming his nose into another mug of coffee, one arm draped over Barum Jim's shoulder.

"Well, for one thing," Bill explained, "we've got a job on our hands. You saw those Fokkers to-night? Well, no one knows who owns them or where they came from. But they are a real menace, as Sir Melville here will explain later. This is not simply a matter for the British Foreign Service, or even the British Empire. It involves the whole United States Pacific Fleet, as you will see later on, when we get somewhere quiet and outline our plans."

"This is a long way to come to do something for Uncle Sam," Red Gleason interposed.

"This is nothing. Right now Bev Bates and Sandy are gathering the old gang and most likely are heading down this way with the six transport fighters, three more Snorters, and a new ship that has been built for six weeks. I have just paid a small installment on it from the prize money of the air race. Bev Bates is flying that, and Sandy, of course, is handling a new Eaglet carried inside," Bill went on to explain.

"Swell!" Cy beamed. "You mean to say that Scotty MacCloskey, Bev Bates, Sandy, and all the rest of the gang will be down here?"

"Every man jack of them," Bill assured him. "But that's not enough, unless we have a lot of luck. If things have gone as I planned, they should be on the way out of 'Frisco by now and heading down the coast of Siberia toward Japan. With any luck in weather they should be here within four days.

"Their route includes Yokohama, Formosa, and the Philippines. Admiral Tyler in Iloilo has arranged for landing permits, but we must make sure they get across from the Philippines. That's the hitch, so far. There's those Fokkers and Blue Funnel liners to watch out for.

I've arranged that the minute they leave Iloilo we are to get the tip and go out to meet them.

"In the meantime, we can put in a lot of work fixing up these planes and going over a plan. All of us have a lot to talk about, and Sir Melville will no doubt be glad to work with us."

"I most certainly will," Sir Melville agreed. "That gun-running business has me completely mystified. They have them stacked away somewhere in that area."

"Well, I saw 'em," broke in Batten, who was frowning across at his beloved *Bullet*. Then in a new tone he went on again: "You know, there was something queer about that craft of mine. I wondered why she was so slow, and when I got in I discovered that the tail-adjustment wheel had been set to make her nose heavy. I'll change that the next time we get in action."

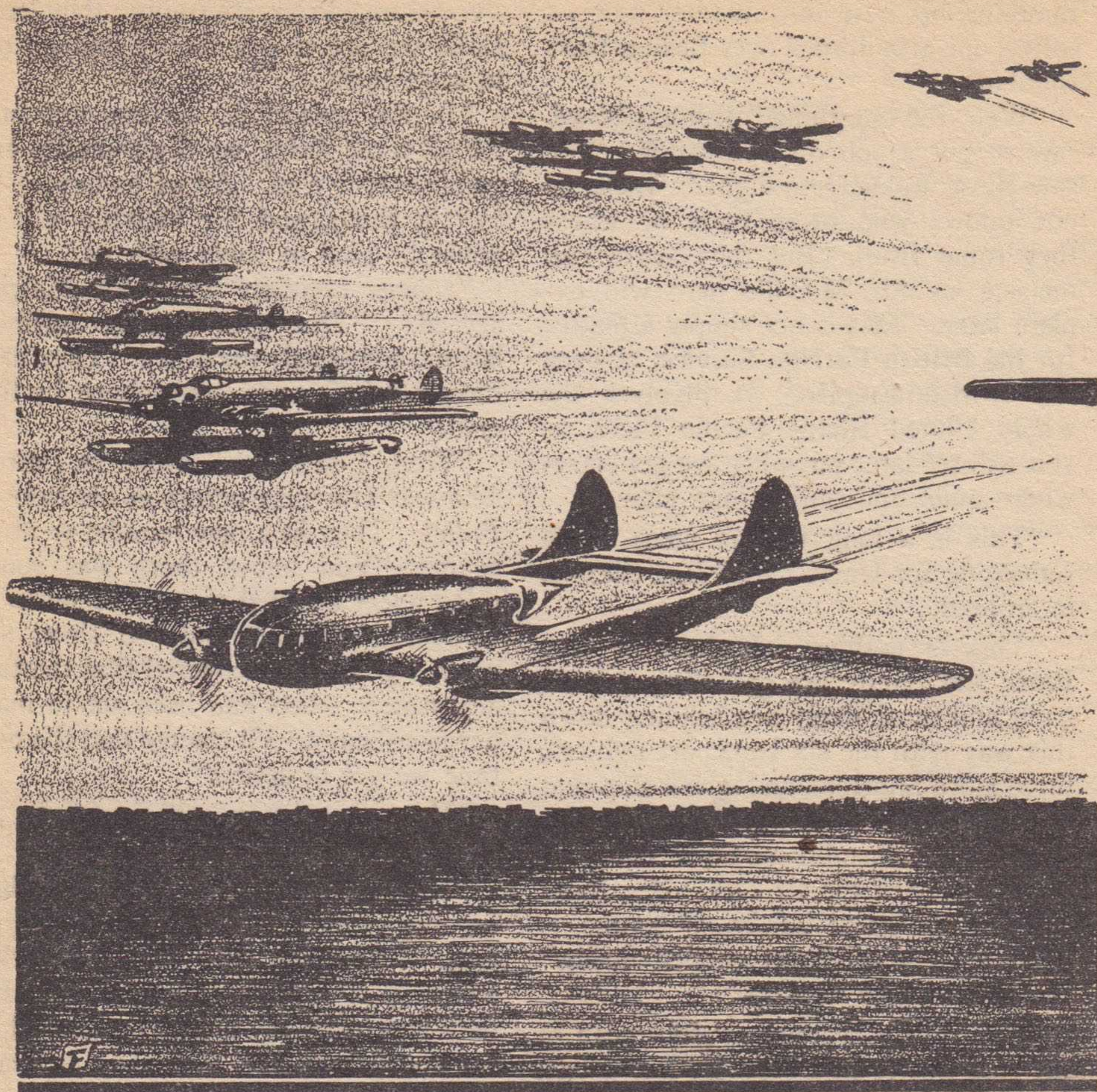
"You saw the guns?" broke in Sir Melville.

"Righto!" Batten went on, remembering the general trend of the conversation. "You see they had me corked away in a natural-prison affair after they had taken my ship. I was tied up for some time, and then they suddenly became rather lax, and I was left untied one night.

"I made the most of it and escaped through a series of chambers cut out of rock and came out in a large room where these rifles and machine guns were stacked. I took one, but could find no ammunition, so chucked it and beat it through another series of chambers and at last came out on a ledge overlooking a river. I clambered down and got into the water and started to swim."

"Don't you know where the place was?" Sir Melville broke in.

"No. You see it was night, and after swimming for a time I waded ashore, made myself a raft and started out again. I came to a Y in the river and



Led by that flying battleship, the mighty air fleet roared out from San Francisco.

took what to me was the left-hand branch and appeared to be moving northeast."

"I'll bet that natural cave you speak of was part of the rock they have that crazy Temple of Death built on," put in Shorty. "You know the joint where they carve up the sacred pigs."

"You see, sir," explained Don, addressing Sir Melville, "I do not know where I started out from. They had me tied up in the back compartment, blindfolded and gagged. I have no idea where we went to, but we flew, for

nearly an hour, as they took me somewhere near Kuching, and that might tie up with the time flown."

Sir Melville rubbed his chin. "Well, we can't get anywhere standing here, and we're all tired. I suggest that we put these machines away in the hangar and have Barum Jim collect a guard and take care of them while we go into Sandakan and await instructions. I must report to London on all this."

"But wait a minute," Don Batten said, frowning. "I want to look at that bus of mine again. That tail-adjust-

ment wheel has me guessing. Come on, Barnes."

They walked over while a crew of Dyak mechanics began to pull in the Snorters and the Spartan. The bucket seat was pulled forward showing the inside of the rear compartment.

"I knew it!" stormed the Australian. "That wasn't like that when I got out. Do you know, Barnes," he said quietly. "That damned chink was in the back all the time. *He* set that tail wheel so that I would not notice that she was tail-heavy. The dirty lug!"

"Judas!" gasped Bill. "Then he probably heard every word I said about the transports and Snorters that are on their way here. This *has* cooked it! If that guy got away, anything can happen."

They cried out an alarm, and a thorough search was made of the field, but there was no trace of Chan Lo.

XV—THE BEST LAID PLANS

BILL SLEPT little that night worrying about the crafty Chan Lo. He admitted that it took nerve to pull a move like that, but he sensed now that he was fighting a grim outfit. What would be their next move? How strong were they with the loss of the Snorters and the *Bullet*? It was true that they still held the *Scarlet Stormer* which in the right hands was worth three of any other craft—except the one that was on its way out in the hands of Bev Bates. But eventually he dropped off to sleep, and like the trained athlete he was, recuperated fast with but a few hours' rest.

He was up bright and early the next morning, but no brighter and no earlier than Sir Melville who was up and about in new neat crisp linen and a clean-shaven chin.

"Ah, Barnes!" he greeted warmly. "Have a nice doss? Look smart, anyway. You youngsters come back fast. I used

to in the old days—in China. By the way, was your father in the Boxer business? I knew a Major Barnes out there."

"He was, sir." Bill smiled. "I am convinced now that you are the same English officer he spoke of so highly. We must get together when we have more time, and renew these friendships."

"Ah right, my boy. Business first, especially these days," the district commissioner replied. He liked this Barnes chap for his businesslike manner and the old tie with his father made him all the more acceptable. "Let's have a talk before breakfast. Most of the others are still abed, and one can't blame them."

They sauntered out to a back yard of the Foreign Service headquarters and found a spot beneath an ironwood tree.

"You met Admiral Tyson, I understand?" Sir Melville asked as an opener.

"I did, sir. He sent me on to you. That's how I ran into all that mess last night—well, what with one thing or another."

"Um—yes. Did he mention anything about the Singapore situation?"

"He outlined it fully, and explained the situation the United States faces in the matter."

"Splendid! It saves a lot of wearying explanation at this end. Your men—they are to be trusted?"

"Absolutely!"

"Again splendid, for of course you, too, now realize what it all involves?"

"I do, sir," answered Bill. "But I am certain we can handle this situation. You saw them in action last night. We made only one mistake—and that hardly ours. Poor Batten, he was so glad to get his ship back, he forgot to make a thorough search, and this Chan Lo stayed aboard."

"Um—but hardly his fault considering that those Fokker devils came down almost at the same minute. We must be generous."

"Generous! Why, I'm delighted to have him, sir. I'm counting on him a lot in this next move. He's a fine mechanic, a splendid pilot, and a rare fighting man. We're all glad to have him. We can use every good man we have."

"Well, you can have Crispin and Woolsey."

"Fine! We'll make a gunner of Woolsey and Crispin can fly one of the transports."

Then Bill took time to explain his fleet, and the commissioner was amazed at the details of the ships that would be available.

"But you'll need them, Barnes," Sir Melville warned. "Do not take this thing too lightly. We are facing a rare mob. You see this chap Chan Lo is a deposed Chinese war lord who itches to get back and take up where old Genghis Khan left off. He has the backing—in brains, at least—of this Eurasian Otto Yahr. He was quite a dabster in the air, I understand, but has a queer twist in his make-up, that is all directed against England. His plan, of course, is to tie in with Chan Lo."

"I know of that angle, sir," Bill replied. "Tell me more of this Borneo twist."

"Yahr is the brains of this gun-running business. He got the Dusans to recall some old tribal differences we had years ago, and now he has them all set for a real uprising. We could do little to stop them as we stand now, for we are nothing more than Colonial police. When Chan Lo heard of this Dusans thing, he induced Yahr to hold it for an attack on Singapore which they hope to establish as a base for their mad plans to capture the Pacific and most of the Asiatic countries."

"Good Lord, sir!" Bill exclaimed. "This gets deeper."

"I was afraid you did not appreciate the seriousness of it all."

"Then, from what I can make out,

they probably plan to use those Blue Funnel line ships, not only as floating bases for the mysterious Fokkers, but for troopships. Can it mean that they intend to ship the Dusans armed with Mauser rifles, across the South China Sea and complete the attack on Singapore once it has been razed by bombs from the air."

The district commissioner cocked his head on one side, just as Admiral Tyson had done, and smiled. "You're a Barnes all right," he said. "You think and act as fast as lightning."

WITHOUT answering, Bill suddenly turned around and stared hard at a bug that was crawling across the hard clay ground. "Look here, sir!" he blurted out. "I've got a plan, and they ought to agree to it."

"Who?"

"Both the British and United States navy."

"Let's have it. I'll bet it's good."

"I want my ships to get here as soon as possible and in as good shape as possible. They are probably crawling down at 200 m.p.h.," he said, "along the coast of Siberia. Wouldn't it be possible for both navies to coöperate—under cover of course?"

"How do you mean?"

"Like this. Suppose they leave a point, say Cape Lopatka off the coast of Kamchatka and fly south to, say, a point off the coast of Japan and land complete on an aircraft carrier? I understand that the new American aircraft carrier is off the Marianas—the *Concord*, I believe it has been named."

"Good Lord!" gasped Sir Melville. "What an idea!"

"Then," Bill went on anxiously, "they could be taken at high speed toward the Philippines and during that rest could tune up the ships, refuel, and make any necessary repairs. Then after twelve or fifteen hours of top speed they could take off at sea and land at, say

Iloilo in the Philippines and refuel again."

"Then what?" Sir Melville asked. "Would you have them make the next hop across from Iloilo to Sandakan?"

"Well," replied Bill, "they could start out from there, all right, but that's where the British navy comes in."

Sir Melville nodded quietly and stared ahead.

Bill went on: "It's roughly six hundred miles from Iloilo to Sandakan, and too many trick islands on the way. My idea is to have them take off from Iloilo and pick up the British aircraft carrier *Courageous* off Cagayan Island which, you recall, is nearly two hundred miles outside of Iloilo and come the rest of the way beneath decks—that is, to a point a few miles outside of Sandakan.

"That will give them another good rest and a chance to fix up any breaks or repairs that could not be completed at the Philippines. They would get here all set, and we could start work on that gun-running layout at once. After that, the business of stopping them from harming the Singapore base would be simple."

"My word!" Sir Melville smiled. "What a brilliant idea! It sounds splendid, and I'm sure that between Admiral Tyler and myself we can arrange it."

"Great!" said Bill, getting up. "Let's go inside and complete the arrangements and have them all ready to radio on to Iloilo and Singapore."

XVI—OF MICE AND MEN

BREAKFAST that morning at the British Foreign Service headquarters was a happy affair, for it gave all a rare opportunity to connect up all the dangling ends of their adventures. Red and Shorty amazed the British members of the group with their colorful arguments and chatter back and forth, although it must be admitted that both "put it on"

a trifle when they saw that their "line" was drawing so much amusement.

"Ah shore would liked to have seen your face when you gobbled that mug of sheep dip," Cy baited Shorty.

"Sheep dip, feller! Say, sheep dip would have tasted like honey and cream after the dose Barum Jim first handed me. I thought he'd been draining the fire extinguishers."

"I wish you could have seen his face, though," Captain Crispin joined in, "just before he got rid of it. There we were, kneeling there, waiting to feel that knife slash through our collars, and there was this blighter doing his best to keep the stuff down."

"Down!" Shorty laughed. "Down! Why, the darn stuff had liquid barbed wire in it, and it was hanging onto my tonsils like the devil. I couldn't either swallow it or let it go."

But then they took time out from their jollity to let Bill give them the story of the race around the world and explain the finish. They listened intently to the details of the fights and the final adventure of attempting to disclose the fact that Cash Gardhouse was ringing in a twin brother and duplicate ships.

"No wonder they fooled me at Tokyo," Red said. "I thought it was all over."

"Well, we owe a lot to Sandy," Bill smiled. "That kid is worth his weight in gold when it comes to a pinch."

"You know," Cy added, grinning at the tablecloth, "Ah somehow kaint wait for that little pie-puncher to get here. Seems as how nawthin' hardly ever goes right, unless he has a horn in on it somewhere."

"Well, he'll be here, and quicker than you guys think," Bill added. "We have outlined a new plan, by which, if it goes through, they'll all be here, bag and baggage, in about three days."

"What! From Frisco?" Shorty asked.

Bill leaned over the table and they

bent their heads toward him while he outlined in a sketchy manner, their plans for bringing them through on the aircraft carriers.

When he was through not a word was spoken in reply. All they could do was to exchange amazed glances and then stare back at Bill.

The members of the British Foreign Service in their crisp whites and ruddy complexions then turned toward Sir Melville at the head of the table. He nodded with a beaming smile as if to say: "Isn't it a splendid idea?"

Red let out a wheeze that sounded like air going out of a toy balloon. Shorty let his lower jaw drop like a trapdoor in an attic. Cy blinked and stared at Don Batten who held a lighted match halfway between the box and the cigarette he held in his mouth.

"And if one of you lets out half a word of it outside of this building," growled Bill, his face taking on a new glint, "I'll batter you to jelly!"

FROM then on they all went to work. Sir Melville was closeted with Bill for more than two hours, drawing up coded messages after each step of their plan was completed. They studied the charts, computed mileages and tankage. Everything was checked and proved.

Captain Crispin was sent on a mysterious errand in a motor launch. He was to return two days later with a cargo of gray-painted crates. Shorty was put in charge of overhauling the three Snorters. Red took care of the guns and checked bomb releases and radio sets. Batten went to work on his own ship, added light bomb racks, repaired a few minor damages, and also took over the work of enlarging the main runway and erecting a new Besseneau hangar.

Bill made plans for the erection of a number of tents to house his gang, for he wanted them right on the job from the minute they landed. Fake signs

were to be erected that suggested the activities of an aerial mapping concern were responsible for the unusual beehive industry.

By late afternoon, all the adventures in Moaning Valley had been forgotten, except that the fact that the emerald-handled knife wielded by Laki Saleh still hung in Shorty Hassfurth's mind.

"You know, Bill," he began, "there's something that would make us forget all our troubles. I mean the dough you're gonner need to carry this thing."

Bill smiled. "There's no use in thinking of a thing like that, Shorty. In the first place we're not in this business to rob dirty tribesmen. Next, you don't even know whether there is such a knife, and if there is, what it's worth."

"I don't know Bill, but when we were all cooped up in that Dusan joint, Sir Melville told me a lot of stuff about those guys. Take it from him, he knows 'em, and he said that the sacrificial knife that Laki guy uses is worth a ton of dough."

"All right. If it is, why haven't Yahr and Chan Lo nailed it?"

"They would if they dare, but they're scared stiff of that joint. There is something queer about the place, and neither Chan Lo nor Otto Yahr will have anything to do with it. They were more scared than we, when they started to pull that crossing of Moaning Valley."

"But if it's that deadly, how does this chief get across?"

"Easy!" replied Shorty. "He crosses over on the high priest's causeway, which carries him above the range of the poisonous vapor. It's a series of stone columns of some kind, and these Dusan guys think they're sacred because they seem to moan. I heard 'em, too. Just before you came down and scared the daylight out of 'em."

Bill frowned. "It couldn't have been a vibration from my engine collecting in that valley, somehow, could it?"

"No. They say it happens regularly,

whether there are planes anywhere near or not. It is queer, but I heard it plainly. Sir Melville claims it is on this that the high chiefs hold this strange spell over everybody. They tell the Dusans that the sound comes from their wailing ancestors, and that they mustn't walk on 'em."

Bill laughed. "Still, these tribes are pretty superstitious and can be handled like babies if you play up to them right," he agreed. "But we'd better forget that emerald-handled knife, Shorty. It might be worth something, and it might not. I don't want to get money by raiding temples or churches, no matter what religion it affects. If we get away with this thing, we may get some financial assistance from the British and United States governments."

"Yeh," returned Shorty doubtfully, "and, on the other hand, they may not even recognize you or admit having ever heard of you. Remember we are in the same class as spies on a job like this. If we get caught or mess it up, they forget all about us to avoid delicate diplomatic relations, as they put it."

"I agree." Bill nodded. "But that's the chance we have to take."

"Some chance! How much are you in for—getting all these ships and paying these guys?"

"About four bucks short of the national debt," answered Bill hollowly.

WHILE all this conversation, however, was going on at the Lubuk field outside of Sandakan, the ether waves were carrying their mysterious messages across the wide expanse of the Pacific.

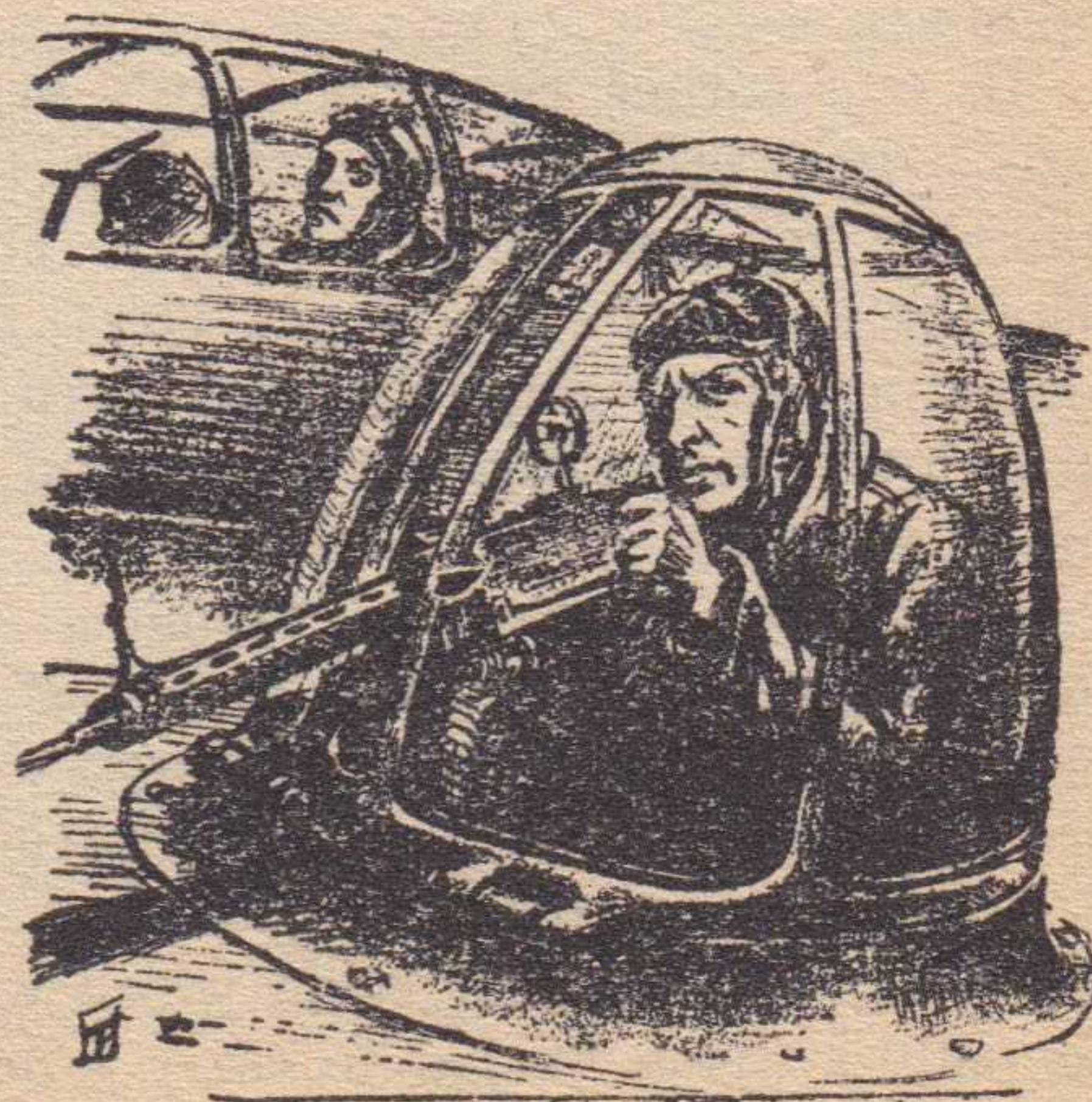
Battleship commanders stared amazed at thin sheets of message paper and consulted their code books. Weary-eyed men in Washington glanced through decoded dispatches and gulped. Flotilla commanders scratched their blue chins and pondered on the strange orders; and two aircraft-carrier skippers bellowed orders into message vents and the thirty-

five-knot speedsters whipped up the foam and took gleaming bones into their teeth as they tore away into the mist.

Out of San Francisco hurtled the Barnes air armada headed by Bev Bates, the battling Bostonian, who made a record run from Lisbon by flying out and catching the Atlantic liner *Europa* off the Azores. He had been picked up in his Snorter and taken aboard, and his ship was placed on one of the postal-plane Heinkel catapults. One thousand miles outside of New York, he took off again from the compressed-air cradle and raced pell-mell for the mainland.

Ahead of him had been delivered messages that rounded up the pilots, mechanics, and planes of the old Barnes troupe. Sandy and "Scotty" MacCloskey took charge of the groundwork while Tony Lamport, working like a Trojan from the Long Island field, had men and machines concentrating on one point on the West coast. Everything had worked like clockwork and presented a sincere tribute to the Barnes system.

Grim transports, outwardly appearing like ordinary commercial planes, but which housed tabloid machine shops, armories, and hidden gun pits, behind the outboard engine nacelles, hurtled on toward the concentration point. Mechanics, gun experts, and five-thousand-hour pilots seeped out of every State



and joined the amazing expeditionary force.

Three Snorters, trim and gleaming in new paint and dope, shoved their Hurricane snouts into the air and tore on. Guns bristled, radios crackled, and men with strange gleams of satisfaction on their well-chiseled countenances rallied for the expedition.

But the one outstanding ship of the lot was Bill Barnes' new *Hellion*. This had been designed on Bill's drafting board weeks before, and the manufacturer, intensely interested in anything that came from the brain of Bill Barnes, had built it, expending thousands of dollars, just for the satisfaction of seeing what it would do. Little did he know that by the time it had been flight-tested, he would get a government order to turn it over to Bev Bates.

Still there it was, a beautiful thing of steel and dural; a fighting craft for an air admiral; two two thousand horse power motors of the opposed cylinder type snuggled into the leading edges of the wings, leaving but a semblance of a bulge where they had been fitted. The cabin was a veritable fighting turret complete with Halgar high-power guns, high-speed Brownings, and two-way radio equipment. One set of guns was mounted to fire directly up through the top of the cockpit, aimed by an ingenious system of mirrors and periscope sights.

In one corner near the pilot's head was a new infra-red-ray-plate lens for piercing fog and smoke screens. This had been one of Bill's pet ideas for defeating enemy ships that had taken to the clouds for safety. It was found to work perfectly for this business.

The radio set had a scrambling arrangement which received a jumble of words, sorted them out, and presented them to the pilot in a readable sequence.

But the most interesting feature of the plane was the rear cabin which was actually a flying hangar to carry a new

high-speed Eaglet for Sandy Sanders. This arrangement provided a release and take-on trapeze which could be raised and lowered at will. The Eaglet, fitted with folding wings, could be lowered and released in twenty seconds. The tiny fighting ship, actually a high-speed interceptor, could fly rings around the average fighting machine, but naturally had a shorter range of action.

This, then, the flag-plane of the Barnes fleet, led the fighting pack out of San Francisco, up the coast toward Vancouver, and then set out for a long jaunt across the Gulf of Alaska, over the Aleutians, and on to Cape Lopatka, where permission had been obtained for a landing on Siberian territory.

"This is the strangest situation I have ever faced," Bev Bates reported to Sandy for the tenth time. "Whatever is in the wind? Barnes must have picked up a gold mine somewhere to take on a fleet like this."

