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By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

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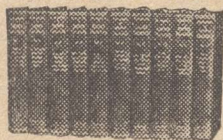
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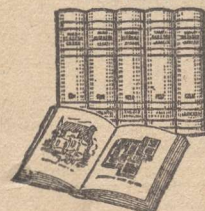
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VOL. I, NO. I

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*from*

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M.C., D.F.C.

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We of the Royal Air Force, who have taken a personal part in the development of this comparatively young service since its inception in 1918, feel particularly proud of the great name it has made for itself in this war, and we are therefore all the more delighted to know that through the medium of your publication, its magnificent exploits are to be made more widely known to the great American public.

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Good luck!

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Companion magazines: Air War, The American Eagle, Sky Fighters, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Captain Future, Popular Western, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Love, The Phantom Detective, Popular Detective, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Sports, Popular Sports Magazine, Range Riders Western, Texas Rangers, Everyday Astrology, G-Men Detective, Detective Novels Magazine, Black Book Detective, Popular Love, Masked Rider Western, The Green Ghost Detective, Rio Kid Western, The Masked Detective, Exciting Detective, Exciting Western, Exciting Love, and West.

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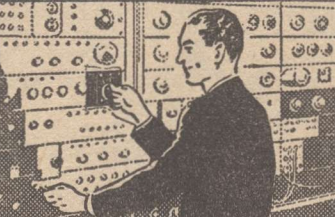
"I had an \$18 a week job in a shoe factory, but desired to make more money and continue my education. I read about Radio opportunities and enrolled with the National Radio Institute."



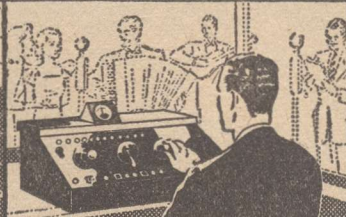
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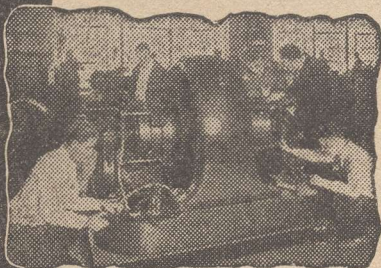
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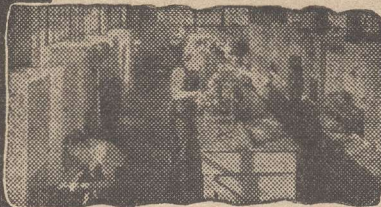
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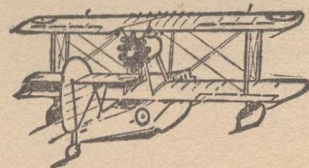
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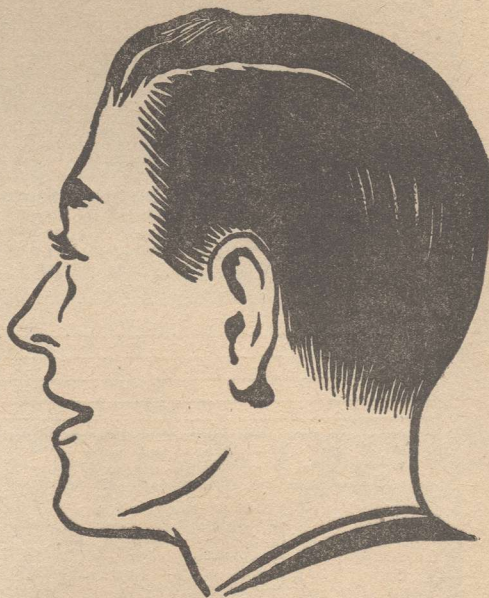
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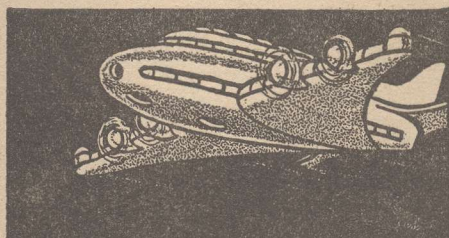
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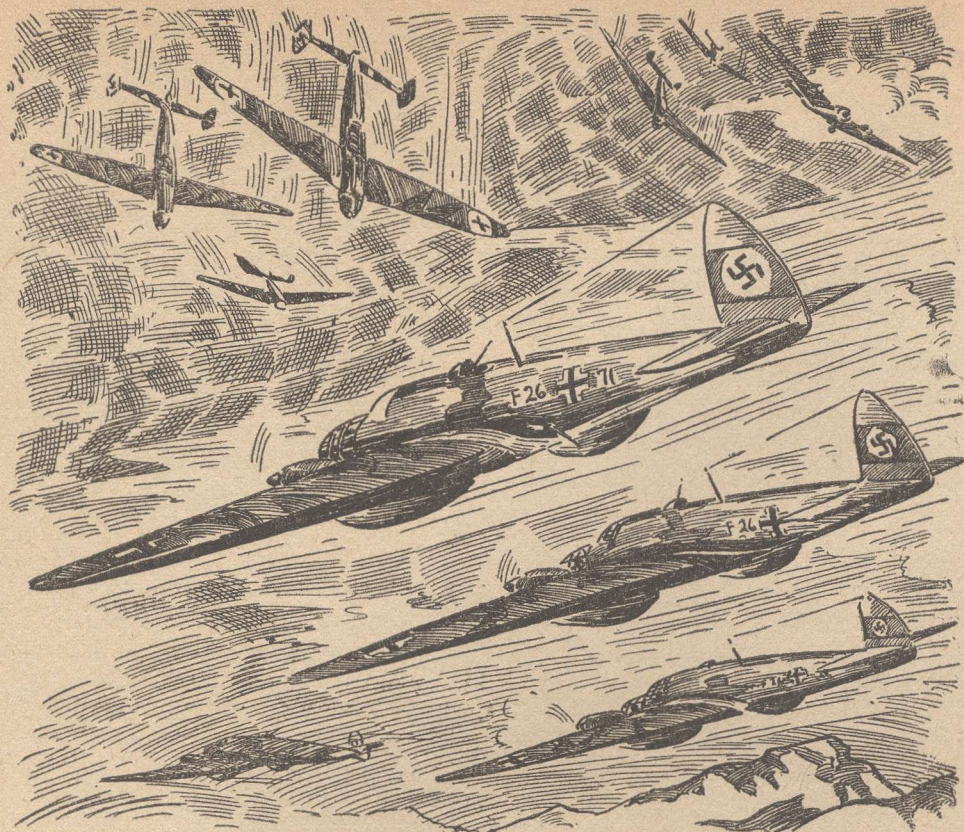