But young Sandy was too busy watching the positions of the nine ships behind him. He was responsible for all reports between the Snorters and transports. Besides, he had a new hobby now. This time it was a noiseless compressed air pistol which hurled slotted slugs with amazing accuracy and power. For the greater part of the trip he had been enjoying himself with odd spots of target practice in a large English penny he had stuck up at the far end of the *Hellion's* cabin. By now he had impudently battered the effigy of King George to a copper nothingness.

"You can talk all you want," he replied at last to Bev. "But whatever it is, you can bet your Back Bay boots we're in for a hot time."

"Ping!" answered the air pistol, as if it knew all about it.

XVII—TREACHERY

"I'D LIKE to know what happened to that yegg, Chan Lo," remarked Don

Batten that night at dinner, a meal served with all the dignity and ceremony of the British officers' mess all over the Empire. "Something tells me that the mug is still hanging around. Ever feel something queer trickling across your shoulder blades?"

There was silence for several minutes, for they all had.

"That's an idea," Sir Melville replied enthusiastically, in spite of the tired lines around his gray-blue eyes. "We ought to shop around a bit to-night and see what's going on in town. I'll have a few of my men show you around later on. There are a few dives we want to check on, anyway."

"I don't like the idea of taking too many away from the hangar out there at the field," protested Bill quietly. "But if you feel that way, Don, it might be a good way to play a hunch. If we can get that Chinaman where we can put our hands on him when we wish, it will make things a lot easier."

"Don't worry!" Sir Melville replied. "I'll see that there are plenty of men on the alert at the field. Barum Jim is in charge of a young tribe of Dyaks, and a Dyak with a new parang is bad medicine. He's like a Gurkha—never satisfied unless he has wetted his blade with blood."

They all laughed and felt that the confidence of the district commissioner placed in the tribesmen was warranted.

"All right," agreed Bill. "We'll all split up later on and give this town a complete look-see. But keep out of trouble, you birds. I'll go along with Batten. I want to have a talk with him as we go."

Shorty looked injured. Cy started to remonstrate, and Red pulled a face as long as a wet week.

"No; you fellows will have to go with some of the Foreign Service men," Bill said. "We want to comb as wide an area as possible. Batten has been here before and knows his way around pretty

well. Every one reports back at midnight on the dot. Can they take guns, commissioner?"

"Well—er, it's not regular, but in the circumstances, I think we can overlook regulations. But keep them out of sight. We don't want to stir up any unnecessary excitement."

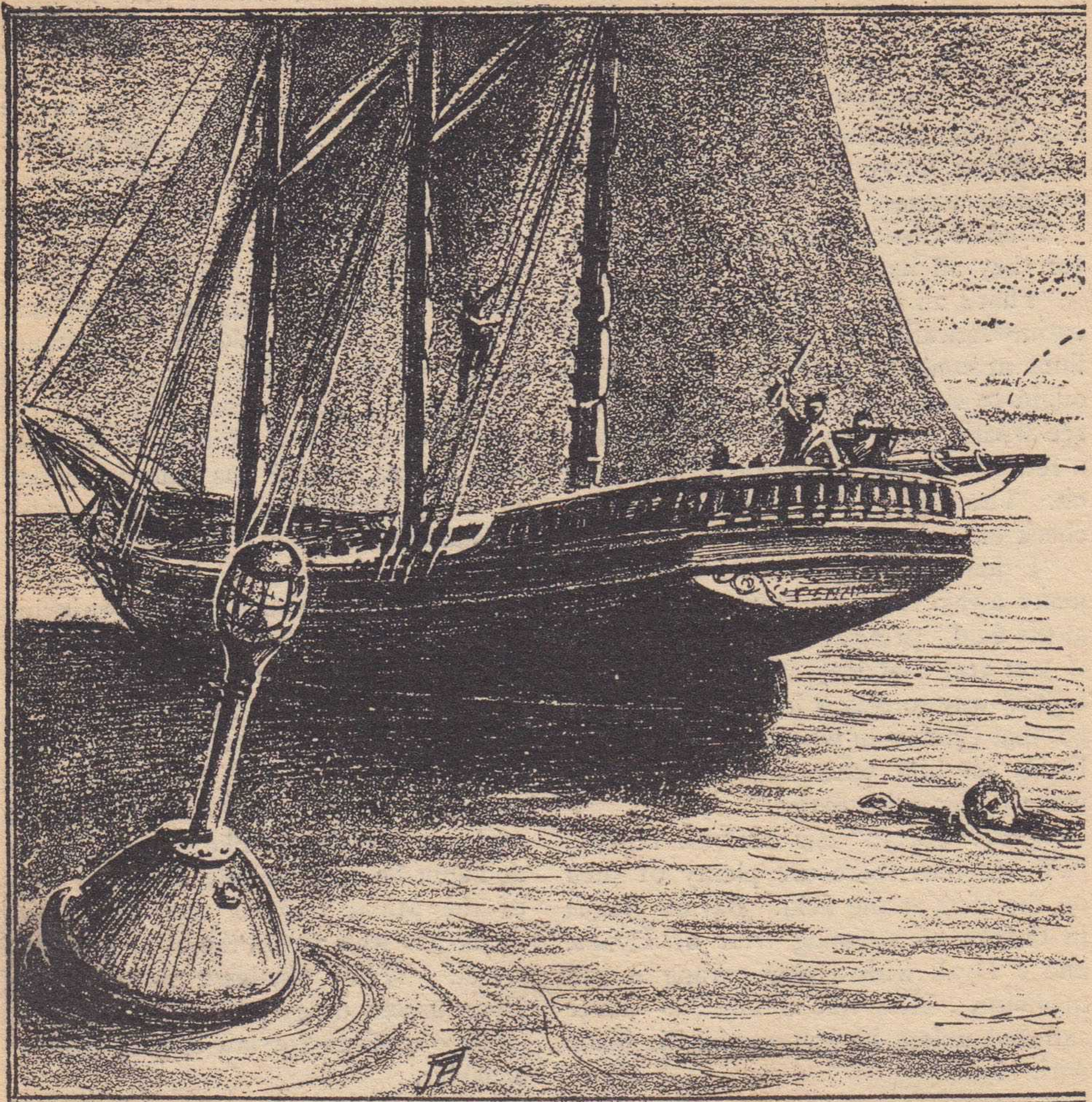
They looked over the map of the town and selected their areas. Bill and Batten decided to take the warehouse district along the water front. It was the most dangerous, but Bill liked the quiet but confident attitude of the tall lean Australian and was more interested in seeing him in action on the ground—presuming, of course, that there would be action.

They sat about smoking and enjoying the district commissioner's choice port and talking over the events of the past few days. Outside, the funereal night began to settle down, and the shacks and shapeless buildings, that had offered such quaint pictures in the sunshine of the morning, now leered like strange ghosts. A gaunt-toothed pagoda, a cheap copy of the Malay temples seen in Burma, seemed to lean across the offal-spattered street. Weird shadows were slapped down across dingy walks and provided strange outlines for law-abiding men to consider.

At last nine o'clock came along and they shuffled away from the table in twos. With a last look at the map and exchanges of glances they started out. Few words were spoken, but they all sensed this new twanging of taut nerves and the strange mystery about Sandakan.

Don and Bill went off after most of the others had left. They slipped out of a side door, clanked across the courtyard, and went through a narrow iron door that was guarded by a B. F. S. private who first challenged and then let them through.

Outside they came upon a narrow alley which, unlike most of the streets of



Sandakan, was neat, clean, and reasonably free from smells. Almost noiselessly they went along, and then with a nod from the tall Australian they suddenly turned and entered a narrower alley that ran through a collection of warehouses and shacks. Here the odor or rotting fish intermingled with the nauseating stench of spices, water nuts, and tropical fruits.

"Just like Fifth Avenue," said Bill jeeringly, stumbling over some rotting copra.

"And as dangerous as the Bund in Shanghai," warned Don.

Queer lights were thrown across the

slippery walk from murky windows and rattan doors that hung askew. Strange sounds came out of the hovels as the men strode on. Dulcet voices of women caught their ears, but they strode on toward the gleaming lights of the water front where a Dutch trader was being loaded under spluttering arc lights.

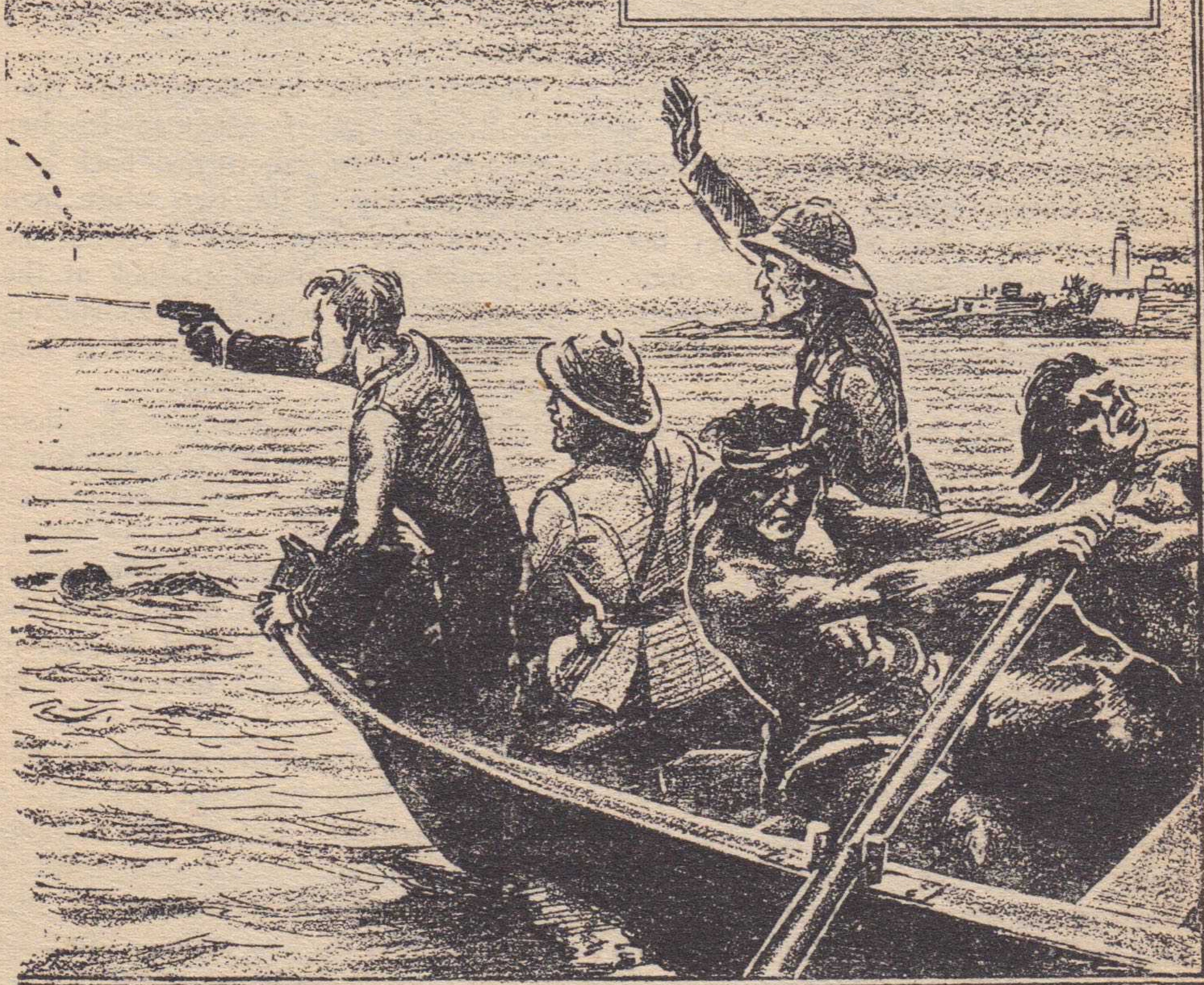
"Listen!" whispered Don. "There's something in the wind."

"A lot of smells," agreed Bill.

"No! Listen!"

They stood stock-still, and at last Bill caught the sound of voices coming from one of the slab-sided shacks. Two men were roaring, and the voice of a

Red replied with his gun, spattering lead into wood and water. But the big three-master was getting under way.



girl was added to the clatter. More hoarse shouts and then a crash of glass.

Bang! A door crashed open and a blob of light appeared, broken by the shadow of a girl who came running out of the rickety, boxlike building.

"Look out, now! Don't fall for anything," Don warned.

But Bill sensed a woman in distress. He was an American, and he could not stand for the abuse of a woman, no matter who she might be. He leaped forward and caught the girl as she stumbled out of the doorway.

"Look out, Bill!" Don muttered. "It might be a booby trap!"

But the girl had clutched at Bill's shoulders and was chattering wildly.

The men saw in an instant that she was a mixed breed of some type—lithe and beautiful in a tropical way. She wore a brilliant yellow sarong and a short, flowered jacket. That in itself would have been the tip-off to any one familiar with Borneo dress routine.

"Oh, tuan!" the girl breathed toward Bill. Her long olive fingers flicked nervously across her neat oiled hair which was touched up with small white flowers which had been woven into the braid.

"What's the matter?" asked Bill.

"Those men—inside there," she said in a voice that had considerable tone in spite of her anguish. "They are beasts! They—they were beating me."

"Watch her, Bill!" warned Batten quickly. "She's—she's—well, she is wearing a jacket."

"What of it?"

"Look here," Don insisted. "She's not an ordinary girl of the streets. She's——"

But before Don could explain further, the girl wheeled quickly and darted into the shadows. They started after her and then turned back toward the door. Immediately from behind came several men who leaped for the two whites.

DON went to his knees with a giant native across his shoulders. He jerked forward quickly, and the man went over his head and struck the steps of the shack with a sickening thud.

"Buzz off!" urged Don, but Bill was struggling with two men in linen suits and a native.

Don tore in and received a clip on the chin for his trouble. He went down to his knees again and Bill laced out with two short hooks. Then, as Don suddenly recoiled like a rattler, Bill went down seeing stars. Don tried to get to him, but they were dragging Bill across the filthy cobblestones.

"Bill! Bill!" Don cried, throwing an uppercut at a native and dropping him on his haunches. "Bill! Your gun!"

But that was as far as he got. Some one stepped out of the light, something swished, and Don knew no more.

The street in Sandakan suddenly became maddeningly quiet again.

The two men were dragged and carried into the shack across the street, through an evil-smelling passageway, and into a low, foul room. There they were tied securely under the direction of the swarthy Oriental in charge. His eyebrows danced as he gloated in his coup, while the battered natives licked

their wounds and added a few more lengths of rattan to the bonds of the captives.

"Beautifully done, Olenadik!" beamed Chan Lo. "For this you shall receive many lengths of silk which will make sarongs that have no equal in the bazaars of Sandakan. Of this I promise."

The girl smiled her thanks and then turned away as if ashamed of her treachery. Then she turned back and glanced quickly at the two white men who lay on the floor. For a second she stared and then turned to look at the Chinaman. He was busy whispering orders to a brave in a short dirty loin cloth.

Quickly she darted across the floor and knelt beside Don and began to touch the livid wound that had been opened above his forehead. From her waistband she drew a clean square of linen, and from a dull-green metal bowl she took some water and bathed the wound until it was clean, and then tied it up neatly.

Chan Lo watched, his eyes mere slits that might have been cut out with a surgeon's scalpel. But he said nothing.

When she had finished, both Bill and Don had regained consciousness and glared around the low room. Chan Lo snarled an oath and spat at them.

"So it's you again!" Don snapped, jerking his head up to add vehemence to his words. "I should have slit your belly before I left, you slimy tonk, you!"

The girl drew back, as Chan Lo drew himself up to charge. But something in the Australian's eyes stopped him, and he spat again. He could not understand the strange feeling of defeatism that swallowed him every time he looked at the Aussie, which no bands of rattan could ease. The girl stood, fascinated, staring at Batten's blazing eyes. Bill caught her glance and tried to make an appeal, but she turned away.

Chan Lo clacked out orders, and the

natives darted about in reply. One of them tugged at a ring in the floor and a trapdoor came up, and with it the undeniable odors of the water. Bill squirmed to get a better look as Chan Lo and the others peered down. They waited a minute, and then they could hear the *flob-flob-flob* of water. Something told them that they were in for it now.

"You lousy swag-man!" roared Don again, relieving his feelings by shouting.

Bill was thinking fast and said nothing. But the situation looked hopeless.

The natives came across the floor and tied gags into the white men's mouths and trussed them up even tighter. Then with a cruel smile, Chan Lo nodded, and the two captives were dragged across the floor and unceremoniously dropped through. There were two resounding smacks, then the noise of splashing water, and Chan Lo kicked the trapdoor back into position.

XVIII—MISSING MEN

THE EYES of the men, when they came back to the B. F. S. headquarters that night told their fears, long before it was known that Bill and Don were missing. Several things had taken place to make them realize that something had happened that night in Sandakan.

Shorty had seen a girl in a bright yellow sarong, who had also noticed them in Lascar Joe's saloon. Crispin had spotted a strange Oriental who was followed by six or seven natives. They had disappeared into a warehouse that jutted over the harbor. Red Gleason had also seen the girl in the yellow sarong hurrying along the Street of the Bloated Faces. She had seen them and hurried across as if to tell them or ask them something, but just as she reached them had suddenly turned away again and hurried back to the other side.

Cy had wandered about with a B. F. S. man and had eventually come to the

water-front section and, with the man in white linen, had seen three ten-paddle proas gliding away into the mist of the night.

But Bill and Don were still missing at one o'clock.

"That girl was just a dive-dame," the B. F. S. lieutenant explained when Red brought up the matter. "You know what they are."

Sir Melville nodded, but somehow felt, as did Red, that perhaps the girl had tried to tell them something, but was afraid.

Shorty was far from satisfied, however. "We ought to go out and get her," he argued. "Who's game to go out again?"

"Those ten-paddle proas," Sir Melville broke in, "they have me puzzled. What the devil were they doing out at that time of night?"

"Come on," urged Shorty. "Let's go out again."

TWO HOURS later, however, they were all back and with no news of any sort. The streets of Sandakan had swallowed Bill and Don up as though—well, as though they had fallen through a trapdoor to disappear entirely.

"This is terrible!" Sir Melville snorted. "Two men go out and fail to return. They must be in the city somewhere. I'll turn every dive and shack upside down, if they are not here by morning."

"It's that girl," Shorty ranted on. "We should have nailed her. I'll bet every nickel I own that she knows all about this mess."

But the B. F. S. men were of the opinion that she was nothing but a Javanese dive-girl.

"She probably spotted you chaps in ordinary clothes and came after you," Woolsey explained. "Then when she saw some of the uniformed men she cleared off."

"She could have seen your white

uniforms long before she could have noticed us," Shorty objected.

Sir Melville was plainly on the fence. He had a lot of respect for the opinions of Shorty and the two other Americans by now, and yet he had to admit that his men knew the moves of the natives much better. He got out the map again, and they all checked the areas they had covered, and it was evident that little had been inspected.

"We might all try again, covering the streets that Barnes and Batten had selected," the district commissioner suggested.

"Let's go!" burst out Shorty.

Then, before one of them could make a move, they heard a dull knock at the front door. They listened again, and once more the old iron knocker clanked down, this time harder. They waited—why, they could not tell, and then they heard the challenge of a sentry, and a shot rang out.

Crispin dived for the door and clattered along the passageway to the front door. Shorty and Red followed. They tore the door open and saw the night sentry, his rifle at the alert, peering down the street.

"What's up?" Crispin demanded.

The guard shouldered his rifle, slapped the stock in salute, and replied: "A girl, sir. Girl in a yellow—yellow dress of some sort. She was knocking at the door when I was approaching from the other end of my post. Ran away and refused to stop. Fired one round into the air, and she disappeared."

"What did I tell you?" stormed Shorty. "She knows what it is all about. Let's go after her!"

"Look here!" said Red, pointing at something stuck in the door.

They turned and saw a piece of paper pinned to the door with a sharp, double-pointed comb. They took it down carefully and went back to the office where they had left Sir Melville. Shorty turned the paper over to the district

commissioner with a hurried explanation. The ruddy Englishman smirked as he read:

"Warning. Two white men taken aboard ship *Copra Queen* in harbor near No. 4 bell buoy. Clear before dawn.
"D. T."

He read it aloud and then watched the faces of the Americans.

"Where can we get a boat?" boomed Red.

"Come on!" Shorty cried, making a snatch at the message.

"Go out and get that girl!" boomed Sir Melville. "This is a decoy!"

"What?" roared Shorty.

"Certainly it is! They want you to go out there looking for them, and they'll get the lot of you—machines and all."

"All right! I'm willing to take that chance, if they have Bill and Don!"

Red and Shorty were up in arms. Cy sat puzzled, unable to decide who was right.

"There's no reason in the world why this girl should tip us off," Sir Melville expostulated. "Can't you see they are playing to get the lot of you?"

"But if Bill and Don are in their hands——" Shorty argued on.

"How do you know?"

"I don't, but if that is the same girl, she certainly knows something about it all."

"All right; I can see how you see it, but we ought to play safe," the D. C. explained. "Let's wait an hour until that patrol comes back. If they have the girl, we'll question her and make her talk. If they do not find her, I'll bow to your judgment and we'll help out in anything you wish to undertake."

"It may be too late then," Shorty moaned.

THE TWO bound men hit the water with a splash and went under, their nostrils sucking in the filthy sea water. They choked and blew out to clear their

lungs which seemed to burst, then, when all seemed lost, strong hands reached for them and drew them over the harsh edges of a boat's thwart.

Silently they moved away through slimy piles and swirling water that was foul with offal and decayed vegetation. Bill was thrown in heavily, and Don was tossed on top of him. The proa moved away like a serpent and threaded its way through the black cavern toward the open river.

In a few minutes it was out in the clear, gliding silently under the power of well-handled paddles and sought the shadows cast by lighters, barges, and oil tankers. It turned toward the river mouth, two more longboats joined it with mere mutterings of recognition, and together they moved on toward the dull shadow of a square-rigged schooner that lay outside the harbor.

Half an hour later Bill and Don were carried up a ladder, their legs were unbound, and they were shuffled along to a rude cabin amidships. As they expected, they were greeted by Chan Lo and Otto Yahr.

Their gags were removed, and Yahr smiled.

"So—this time," he gloated, "the great Beel Barnes has fallen into our net! The rest will be easy."

"What will be easy?" taunted Don, trying to draw him out. "The race is over, and Barnes won it. What are you going to do now?"

"Bah!" Yahr spat. "The few thousand dollars of a prize! That is mere dross compared to what we shall get within a few days."

Bill threw a quick glance at Don, as much as to say "Keep quiet!"

Chan Lo had been baited, however, and he rattled: "You will see—you will see, you Americans and British, you will see Singapore fall first and then your possessions in the Pacific."

"Singapore?" asked Don, as if in ignorance.

"Yes; Singapore, long before you can complete the defenses you have started there. We shall blast them to eternity—and then where will your vaunted protection of the Pacific be? Next we shall take Guam and the Philippines. Hawaii will fall to our guns, and after that you will have nowhere to coal and fuel your fleets. Australia and Alaska will crumble, and then we shall go about planting our armies on the American mainland."

"You would do well, Chan Lo," Yahr reminded him with anger in his voice, "if you would keep our plans to yourself. We must learn not to take too much for granted where these gentlemen are concerned. For my part I shall not rest until they are aboard one of our ships. After that, we shall perhaps have the satisfaction of seeing them suffer while we destroy this great fleet which Mr. Barnes has so kindly sent for."

Chan Lo swallowed his anger and nodded gravely.

Bill and Don stared ahead, their faces impassive and cold. Inwardly they were both at the boiling point.

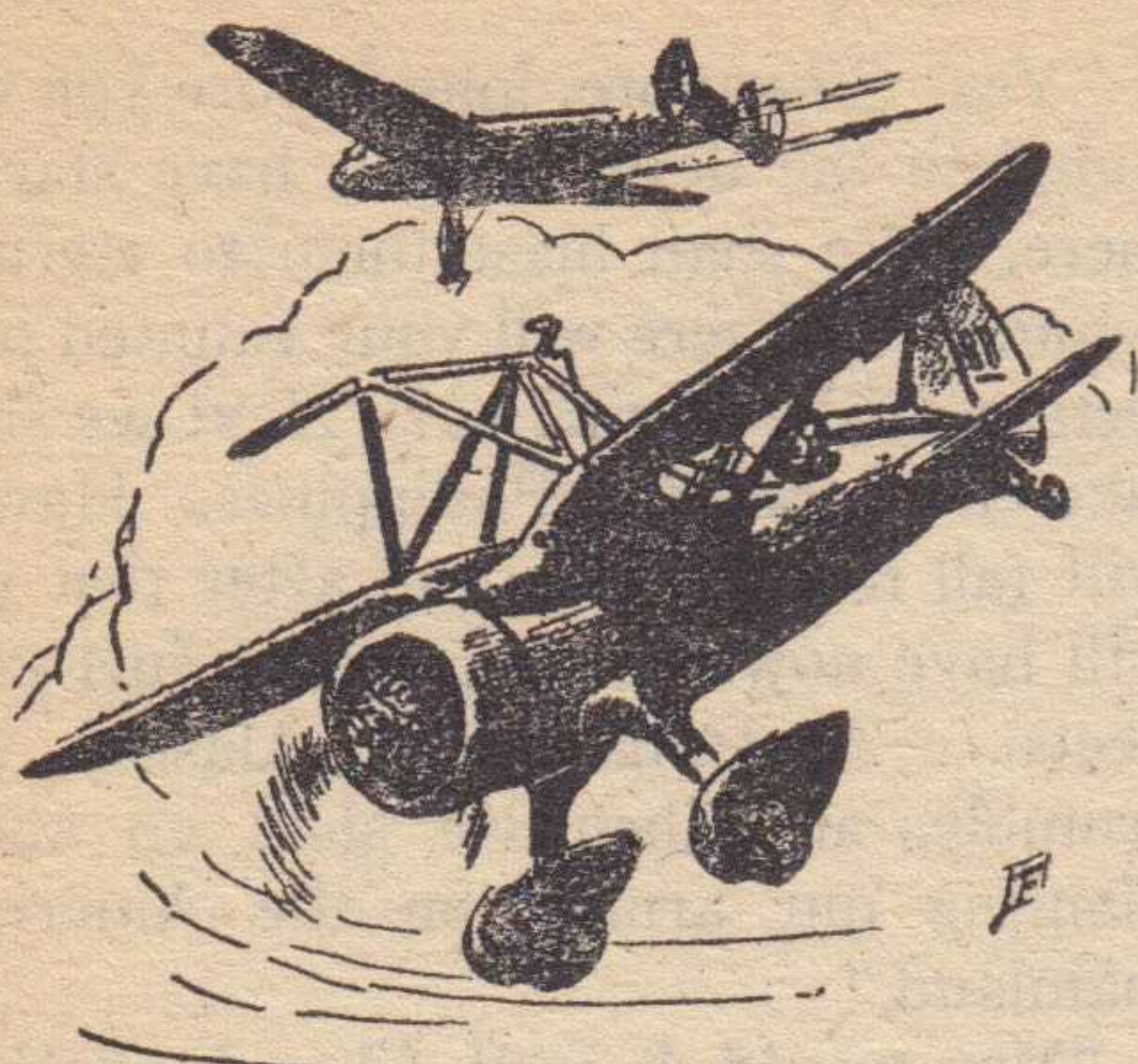
"How soon can we get under way?" the Chinaman asked.

"The minute we get the word from—from Yato that we can approach," Yahr replied. "Meanwhile, we had better put these gentlemen where they can do no harm, eh?"

With a nod the Chinaman clacked an order to some of the lascar seamen who stood by with wicked-looking knives in their belts. They jerked Bill and Don to their feet and hustled them off along a companionway and locked them up in another cabin. A lascar seaman squatted outside the door and fingered his knife with anticipation.

XIX—ABOARD THE LUGGER

THE MEN at the B. F. S. headquarters waited an hour and then the patrol came back—empty-handed.



"Sorry, sir," a young lieutenant said, "but we searched every house in that area and could find no trace of her. The native police, who are acquainted with every one of the girls in Sandakan, claim they have never seen any one of that description."

"Just as I expected," Sir Melville replied. "She was a decoy, and we are probably wise in not paying any further attention to her."

"Well, you can think as you like, sir," Shorty growled. "But I'm going out there to get aboard that boat. Will you lend me a B. F. S. officer to help me gain the deck?"

"Just as you say, Hassfurth," agreed Sir Melville, "but I'm certain you are taking a wild chance. I can't order a man to go on a thing like that, but if any of these men wish to volunteer, I'll allow them to go."

Crispin, who had just returned, and Woolsey got up and began buckling on their belts.

In ten minutes they were all on their way down to the docks where they found a native vinta and rounded up a Dyak crew. Shorty, Red, and Cy joined the two Englishmen in the stern, and they headed down the river.

A strange light was creeping out of the east presaging the coming of the dawn when they rounded the harbor light and swept out toward the No. 4 bell buoy. Crispin took charge, know-

ing the harbor well, and they saw the three-master lying a few chains' lengths from the jangling marker.

Lights blinked, and there was activity about the rigging.

"Hello! They've spotted us. They're off!" Crispin ranted quietly out of the side of his mouth.

"Step on it!" Shorty returned, throwing off his coat. "Bring her up alongside the stern, and I'll slip overboard and try to get aboard while you challenge the watch."

"Righto!" Crispin nodded. "But take care of yourself."

"Leave it to me. If Bill and Don are aboard that boat, we'll get them off."

They raced up to the ship under increased speed and then saw that the vessel was hoisting sail.

"Ahoy!" bellowed Crispin. "Belay there, in the name of the king! Stand by for boarding!"

But there was no answer, and Crispin ordered a new course that would put them quicker under the lip of the stern. Then a gun spat out and a bullet chugged into the water near by.

"Ahoy!" bellowed Crispin again. "Stand by for boarding party."

Again the gun flamed, and something struck the front of the vinta. Red swore, and Cy answered with an automatic. There was a sharp splash, and Shorty went over the side and disappeared. A minute or two later, Cy followed and set his course for the swirling wake left by Shorty.

Crispin swung the vinta back and forth, to unsettle their target.

"In the name of the king!" raged Crispin again. "Stand by, or we'll open fire!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Guns spat again, and a little Dyak went headlong over the side with a scream that grated on their eardrums.

Red replied with his blue-steel gun and lead spattered into wood and water. The big three-master was getting under

way. A winch creaked somewhere, and Red sensed trouble. Cordage creaked, too, and a new sound broke on their ears—the thunder of a Diesel motor.

"Have they an auxiliary?" Red asked.

They stared at the stern, but there was no foam to speak of.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

More guns flamed, and Crispin lost his pith helmet when a bullet went through it and hurled it into the lead-slashed foam.

"Come on!" roared Red. "Take a chance! I'll keep them off the rail!"

Crispin nodded and swerved the boat in sharply toward the slowly moving windjammer. Red's gun sang in snatches as bodies threw their silhouette against the rail. They ran the vinta in close and grabbed at ports with boat-hooks to keep her there.

Then suddenly above them a new uproar arose.

ACROSS the deck crept two dripping figures swinging their guns. Shorty was first, and he darted to the base of the stick and let fly at two half-naked devils who were firing through a hawse block. They fell forward and rolled into the dripping scuppers. Shorty charged on and found a ventilator, while Cy slipped behind a hatch well. Their guns flamed again in two short blue-tongued barks.

"Come on, here's a line!" screamed Shorty, heaving a rope overboard.

Again that winch scream broke through the night air, and the motor which had been lowered in tempo roared out again. Two Dyaks came up the rope like monkeys and slipped over the rail, their gleaming knives flashing in the glint from the muzzles of Red's and Shorty's guns.

Up the deck they padded driving the lascars before them. One of the Dyaks let out a screech and rushed them, his keen blade bringing down a man before he could hurl himself overboard. Out

of somewhere came Cy with more clips of ammunition. They reloaded silently and charged on.

Shorty came to the brass handrail of a companionway and stared down. A lamp swinging in gimbals threw its gleam on a man who crouched near a doorway with a long blade in his hand. Shorty drew back quickly, but not quickly enough. The knife was flipped through the black shadow between himself and the lamp and caught him full in the chest. He let out a scream and went headlong down the companionway.

Across the deck, Dyaks were storming after lascars, their parangs slashing men from their shoulders to their breastbones. They screamed and fell forward like logs and hit with sickening thuds.

More shots and more yells followed.

Crispin came out of the shadows under the shrouds and darted to the companionway, a Webley clutched in his fist. A face came up the companionway steps, and then a blue-steel gun joined the picture. Two shots rang out, but the Webley was first, and a lascar with the top of his head blown off went down and landed across the cursing Shorty.

"Down here! Down here!" Shorty yelled after getting his breath.

Crispin bellowed and charged down, pulling the quivering lascar off the American. They crouched and peered up and down the curving passageway and then stared at each other.

"What's that?" they said together.

"In here!" some one replied quietly.

Crispin looked closer and caught the outline of a cabin door. He tried the brass knob, failed to turn it, and then hurled himself at it like a plunging tackle on defense. The door went in with a creak, and there under a swinging lamp sat Bill Barnes and Don Batten.

"Barnes!" Crispin yelled, darting across the floor, feeling for his clasp knife.

"Bill—Don!" roared the staggering Shorty. "I knew——"

Then he keeled over and bashed his face against the wall as he went down. They soon were on their feet, puzzled over all the noise upstairs.

Crispin led the way, and Bill supported Shorty, while Don Batten, armed with a lascar knife and Shorty's gun, followed on and covered them. Two shots rang out in the passage, and a lot of glass went tinkling all over the cabin.

"The *Scarlet Stormer*!" roared Bill. "I heard the *Scarlet Stormer* out there. Who has the *Scarlet Stormer*?"

"Up this way!" yelled Woolsey, from somewhere in the darkness.

They raced on down the deck and caught the harsh lines of a rigged boom that had been swung overside. They all knew instinctively what had happened, but there was nothing they could do about it now—except hug cover and hope.

The *Scarlet Stormer's* engine opened again, and it was free to taxi away from the schooner which was wallowing in the swell, with only a few square yards of canvas drawn tight. Don, Red, and Cy leaped for the rail on that side and fired at the scarlet ship, but their shots were not rewarded. In answer came a storm of lead from a rear gun mounted somehow to fire out of a port that apparently had been cut in the rear cabin.

"Down!" screamed Bill from the base of the mast.

Lead spanged through the rigging and cut several lines, and a sheet came down enveloping them in its voluminous folds. They struggled to get clear, and by the time they were in covered positions to get a shot at the ship, it was hitting the rollers two hundred yards ahead and taking the air.

"Watch out now!" Bill warned. "They might take a chance and come back."

Up forward Woolsey was rounding

up the lascars, alone and barehanded. His great fists shot out like pistons and bowled the greasy seamen over like tenpins. Their clasp knives were parried cleverly, and his short hooks curled under their guards and they went down in heaps.

At last he had them all rounded up, bruised and bleeding, in a small fo'c's'le cabin where he left two Dyaks to care for their well-being. The glinting parangs, stroked ominously by the lean natives, were sufficient to assure the safety of the lascars.

But Bill had the right idea, and he scrambled about, making sure that every one was well covered.

The *Scarlet Stormer* curled away, shooting for height like a demon. At the stick, Otto Yahr grinned tauntingly into the reflecting dials of the instruments. His cruel mouth above all betrayed his Eurasian instincts, for, as scientists have long since discovered, the true Eurasian is a beautiful animal, but his instincts are inherently cruel and treacherous, and he is hated by both native and white.

Over she came, with Otto Yahr's eyes glued to the sights—the same eyes that had won him distinction as a gunner in the air during the war were even more keen and accurate to-day, for his nerves were under firmer control and his flying even more deadly. Experience, the greatest teacher of friend and foe, had plied her trade well and Otto Yahr's hands stroked his throttle and stick with all the touch of a skilled surgeon.

Bill watched, and his mind raced as fast as the *Scarlet Stormer*. There was more to this than just a fighting ship equipped with guns. The real story was written in a long black tube that snuggled between the depressions that housed the retractable pontoons.

"A torpedo!" gasped Bill.

"We're trapped!" stormed Crispin.

"Like hell!" raged Cy. "Take to the rigging and huddle in the shrouds."

Bill's face beamed at the idea, but they had to act fast.

The *Scarlet Stormer* came at them, spraying lead from the front guns. Bill swore under his breath at the helpless position in which they found themselves. His own *Scarlet Stormer*, which had brought him fame and a small fortune, was now being used to batter him and his men to their doom.

XX—DEATH ON THE DEEP

LEAD splashed at the ship in a terrible two-fanged cone. The Dyaks, unused to action of this kind, lost their heads and went racing about the deck, screaming and calling on their toh-gods. The pitiless muzzles spat and blasted them to their doom. Bill watched from the shelter of a mast stub where he had dragged Shorty and tried to yell advice, but the natives were insane with terror.

Bill threw another glance around and spotted a large lifeboat swinging from a davit. He frowned for an instant and then raced across the deck, snatching up a length of splintered boom that had smashed itself in the mêlée of tangled cordage.

Bracing the boom so that it fouled one side of the dangling boat, he leaped up and slashed the ropes that held one end. Then, with a length of sail line, he threw a knot through a thwart cleat, and before the rest could see what he was doing he slashed the other davit rope and let the boat topple away. As it fell, one side caught the boom end and the boat jerked as it turned over and fell flat on the water—upside down!

"I'll let her float clear," he muttered as the *Scarlet Stormer* above set herself for another dive.

The overturned lifeboat floated away from the side of the schooner, and Bill let all the rope out so that it could get away as far as possible.

Bar-at-a-tat-tat-tat!

Again those guns flamed out and more

screeching Dyaks went down in quivering heaps.

"Come on, Red!" Bill yelled. "Get over the side with Shorty and hide under that boat! You can hold on and keep your heads clear by curling your arms over the seats."

"Good Lord! What an idea!" gulped Crispin, taking a wild shot at the roaring plane. "Go on, Red!"

Gleason took one look around and jerked at Shorty who had been propped up behind a pile of hatch covers. One of the B. F. S. men had plugged the knife wound in his chest and bound him up with yards of bandage and stiffened the lot with lengths of sail canvas ripped from the crumpled sheets.

"Come on, Shorty, boy!" Cy called. "Got to work fast, lad! Them varmints up there are out to run us clean out o' the corral this time."

"Hell with 'em!" defied the helpless Yank. "Let's go!"

They got him to the rail, and together he and Cy slid down the cable and dropped into the water. With the line passing under one arm, the lanky Texan piloted the helpless Shorty across and got him to the boat.

"Go on, next!" ordered Bill, with one eye on the *Scarlet Stormer*. "Move fast, you birds. He won't wait much longer to get rid of that torpedo."

A few lascars came up the companionway with their hands up.

Bill spotted them, and with a gun aimed at them ordered them to throw away their knives and take their own chance. They swarmed over the side, after hurling planking, hatch covers, and an air-chamber raft over.

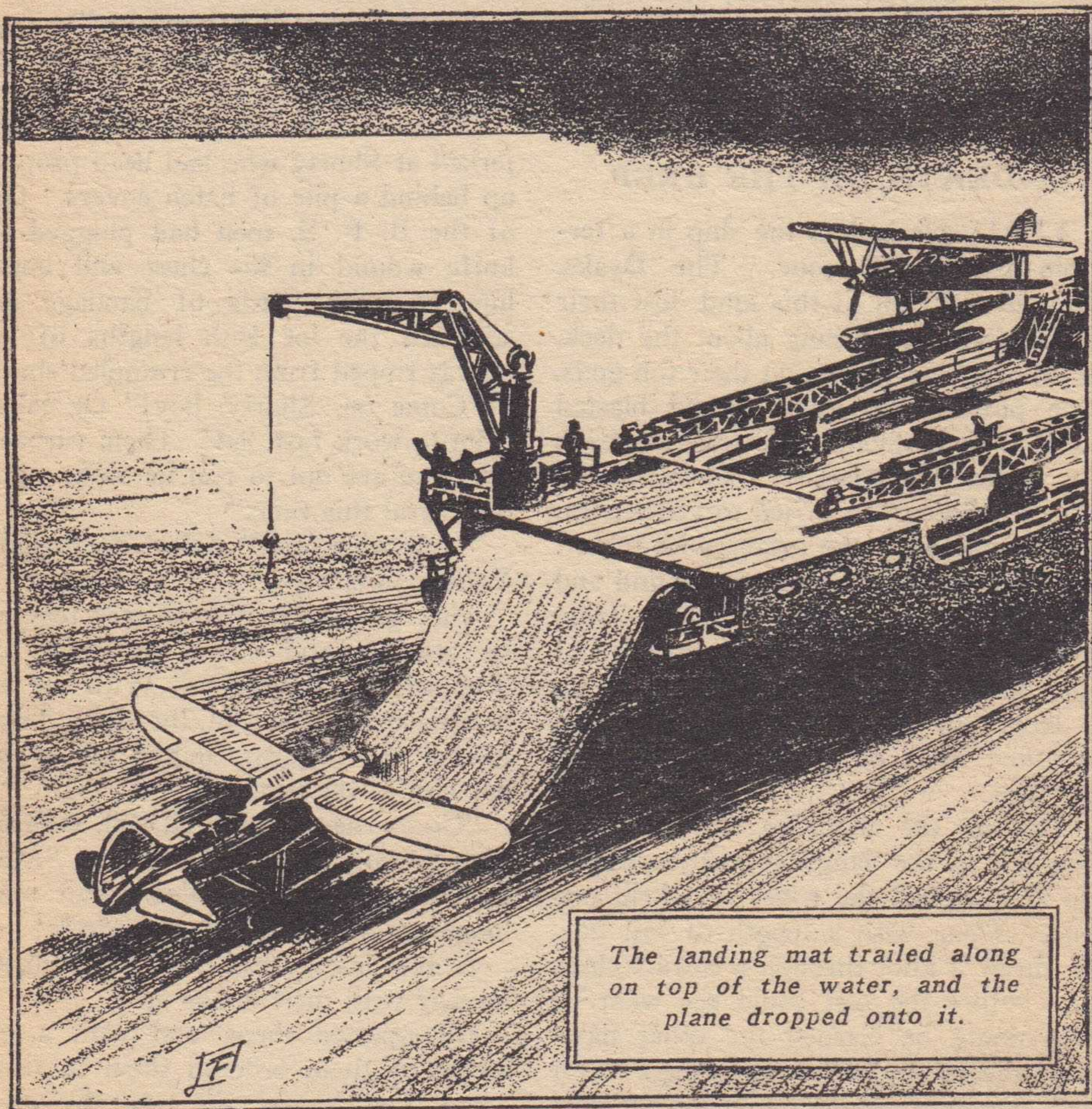
The *Scarlet Stormer* was turning now.

Then a strange thing happened. Out of a companionway, hidden between a low deck house and a mast, came the grotesque figure of a man. He was tall, in spite of his age and bent shoulders. His face was painted scarlet and the eyes framed in broad white circles. His

head was decorated with short peacock feathers and the tanned hide of some water animal. A gaudy sarong, from which hung streamers of monkey fur, was tied with strips of baboon hide. His legs were bare but crudely tattooed and

shouted. "How did the blighter get here?"

"Tuan—mercy!" wailed the old chief holding one hand aloft. "The dogs deserted their bowl now that their bellies are full."



painted. A long knife blade flared beneath the broad band of his belt.

"Holy mackerel!" Bill exclaimed. "Who's that?"

"Tuan, master!" the tall native cried, stumbling across the deck. "Have mercy on an old brave. They have left me to die."

"That's Laki Saleh—the Dusan chief who had us the other day!" Crispin

"Go take a leap for yourself!" snarled Red. "You're no better than the rest of these rats."

But Bill was thinking hard. This man might be the answer to their problem if he still held sway over the Dusans.

THERE was no time for further action, however. The *Scarlet Stormer*.

was coming on at tremendous speed. Her red hull was only a few feet above the water, and Bill knew what that meant.

"Scatter!" he yelled. "They're going to release it!"

There was the thunder of motor and the roar of wings through the air. They saw the long black tube drop. The *Scarlet Stormer's* guns opened with a last chatter, and the big monoplane zoomed, just clearing the swaying sticks.

Bong!

The torpedo hit full amidships, and the schooner was struck in her vitals. There was a thunderous roar of bursting wood and the shredding of canvas. A boom swung around and clipped a mast off at its base as though a knife had slashed through it. Long splinters of flame slashed up through the fractured deck planking and threw cordage and debris in all directions.

Men went hurtling everywhere. Dyaks and lascars were battered together. Two B. F. S. men in dirty white went sky-high and became tangled, grim, shapeless masses among the slashing cables of the rigging. Bill was thrown headlong at the bundle of mainsail aft and hit hard. A few seconds later he came to and staggered about on half a ship. The forward section had swung clear, blazing and crackling amid a storm of smoke, sparks, and the foul stench of burned explosive.

Some one snatched at Bill's arm and dragged him to the rail. It was Crispin, blackened and battered, but game to the last.

"Where's the rest?" Barnes called weakly.

"Red's over the side, making for the boat!" Crispin yelled. "Come on; they're not through yet!"

Bill steadied himself and stared about. Then his eye caught the tottering form of the old Dusan chief who was staggering toward the open end of the severed vessel.

BB-6

"Quick! Get that bird!" Bill called, but he was too late. The befeathered native went over the edge and dropped with a scream into the water.

"Come on!" screamed Crispin. "No time to waste. Got to cut that line to the boat or she'll founder and finish the lot of them."

"Go on!" ordered Bill. "I'll follow you!"

With that he gave the B. F. S. man a shove, and he went over the low rail and hit the water. With a last glance up at the curling *Scarlet Stormer* Bill tore along the wreckage-strewn deck and pitched over the severed end. As he went down he caught a glance of the knifelike gash that had severed the schooner, leaving open the companionways, cabins, holds, and compartments.

Then he hit the water and came out to see the Dusan chief struggling furiously to keep afloat. But he was old and never had to swim before and his end was near.

"Hang on to something!" screamed Bill. "I'll get you out of here."

The old chief, his face even more terrifying now that the water had washed part of his war paint off in splotches, turned his head, let out a new throaty cry for help and went down again. Overhead the *Scarlet Stormer* charged down and sprayed the wreckage with a new torrent of death. The water all around Bill was battered with lead, and small spumes of water flicked up like serpents.

"Hold on!" he bellowed again, striking out for the spot where he had last seen the Dusan.

He kicked something and dropped into the water deeper and pulled a stringy tangle to the surface. It was Laki Saleh's hair. With another tug he pulled the man's head clear of the water, hooked one arm under his shoulder, and struck out for the upturned lifeboat which was now floating away on the tide.

All around him floated lengths of planking, tangled cordage, and the battered remains of humans. He felt sick at heart, but plunged on amid a terrific fire from above. Somehow he made the boat, slipped under it and rammed the unconscious form of Laki Saleh over a seat and hung on for breath.

The steel boat echoed and boomed with the groans of battered men and the calls of those who inquired who had joined them. Then slabs of timber thundered against the sides and almost deafened them. But amid it all they sensed the thunderous roar of a Diesel and the *flak-flak-flak* of machine-gun fire which was thundering all about them.

"Got to hold on, fellows," encouraged Bill.

"If I ever get into the air again," fumed Red Gleason, "they'll never get me on the water again!"

"If we ever get into the air again," cheered Bill, "those birds will certainly know what it feels like to be under fire."

This sort of thing went on for twenty minutes and then the thunder of Diesel and the pound of machine-gun bullets died away. Bill slipped out, took a look around, and saw that the air was clear. He swam about, collected a lot of timber, and somehow managed to get a small raft bound together. Red and Crispin came out and helped him, and at last they managed a floating surface large enough and steady enough to warrant trying to right the boat. The old schooner in two halves had slipped away out of reach, one half still burning fiercely.

"Get her into the wind and we should have little trouble," Bill explained while the rest were pulling Shorty, the Dusan chief, and two wounded B. F. S. men aboard.

By distributing the weight and swinging the boat around, they lifted one end. The wind got under it and helped considerably in righting it. They bailed it

clear and put Shorty and the rest aboard on pads made up of life belts. Then they shoved clear and tried to get back with the aid of four oars that were still wedged under the thwarts. After an hour a sponge-fishing yawl with an auxiliary came up and took them aboard and, under Crispin's orders, headed back for Sandakan.

XXI—A PARTING GIFT

SIR MELVILLE fluttered about when they were brought in. A hospital was established in the main office and the wounded cared for. He was particularly interested in the Dusan chief, who continued to call for the man who had saved him.

"You'd better go and talk to him, Barnes," advised the D. C.

"I mean to do so, sir," returned Bill. "But we've got to warn Bates and the gang to look out for these yeggs."

"I know—I know. We had a line that they are already off Iloilo and should be coming through first thing in the morning. We'll tell them to get ready for anything. But go and talk to that old boy. He won't say a thing to me, and I'm afraid he's not long for this world. Has a bad smash across the back with a plank or something."

"All right," agreed Bill. "I'll go now."

"Get what you can out of him, about those rifles if possible," advised Sir Melville.

"That's my intention," returned Bill.

He went out of the office, crossed the corridor, and went into the temporary hospital which was being manned by three nurses who had volunteered from the European quarter.

"Ah, my son!" beamed the old Dusan. "You are a man!"

"Thanks," replied Bill. "How do you feel?"

"Laki Saleh does not feel, tuan," the

old Dusan replied weakly. "He will never feel again."

"Don't worry. It's just the shock. You'll be all right in a few days."

"No. I shall never lead my tribes on the Rejang again, tuan," the old man muttered. "That yellow viper has broken the spell of *M'dunu* and with it has gone the power of Laki Saleh."

"How did you come to be aboard that ship?" Bill asked quietly.

"I was brought there in the devil ship with wings. That dog with the tiger's face—he who goes by the name of Yahr, brought me here when I refused to lead my warriors into battle against the white men across the sea."

"What do you mean?"

"Know you not, tuan, that the dog Yahr is to make a great attack by the next moon?"

"By the next moon?" gasped Bill. "Why, let's see, that's in three days!"

"By the next moon," persisted the old chief. "They have poisoned the minds of my warriors and those of the Punans to go in the great ships that smoke and attack the white man across the sea. I was against it when I saw what manner of men we were against. Old Laki Saleh knows the worth of men like yours. It would be madness to make great battle."

"So they got rid of you, eh?" Bill urged.

"Brought me from Rejang in devil ship with wings and put me on ship of sails. The foul Chief Wanni Kroi of the weak Punans will become chief of the two tribes. They left Laki Saleh, who knew when not to fight, to die aboard the ship of sails. Gratitude of wild dogs, tuan."

"But look here," Bill warmed up to him. "You can still fight them. You can tell us where they have those rifles hidden, and we can go and capture them."

"I shall not live to see you start, tuan." The old chief wept. "My last bow has

been drawn. I am slipping fast into the beyond. I see my forefathers gathering now to greet me."

"But the rifles?" persisted Bill. "The rifles—where are they?"

"Ah, tuan!" The old man's eyes were getting glassy, and his face was taking on a new parchment hue. "The rifles—they are hidden in the cave beneath the Temple of Death. You—you can—can only get there by water—a hidden stream out of the Rejang which curls through the great rock. In there you will find the rifles, my son."

"Don't worry," beamed Bill. "We'll get them out and stop all that business. We'll run Chan Lo and Otto Yahr out of the Dusan country. Then you will be able to return and lead your tribes again."

"No, tuan. They will never follow. They saw *M'dunu* overthrown. By now they will have ravaged the Temple of Death—but—but they will never get this."

He fumbled beneath the strange white sheets of the white man.

"You mean they can get across that Moaning Valley place?"

"No. But they will use the high priest's causeway and break the Dusan law. Then they will not have to walk through the poisonous vapors of the valley. The giants will moan, but they will ravage the sacred path just the same," the old man muttered.

"How do the giants moan, chief," Bill went on, holding the old man's hand.

"It is very simple, my son. The giants are the stone columns that have been pitted by the elements for years so that their surfaces are coated with little holes. The evening trades sweep in from the sea and play little tunes through these holes, just as a child would play a pipe. Only you would I tell this. You are the only man I have ever met who risked his life for me. Of not one of my braves can I say that much."

"Um!" mused Bill. "That could hap-

pen of course, so that these stones actually seem to sing, when it is only the wind blowing through the holes in the stone columns."

"That is the secret, tuan, and you must keep it until you have forgotten all about me. But watch out, my son, for the Yahr dog and his Blue Funnel ships. They are devil chambers afloat."

"I'll never forget you, chief," replied Bill. "You are one of the most amazing characters I have ever met."

The old man's face lighted up at that. He was not quite certain just what the word "amazing" meant, but Bill said it with considerable gravity, and he was certain that it was flattering. His hand fumbled under the sheet again.

A NEW HUSH settled about the room, broken only by the low breathing of the other wounded men. Bill watched the old chief and wondered what to say next. There was an unexplainable peace in his eyes, and Bill smiled at him.

"No. You are the only man in the world who has risked his life for me," Laki Saleh went on quietly. "And for that—for that——" His breath came in short convulsive gasps. "For that, my son, I give—give you this."

He drew out from beneath the sheet a long package.

"For you, tuan, who should have been a chief—to do with—with as you wish."

Bill took it, and a strange quiver ran up his arm. The package was about three feet long, and it was wrapped in silk and bound tightly with strips of baboon hide—a parang belt of more than usual beauty.

"You take it, my son," the old man said in a low whisper. "You will use it to a better end than I. Sunshine—sunshine and a true course—to—you."

The old man stiffened an instant, glanced up once at Bill with his deep eyes, and passed away.

Bill arose, nodded to one of the

nurses, and stepped back from the cot. Then with a last glance at the old man he walked out and went back to Sir Melville's office still holding the long blade in his two hands.

"Well," Sir Melville asked anxiously. "Get anything out of him?"

"This," replied Bill, quietly staring off into space.

The district commissioner took it, unwound the hide and silk wrapping and took out a long knife.

"Whew!" he gasped. "The emerald-handled sacrificial knife of the Dusans!"

"What?" Bill said with a low cry.

"Absolutely! He gave it to you?"

"Just before he died," replied Barnes.

"My word! This thing is worth a fortune—a real fortune, man!"

"Well, at the rate we are going on, I can use it," Bill smiled wanly.

The brilliant green handle sparkled in the early-morning sunshine.

They sat together, holding the great knife between them, while Bill told the story of the old man. Sir Melville whistled at odd intervals and then said:

"Well, as it is, it's no use to you, but I can assure you a good sum for it. A London syndicate offered a large price for this a few years ago. They wished to present it to the British Museum. I think we can get more now. How about letting me handle the matter for you?"

"You do as you think right, sir," Bill replied. "I do not know the insides of this sort of thing, or how much I really own it, considering everything."