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*Author of "Dave Dawson at Dunkirk," "Ambulance Plane Patrol," etc.*

Follow Squadron Leader Crandall and His Sky-Busting  
Pilots Through Arctic Air on a Perilous Mission for the R.A.F.

## CHAPTER I

### *Wings of the Maple Leaf*

**T**HE band played "God Save the King," and every pilot and mechanic stood rigidly at attention as the long black Daimler, bear-

ing His Majesty George VI, rolled down the length of the tarmac.

At the far end Squadron Leader Crandall saluted smartly. His Majesty took the salute, smiled warmly, and then the Daimler nosed out onto the road and picked up speed. When the

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The Heinkels broke formation and scattered as the Defiant hurled into their midst, bringing down victims right and left



# Over Svolvær, a Daredevil Crew of Battlers

last note of band music died away the Daimler was just a cloud of dust in the distance. The royal inspection of Fighter Squadron Sixty-five, of the Royal Canadian Air Force, the first air unit from the Dominion to be assigned to active duty inside England's island fortress, was ended.

A ringing order hit the air and the rigid line broke ranks. Pilots and mechanics split up into groups to hash over impressions of His Majesty's visit. Squadron Leader Crandall and Flight Lieutenant Jeff Stacey automatically fell into step together and headed for the mess bar. Neither spoke a word until the bar orderly had poured the drinks. Crandall held his up in a gesture of half toast and half inspection.

"Kings were always a dime a dozen in my book," he said, "but that lad is okay. I'm for him one hundred percent. He's done a swell job, and I like him."

"Me, too," Stacey grunted. "At least he's a pilot and can talk our language. That's more than most of the big shots who come messing around to look you over can do. And the pep talk he gave us was all right, too. Only, I wonder just what he meant by that crack."

The squadron leader looked up.

"Crack?" Crandall echoed. "Where's your manners, my boy? A king doesn't make cracks."

"This one does," Stacey said, with a grin. "He's regular. He's one of the boys. I've got a hunch he was just itching to boot that stuffed shirt body-guard away while he took one of our Hurricanes up to see what it would do. Yeah, I mean crack. When he said, 'I know you will successfully complete any and all missions assigned you, no matter what they may be.'"

"So what?" Crandall said, with a shrug, and took a pull of his drink. "What did you figure him to say? That

he had a hunch we'd turn out a bunch of dopes?"