"Look here, my boy. No Dusan in Borneo would take it from you after it had been turned over to you by Laki Saleh on his deathbed. They would be more afraid of breaking that spell than any other the old chief might brew. They have too much respect for the dead, ever to consider taking it back."

"Well," Bill went on, "if you can do anything for me about it, I'd certainly be grateful. I can use all the money I can

lay my hands on in the next few weeks. These ships and men——”

“Hello! What’s this?” Sir Melville said quietly as an orderly came in with a folded message form.

Bill sensed what it was.

The district commissioner opened it and then turned with a smile to Bill. “Your fleet in splendid shape leaves Iloilo at three o’clock to-morrow morning so as to reach the *Courageous* by daybreak,” he read aloud. “That means they will be well on their way to Sandakan toward noon. How does that sound?”

“Great! Then they are all O. K.?”

“Fine—according to this.”

Bill smiled, and then suddenly his face clouded.

“What’s the matter?” Sir Melville asked.

“I have just remembered something. I think Yahr intended to destroy my fleet before it even gets here. Can we warn my man Bates to look out for them?”

“Um!” the D. C. mused. “We could, but what would be even better, would be for you to go out and meet them somewhere between here and the point where they will leave the aircraft carrier. Let’s draw up a course for them to follow and then go out on the same line and meet them. That should help in case they are intercepted by those devils.”

Bill nodded in agreement. The district commissioner went back to his desk, checked his charts, and wrote out a message to the commander of the *Courageous*.

XXII—ENEMY PLANS

HUDDLED in the morning mist that swirled off Sanga Sanga in the Sulu Archipelago, three single stack steamers of nondescript outline lay. Thin streamers of silky smoke trailed from their funnels, and their decks displayed

little or no activity. A passing liner would easily have noted them as coastal tramps beating up from Singapore to Hongkong or Shanghai. Their funnels were inky black with three narrow white bands near the top. The superstructure was dirty and unpainted, their ventilators swung at all angles, and the booms leaned at unseamanlike angles.

But below decks these ships belied their lack of nautical trim. The holds were wide and clean. Strange elevating machinery would have been noticed, and efficient workshops would catch the eye. The clanking old engines had been replaced by gleaming Diesels, and glistening tubes and torpedo cradles huddled behind hidden ports.

These were the Q boats that had been at one time under the funnels and house flags of the Blue Funnel line. To-day they were flying the pennant of the Anglo-Indian line. To-morrow a strange change would take place about the superstructure, a false funnel would creep up from somewhere, the bridge deck would be moved back a few feet, and they would resemble the refrigerator boats of the Australian Packing Co.

But there was more to all this. From out of the southwest came the boom of an aircraft Diesel. On one ship a man climbed up on the bridge wing and peered into an infra-red signal-scope and stared at the oncoming plane. For several minutes he peered, and then he caught the telltale blink of black light, invisible under ordinary examination, but brought out in dull violet flashes by the strange infra-scope. He nodded to another man along the bridge and the master bellowed orders into a speaking tube. Immediately many strange things happened.

The ship, leaping out of its tropical lethargy, suddenly swung into the wind. Then activity of unusual proportions took place on the aft deck. The taffrail dropped away mysteriously, and from a hidden shelf came a broad canvas-and-

lath covering which rolled over the stern and dropped into the water.

As the ship sped on, it rolled out to its full length, which was about sixty feet. Its width was about half that. The ship gathered tremendous speed and hit something in the vicinity of thirty-two knots, and her funnel spumed smoke like a charging destroyer. A boom swung around dead over the stern, and a block and tackle creaked down and hung in an action-rear position.

More orders crackled out, and the thundering Diesel-powered *Scarlet Stormer* roared around into position dead behind the steamer. The pilot peered over the side, lowered his retractable pontoons, and came in at an easy glide. Below him the landing mat trailed along on top of the water held in a rigid position by the speed of the ship. Gradually the *Scarlet Stormer* eased and then dropped her pontoons gently on the surf-mat.

The boom was lowered, the block and tackle swung into position over a looped hoist cable, and the hook was pulled in by Chan Lo who had scrambled out of the rear of the cockpit. Then with smart seamanship at the winch, the *Scarlet Stormer* was drawn up and deposited on the aft deck and the landing mat was drawn up and over it and supported by curved formers that provided shelter and additional camouflage and gave the ship the lines of a bulbous tanker.

This, then, accounted for the mysterious business of taking on the Fokkers.

OTTO YAHR and Chan Lo clambered down from the *Scarlet Stormer's* cockpit and strode forward, returning respectful salutes from the seamen and petty officers, who, in spite of their disreputable dress, had all the movements and activity of trained navy men.

Yahr clacked an order to a man in denim and outlined what he wished done

to the ship. Then with the Chinaman he went on to the bridge companionway and strode up the dingy steps. At the head he was greeted by a swarthy chink in a tight blue pea-jacket and a navy cap. Again salutes were exchanged and the men passed on into the chart room.

"Your position?" snapped Yahr.

"Exactly where you ordered, sir," replied the skipper.

"Right! Then we are about one hundred and fifty miles southwest of Cagayan, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I have reduced speed again to eight knots. Is that right?"

"Splendid! We engage this new fleet to-morrow. Have you seen anything of the British aircraft carrier?"

"No, sir; but we have caught her signals and checked them. She is standing by."

"Good! I suppose you caught that radiogram from Sandakan? We picked it up with the set aboard that Barnes ship. They plan to try to get them through. Their plans fit in perfectly, for they do not know our strength. We shall wipe the lot out to-morrow morning and perhaps get the carrier in the bargain. You have your tubes ready?"

"Everything is ready, sir," the wizen-faced little Chinaman replied.

"Call the pilots—at once, here!"

The skipper nodded to his first mate, a lanky Swede who had lost one eye and flaunted a grim scarlet scar from the empty socket all the way down to his jawbone. He took up the message tube and barked into it.

Chan Lo and Yahr stalked across to the chart board while the order was being obeyed and played with pencils.

"This is where we ought to nail the lot." Yahr pointed out the spot with a cruel grin. "I would like to get that carrier, too, if we could. That would help a lot. Think of all the planes and munitions we could obtain!"

The eyes of the Chinaman gleamed evilly. He, too, could see the value of

such a coup. His vision of conquering the Asiatic world began to take on more definite shape. His little fleet of Q boats, headed by a captured aircraft carrier, would sweep the Pacific and assure him success in his first thrust.

But by now the pilots of his Fokkers were swarming into the chart room. They were an incongruous lot of buccaneers, sopped up from the dregs of the world. There were broad-cheeked and glinting-eyed Mongols, tall rangy Swedes who glanced sideways every time they spoke. There were three or four rat-faced Frenchmen who had seen the insides of Paris prisons—the dregs of Paris who had learned to fly during the last few months of the war and had since broken every air law known to the civilized world.

There were one or two Englishmen who had been hounded across the Continent for various crimes involving the illicit use of aircraft. Splendid pilots all, but with a warped sense of justice. There were several German and Polish airmen, gruff, blunt, and of few words. But most of them were Orientals with long talonlike fingers, small glinting eyes, and pantherlike movements.

They stood in a half circle facing their monstrous leaders. Yahr strode up and down eying them for several minutes before he spoke. Then, with a sudden movement, he whipped around on them, and in a voice that cut to their nerves like an icy blade he began:

"You men! To-morrow is your great day. A great day for all of us. To-morrow we actually engage this mob of Americans who have stood in our way so long."

There was a low growl of approval from the semicircle of sin.

"To-morrow," raged Yahr, "we strike! Yesterday they outwitted us, but they have run their heads only deeper into the trap. Old Laki Saleh died aboard the *Copra Queen*—we left him to the fate he deserved, the yellow-bellied dog.

The Dusans, and the Punans who will follow them to the bitter end, will be under the leadership of Wanni Kroi who will turn over the hidden rifle cache to the men, once we give the word."

More growls of satisfaction.

"Then, men," Yahr stormed on, "you will get your first taste of victory—and spoils."

"How about some money?" one of the Englishmen broke in.

"Money? Money did you say?" Yahr replied with a leer. "Money, you will get, bags of it. Once we get into Singapore we will rifle the governor general's coffers, where the funds for the building of the new naval defenses are kept. There you will get your money. All you can spend."

They all grinned widely.

"But remember," Yahr explained, "to-morrow you will be tried by fire. These men will not go down easily. They have a wicked fleet and we shall have to fight like demons to stop them. Here are our plans."

He shuffled a few papers in his hands and stared about him.

"Once we engage them, you are to destroy as many as possible. But there is one ship I particularly want for myself, if it is humanly possible to get it. It is the new ship intended for this devil Barnes. They have named it the *Hellion*. I know little about it except that it is unusually fast and well-armed. If you can get it down safe and intact, all well and good. I'll give one thousand dollars in gold to the pilot who gets it."

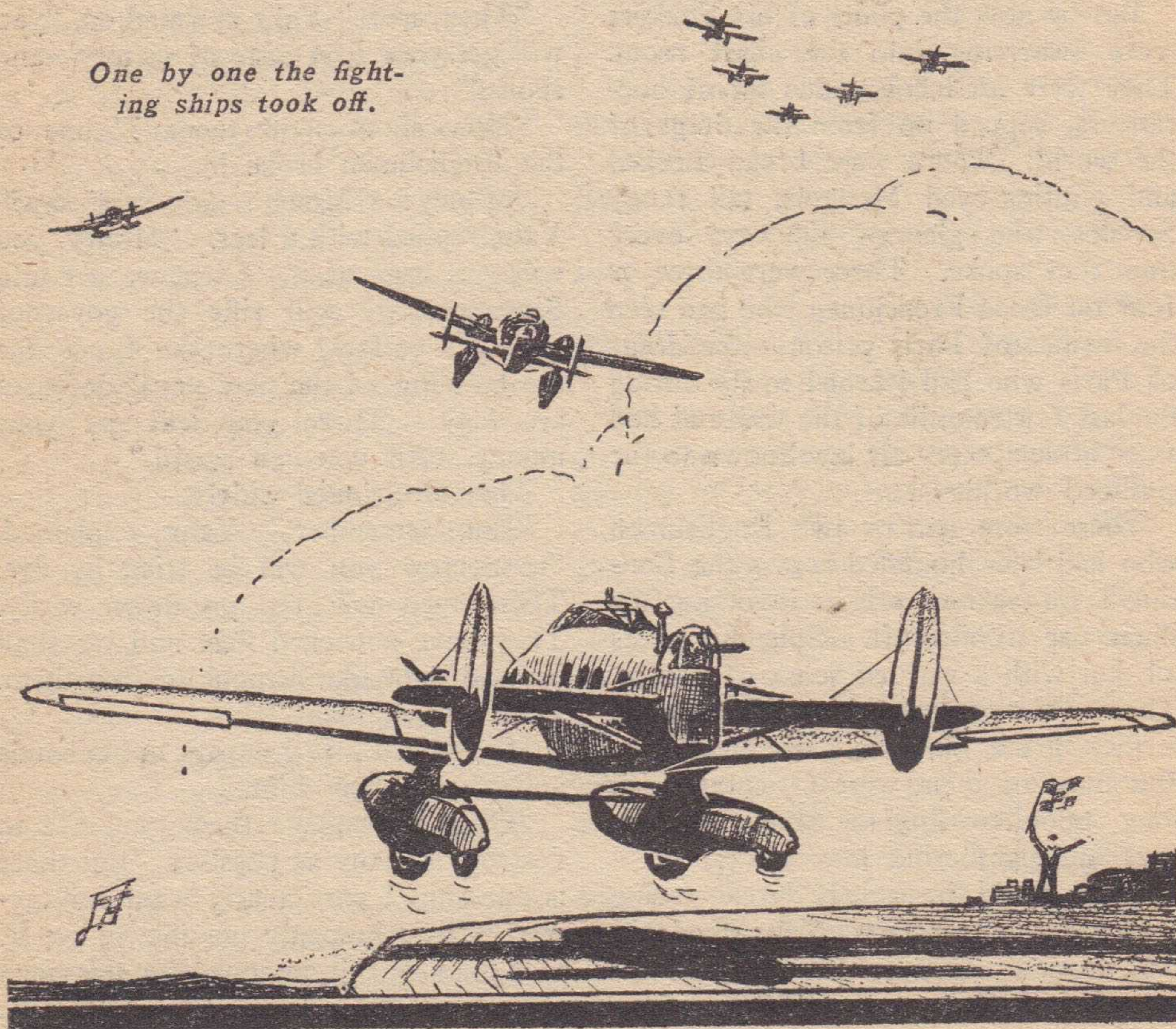
Again that semicircle gleamed in anticipation.

"Once we have destroyed this fleet, you will all return to your base ships which will head on toward Rejang. We will send out a fake appeal to the British ship *Courageous* and lure it into action. If we can capture this *Hellion*, I will take it over and land on this aircraft carrier, making them believe I am Barnes.

"The ships will suddenly appear out of nowhere, and I will hold every man on the bridge and force them to turn it over to us. A torpedo in the right place and you men aloft again with

tribesmen and rush on Singapore. You gentlemen will attack from the ships once we are within range. You will bomb the defenses, destroy the Singapore field and then disappear to our

One by one the fighting ships took off.



bombs will be sufficient to make them give up, for they will have no chance of getting their fighters off."

Again that half circle of cruel faces beamed.

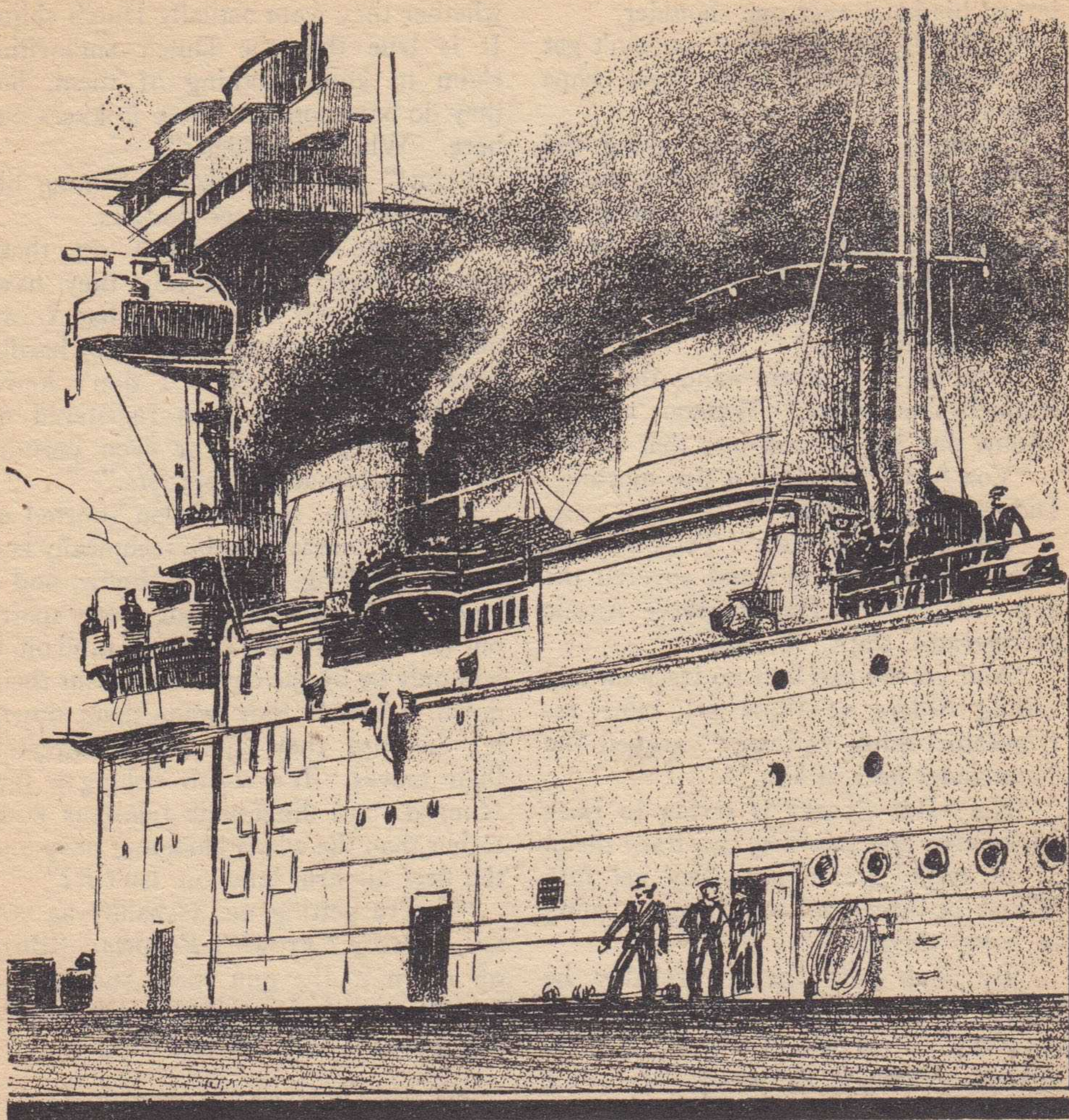
"This may sound impossible," Yahr added, "but if things work out right, I can capture the vessel. It is unmanned and should be easy to take. If we get that, our effort will be that much easier.

"However," he went on, "should we be repulsed in that matter, our plan will be to get away quickly and race to Rejang where we will pick up the

hidden field on Bintang Island. There you can lay low until you get the word to return to the ships which by then will be in the harbor.

"In the meantime we shall have made the landing of the tribesmen and should be in complete control of the city. Then, gentlemen," he added, "you may take your rewards. There will be the governor general's establishment first, and after that the European quarters where you will have your pick of—well, of—oh, take your choice. A charming reflection, eh?"

Low grunts of appreciation rewarded



this speech, and then Yahr ordered them back to their quarters.

"Remember now. First, your ships must be in first-class condition. Second, rest and get plenty of sleep. You will need all you can get, for the next two days will be hell upon earth. I wish you the best of luck, gentlemen!"

XXIII—ON TO SANDAKAN

THE COMMANDER of the *Courageous*, Rodney Fellows, cast a weather eye upward and grinned. His broad hand stroked his blue-steel prow of a

chin, and then tugged his cap deeper over one eye. He stood on the offset bridge and peered down on the deck activity below.

One by one the machines of the Barnes fleet were being brought up the hydraulic lifts from the hangars where they had been sheltered for a few hours and given their final overhaul. At his side stood Squadron Leader Monty Watson, a natty figure in his sky-blue R. A. F. uniform, with gold wings, and a double row of ribbons.

"You'd like to be in that, eh, Watson," Commander Fellows remarked as he

jerked his head over one shoulder.

"Rather! Are you sure you can't get permission for me to escort these chaps across?"

"Positively not! We're taking the devil's own chance now, giving aid to civilian machines without emergency reasons. If they heard of this, there'd be hell to pay in the Pacific. These chaps have no official right to be messing in a thing like this."

"But those Fokkers—and the Blue Funnel line ships," Watson argued. "Some one has to look into that mess."

"You had a look into it this morning. Did you see anything?"

"Not a trace of them. Took a whole flight of Nimrods out and covered the area completely. Did see three Aussie refrigerator ships, though."

"And yet we can find no trace on any sailing orders of these self-same refrigerator ships, can we?" argued the commander back at him.

"No. But Sparks is trying to raise Melbourne and see if he can trace them. If he can't, the minute they get into British or American waters we're going to board them."

"By that time they'll probably be decorated up to represent Harwich fish trawlers. I tell you, Watson, we're up against something big—very big, and I pity those poor devils down there, trying to get to the bottom of it."

"Well, look here, sir. Wouldn't it be possible for me to take a flight of Nimrods up again later, with the understanding that I give those ships another look over? We might get there—by coincidence—and see the fun."

"Suppose you did? Then suppose that you got there just in time to see some Dutch Fokkers making an attack on these ships. What would you do?"

Watson looked puzzled.

The skipper laughed at him. "You see," he gloated, "you couldn't do anything without risking a serious diplomatic break. You wouldn't know

whether they were actually Dutch ships. It is true that the Dutch authorities claim to know nothing of them, but they do have some of these Fokkers out here. Which is which?"

"Um!" mused Watson, ramming his hands into his trouser pockets.

"Suppose they did fire on these Barnes ships? Apparently they have plenty of right, for from what I can make out of the whole thing, they hardly have any rights here. I don't know whether they have been registered or have landing permits or even permits to cross international borders."

"Look here, sir," Watson snorted at last. "All you say is right, technically and legally speaking. But you know, and I know that there's something pretty spotty out here, and if these ships are fired on, it will only be by the chaps who want them down. And if they want them down, it's because they apparently threaten their moves. It's worth risking a few Nimrods and diplomatic relations now, rather than the whole blooming navy and the fleet air arm later on, isn't it?"

"You're getting me as balmy as you are, Watson," growled Fellows. "Buzz off down to the gun room and read a few pages of the 'Needlework Guide' and get your mind off this thing."

BUT WHILE this somewhat ineffectual conversation was going on up on the bridge, Bev Bates was up to his ears in worry, getting his ships and men together. There had been a series of strange radiograms offering advice and issuing warnings. While they had already traveled several thousand miles over wide expanses of water and strange lands to alight on an aircraft carrier, he was still somewhat at a loss to realize just what the crusade was all about. He sensed that Shorty Hassfurther had been in some danger, and probably still was, but all this business about watching out for Blue Funnel ships had him guessing, for in all their correspondence, Bill had

been unable to put in actual words just what the situation was.

His pilots were on deck, examining their Snorters and transports. Scotty MacCloskey and Tony Laport were there checking stores and radio sets. Sandy Sanders was nowhere to be seen. Actually he was down in the hangars picking up more aeronautical knowledge from the R. A. F. men who were working on the aircraft carrier's complement of Hawker Nimrods, Fairey III-F's, and Ripon torpedo carriers.

So far the whole affair had been a rare lark for Sandy. He'd been aboard an American carrier and grabbed a chunk of information, and now he was able to compare Yankee fighters with those of the British. It was a pleasant experience. By this time he had a lot of respect for both.

"Everybody to his post!" roared Bev. "Engines warmed fifteen minutes and then report to the signal deck for final instructions."

The Snorters huddled behind the *Hellion*, and bringing up the rear were the six transport fighters, each powered with 1,200 h.p. Diesel motors, with gunners' cockpits behind each engine nacelle, another in the nose, and still another well out beyond the tail which commanded an arc of fire threatening any ship attempting to get behind them.

Inside were kitchens, benches and storerooms. The main cockpit accommodated two pilots, and in a small cabin behind that was a radio set, from where the operator could receive messages, write them down, and hand them through a wicket to the pilots. There were bunks where the men could rest and a first-aid section. All in all these transports, while not equal to the Barnes T-1 ship, which carried an Eaglet also; were more suitable for the work involved on this adventure.

By now Bates was satisfied that all was well and that they could get away any minute.

"I have received word from Barnes," he explained to them all, "and we are to look out for attacks by some strange Fokkers—D-XVII's, as I understand it. They are carrying the Dutch government insignia so you are not to fire until you are first attacked. This mob, for some reason which I cannot explain, has Bill's *Scarlet Stormer*."

"What?" they cried in chorus.

"That's the information offered," Bev went on in his calm manner. "I know nothing about it and intend to ask no questions until we get to Sandakan."

"Will they attack us in Bill's *Scarlet Stormer*?" asked one of the transport pilots.

"You may be ready for anything, so keep your chins up and above all obey orders. I'll take the responsibility for anything that happens. If we can get the *Scarlet Stormer* down and capture it, so much the better."

"What's the routine in case of damage?" another asked.

"If we are near Borneo, try to get to Sandakan and the Lubuk field. If not, do your best to get back to the *Courageous*. If you have to go down, be certain of your position and radio continually. We'll see that you are picked up. But—in case any of you are captured," and Bates looked around anxiously, "keep your mouths shut and answer no questions of any sort."

There was a low silence for several minutes.

At last one of the radio men broke in with: "What about Barnes? Where is he?"

"I expect we'll pick him up soon. He has three Snorters, an Australian ship of some kind, and possibly a British Spartan. Outside of that, I know nothing. Now get aboard and keep tight formation all the way."

THE MEN turned, halted at attention, saluted the bridge, and swarmed away to their posts. The deck officer

was at his post, grasping the panel signal handle, and Bev Bates got aboard and then looked around for Sandy.

"Where's that pie-piercing little devil?" he snarled.

There was a clatter across the deck and along tore Sandy with his air pistol in one hand and a length of good old British suet dumpling in the other. At his heels was an irate navy cook, with a linen hat on his head and a cleaver as long as a Cuban machete in his hand.

"Thievin' little cockroach, you!" bellowed the cook. "I'll 'ave every button on yer trousers, my lad, if I gets me meat 'ooks on yer."

Commander Fellows from his perch on the bridge stared down at this amazing spectacle, gulped once, and then hid his mouth behind his hand. He stifled a loud guffaw and rammed his elbow in an officer's ribs.

"These chaps will do!" he roared. "The blighters will have our funnel, if we don't get them away quick. Pinched cookie's pet pudding! What a mob!"

But Sandy was up inside and out of danger by now. His mouth was stuffed with sticky suet and jam. He tried to laugh and bellow back through a circular port, but his mouth was too full. The cooky turned away repulsed and stalked back to his companionway, stiffening his dignity and setting his hat right.

"Let's go!" gurgled Sandy, raising his air pistol. "I have an idea."

The barrel was placed at the port and Sandy drew a bead. There was a dull chug and cooky leaped four feet, with a large mutton hand clapped to a spot where his white ducks fitted the tightest. He swung around, glared hard and shook his fist.

"One of the currents out of your buns, cooky!" Sandy bellowed. "So long! I'll see you in Singapore."

The take-off panel flashed, and Bev gave the *Hellion* the gun. The motors roared and the tail came up with a snap. Sandy went down in his seat with a

chunk of suet roll, almost choking him. Then they were racing down the deck for the lip of the stage.

Without moving the stick the *Hellion* responded beautifully to the air and flew off clean. Bev shot away like a javelin and then turned to watch the three Snorters and the six transports follow down the white line that split the deck.

One by one they came up and took their positions. The *Hellion* took the lead, and the transports in two three-ship V's hung behind the wing tips. Above them raced the black Snorters, and they all swung in closer as Bev headed southwest for Sandakan.

XXIV—INTERCEPTED

WITHIN an hour the planes had covered two hundred miles at cruising speed, and Bates had about come to the conclusion that there was little to worry about. He checked with the rest of the formation by radio every fifteen minutes, instead of every half hour as he had done before, and all was well. Below them lay the tropical expanse of the Sulu Sea, and off to their left ranged the spattered islands of the archipelago like sleeping demons that haunt the seas.

Then, when they had just settled to the fact that there might be nothing in all the worry they had stored up, Bev caught sight of three sets of specks off to the west. He watched them for some seconds, told Sandy to tip the others off, and then sat pondering on the fact that they were coming in from the west instead of from Sandakan which was well ahead of them.

"Come on, Sandy!" he ordered. "You be the guinea pig. Get that orange box of yours out and for Heaven's sake stop potting away with that damned air gun!"

"Guinea pig, is it," Sandy growled. "Who are those guys?"

"Our friends, the enemy, if these old eyes do not betray me." Bates grinned.

"But that's for you to find out. Go and rag 'em a bit, and if they shoot you down, we'll take it up with them. Get the idea?"

"I get it," replied Sandy, buckling his helmet tighter. "But watch me give them something to think about."

"Going to steal their puddings?" asked Bates, trying to be gay, but realizing every minute that they were facing real danger.

Sandy slipped back into the cabin, climbed into the Eaglet and started the motor. Bates could watch his progress through a series of mirrors, and he saw the youngster lower the trapeze so that the little fighting scout was clear. Then the wings were opened and Sandy, with a signal to Bev, prepared to let go. Bates swung into the wind for an instant, and there was a telltale jerk. The Eaglet slipped away, and the automatic trapeze rolled back into position.

"Go it, boy!" Bates cheered as he watched the little Eaglet dive and then zoom on her steel prop. "Draw them in and we'll take care of them!"

Bev checked his own guns and saw that the Halgar rifles were loaded with their deadly armor-piercing slugs and that the high-speed Brownings were being fed with disintegrating belts and fifty-caliber ammunition. On came the two formations and Bates' practiced eye identified them as Fokkers.

Like a shot he roared over and watched the movements of young Sanders who was now darting back and forth, taunting the Fokker leader. Then, before any one could make a move, out of the sky above like a winged dart came a ship they all knew so well and loved.

The *Scarlet Stormer*—her guns blazing and spraying death.

BATES leaped and tore at her. He saw Sandy's ship stagger an instant as if startled, and then with a smart curl it

slipped out of range and came into the fire of the leading Fokker formation.

Bates groaned. "They'll cut him to ribbons! Where the devil is Barnes?"

But there was no time for considering possible help now. They were in the thick of the battle. Sandy had caught the spirit of the thing and was playing his part well. In and out he shot, threatening one instant to smack his steel nose into the leading Fokker, and then like a midge he would dart away and sink his leaden fangs into another.

They tried to crowd up on him, but there was no setting a sight on that lightninglike maneuver. Sandy slashed away, one eye on the mob above, the other on the onrushing Snorters and transports.

The *Scarlet Stormer* had lost its position in the initial rush, and two Snorters were on it like winged demons. Chan Lo in the back seat was a cool gunner, however, and he soon drove the Snorters off with his terrible blanket fire. Bates led the transports smack into the Fokker formations and split them up, while the gunners sprayed lead in all directions.

Sandy came out of a wild mêlée and dashed at a Fokker. The Dutch-marked ship swerved to avoid what looked like a certain collision and crashed madly into one of the transports. There was a loud sound of the battering of steel and three-ply and they went down together.

Bates saw it and swore under his breath, and then saw that the gunners and pilots were leaving their craft by parachutes and jerking their kapok jackets up high around their necks as they dropped.

"We'll pick you up if things get easy," Bates murmured, putting his roof gun into action and firing directly up into the oil-streaked belly of a Fokker. The Dutch ship swerved, leaped like a harpooned whale, and threw away its wings.

The heavy-nosed fuselage poised for an instant and then went hell bent toward the sea below.

But by now they had crowded up on Sandy and the youngster was fighting like a madman to get clear.

Bates tore in to help him, and his heavy guns battered a Fokker's nose to steel splinters. That biplane curled over like a wounded shark, dropped away, and finally settled into an easy glide. Off in the distance, Bev spotted what looked like a tramp steamer, but it did not have blue funnels so he promptly forgot all about it to give further aid to Sandy.

A transport came charging into the fray, and all guns were battering at the Fokkers, which by now were adopting new tactics behind the knifelike wings of the *Scarlet Stormer*. In surging charges they came down on the Snorters and transports, so that Bev had to make a hurry call for new formations.

They re-formed behind the *Hellion* and flew in a circle, the transport gunners getting most of the action.

"Damn!" swore Bev. They'll get us all if we keep this up. A few shots in the right place will get the tanks, and we'll all have to go down. Then what will happen?"

But Sandy was manfully terrorizing the Fokker pilots and trying his best to break up the formation so that the Snorters could pick them off or engage them singly. At times his ruse would work, but then the *Scarlet Stormer* would surge after him and drive him out of the play.

"Got to do something fast," Bev moaned. "They'll get us yet. Where the devil is Barnes?"

The Fokkers crowded up on two transports that could not keep up with the game, and for a few minutes Bev lived ten men's lives worrying until Sandy slashed out of nowhere and broke them up again. The little Eaglet was putting on a show that would have

brought decorations in a regulation war.

In and out he raced, chipping in a short burst now and again and making the Fokkers jerk their great heads back and forth like taunted dragons. The sky was madly traced with slashes of lemon-colored fire, with flaunting plumes of black smoke from wrecked engines, and fluttering lengths of fabric torn away by the slipstream after bullets had slashed in their first openings.

Still no trace of the other half of the Barnes fleet.

"Got to get out of this somehow," yelled Bates, losing his Back Bay dignity for the first time. "I'm going to stop these brutes, or know what's what!"

But all his hell-hurtling across the sky brought little result. Another Fokker went down out of control, but the transports were taking a wicked lacing. One or two were cruising on one engine and bearing hard on readjusted fins to make up for the torque of the outboard prop that had tried to compensate for the loss by resetting its own blades.

Another five minutes of raging agony and still no Barnes. These Fokkers had the edge in offensive and speed attack. It was only a matter of time now, and Bev sensed that a strange throbbing was thumping at his throat.

XXV—DECOY FLIGHT

THERE WAS a reason for all this, even though Bates could not know it. Off toward Sandakan, Bill Barnes had taken off according to schedule with his three Snorters, with B. F. S. men as gunners and Batten in his *Bullet*. Gleason had his own B. B. 5. Hawkins was flying B. B. 3. while Bill took over Shorty's B. B. 2. and allowed Shorty to go along as gunner.

Actually Hassfurth was in no shape for this affair, but he would not hear of staying behind. His wound was clean and would heal fast, but he needed rest and sleep. Still, Bill figured, he would

only work himself up into a lather if he had to stay behind, so he agreed to let him sit in the rear cockpit and act as lead radio man, and gunner if an emergency arose.

"You didn't think you could keep me out of this, did you, Bill?" Shorty demanded in an injured tone.

"No. I knew you'd do something foolish if I left you behind, and I figured that you were safer with me."

"I'd have swiped that Spartan," Shorty told him.

"That would have done you a lot of good, taking on Dutch Fokkers," Bill replied. "They'd have bopped you off in no time."

"Well, I'm kinder gettin' used to it by now," Shorty grinned back. "Just an old trial horse. They all knock me off lately. If ever I get into a real fight again, I won't know what to do."

"You're full of hoopla," Bill snorted.

"You mean Dusan dew, don't you?" replied Shorty remembering his dose up at Rejang. "*Pfutt!* I can taste that yet."

"Well, when you get a bead on these guys," Bill reminded him, "make up for it with every shot."

"Let's go!"

The strange formation, with Batten sitting high over the three Snorters to act as scout, raced away, leaving Crispin, who had been fumbling about in a spare hangar with Barum Jim, uncrating some strange gray missiles. Barum Jim had been put on a job of painting out the broad-arrow marks on the sides and replacing the official British government insignia with something that looked like a German pretzel.

Sir Melville was quiet and secretive as they left the ground. There was something queer and mysterious about the whole mess, and he was unable to plumb his own feelings.

The three Snorters left the ground as though they were wired together with invisible bonds. The *Bullet* slashed after

them, and with its superior speed had to do two S turns to keep back. Barnes at last wheeled them all into position and then climbed away for the coast line.

The day was bright and with but few clouds, wispy, creepy affairs that swept out toward their destination. Like all cloud gatherings they appeared to hang close, but no amount of speed seemed to cut down the distance to any noticeable extent.

Bill peered ahead anxiously once they were well clear of the coast line and, as the minutes crept on, he began to sense those unexplainable fears that all airmen seem to develop. He talked to Shorty and requested that he try to raise Bev and the gang by radio.

"Been trying for five minutes!" Shorty hollered down the Gosport. "No line of any sort. Can they have started?"

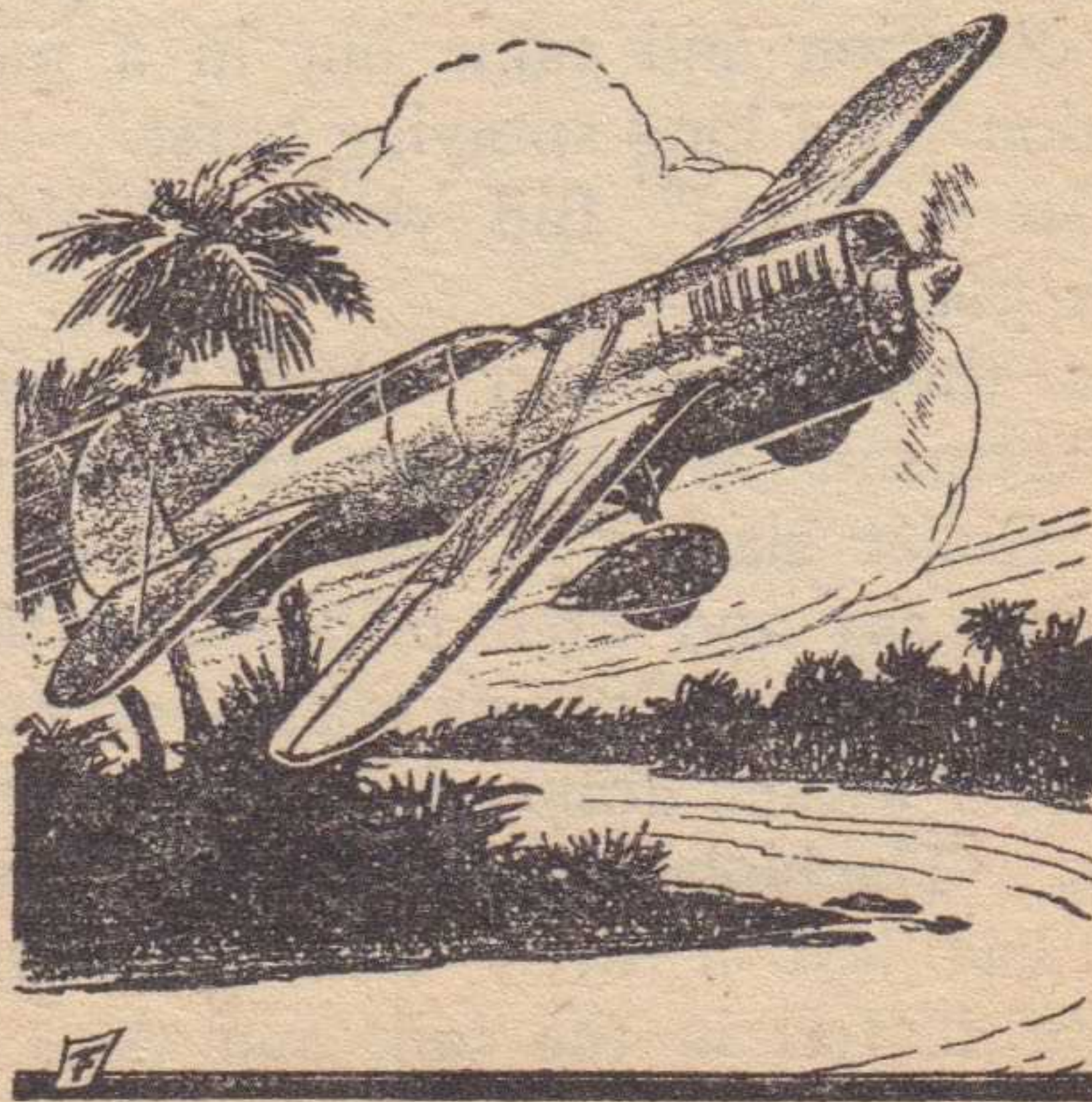
"The commander of the *Courageous* gave us the word an hour ago. They should be well within sight by now. Get in touch with the rest and see if they can pick them up."

"What's the matter with you, Bill? Those B. F. S. guys don't know how to use these sets."

"That's right," agreed Bill. "Well, call Batten; he has a set that should get them."

Shorty had a short conversation with the Aussie, but there was nothing to report.

"Been trying for some time to get



their signals," Don told him, "but all I can get is you and some high-frequency stuff I can't understand."

"That's bad," said Bill when Shorty had explained the situation. "That might be the Blue Funnel line ships or even Chan Lo and Yahr trying to jam us out. Step on it and get your glasses going."

THEY ROARED on again, picking up an even tighter formation. Then Shorty suddenly barked into his Gosport and pointed upward.

Bill turned and glared smack into the blunt noses of six Dutch Fokkers. They were coming down the chute like madmen. The gunners, who had been watching Bill's ship, caught the move at last and their weapons shrieked their ire. The Dutch ships came on, dead for Bill's machine, before Shorty could untangle himself from the radio plugs. He struggled with his stiff shoulder to break out his gun, but Bill barked through to him:

"Take it easy! I'll handle 'em!"

The Fokkers continued on and the air crackled with their hate. Bill hung on as long as he dared and then, with a quick signal, he whipped his Snorter over and cleared. Up went the Snorter and the three others after it, and the Fokkers found themselves hurtling past the Barnes ships from where the waiting gunners poured a broadside into them. Don Batten wheeled in the opposite direction and came out in a nice position for a long spraying burst.

"Go it, Don!" Bill yelled. "We'll cover you."

As though he had heard the encouragement, the Australian charged in. The *Bullet* slashed across the tracer-streaked sky and went pell-mell at the Fokkers. Then his guns opened up and poured a wicked dram of death into the leader. The biplane swerved like a racer that has lost a tire. Another burst caught it full in the tail, and then it

leaped up and clawed at the air with its wheeled talons and fell back—minus a wing.

Bong!

The tank exploded with a roar and threw blazing fuel across the smoky haze like a scarlet blanket. A Fokker plunged through it and miraculously came out unscathed. Don came around under Bill's nose and forced another Fokker under Shorty's guns.

"Thanks, Don!" Shorty grinned. "I'll remember you in my will."

Brat-a-tat-tat-tat!

Shorty's gun poured out its scarlet spray and a Fokker dangled in mid-air drunkenly. At last it swayed around, its silver prop suddenly stopped, jerked back and forth twice, and then threw a blade away as though it had been a knight-errant giving up his sword. The ship swayed its head again and then nosed down to spin slowly toward the blue sea.

"Feel any better, now?" asked Bill wildly.

"Plenty better," boomed back Shorty. "Could go another dose of rotten eggs."

"Look out or you might get it!"

A Fokker charged at them, but Cy swept in and drove it out of the play.

"You caint play thata way with my boss, mister," Cy growled. "Take that little portion of devil-dust to go on with."

His guns flamed wildly, and the Fokker sheered off and tried it on Batten who was waiting outside the group like a sheep dog ready to drive in any stragglers. Don whipped up, slashed around on one wing tip, opened his guns and sprayed the Fokker fleet with a fusillade that drove them back.

Bill dived on one and played a merry tattoo on its top wing until it writhed clear. The others joined it, and they swerved off toward the coast line which lay like a long green lizard off through the surface mist.

"What's the game?" demanded

Shorty. "They don't want to play any more. Two down and they quit."

"Let's go after 'em," said Bill, rallying his ships.

"Seems queer. Look at the way they are hanging about over there. They could beat it now and save their dural."

"Got it!" snapped Bill. "What saps we are! They're nothing but decoys who played too hard. Come on; let them go. We'll go on with our jobs."

"We may be too late," Shorty barked, reaching for his radio set.

BILL fretted and fumed for the next five minutes. Then as they re-formed and all reported to be in good shape, he waited anxiously for the sight of his crowd.

They soon spotted them. A telltale blaze of antiaircraft bursts gave the show away. Evidently the decoy ships had warned Chan Lo and Yahr that they had not been able to get away with it.

Bill gave the Snorter everything she had, but Batten was ahead of him. They roared on and first came up to Sandy who was trying to draw the *Scarlet Stormer* their way. They exchanged quick waves and plunged in. Bill struck first, his teeth clenched and every nerve in his body taut.

"Come on, Shorty!" he roared. "Give it to 'em!"

The appearance of the new Snorters and the *Bullet* broke up the fighting formation that was hounding Bev and the boys. With a rousing cheer they took up the battle again and drove into the Fokkers with new life and vigor. The Snorters flown by the Bates men were not manned in the rear and the sudden realization that these new fighters were two-seaters upset the Fokker pilots so much that they were uncertain just what to do.

As a result, they did the wrong thing over and over again. Two went down in flames under Bill's guns, and gradually Bill's men got the upper hand; then

they saw the wreckage of a transport floating below.

"See that, Shorty?" Bill asked hurriedly. "Signal one of the transports down to pick them up. We'll cover him all the way down. Send Batten off with the other Snorters to drive the *Scarlet Stormer* down."

Shorty dropped his gun and went back to his sending set. In a minute the new plans were being carried out, and the Fokker crew was edging out toward the streaking ship below that was still sending up desultory shots from its anti-aircraft guns.

"Let them go," warned Bill. "Can't take too many chances. Don't know how badly these babies are hit. Two running on one motor now."

They went after the retreating Fokkers who threw out their heavy smoke screens and cleared while the rest of the Barnes fleet huddled together over Bill's Snorter. One of the transports dropped down on its pontoons and picked up the men who had left the crashed transport. The *Scarlet Stormer* disappeared completely in the thick black curtain that was being woven by the Fokkers.

"No use trying to get through that!" Bill yelled. "Take too many chances on crashing. Let them go; we'll get them at Rejang, if they try getting the guns out."

They re-formed under Bill's orders and staged some semblance of military order. Away they streaked, barking back and forth at each other by radio, shouting encouragement and passing old gibes and jokes.

But the cheerful gathering was suddenly battered into confusion by a call from Bev Bates in the *Hellion*.

"Hey!" Shorty bellowed into the Gosport at Bill. "Where's Sandy?"

"Isn't he aboard the ship Bates is flying?" demanded Bill, his face going a shade or two lighter even under his thick coat of tan.

"He says no. Been looking for him to come up and hitch on. Nowhere to be seen."

Bill ordered Bates to turn back and cruise for half an hour. He also sent Cy back with him and told them to report at the Sandakan field after their search.

The two ships turned back, and Bill reluctantly continued on. He stared ahead, as they roared toward the mainland, a real lump in his throat this time. The kid meant as much as, perhaps more than, any man in his outfit.

"This affair seems doomed to disappointments," he mumbled to himself. "Nothing goes quite right. I wonder whether we should go on. Have I the right to take chances with these lads so often?"

"We've *got* to go on!" he growled aloud after a moment's solemn reflection.

"You said it, boy!" bellowed Shorty who had caught the words. "You're in hock all the way up to your armpits. I've got a gash in my shoulder. Batten has one eye in a sling, and Heaven knows what has happened to Sandy. But we'll carry on, boy!"

XXVI—DOUBT AND MYSTERY

THE PLANES all dropped on the Lubuk field and dragged their skids up to the cab rank. Bill leaped out to greet them, but his face was still lined with worry about Sandy.

He ran up and down shaking hands and thanking them for coming in the same breath that he begged for information. No one seemed to know what had happened.

"I could swear I saw him go into that smoke screen," Red Gleason said hollowly.

"I thought he crashed into one of those Fokkers just after you came up, Bill," Tony Lamport said.

"I'm inclined to think you are right, Red," Barnes answered.

Then Sir Melville came up, and Bill made a hurried report to him.

"The ship I saw was a tall, funneled affair with a high poop and carried three white rings around it. The superstructure was just ordinary, but the bridge was unusually high," he explained after mentioning the fact that they had been fired on also from below.

The D. C. rubbed his chin and wondered how many ships there were out there, connected with this affair. While he pondered, Bill introduced the rest of his men and got the B. F. S. officers acquainted with the newcomers. Then he went back to the office after leaving orders for every ship to be put into shape and refueled at once.

"This business of young Sanders, sir," Bill said, "has me worried to death. They may have picked him up and they'll use him as a hostage to make us keep our hands out of this affair. I'm worried."

"It seems like the worst move we've pulled," the D. C. growled.

The whole business was getting under his skin. It was all new to him, too, this flying game and youngsters who should have been in school, taking parts—big parts.

"Well, we'll wait until Bates and Cy get back. They may have some news of him. What do you think will be their next move, sir?"

Sir Melville frowned and stared at the floor. "You say you destroyed at least four of their ships?"

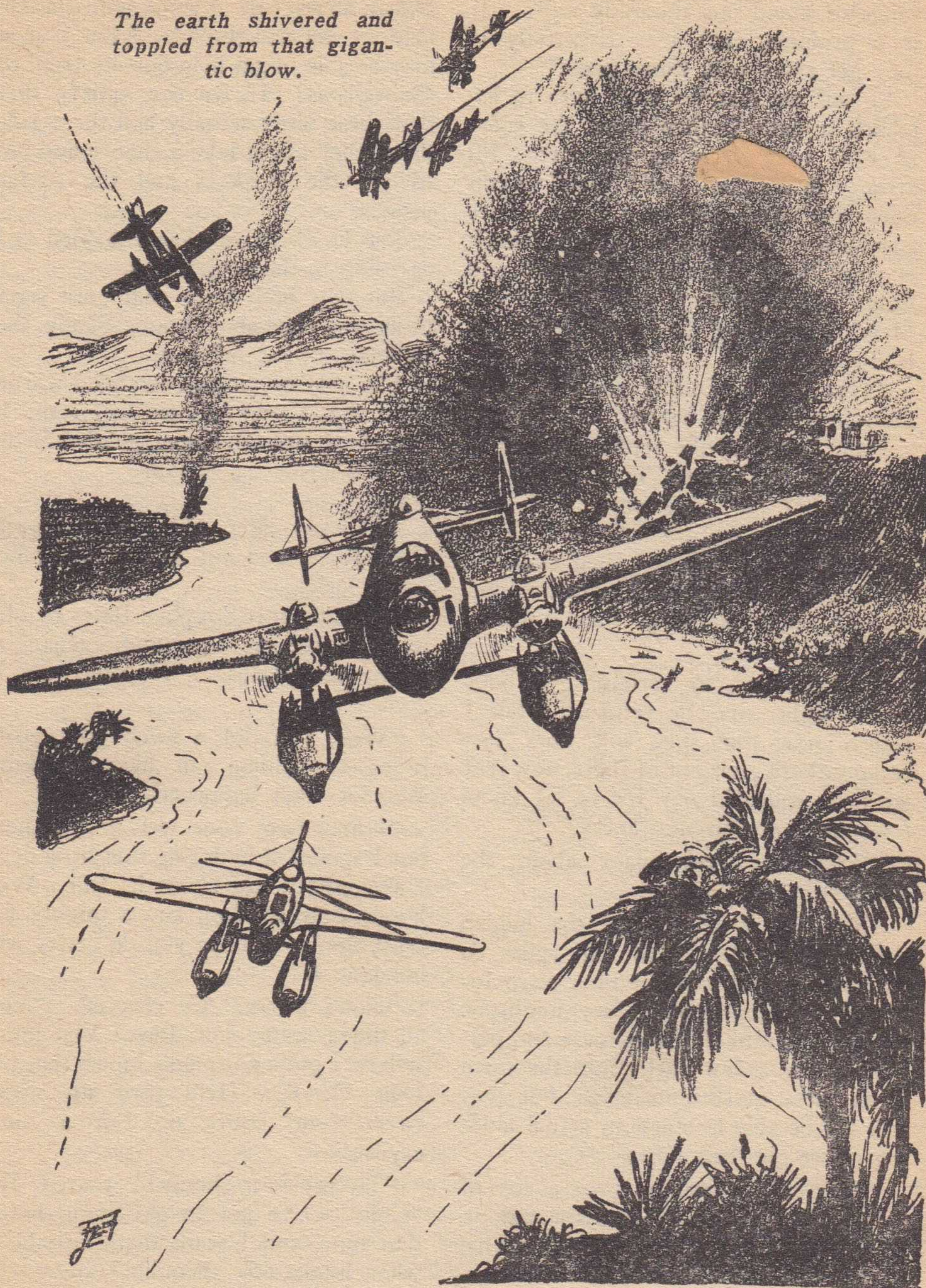
Bill nodded grimly.

"They had apparently four flights of six machines. That would be at least twenty-four Fokkers. They probably have twenty left. You will have—let's see?"

"Six Snorters, five transports, the *Hellion*, and Batten's *Bullet*," Bill reminded him. "That's thirteen machines against twenty or more, but you must remember, sir, we out-gun them plenty."

"But they apparently have a surface

The earth shivered and toppled from that gigantic blow.



base to work from. You will have to work from here or from emergency bases farther up along the coast. That's what worries me. You are now five hundred

miles from the mouth of the Rejang. That means that you probably carry enough fuel to go there and back."

"Right! Most of our ships have a

range of about one thousand miles. It is a problem, isn't it? Especially if they get away with those guns."

"I can see that we shall have to establish a base farther down the coast as near to Rejang as we dare. I'll arrange it at once. Get a vessel to run down with fuel and have it set ashore somewhere near—let's see, the beach is very good between Balineau and Egan. What do you say?" asked Sir Melville, pointing the area out on his wall map.

"That will be fine, if you can get it there in time," Bill agreed.

"Oh," Sir Melville replied, "we shall have plenty of time. They will probably lie low for a few days now. For one thing they will probably have to fix up their planes first and then make all arrangements for getting the natives out, if they really intend to have a go at Singapore."

Bill was not so certain. "I hope you're right, sir," he returned, "but I believe now that they will work fast and get those guns out of there, now that we have collected our forces. I know I would, in the circumstances."

"What are your plans about the guns?" the D. C. asked.

"My idea is to capture the hidden rifles if possible. That will spike all their efforts and break up their plans for a raid on Singapore. They might be able to bomb the defenses there and perhaps throw a few shells into the town from these mysterious ships, but they will not be able to stage an actual landing, if we get their rifles."

"That will certainly save a lot of trouble and unnecessary explanations, Barnes," agreed the Englishman. "That to me seems like our real point. Singapore should be able to take care of itself—but, of course, they can't right now."

"I propose to go up there, take as many men as possible, any one who can handle a gun, land on the river and

swarm all over it. I think with Batten's help we can nail the lot. After that we may be able to get help outside from the *Courageous*. If we can satisfy them that these birds actually had those rifles there, they might take a chance and help us get the Fokkers and the surface vessels."

The D. C. frowned and nodded as if agreeing to the proposition.

But they both knew that until something was done about young Sandy, they were somewhat helpless.

The roar of motors overhead warned them that Cy and Bates had come in. But there was no *Eaglet*, neither in the sky nor inside the *Hellion*.

"HELLO, Bev old man!" greeted Bill as he raced out of the field office. "Any luck?"

"Not an ounce," replied Bates rushing up to greet his boss and exchanging warm handclasps. "Nowhere to be seen."

"Well, you did a swell job getting here; everything ran like clockwork. Wonder what happened."

"I may have done well getting here, but I spoiled it by losing that little devil. I feel pretty bad about it, Bill. Well, here's your *Hellion*, and a mighty fine craft she is. I hope you do better with her than I."

"Don't worry," Cy cheered. "You-all did a nobby job, Bev. You know, fellers, I got a cowman's hunch that that kid's O. K. He'll turn up within twenty-four hours or I'm a dumb cayuse!"

"Twenty-four hours!" roared Bill. "Golly, we've got to get going before that time, and I want that ship aboard when I take off. Wouldn't know what to do without Sandy in there—to bait them with."

There was more introducing and long explanations to make, and Bev Bates listened in awe. The more he heard of

the strange story and realized what a close shave they had had, the worse he felt about the disappearance of Sandy.

"By the way," he broke in, "who was the girl—this girl in the yellow sarong? She sounds interesting."

"Don't fall for that, Bev," Bill said. "She's a native of some sort, and from what I can make out from Batten, she's not the sort of lady for you to be chasing."

"No, no!" protested Bev. "You've got me wrong. I mean, she seems like a clue, or a cog in this mess, somewhere. Why did she dress Batten's wounds that way after she had helped to trap you? And then why did she warn them about where you had been taken?"

Both Bill and the D. C. exchanged puzzled glances.

"Golly!" gasped Bill. "She must have had a reason. Wonder if we can pick her up again."

"I've had a patrol out looking for her ever since the other night," Sir Melville said. "But we have found no trace of her, and no one in town seems to have ever heard of her before."

"You get that girl," Bates told them, "and you'll get a lot of news about this mess."

"Well, what about Sandy?" demanded Red.

"There's nothing we can do for a little while. He may be down along the coast line somewhere, or he may be captured and they might have him at the Dusan camp. We'll have to wait now. In the meantime we can make the rest of our plans and get the ships and men ready."

THE REST of the day was taken up in preparing the Snorters and transports for the raid on the Dusan gun cache at Rejang. Scotty MacCloskey worked like a Trojan bossing the mechanics and getting a kitchen into action. The B. F. S. men and officers looked on in wide-eyed wonder at the amazing efficiency of the

outfit and soon caught the spirit of the thing and whaled in and did more than their share.

In the meantime, Sir Melville had dispatched a coastal steamer off with oil and gasoline to be planted under a guard of natives and B. F. S. men on the beach below Balineau. It would take at least thirty hours to get it there, which would also hold up their take-off from Lubuk field.

This worried Bill no end, for he felt that they were losing valuable time, and he did not trust Otto Yahr and Chan Lo any further. But no matter what he felt there was little they could do about it until they were certain they had a base for supplies.

Night came on, and still no news of Sandy. Sir Melville got in touch with every post in his district and ordered a strict lookout for the young pilot and his ship.

Midnight came and a lull settled down over the field. Barum Jim was put in charge of the guard around the hangars, and he was assisted by a patrol of native Dyaks who swarmed about, parangs alert, and keen for action. The pilots and mechanics huddled down in their folding cots and decided to get as much rest as possible. The last motor had been overhauled and tested and the tanks filled with high-test fuel.

But Bill was uneasy and he simply had to do something, so he took Bev Bates and went up in the *Hellion* in hopes of finding Sandy, or some trace of him.

"She handles beautifully, Bill," Bev said. "How do you like her?"

But Bill was staring out across the wide expanse of sea, seeking for a trace of Sandy.

"She's hitting nearly four hundred," Bev went on.

"I wonder where Sandy is," was all Bill could reply. He turned the *Hellion* around and headed back to Lubuk.

XXVII—THE WANDERER

PUTTING the *Hellion* in a hangar, the two men sauntered back to the field office where Sir Melville and his staff were quartered. Bill had berths there for his chief lieutenants and Batten, who was now an important cog in the outfit. All were considerably downcast on account of the loss of Sandy.

The Australian was working on a large-scale map, showing the complete layout of the hidden cave where the guns were hidden. It showed the strange twists of the Rejang mouth and the layout of the section that crawled into the rocky wall and wound around making a natural hidden channel through which the proas had brought the guns up from Rejang. It was well done, and a quick glance over it assured Bill that he would be able to find it. The B. F. S. officers were certain they could storm it with their trained soldiers and get the guns—or at least steal the bolts and destroy them.

"I wish we had Sandy and could get away now," Bill fumed.

"But look here, Barnes," Sir Melville muttered from a couch. "There's no use working yourself like this. You can't go up there and take the chance of leaving your ships stranded all along the coast. You've had a tough enough time getting them together now. Why take any more chances?"

Bill could see the logic of it all, but he was certain that Chan Lo and Otto Yahr would wait for nothing now.

"Let's cork off a few winks," said Shorty. "Something will turn up in a little while."

Shorty had hardly said the words when something did. They all listened intently and caught the unmistakable sound of an airplane motor. They listened again, and a ring of grins circled the room beginning with Bill.

"That's the Eaglet!"

"That's Sandy!"

"The kid's back!"

"My word!" gulped Sir Melville.

They crashed through the door, cheering and slapping backs. Once out on the field they saw that Scotty had broken out three arc lights and had flooded a runway. Out of the inky blackness above trailed a flame pennon of a motor and before they could set themselves to race out to greet it, the little Eaglet had dropped into a side slip and was coming in beautifully for a three-pointer. The kid jockeyed the ship up to the line, thundering the radial to kick his rudder around and at last brought it up into line like a veteran.

"Sandy!" bellowed Bill, rushing up to the cockpit coaming.

"Bill!" replied the kid throwing his arms around Barnes' neck.

"Where in tarnation you been, youngster?" demanded Cy.

"Get out of there, you little hound," beamed Bill. "Get down here. I want to punch your head!"

"One at a time." Sandy laughed. "I'll take you all on, one at a time, if you've got a hangar for us to go behind. By the way, how about some chow?"

"Oh my land!" groaned Shorty. "Don't worry. He's all right!"

"The last time I saw the little shrimp, he was eating a length of suet pudding he had swiped from the *Courageous*. Nearly put the *Hellion* off keel!" added Bev Bates, with a quiet grin. But he was really tickled to death to see the youngster.

"You've got about fifteen hours to account for, youngster," Bill told him.

"You'd never believe so many things could happen in such a short time," went on Sandy, clambering out, still carrying his air pistol. "Only fifteen hours?"

"Seems like two years since we saw you. What happened?"

They led him to the staff building in triumph and crammed him with food

while they plied him with questions.

"Say," gulped the youngster, "you birds interested in a lot of natives in funny boats who are boarding three ships somewhere off—off this place here?"

He pointed to a spot outside of Brintula which was a few miles north of Balineau. He got up and went to the wall map, a sandwich as big as a decent-sized tombstone in one fist.

"Interested?" roared Bill. "I should say we are! You see them?"

"Sure! Not long ago. A jane in a yellow dress told me they were going to Singapore. What's going on up there, a World's Fair or something?"

They all gulped, exchanged hurried glances and then sat speechless.

Bill was the first to come out of the stupor. He grabbed Sandy, shoved him back into a chair and said:

"Look here, youngster. You'd better begin from the beginning and tell the whole story and tell it right!"

"Suits me," beamed Sandy taking another huge bite. "Here's what happened: I went after your *Scarlet Stormer* through that stinking smoke the Fokkers threw out. I kinder hoped to get it down and nail it for you, but I had no luck. They dived like the devil, and I couldn't keep up with them. So I decided to stay upstairs and picked a wispy cloud and took in the show."

"You should not have done that, youngster," Cy reprimanded. "You had us loco."

"Shut up, Cy!" snapped Bill. "Go on, Sandy. Talk fast!"

"Well, they kept on for quite a while and then I saw 'em go down to three ships that looked like tramps. But somehow they let out some sort of platforms, all three of 'em and the ships seemed to land on them while these things were being dragged across the water. Then they pulled 'em aboard and dropped 'em inside."

SANDY took another bite and beamed. The rest waited anxiously.

"Then," he went on, "a funny thing happened. Them ships suddenly seemed to drop their black funnels and a short blue one came up. Something happened to the upper part, the bridge was lowered and new parts came up from nowhere, and they looked entirely different. But could they go!"

Bill and the D. C. exchanged glances. The secret of the Blue Funnel line vessels was out.

"Anyway," Sandy continued, "I followed them for a time and then saw that I was short of gas and decided to go down near by along the beach about there—that place you got marked as Brintula. Anyway, I could find it again."

"I was wondering what to do and how to get in touch with you when I spotted a small native boat with a tricky sort of sail coming along. I went to the edge of the water and waved to it. I could see that it was being handled by a girl, who knew how, too. She came up as close as she could and then anchored offshore a way and waded in."

"In a yellow dress?" asked Bev Bates anxiously.

"Yes. You know her? She seems to know something about you guys. One of you, anyway. I asked her where I was and she told me. Spoke pretty good English, too. Then I told her I was out of gas and she said she knew where I could get some. She started along the beach, me following her, and I got talking to her and she said she knew a chap named Batten. I sensed that she meant that Australian guy who was missing. I figured he was down somewhere about there and that she had met him."

"Why, here's Batten," said Bill. "Do you know this girl, Don?"

The Australian looked puzzled for a minute and then suddenly took on an expression of enlightenment.

"I know old Laki Saleh's daughter,

Olenadik," Don replied. "It couldn't have been she, could it?"

"Why, that's the jane they accused me of bewitching," Shorty broke in. "Where does she fit in?"

"Laki—Laki Saleh?" mused Sandy, after staring several minutes at Batten. "That sounds like the name she mentioned. She said she was the chief's daughter. How did you know her, Batten?"

"You see, when they had me tied up there, this girl took a shine to me," Batten explained sheepishly. "She used to slip me drinks of water when no one was looking, and I gave her a pocket comb. Judas! I wonder if she was the one who untied me. You know, I woke up one night and found that my hands and legs were free. That's how I got off."

"This thing is beginning to clear now. But didn't you recognize her that night in Sandakan? She was the girl who fixed you up and bathed your wound."

"No. I was almost blind with blood, I guess. But it's funny I didn't recognize her. Still, she never wore those clothes in the Dusan camp. She had on real native costume—not this town stuff."

"Well, anyway," Sandy went on, "she led me to a place a ways down the beach and there stacked up under the trees were hundreds of red cans, all aviation gasoline."

"Is it still there?" Bill roared.

"Sure! As far as I know," Sandy replied, attacking the sandwich again.

Bill nodded to Sir Melville and got a nod back in return. Then he whispered something to Captain Crispin who darted outside.

"Go on, Sandy, but make it snappy," Bill ordered.

"Well, I carted enough back to fill up. The girl helped me, and while we were dragging the cans up to the Eaglet, she told me how her father had been tricked by these birds who had stacked the gaso-

line there. The story seemed cockeyed to me. All about big ships and guns that were to pick up her father's tribesmen and take them to attack what she called the white man's kampongs across the sea. I got the word 'Singapore' out of her once, but it was all dizzy. Maybe you birds can make something of it."

"Go on, Sandy, what then?"

"Well, I asked her if I could do anything for her, but all she wanted me to do was to look up Batten and tell him about the ships and the guns. I didn't know, of course, that he was here with you, but somehow this yarn got me and I decided to have another look around. So I took off again and the girl went back to her boat and evidently continued on. I haven't seen her since."

"You went to have a look—at what?"

"This dive that used to be her father's camp, to see if there was anything going on."

"Oh, good night!" Red moaned. "Now for it!"

XXVIII—MOVING FAST

"LET HIM go on," growled Bill.

"I just went down there and could see nothing," Sandy continued. "Nothing—that is, until two Fokkers came out of nowhere and tried to nail me."

"Judas!" gasped Batten.

The D. C. stared at the youngster, hardly believing his eyes or his ears.

"And——" Bill urged.

"Well, I chased 'em around a while and at last buzzed off with them after me. They fired plenty of stuff at me, but I got away—but not before I noticed plenty of goings-on all over the beach near by. They were heading out toward the ships with crates galore."

"Damn!" swore the D. C. "They've already started to get out the rifles. We've got to move fast now."

Sandy took a look at the ruddy Englishman who was pulling on his boots again.

"Well, I decided to come back," Sandy went on, when I noticed that I was losing gas fast. So I went down to have a look and see what was the matter. I managed to get almost back as far as the gas dump by gliding her out to the limit. Then, when I was down, I saw that a bullet had clipped a rubber connection from the main tank to the main feed, so I fixed it and decided to mooch up and get some more gas from the dump."

"Was it still there?" Barnes asked.

"Sure, but I saw that it wouldn't be there long unless I did something about it. You see, there were half a dozen natives there, and they seemed to be loading the stuff into some boats. Guess they were getting ready to ship it away. So I decided that I still needed some and got the idea of scaring them away long enough to nab a few gallons."

"What was your idea, youngster?"

"I know." Bev Bates grinned.

"This!" Sandy triumphantly explained, holding up his air pistol. "See! I huddled in the bushes and took pot shots at them when they were bending over. For a minute they began fighting among themselves, but as they couldn't hear any shots they became scared. I played 'em swell, hitting 'em where it hurt most, and increasing the force of the bullet with this set-screw thing."

"At last they couldn't stand it any longer and with a loud whoop bounded off, leaped into a boat, and shoved off. I watched until it got dark and saw that they had gone for good, picked up about twenty gallons and dragged it to my ship."

"And here you are," said Bill happily.

"But by then I noticed that more of these native boats were going up the coast line, and then one of the Blue Funnel things came along and picked them up, while a few brought the boats back to the shore. I'll bet there are four million of them up there now."

"There's nothing left now, Barnes," the D. C. said, buttoning up his tunic.

"We've got to get them. They're evidently gathering for the trip to Singapore. It's too late now to do anything about it. The *Courageous* has started back for Hongkong. We've got to stop them ourselves."

"Well, if this gas dump is still there, we can manage. How much stuff do you think they left, Sandy?" Bill inquired.

"Plenty! There must have been more than a hundred of those crates and there's, let's see, a dozen gallons in six cans. That would make at least two thousand four hundred gallons, probably nearer three thousand gallons. Enough?"

"You'd better be a good counter, Sandy," Bill warned. "We're going to stake a lot on you."

"How about some cake?" returned Sandy, not to be daunted.

CRISPIN had started things buzzing outside, with the aid of Barum Jim, Scotty, and Tony Lamport; they got every one up and had the Snorters and transports fitted with long, lean, gray-painted bombs. The guns were loaded and checked. A last-minute fueling was given to the *Hellion* and the little Eaglet which was to be sent along also, in spite of the long hours she had been in the air so far.

The men were brought in and given the whole story. Gunners were told off to various ships. Bates took over a Snorter which had been given his old markings B. B. 4., and Bill prepared to lead the expedition in the new *Hellion*. Batten was to act as lead once they got to the Rejang, providing, of course, that there was an excuse for going down and attempting to nail the rifles.

Crispin was to go with Bates, Sir Melville with Red, for whom he had taken a great liking, and Woolsey was posted to fly with Cy Hawkins. Scotty MacCloskey had adopted Barum Jim and had him posted as a gunner on the

lead transport, which also carried Tony Lamport, the radio boss.

Gradually as the minutes flew past, the organization was complete. Gunners were in their cockpits, radio men at their dials, and pilots under the noses of their ships awaiting final orders. The transports also carried a few well-disciplined British Servicemen who could be trusted in a pinch. Fine soldiers they were, with heaps of World War experience, and who in addition had a keen knowledge of the natives and their wiles.

At last they were ready, the field ground crew handled the floodlights from portable trucks, and they were getting the last few degrees of heat on the thermometers. Exhaust stacks flamed and added to the weird glare of colors that mingled with the murk of the early morning. A last handshake, a word or two of friendly advice, and they were ready for the most amazing expedition the British Foreign Service had ever experienced.

THEN Bill Barnes gave them the word from his signal blinker mounted in the top of the *Hellion*. He sent the transports off first to get height and arranged for the rendezvous over Sandakan at four thousand. One by one they raced away, tried and true, with tons of experience behind them as the result of the amazing flight from San Francisco to Borneo. Into their positions they swept almost as soon as their great wheels had left the earth of Lubuk field.

Then a three-ship flight of Snorters under the leadership of Shorty Hass-further, who was now considered well enough to take over the controls again, raced down the field with the gleam of the floodlights dancing on their tails. Don Batten, with a wave to Bill, took off next in his well-tuned *Bullet* and shot up into the sky with a vengeance.

"Go on, Bev!" Bill signaled to Bates who was to lead the other three-ship

flight of Snorters with Captain Crispin as his gunner.

Barnes watched and then turned to the beaming eyes of Sandy Sanders.

"Say, but this is swell, eh, Bill?" the youngster said, strapping on a radio helmet. "What an outfit, eh?"

Bill wagged his head and said nothing. He was wondering how much of it would be left when it was all over and where the money was coming from to pay for it all.

"Well," he agreed at last, smiling faintly at the youngster, who still munched on a half-moon jam tart, "I hope your gas dump is still there. If it isn't, there's no telling what will happen to us. As we stand now we can all stay in the air for about a thousand miles. After that, it's go down, and perhaps oblivion."

"Why?"

"Just this," Bill explained. "From here to Rejang is about five hundred miles as the crow flies. If your dump is no longer there we shall have to go on with the gas we have. If this guy Yahr and his mob have already started for Singapore, we shall *have* to go after them, and no matter how you figure it it's another five hundred miles across the Java Sea to the British naval base. Get the answer?"

"It gives us practically no leeway for fighting action, does it?" moaned Sandy.

"So you see, youngster, if your gasoline dump is not there, we shall have to come back to Brintula, land on the beach until that vessel comes up with gas. It is not due there until late to-morrow."

"I guess the only thing I did after all," returned Sandy faintly, "was to get you guys in a jam, eh? If I hadn't seen those ships, though, you would not have started, would you, and it would have been too late, anyway?"

"Never mind, kid. We'll get away with it somehow—we always have," Bill assured him. "Besides, we shall have a

lot of time to think between here and Brintula. Let's go!"

And with that, Bill gave the two motors the gas and rolled out for his take-off. Sandy went to work and called the rest of them and advised them to get every ounce of power from their fuel and run at their best cruising speed for economy.

XXIX—THE REASON WHY

THEY gathered over Sandakan and all reported to the *Hellion* flagplane that all was well and ready to go. Bill flaunted his signal flares, ordered a wide formation for safety in the dark, and headed dead across British North Borneo on a southwesterly course for Brintula where Sandy had reported the gasoline dump to be.

Bill had gambled his all on this and hoped that the youngster's report was reliable, but he had never had cause to doubt him in the past, and he felt certain that his calculation of the amount of gas was reasonably correct.

On they roared as the first wisps of gold began to trickle over the eastern horizon. Another twenty minutes and the ships were flecked with gold, their undersides gleaming as though burnished with precious metal. As they roared on, Bill held short conversations with Sir Melville and Don Batten concerning the possibility of the gasoline dump's being removed or otherwise made unavailable.

"I leave it all to you," Sir Melville replied. "You know the range of your machines better than I—but I would like to make a success of this affair."

Don Batten was headstrong about it, of course, and advised taking a chance.

But Bill was still thinking of his ships, his men, and the money involved, so he continued on and decided to act when the occasion arose.

More miles slipped away beneath their wings and he called for another check-up

of the tanks. The reports sounded good, but he realized that they had been flying through heavy night air and that all motors consumed less fuel and more air under these conditions. An hour and a half passed and Bill suggested that wherever possible spare pilots should take over the controls until they reached the site of the dump.

The morning sky was beautiful now, with the slanting rays of the sun slashing through the trees below and spreading fan-shaped across the low hills. The sea off to their right was steaming up its early-morning mist which would soon be dissipated by the sun and land breeze. Bill took it all in and pondered on the fact that this beautiful island could provide so much terror, torture, and tribulation.

He laughed quietly to himself as he reviewed all that had happened here in the past few days. Most men could not have crammed half of these experiences into a whole life, but when you were with Bill Barnes, you needed to carry a pretty heavy history book to jot down the adventures that befell you.

But the low laugh was suddenly choked off. Bill let out a cry that startled Sandy.

"Look!" Bill exclaimed, directing his steel-blue eyes out through the glassed-in cowl. "What's that?"

"That's it!" groaned Sandy. "Somebody got to it, all right!"

Dead ahead a long curling plume of smoke was climbing up into the sky. As they raced on, it grew to monstrous proportions and Bill's heart sank.

"Well, it *was* there, anyhow," growled Sandy.

BILL called Sir Melville and explained his fears. The Englishman had little to say in reply, so Bill then gave orders that they were to circle the place for a few minutes while he took the *Hellion* down and made an investigation.

"We might still be able to salvage some of it," he explained.

But he was heartsick as he hurled the *Hellion* on with every ounce of power in her motors. He reached the place well ahead of the others and saw that his initial fears were correct. The dump was a blazing pile of exploding crates that threw their flaming liquids in all directions. The air was filled with burning embers, and the pungent smoke of the ignited fuel swirled up adding monstrosity to the grim shapeless column that rose up, fell away gradually, and then spread itself out over the nipa palms.

"Look!" shrieked Sandy. "There's that girl's boat again."

Bill peered down and saw a native vinta with its sail lowered. On the shore stood a figure in a flaming yellow sarong. There appeared to be no one else near by. He glanced up and saw that Don Batten was well over him, ready to give aid if necessary.

"I'm going down," Bill said. "Tip them off!"

And while Sandy advised the rest by radio, Bill eased back on the throttles and went down to make a neat landing on the hard-packed sands. The tall native girl watched them and then began to run forward as Sandy climbed out of the cabin. Leaving his engines ticking over and drawing a gun for safety, Bill followed.

"Who did that?" Sandy was yelling.

Bill came up, shaking with rage. "Did you do this?" he demanded.

"I did," the girl replied, her eyes flaming. "They shall not have it to do more battle. They have killed my father, Laki Saleh, and they shall do no more damage."

"Are you Olenadik, daughter of Laki Saleh?" Bill asked more respectfully.

The girl drew herself up as straight as an arrow. Her well-chiseled features took on a new beauty. "I am," she replied proudly.

"Then why did you help Otto Yahr and Chan Lo capture us on Sandakan?" asked Bill.

"I did not know what they were doing, until I saw the man with the golden hair. They said I was to help get him because my father wished to reward him, to make him a chief and offer him my hand. I did not know then that they had taken my father to the big proa to murder him."

It did not sound sensible at first, but Bill began to see that this native princess had fallen hard for the handsome Australian with the blond curly hair. He hurriedly told of the end of Laki Saleh and mentioned the fact that he had given him the sacrificial knife.

"My father did that?" the girl said faintly. "I am very glad. You must have pleased him mightily."

"He tried to save his life," blurted out Sandy. "Now you have gone and gummed it all up by setting fire to this stuff. What did you do that for?"

The girl stared up at the swirling formation above and smiled.

"They came, you see, to get it with a big ship—a blue funnel monster—but I set fire to it. An hour ago, they left when they saw the first smoke rise. Then they turned and went off again. I had a hard time getting it all burning."

"I wish you'd had a harder time," said Bill staring across at the blazing dump. "Now we have little chance to stop them."

"You were going to do battle—against all those men and ships?" asked the girl hollowly.

"Why not? They might be stopped, even yet. Is there anything we can do for you?"

"No. Go on and do battle. Olenadik will sail on to her tribe and lead them away from the Moaning Valley and the Temple of Death. You have the man with golden hair destroy Wannu Froi and Olenadik will do the rest. Go! Godspeed to you!"

And with that the girl smiled, turned away and raised her sarong and walked into the surf toward her vinta.

"Boy! She certainly went for Batten in a big way, eh?" Sandy said to Bill.

"Poor kid!" Bill replied. "She thought she was doing the right thing, but she'll never know what a headache she's given me."

Then with another look at the blazing pile of crates that still thundered and belched with explosions, they climbed back into the *Hellion* and took off.

THE FORMATION gathered again five miles away and Sandy explained everything to the men in the other ships.

"Quite a bit o' fluff I had trailing me, eh?" Don Batten called back. "She certainly tried to set Borneo on fire for me, eh?"

They all caught this and laughed, but Bill was figuring fast and ordered another check of fuel. When the reports came through, he was still uncertain, but decided to make the best of it and forget the Blue Funnel line ship that must be within a few miles of Cape Sirik, by now.

"We'll try our luck at Rejang and see if they have got away with the rifles," he had Sandy explain to the leaders and Sir Melville.

They thundered on, keen for action now. Once more they had been frustrated and without being able to fire a shot or throw a punch in their defense. By now every pilot and gunner aboard the Barnes fleet was itching for action, and a new tenseness swept through them, as though they felt that it was time that something was done.

They left the seacoast again and cut across the jungle that lay back in the foothills of the Ular Balu Mountains of Sarawak. Another hour or more passed, and then the murky delta of the Rejang crept into the picture. Throttles were shoved forward eagerly and the

expedition closed in on the Dusan country.

"There's two ships lying off there," Bill said. "They must still be loading men and guns. Advise them that we will try the river plan first and get into the cave. Understand?"

Sandy nodded, turned back to his dials, and gave the message into his muzzle mike. They all checked back the order and the stage was set.

Don Batten roared away to the coast, followed by the transports. Below, Bill could see dozens of proas crawling down the river mouth. From one of the ships out in the hidden harbor shots went up and shells exploded with dull, dry roars. The transports kept on behind Batten as though they were tied to his wing tips.

Bill led the rest smack into the Y mouth of the river and began pouring tons of lead into the proas. The natives scrambled out of the water, crept up the rocky wall of the bank and, snuggled behind rocks and breaks in the formation, potted back with glinting Mausers.

"They've got some of them out!" Bill roared. "Come on, gang; cover Don and the boys!"

XXX—BATTLE OF REJANG

THEN began one of the wildest fights that Barnes and his Snorter crowd had ever experienced. They had to fly in line formation through the soaring walls of the river. The gunners stood up and poured burst after burst into the foliage that hid the natives, who blazed back with rare marksmanship with their new weapons. Slugs sang past their ears, battered into metal, and screamed through the three-ply and dural.

Back and forth they roared with Bill and his *Hellion* in the lead. Sandy danced on the end of a Browning mounted in the back, and the Snorter

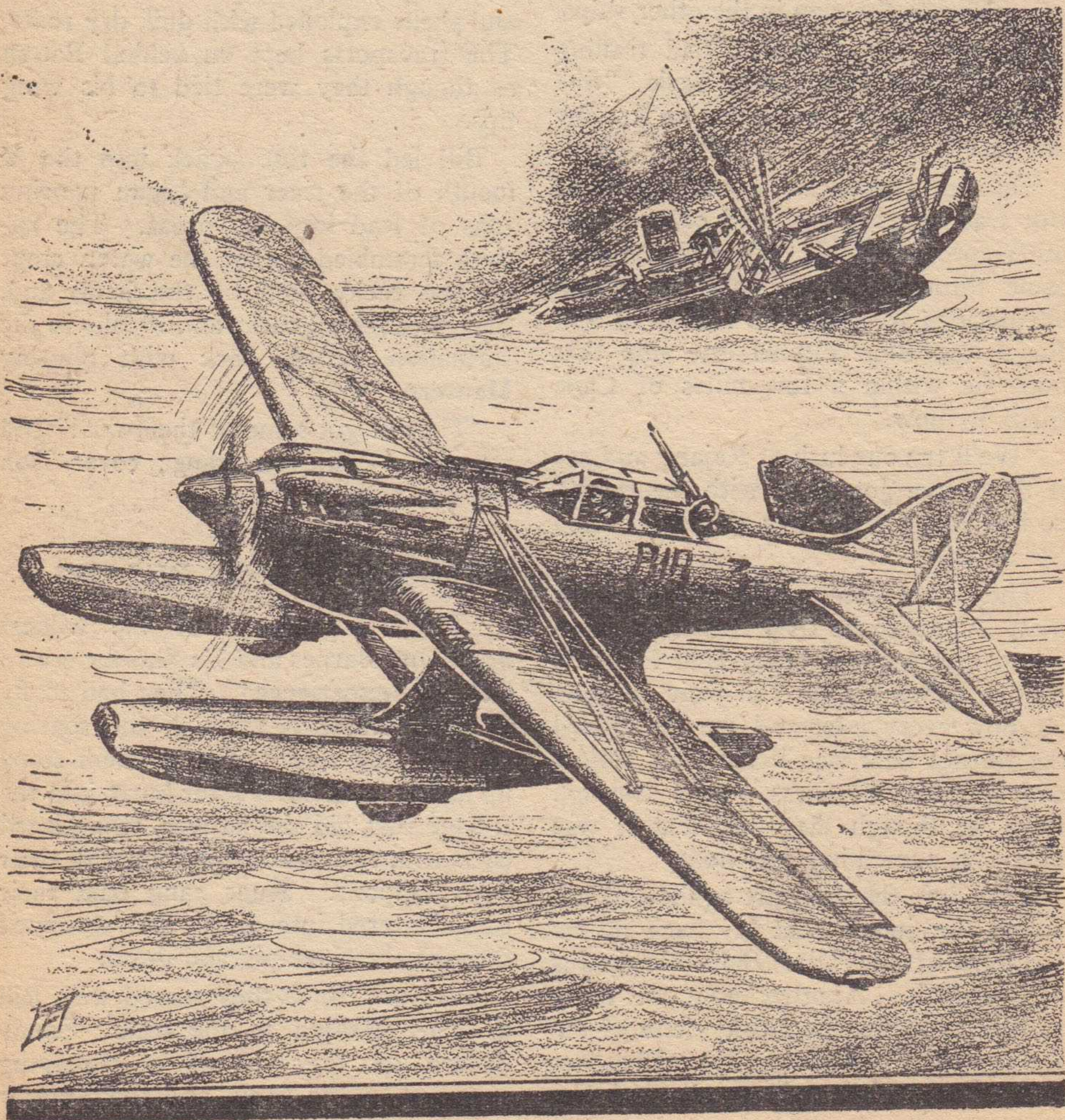
gunners saw him pick men out from the hiding places with all the accuracy of a trained marksman. Where they were using up long bursts, Sandy was spitting venomously with short four or five-round bursts and sending half-naked men tumbling to destruction in the slimy waters below.

Then out of the flurry of antiaircraft belches screamed the *Batten Bullet* and the transports. One by one they glided in, the gunners fighting a mad action on both sides until their pontoons hit the water. Then with Don Batten in the lead the B. F. S. men swarmed out of

the cabins, surged across the shallow water to the bank, carrying long, gray boxes and Webleys.

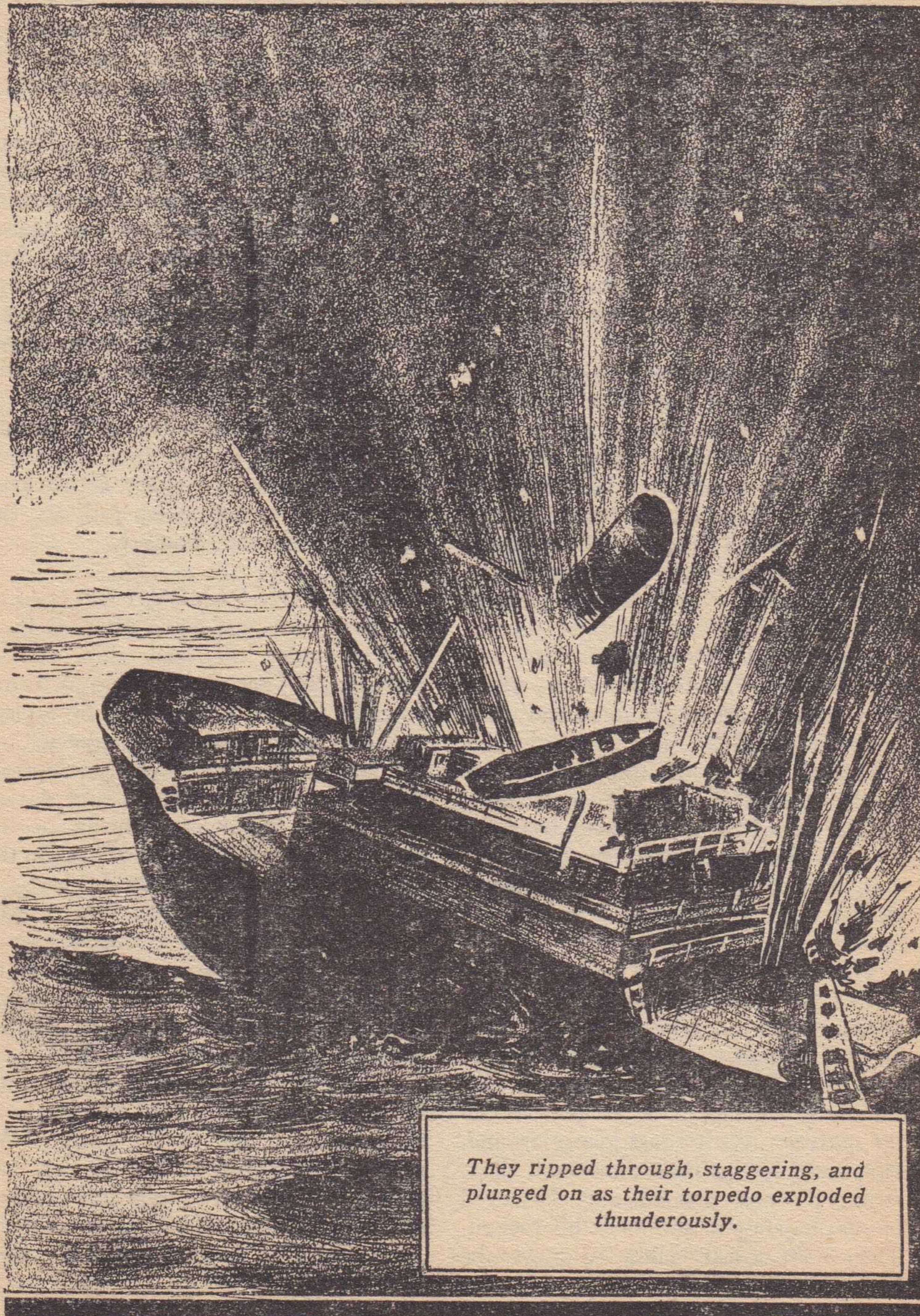
"There they go!" Bill roared hurtling his *Hellion* onto a crowd of natives who were swarming across the face of a large rock to get shots at the transports. "There they go with the explosives. They'll blow that cave to fragments, and any rifles left in there will be just twisted metal!"

His guns flamed out and battered men to bits. They screamed and fell over into the swirling waters below, all legs and arms. Their rifles fell away from



dead hands, flashed in the sunshine for a minute, and then disappeared with a low *chug*.

Batten's ship had been run up on the bank, and left idling. The transports were jockeying for position again for



They ripped through, staggering, and plunged on as their torpedo exploded thunderously.

take-offs while the gunners poured lead and fire into the raging natives who crept into cover and foliage shelter. The place was a madman's holiday. The Snorters under Shorty Hassfurth dived on a bevy of natives who were trying to get to Batten's ship with burning torches. His guns mowed them down in rows, and they rolled over the edge of the bank, clawing at tufts of grass and reeds. Wounded men were struggling in the water, throwing up their hands and sinking with screeches that would have made men ill.

"This is too easy, so far," warned Bill. "Where are the Fokkers and that crowd?"

Below again, the B. F. S. men were swarming out of the cave, splashing through the water and firing a rear-guard action. Above them, Mausers spat and two went down headlong into the water. Almost at the same instant three natives still clutching rifles plunged headlong off the cliff and smacked the water near by. Two Barnes gunners hurled themselves out of their turrets, dragged the B. F. S. men clear, and rammed them into the cabin doors where more hands reached for them and drew them well inside.

Batten, with a Mauser rifle in his hands, picked up from somewhere, backed out of the cave, firing from the hip. A swarm of natives plunged after him, hurling spears, knives, and using blowpipes. Don mowed them down in ranks.

The Snorters charged in again while two of the transports surged away and began to get up take-off speed. Don peered up and saw Red circling over him, and Sir Melville leaning over the side was pouring in a terrible hail on the natives. With a last glance around, Don dived for his *Bullet*, shoved it clear, swung the nose around, and clambered up on the pontoon and made his cockpit. Then with a last bellow of power he took off, followed by another transport

with the gunners driving the natives back into their holes.

Boom!

A gigantic detonation belched out of the rocky cave.

The hidden cave then seemed to shiver, and at last with a low roar the whole river wall toppled in and blocked up the entrance.

"There's the finish of the Dusan death trap," beamed Bill. "Get them out of here, Sandy. Those ships next!"

But before the Snorters and transports could re-form, they saw that they would never have to go to Singapore that day. The battle was to be staged then and there, for out of the sky above charged an air armada that made Bill suck in his breath.

The *Scarlet Stormer* led six V-formationed Fokkers. Behind them and above were two more six-Fokker formations. One was led by a Swedish Jatkfalk, the other by a Bernard bomber.

"COME ON SANDY!" Bill cried as he saw a transport being attacked by a Fokker under the leadership of the Jatkfalk. "That Swede ship is being flown by Chan Lo. I can tell his style."

Sandy knew what was expected of him, and he quickly switched his muzzle mike over to Bill's helmet and darted back down the companionway to the Eaglet which had been placed back in the *Hellion* before they left the field.

In twenty seconds the Eaglet was being lowered on the trapeze.

In the meantime he shot orders to the Snorters which carried torpedoes. The transports flocked behind Batten and they plunged into the fray.

"Golly, we were lucky!" Bill beamed as he watched Sandy tear into the Fokker formation and break it up. "We missed the gasoline, but if we had waited to refuel, we might have missed this gang. A lot can happen in an hour. And a lot may happen within the next hour."

The transports fought a running action with the Fokkers. Batten led them on toward the two ships which were getting under way. Their deck Q-F guns were blazing away merrily, regardless of friend or foe. Two Fokkers locked wings as Sandy plunged into them and made them swerve sharply.

Batten led the transports into position and swirled around the *Bernard*. The guns opened fire, and the big Frenchman tottered, like a man who has stumbled, and fell forward, its nose down. It faltered on, jerked up into flying position, and then threw its motor away with a belch of flame.

It went down, livid fire licking at its longerons and men toppling out in all shapes to hit the water two thousand feet below with a sickening thud. Sandy tore out of the formation he had split up and turned his attention on another. The Snorters tore on for their objective, gunners' hands on the torpedo toggles. The *Hellion* followed them down and kept the third formation of Fokkers busy.

Batten led the way, and three Snorters slipped to an in-line position. Then one by one they let drive with their torpedoes that hit the water with a splash and continued on like steel sharks.

Bong! Bong! Bong!

Three splinter-tipped balls of flame appeared at the side of the first steamer, and blotted out forever her treacherous blue funnel. Down from above blazed the Fokkers, steel-tipped death spraying from their guns. Bill screamed and tried to head them off, but they were in for blood, and a Snorter went down in a jagged mass of dural and steel. It hit with a resounding crash on the poop of the doomed steamer.

"Who the devil was that?" Bill yelled.

Then before the Fokkers could pull out of their concerted dive, the *Hellion* battered after them. Into the curling formation raced Bill, his Halgar guns

flaming and chattering. The armor-piercing bullets pounded into the steel engines of two, and they floundered. Steel ripped against steel, tearing out vitals, cylinders, wrist pins, and pistons.

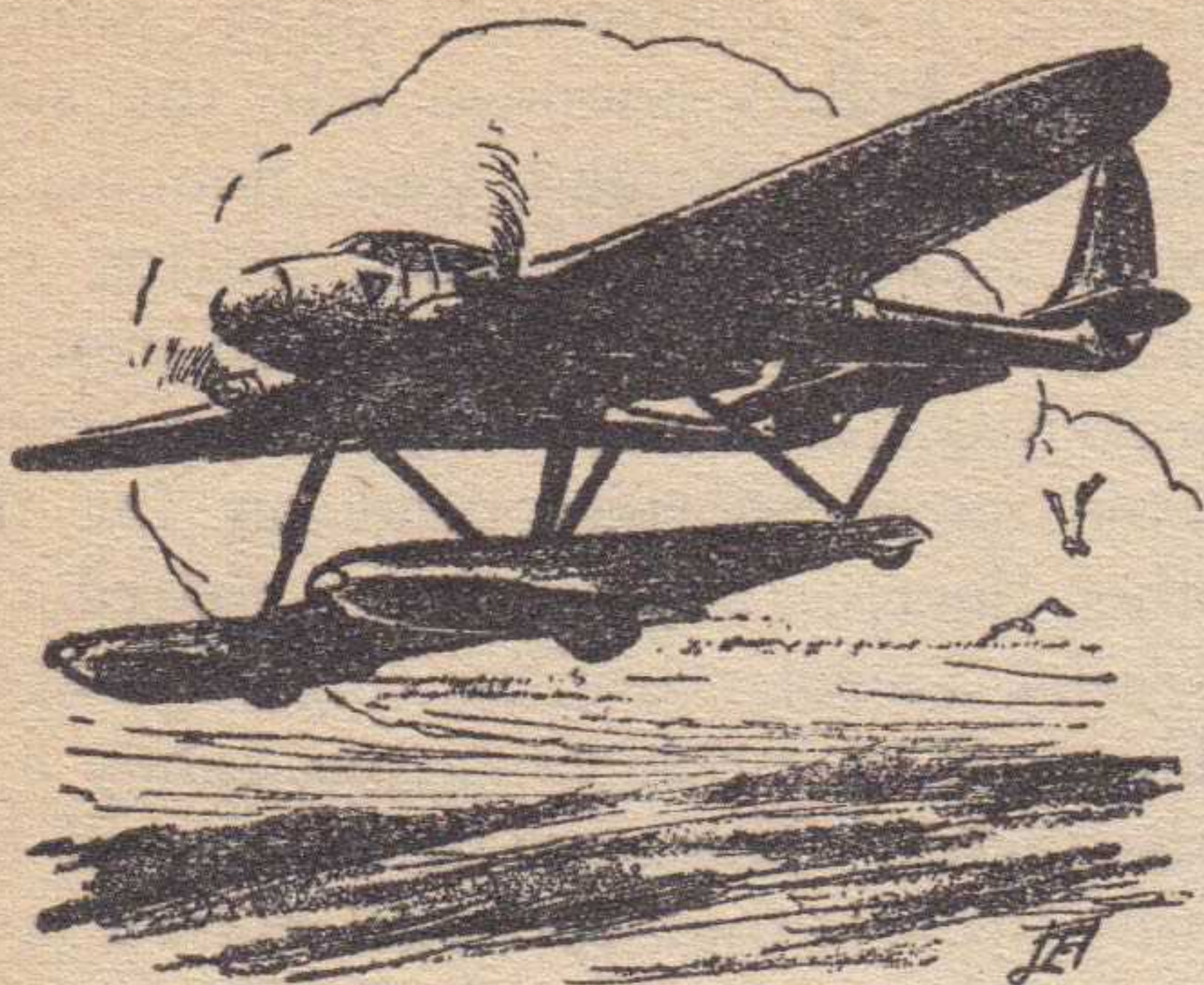
Across the tracer-flecked sky came three more Snorters dead on for the other liner. Into the game roared the *Scarlet Stormer* leading three Fokkers. Then out of nowhere darted Sandy and his Eaglet. The youngster snapped his wing tip past the *Scarlet Stormer's* nose and slithered it out of the line. The Fokkers tearing on opened fire on the little single-seater but missed, and the *Scarlet Stormer* pilot had a close shave himself.

The torpedo-armed Snorters set themselves for action while the gunners, one hand on their toggles and the other on the gun breeches, fought their way through the Jatkfalk and more Fokkers. Wings and struts fluttered through the air.

The Snorters fought their way through, nosed down and tore at the steamer in spite of the barrage of Q-F fire that was being aimed point-blank at them. Bates and Crispin were in the first ship, and their missile hit first, blasting a great hole in the steel sides of the racing ship. Gleason followed, letting the torpedo go at point-blank and then charging up through the wireless aerial between the two masts. They ripped it all away, staggered under the shock, and plunged on as their torpedo went off with the thunder of doom.

Bong!

Steel chunks, wreckage, and rigging flew in all directions. Natives were clambering over the sides and heading for their deserted proas. Then a third Snorter came in from somewhere and let drive. This time the released torpedo caught the racing prow and blew it clean away, and surging waters leaped in and throttled the sea pirate, so that she began to go down by the nose almost instantly. The other steamer had



rolled over on one side, displaying a new bronze racing propeller and dozens of natives who were scurrying over her slimy sides to get clear and make for rafts and floating wreckage.

"Get away!" ordered Bill, bellowing into his microphone. "Get clear and fight it out and finish them off."

They re-formed quickly, noting a transport stagger out from the mêlée with both props dead. It went down in a long easy glide toward the northwest. Bill wondered what had happened there, but he was proud that they had done so well with such little loss so far.

XXXI—TO THE FINISH

THE BATTLE for life was on in earnest now. The Fokkers that remained had re-formed behind the *Jatkfalk* and the *Scarlet Stormer*. There appeared to be about twelve or fifteen left. The Barnes troupe had lost a *Snorter* and a transport so far, but the odds were still well in the enemy's favor.

"But," argued Bill, talking to himself as he jockeyed to get a few *Snorters* behind him, "they have lost their bases now and will have to break off soon and form new plans. At least we have blocked their raid on Singapore. It's neck or nothing now."

He was right. The *Scarlet Stormer* guy was out for revenge and he drove his Fokkers into the fray, trying to get

through the splendid gunnery put up by the transports, but the big ships were huddling together like flying forts and keeping the Fokkers at bay.

Then, suddenly, there was a new twist to the battle. Through the maze of wings, tracer smoke, and fluttering débris shot the *Jatkfalk*. On its tail was the *Eaglet*. Young Sandy had caught the Chinaman napping and was finishing him off. The two ships slashed through all formations like demented vultures. Then as the little *Eaglet* closed up until it seemed that Sandy's prop must cut off the *Jatkfalk's* tail, his guns spurted wickedly and the Swedish fighter made a sudden half roll, flattened out on her back, swung a wing back until it foundered the tail surfaces, and then nosed down, breaking away the other wing on the way down. That was the finish of Chan Lo. His ship hit with a majestic splash, belched a last gulp of blue smoke, and disappeared.

But Sandy had not waited for that. With a quick twist of his stick and a tap on his rudder he was up again, pecking away at another Fokker, his lead flaming through the greasy belly of the Dutchman. Another ship was caught in his hail, rolled off, flamed wildly, and nosed up like a winged duck. It fell away, the tail flashing back and forth in mechanical agony.

"Good boy, Sandy!" beamed Bill. "Keep 'em broken up and the transports will stop them."

He was right. Within a few minutes, the Fokkers had been cut down to a mere five ships. Two were streaking away for the mainland, their motors and tanks shattered. One went down with a dead pilot hanging over the cockpit coaming. Two more charged in at Don Batten, but the Australian parried them, staged a beautiful bit of deception, and shot back with his two guns flaming a swath in their path which they both flew into and fell out of the fray.

"Come on! Come on!" Bill raged

into the microphone again. "They're trying to do a sneak. There goes the *Scarlet Stormer*—my *Scarlet Stormer*!"

By majestic maneuvering, Otto Yahr had wormed his way clear and had drawn four Fokkers with him, leaving the rest to the mercies of the transports. Bill crashed through two, blasting them out of his path with his Halgar guns so that they fell in tangled masses below him, and charged after his pet machine.

But again that blinding screen of smoke poured out from the retreating Fokkers. Bill tried to make his way through it, but was enveloped in sticky black smoke that clung to his screen and threatened to blind him completely. He swung out wildly and almost crashed into Shorty Hassfurth who had loyally followed him. That was enough for Bill.

"Re-form, over the downed transport," he ordered. "Snorters on my tail. Batten take the transports and see if they can get that crew out safely."

Then a new tone came into the ear-phones. It was Sir Melville speaking.

"Barnes! Barnes!" he yelled excitedly. "Here comes the third Blue Funnel ship. This is your chance. Nail it!"

Bill roared up and took charge again, the Snorters behind him in trim formation. Ahead he could see the oncoming liner, smoke belching from two blue funnels. This, then, must be the ship that had gone back to get—or destroy—the gasoline dump. He pondered on this for a minute and sensed that Sir Melville must have had a reason for saying that this was his chance.

"NO USE trying to stop it. No more torpedoes," Bill explained. "Let's capture it!"

"The right idea!" Sir Melville barked back. "Do you see the move?"

Bill didn't, but he knew there was something behind it. Into the fray they tore again. Batten and the transports

under him were down picking up the transport crew. Bill rushed away with the Eaglet and the five remaining Snorters behind him. Over the Blue Funnel liner he poised, dived madly and dropped a note. It was a message to stand by for boarding.

For an answer they got a belch of Q-F gunfire. Over went the *Hellion* again and his Halgar guns and the fifty-caliber Brownings sprayed the bridge, the deck houses, and the gun platforms. The Snorters tore in, too. Lead spattered across the decks, seamen went down into the scuppers and rolled against the rail. The guns were suddenly silenced, and they ran a flag up the mast, indicating surrender.

Bill cheered, dropped another note and ordered the master and full crew to take posts on the fo'c's'le deck within fifteen minutes. The Snorters slashed back and forth ominously while men raced up and down the decks and took their surrender positions. At last Bill was satisfied that all was well and ordered the transports to come alongside and board her.

The B. F. S. men who had been shut up in the black bellies of the transports were eager to get aboard. They dropped out on the pontoons and like happy buccaneers clambered up a Jacobs ladder and swept up the decks to take full charge.

"All hands stand by. Ships will land alongside this vessel," ordered Bill. "They will be taken aboard at once."

Like clockwork the B. F. S. men worked and had a skeleton crew under close guard lifting the ships aboard with the derrick that had once lifted Fokkers. Within half an hour every ship of the Barnes fleet was aboard and stowed away.

IT WAS two days later that Bill got all his ships back intact on the Lubuk field. By now all traces of their battle had been removed, and they were ready

to go again. The wounded were resting comfortably in Sandakan and were r'aring to go again. They had heard something about a strange cablegram from somewhere in North Africa.

Sir Melville called Bill over to the field office, late in the afternoon. He was particularly jovial and pleased with himself, for the home office was loud in its praise—on the quiet, of course—of his success in handling the gun-running business. He made Bill sit down, while he packed his big pipe and settled back for a comfortable chat.

"Well, you see we did the right thing in capturing that liner, Barnes," he began. "Not only capturing Wanni Kroi who was aboard."

"You mean so that we had accommodation for the wounded and for getting all the ships back safely?" Bill asked.

"Well, yes—in a way, but for a better reason." He reached for a cablegram form.

"You see," he went on, smiling enigmatically, "you actually paid for that whole expedition, with that one move."

"What do you mean?" Bill asked.

"Well, the British government is going to reimburse you for those ships and your expenses. The captured liner will pay for most of it, but you see they can do it, either by pretending that the money is salvage money or pirate cap-

ture prize. That ship was all the evidence they required. The rest will be all quite in order."

"Wow! Then I am all clear and out of debt, eh?"

"Better than that; you have quite a nice bank roll, as you put it. The syndicate I mentioned has agreed to purchase the sacrificial knife for fifty thousand pounds. That, I believe, in American money, is about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Ought to keep you in petrol and motors for some time. What do you say to the offer?"

"I still leave it entirely to you, sir. I'm completely flabbergasted!"

"Then I'll complete the sale and have the money placed to your account in your New York bank at once."

"Thank you, sir," said Bill sincerely.

"Don't thank me. We of the British Foreign Service owe you plenty. We'll never be able to repay you for what you have done."

"No? Well, could I ask one thing?" Bill said quietly.

"Certainly! What is it?"

"Well, it's like this, sir. That kid, Sandy, is still hungry, and I think it would be very nice if the British Foreign Service gave a dinner for him to-night and see if we can really fill him up."

"Oh, good Heaven!" gasped the district commissioner. "But," he added, smiling, "I fancy we can arrange that."



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The first air crossing of the English Channel was made in 1875, in a balloon?

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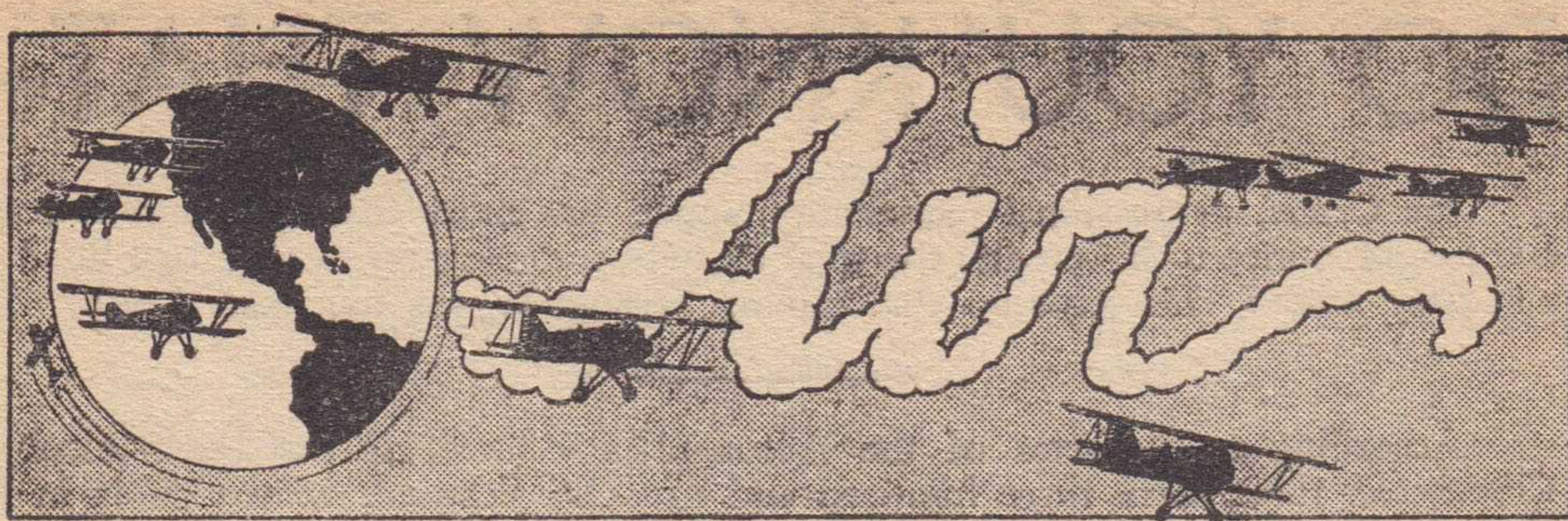
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AIR ADVENTURERS—a more appropriate name would be difficult to find. When Bill Barnes was a boy, he tells us that his one ambition was to be a flyer and an adventurer. In those days facilities for learning aeronautics were few and far between. But he was persistent in his desire. By reading everything he could find on the subject, he eventually acquired a complete mental picture of how to fly. But it wasn't all from books that he garnered his knowledge. Right from the beginning he built solid models. Then, as he became more proficient, he turned his attention to flying models.

At last the day arrived to try his skill

at building a full-sized plane. After weeks of painstaking effort, with many unforeseen obstacles to overcome, his labors were rewarded. That was the first plane that Bill Barnes ever flew, and he was started on his career to fame as an adventurer. But he never stopped building planes. Each new one has always been a big improvement over its predecessor—the result of long experience and pioneering.

When Bill and his gang of intrepid pilots first gave thought to starting a club, he believed there would be a considerable number of enthusiastic recruits. He didn't dream there were so many red-blooded, patriotic young Americans eager to do their bit to secure the nation's future in aviation; a group of air-minded patriots ready the minute notice is received to offer their services to him, no matter when or where his thrilling, but oftentimes perilous, adventures may take him.



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Advancement of American Aviation

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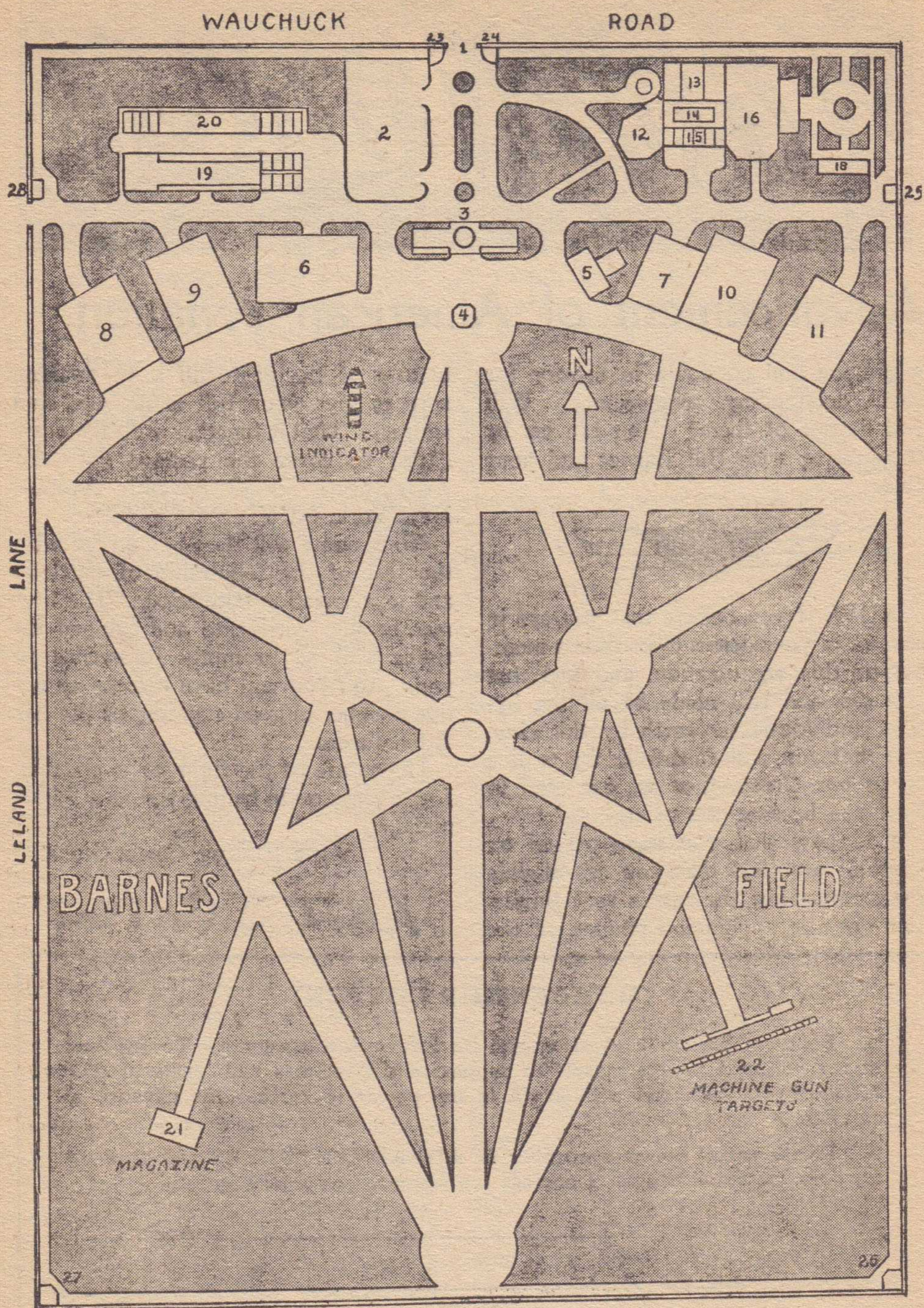
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THE BILL BARNES AIR FIELD

Here's something different. Bill thought it'd be a swell idea to give all of you the lowdown on the organization and equipment of his famous home port. So he goaded Frank Tinsley out of his easy chair, trotted him around the buildings and the field itself, and—here's the result. Take our word for it—Bill thought of everything when he planned this outfit!

BILL BARNES gazed reflectively at the dancing flames of the log fire. Ruddy light leaped and flickered in the dimly lighted living room of the famous young flier's bungalow.

"Frank," he said at last, "why in the heck don't you write an article telling your readers something about our headquarters here? You know, it's not a bad field as airports go."

I grunted suddenly and rapped my skull with my knuckles.

"Why the despairing grunt?" Bill grinned.

"I'm wondering why the devil I never thought of that before. Here I've been crabbing about the dearth of new ships to write about—pestering the life out of you and myself—and passing up something pretty swell that's been right under

my feet all the time! Dog-gone it, Bill, it never once occurred to me that right here you have one of the most interesting and complete flying fields in the world. Boy, is my face red!"

"Almost as red as the curly wool and the—ahem—mustache," Bill agreed solemnly.

"Listen," I said. "Have you fairly complete plans of this place?"

It was Bill's turn to look slightly foolish.

"No," he admitted. "I'm afraid I haven't. Not up to date, anyway."

He refilled our glasses, and while he did so I thought about the idea. Why not? I knew that you readers were interested in all the varied activities of the world's most colorful pilot, and I felt certain that a description of the Long Island headquarters at the Barnes

outfit would make all you readers feel more comfortably "at home," so to speak, with Bill and his loyal gang of buddies.

After all, it takes five men on the ground to keep one in the air, and as you are already acquainted with some of the ground crew that keep the Snorter props efficiently turning, I figured you would like to meet the rest of that very efficient bunch and learn something about the equipment and plant with which they work.

I took a long sip at the glass and set it down. Bill groaned as I picked up my trusty notebook. Bill regards me as a cross between the Spanish Inquisition and an assistant district attorney. However, a lot of you readers have written in to say that you like these interviews, and I guess that's what keeps me from being murdered for being too inquisitive. If there's anything Bill likes, it's giving you readers exactly what you want.

"TO BEGIN WITH," I said, "suppose you tell me something of the history of this field. How did you happen to select this particular spot in the first place?"

"Hmmm!" Bill murmured. He lighted one of the long rat-tail cheroots that he had brought back with him from the East and blew a cloud of fragrant blue smoke.

"It was completely by chance," he replied slowly. "I'll tell you how it happened." He puffed a moment. "Back in 1929, if you remember, we had a financial crash. At that time I had recently completed a rather well-known flight, and, to put it bluntly, I was in the money."

"I remember."

"I invested the money in a certain air-line project that looked pretty good to me. The public evidently thought so, too. Although actual operations had not

yet begun, the stock had already soared sky-high."

Bill smiled faintly.

"Now, I take no credit for what happened," he went on. "It was not a stroke of financial genius on my part. Just dumb luck, I guess. I happened to run across some information concerning the reliability of the bird who headed the outfit. Becoming distrustful of the whole affair, I quietly sold out my holdings and was looking around for another investment when, *bingo!* the crash came."

"*Bingo* is right," I muttered. "I've still got lumps from that particular crash."

"I then had," Bill resumed quietly, "nearly half a million dollars in ready money and nothing to do with it. A couple of weeks later, a wealthy acquaintance, who had heard of my luck in escaping the crash, came to my office. He had remembered hearing me say some time back that I was looking for a good air-field site. Well, he came to me with a proposition."

"I see. Go ahead, Bill."

"This man," Bill said, "had bought, late in 1928, a tract of land in an exclusive section of Long Island that he had planned to develop as a private estate. It was, luckily for me, a perfectly level plot, and I knew it would make an ideal airport. The man was in a tight financial situation, and he offered me the land at a fraction of its real value provided I bought immediately and paid all cash."

Bill knocked the ash of his cigar into a copper tray.

"I drove out to the place that afternoon. One glance at it and I made up my mind. It was exactly what I wanted. It was fairly convenient to the city, and yet it was far enough away from main highways to insure the complete privacy I desired. By gosh, Frank, I felt pretty elated, I can tell you. No high structures in the neighborhood, no railroad

near by, no high-tension transmission wires. That night I handed my worried friend a check and we shook hands. I owned an airport. And I can tell you, Frank, I meant to make it a good one, too."

BILL BARNES chuckled and sat back in his chair. "And that," he said smilingly, "is the story of how I happened to settle on Long Island. Any more questions?"

"Sure thing, Bill. I'm just beginning to listen. What happened then?"

"I then got to work, my lazy friend. Being an artist, you wouldn't understand about work, would you? Anyway, after selecting a layout for the field from dozens of tentative sketches, there was the business of buying equipment, allotting contracts for building construction, studying various types of surfacing for the runways and field, investigating the important matter of drainage—oh, a million things, Frank. All of 'em darned important,"

Bill waved his cigar at me.

"You see, old man, I wanted to make this an A-1 airport in every particular, so I had also to figure on complete lighting and radio equipment as well. Then there was the question of expansion. The field must be laid out to permit any increase in facilities that might become necessary."

"I see."

"At last," Bill murmured, "the carpenters, the masons, and the bricklayers went back to the city, the plasterers dismantled their lime vats, and the painters knocked down their scaffolding. Barnes Field was finished." The lean-faced flyer smiled sourly. "At least, that was what I thought."

"And wasn't it?" I asked encouragingly.

"Not on your life! It will never really be finished. There's always something to learn, some new device to adopt. We've been working on this field ever

since. Enlarging, changing, rebuilding. In aviation, conditions change so fast that I doubt if the day will ever come when I can truthfully say: 'Barnes Field is now finished. There is no more work to be done on it.'"

Bill Barnes rose suddenly, walked to the window and stood looking out at the silvery October moonlight. In the soft moonlight his lean face looked very boyish and very proud and very happy.

"Nice, isn't it?" he said in a low voice. "Let's turn in, eh, Frank?"

THE NEXT morning found Bill and me up bright and early. It was a crisp, snappy day with a bit of chill in the air—good weather for a man-sized appetite like mine. Bill's breakfasts are one of the reasons why I never seem to be able to get below two hundred pounds.

Anyhow, Bill led the way along the path that leads from his comfortable bungalow to the administration building. Once in his private office, he soon found the plans for the original airport. With a heavy black pencil he indicated the changes and the positions of the newer buildings. When he had finished he spread the big blue print on a table and we examined it together.

Here is the exact dope for you readers: The airport is rectangular in shape and occupies about two thirds of the Barnes property. It is completely surrounded by a high wire fence, protected by a burglar-alarm system that rings automatic bells in the guard posts and turns on huge floodlights.

The flying field is traversed by no less than seven runways of varying width, so arranged that a ship may take off or land from any quarter of the compass. The principal runways are of concrete and are nearly fifty feet in width. The others are paved with Tarvia and are slightly narrower. All are painted with transverse bands of yellow and black pigment. These bands,

being of a standard width, are very helpful in estimating height when making night or fog landings.

The runways, after darkness falls, are outlined with flush border lights which are connected with the illuminated wind indicator in such a way that only the runway leading into the wind is lighted at any one time, all the others being automatically cut off. In addition, large illuminated arrows, running longitudinally in the center of the runway, indicate the direction in which to land.

The entire lighting system of the airport is automatically switched on by an electric-eye device, as soon as natural daylight falls below a certain recorded intensity. The sound of an airplane motor above the field is picked up after dark by an electric detector which operates the apparatus controlling the floodlights.

These lights bathe the selected runway with a shadowless sodium vapor light which is perfectly diffused and cannot blind the incoming pilot. All in all, as far as the lighting system is concerned, the Barnes Airport is just about the last word in comfort, convenience, and safety for night flying.

AT THE NORTH END of the field is a wide, semicircular concrete apron. In the middle of this apron is a large circular space. In the center of it stands the traffic-control office—No. 4—containing a complete emergency set of manually operated switches which control the lighting system, as well as wireless and telephone connections.

Directly in the rear of this small booth is the administration building—No. 3. Opening upon the apron is the construction and repair hangar—No. 6—which is, really, a small and perfectly equipped airplane factory. It is here that the new ships designed by the genius of Bill Barnes are built. It is here that the Barnes fleet receives periodic overhauls and inspections.

On the other side of the control booth is the fire house—No. 5—in which is housed a modern fire engine and hose cart, an ambulance, and a fast crash truck with complete emergency equipment. To the right of the fire house is hangar—No. 7—in which Bill Barnes' personal ships are kept. "Sandy" Sanders' Eaglet is also stored here. In addition to these buildings, four large steel and concrete hangars—Nos. 8, 9, 10, and 11—also face the apron.

To the rear of this line of structures, a concrete paved street runs east and west and forms the service road for the airport. At the east end, a gate, large enough for heavy trucks, is the service entrance and it opens on Leland Lane. North of this transverse road, the plot is divided into two equal sections by a north and south parkway, which runs from the main airport entrance—No. 1—to the administration building—No. 3.

To the left of the parkway is a large public parking area—No. 2—for the use of newspaper men and the general public, upon those infrequent occasions when Bill Barnes stages a public exhibition of flying.

Still farther to the left are two long buildings. One of them—No. 19—is a dormitory for the unmarried mechanics; the other—No. 20—is the airport power house. Retracing our steps along the transverse road, we again pass the administration building and arrive at the space to the right of the parkway. Here is situated Bill Barnes' private bungalow—No. 12—and the living quarters of his gang of fighting pilots. Sandy, who acts as a sort of confidential flying secretary to Bill, has a room in the Barnes bungalow.

RIGHT HERE, I'd like to mention the system of guarding this interesting and very important field. A concrete path runs all around the perimeter of the airport, just inside the electrified wire fence already mentioned.

At strategic points are placed booths from which trained guards can observe the concrete walk. Two of these booths—Nos. 23 and 24—are at the main entrance. From these stations the guards command a view of the whole northern border of the property. Two more booths—Nos. 25 and 28—stand at either end of the transverse road and control the service entrance and the sides of the field. Another pair—Nos. 26 and 27—are situated at the southern corners of the property and guard the south border as well as the sides.

The men in the last four posts—Nos. 25, 26, 27, 28—are equipped with motor cycles on which to speed to any point of their long patrol beat which may be threatened with intrusion. Of course, all booths are connected by telephone to the central guard room in the administration building.

When I had finished absorbing all these fascinating details of the airport layout, Bill Barnes rolled up the blue print and led me out on a tour of inspection. We went first to his bungalow—No. 12. I was, of course, familiar with it, having spent many a pleasant week-end in his snug little retreat.

We entered the front door, walked down the hall, and passed through a rear door into an open courtyard containing a magnificent tiled swimming pool—No. 14. Around the courtyard was a covered walk with doors along the south side opening into No. 15—the individual garages of Bill and his gang.

I LOOKED through stucco arches leading to a pair of well-rolled tennis courts; also a handball and squash court—No. 13. Through a door opening on the handball court we passed into the gymnasium where, in addition to the usual equipment, I saw a blind-flying trainer mounted in the middle of the floor. There was also a dummy gunner's cockpit in one corner, with a flex-

ible Browning, equipped for sighting practice, mounted on it.

Beyond the gymnasium was the pilots' quarters—No. 16. Bill Barnes led the way past a gleaming white-tiled lavatory, down a hall and into a large living room that was comfortably furnished with deep leather club chairs and a huge fireplace.

I glanced into the dining room, the spotless pantry, and kitchen. Each pilot had his own room upstairs. Most of the familiar gang were out at this time of day, puttering around their ships or busy on some detailed duty.

I next visited the mechanics' dormitory—No. 19—a large, comfortable living room, an immense dining hall; a library with tables covered with popular novels and magazines; shelves filled with technical books on aviation, engineering, and mechanics. To the rear were a billiard room and lavatory. Beyond a fire door, were individual garages for the employees.

I crossed with Bill a wide concrete roadway and entered the power house—No. 20. I gazed at the two huge, stationary Diesels and at all the glittering array of machinery which supplied power to the airport.

The engineer on watch showed us around. I noticed how carefully Bill checked the numerous gauges and inspected the various installations. The ends of the building were separated from the engine room by fireproof walls and contained more garages, accessible only from the outside.

LEAVING the power house, I entered one of the big hangars. This was hangar No. 9—one of the four large fireproof, steel-and-concrete structures that housed the Barnes fleet. This particular dock contained Snorters. A swarm of mechanics and sheet-metal men were busy making minor repairs and adjustments on the sleek-looking fighters. The adjacent hangars, Bill

told me, housed transports, as did also Nos. 10 and 11.

I crossed the apron to No. 6. In this smaller building were housed all the facilities of an up-to-date airplane factory: A machine shop where motors were built and assembled; a welding plant where the heavy steel tubing was cut and shaped into the skeletons of Snorters and transports. In another shop expert workers in aluminum and dural sheet trimmed and bent the light metal plates into the shining skin that covered the Barnes ships.

This building has been the birthplace of all the Bill Barnes creations and, as such, it held a fascinating interest for me. Here was the spot where the first Snorter took shape, where the big transports first saw the light of day; where I had my first glimpse of the sleek and beautiful *Scarlet Stormer*. I left this building with great reluctance, as you can well imagine.

As we came into the open again, Bill indicated to me the fire house—No. 5—and the hangar that sheltered his own personal ships and Sandy's Eaglet—No. 7, as I have already mentioned. I followed him to the administration building.

I've seen the A. B., of course, many times, but I'll describe it to you as though it was my first visit. The building consists of a square center portion, two stories high, surmounted by the glass dome of the control room, and two single-story wings, each of them opening on a spacious terrace facing the flying field. From the control tower and these lovely terraces a perfect view can be had of all field activities.

The east wing contains a writing room for pilots, the guardroom and the general office. I peeped into the headquarters of the guard as we passed. There was a telephone switchboard visible, an alarm-panel studded with colored lamps, and a large-scale map of the entire air-

port. Bill pointed it out to me and grinned.

"That's more than I have in my own office," he chuckled.

We passed the door, and Bill responded to the respectful salute of the man on duty. At Bill's order, the man opened the arms lockers that lined the wall and revealed to me racks of pistols, rifles, submachines, and gas guns. Bill explained that all arms, except those of the men actually on duty, were kept in this room under lock and key. He then unlocked a steel door and revealed a small but perfectly equipped brig.

"Do you ever use it?" I asked, smiling.

Bill nodded. "Yes. As you know, I keep pretty strict discipline." His serious expression faded. "Better watch your step, Frank, and never bungle any assignments I make or—*poof*—in you go. That is, if that barn-door back of yours could fit into anything smaller than Grant's Tomb."

The pilots' lounging room was empty, and I merely glanced into the general office before inspecting the other wing. There I found the radio room and the main telephone switchboard. A door bearing the famous pilot's name led into a small office occupied by Sandy in his capacity of Barnes' secretary. Beyond this cubicle was Bill's private sanctum. Here he received visitors and transacted his business affairs.

While I stood, examining the room, Bill crossed to an innocent-looking closet door and threw it open. Inside were coats on hangers and a shelf with two or three hat boxes. Bill's finger pressed a concealed switch and the whole back of the closet swung open, revealing a flight of steps leading somewhere below.

I followed Bill down the steps and found myself in a brightly lighted passageway. At the end of the corridor we were confronted by an armed guard who gave Bill a smart and snappy salute and unlocked a steel door. Bill produced

a key similar to that used by the guard and turned it in a second lock. The massive steel door swung open, and we entered the famous flyer's secret study.

I HAVE described several times in previous articles this well-guarded vault in which Bill Barnes' confidential plans and records are safeguarded. Here is his world-famous library of technical books, scientific monographs—a few of them rare first editions, written by himself—and translations of works written by leading foreign aviation experts from almost every civilized country in the world.

I think I can say without hesitation that Bill Barnes possesses the finest private collection of *materia aëronautica* ever gathered together by one man. Here also are the drafting tables on which the young genius prepares his revolutionary and prophetic designs of ships of the future. I never enter this private retreat without feeling that I am standing in the very forefront of man's most inspired effort to conquer the air—and the vast cold reaches of space beyond our spinning earth. Bill never talks much about that, but some day—

I sank into a comfortable leather chair and Bill reached for the glasses. We

had a drink. The sight-seeing tour was finished. Bill Barnes glanced at the watch on his sinewy wrist. It was almost noon.

"Hungry, Frank?" he asked.

I nodded with enthusiasm.

"Fine! So am I. Let's go back to the bungalow for lunch and then you can work here on your plans all afternoon. How does that sound?"

I downed my drink.

"It sounds exactly like the Barnes airport," I replied. "Just about perfect."

"It always amuses me," Bill returned with a grin, "to see the way you buckle down to honest work on your visits here."

I looked Bill squarely in the eye. "If I didn't work like the devil on these plans," I replied, "I'd have no excuse to come to see you. And that would be a pity because—well—your friendship has come to mean something pretty swell to me. If you ever get in a jam and I can help—even in some small insignificant way——"

Bill didn't say anything. He just gripped my hand with one of those male grips that hurt.

So I guess I had the last word that time.

COMING UP!

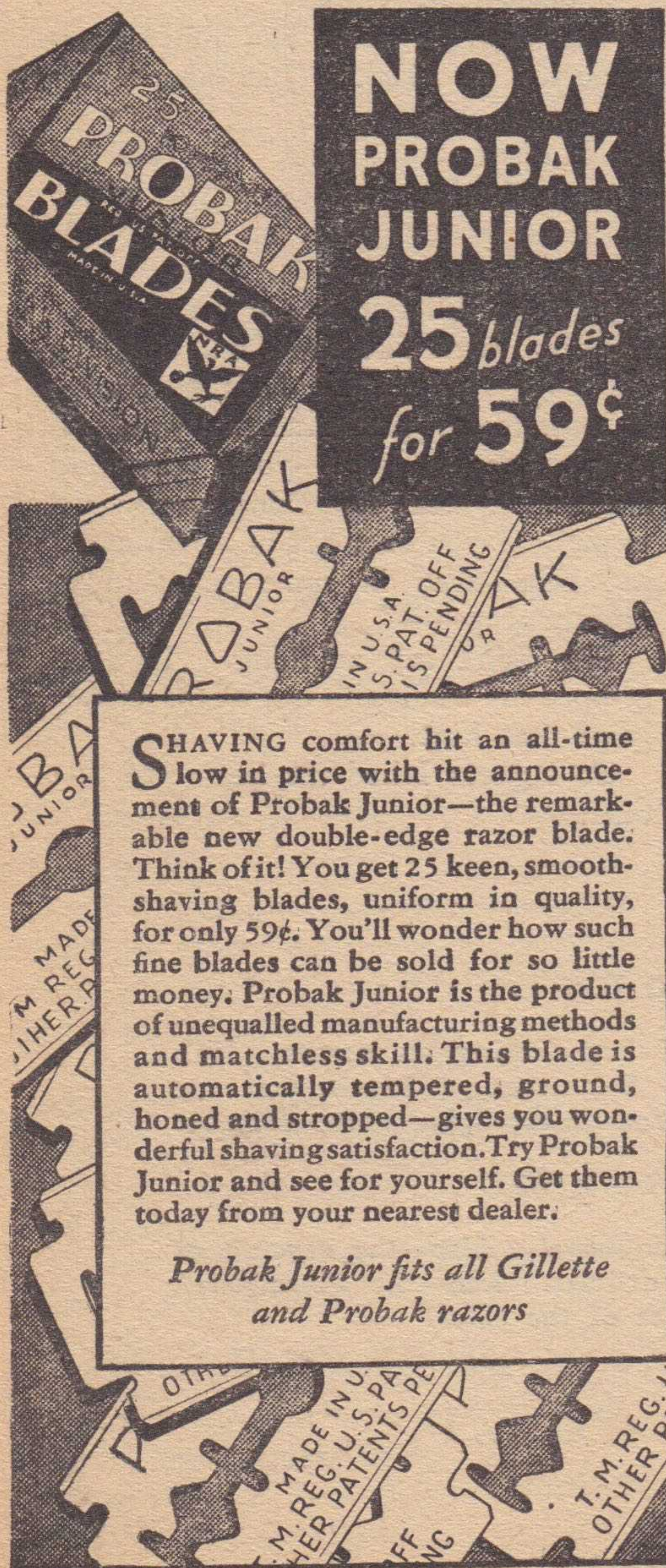
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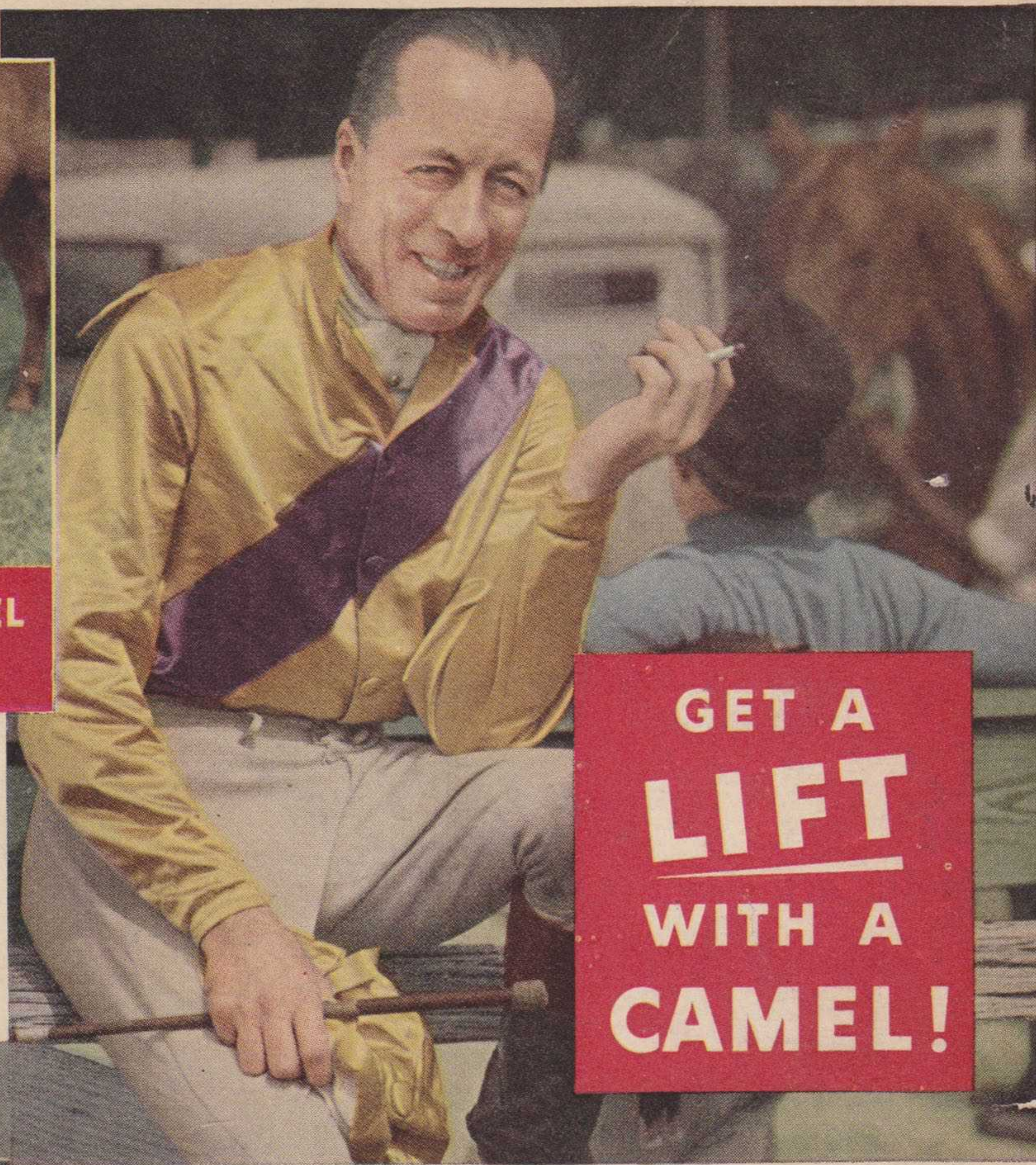
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