STACEY sighed and wagged his head from side to side.

"For a squadron leader, you're . . . But let it slide. No, I've got a bee in my bonnet that something pretty special is being saved for us."

"Nuts!" Crandall snorted, and drained his glass.

"Okay, nuts," Stacey said. "But take the last war. It—"

"I wasn't that old," Crandall cut in. "Nor were you. So let the old duffers who fought it, keep it."

"It is a matter of record," Stacey continued, as though he hadn't been interrupted, "that Dominion and Colonial outfits were given special jobs on purpose. The reason was publicity. It helped recruiting and stuff. These English lads are smart. They'd be dopes to make it look like a closed corporation, that just Englishmen were fighting this war. Sure. So they make certain that Australia, and New Zealand, and India, and South Africa, and us, hit the front pages. But often."

"It was a good speech," Crandall said. "And now that we're a duly recognized outfit it's up to us to prove we aren't a complete waste of time and money."

"Sure," Stacey murmured. "And a hand-picked special job now and then so's we can hit the front pages and *prove* we're not just run-of-the-mill boys with wings on our tunics."

"Aw, for—" Crandall began and stopped short. Because at that moment the siren mounted atop the dispersal office let go with a short eerie wail.

Crandall and Stacey slapped their drinks down on the bar, spun around, dived out the mess door and over to the dispersal office. They reached the office neck and neck with every other pilot in the squadron. The operations officer was just hanging up



# Defies the Cohorts of Nazi Tyranny!

the phone as they swarmed inside. He looked at Crandall.

"Spotters in Zone H reporting, sir," he said. "A mess of Heinkels sighted a dozen miles off the Yarmouth shore. In the clouds at twenty thousand. Probably waited for a chance to cut inshore."

"How many make a mess?" Crandall snapped.

"The spotters' own words," the operations officer said, and flushed a lit-

were grinning from ear to ear in excited anticipation.

"Give them the old Maple Leaf one-two, sir!" the flight sergeant sang out as Crandall crawled into his pit. "Us boys will stand drinks for every one you bag."

"There goes your month's pay!" Stacey shouted at him. "There are ten of the babies up there."

"That won't make us mad!" the non-com shouted back.



Squadron Leader Crandall

tle. "Counted ten, they said."

"Swell!" Crandall breathed. "That means we can all take a ride. All right, you fellows, into the pits. It's Zone H. Check it on your maps. Let's smack this batch for Canada. The second batch can be for England. Okay, let's go."

The mechanics had all props ticking over by the time the pilots reached the line of ships. This was the first job for the outfit and the grease-balls, or "erks" as they are called in this war,

Then, as chocks were yanked away and Rolls Royce Merlin engines started to thunder out their song of power, the flight sergeant clasped his hands above his head like a boxer being introduced from the ring, and shook them vigorously. In recognition of the good luck gesture the Merlins bellowed a louder note. In groups of three, plus Crandall's ship, the twelve planes rocketed off the field and nosed up toward the cloud-dotted blue.



**H**OLDING his climb steady, Crandall listened to the pilots of Red, Yellow, Green, and Blue Flights check their radios with their respective flight leaders. When every pilot had completed his check Crandall called the operations office and reported the patrol safely in the air.

For a second he was tempted to assure those on the ground that Goering was going to be minus ten Heinkels in a mighty short time. However, he checked the urge. Not only would his words be heard by those in the operations office, but also by any of the big shots listening in at Adastral House. That was one of the screwy things about this war, different from the last. They didn't have two-way radio in '14-'18, and a pilot could sing, curse, or otherwise amuse himself while on patrol. Not so these days, however. Every peep you let out went into somebody's ears, and in many cases got recorded for intensive study later on. No, a loud-mouth pilot fighting Hitler could get himself into a peck of trouble.

So Crandall stuck to air patrol routine and led his gang upward and toward the northeast. They hit twenty thousand feet right smack above where the breakers of the North Sea burst into foam against the Yarmouth shoreline. There they strung out in a line formation of Vs, with Crandall in the middle, and started sweeping due eastward. Cloud curtains made visibility not so good for spotting lurking enemy craft, and when some fifteen minutes of high-test gasoline had been used up the tiny fingers of bitter doubt began to pluck at Crandall's thoughts.

A Hurricane, like a Spitfire, he was thinking, had only gas enough for about an hour and three quarters, fuel being sacrificed for increased fire power. In the old days you could cruise around in a pursuit or scout job for well over three hours looking for a scrap. Today, though, you

tangled with the enemy mighty darned soon or you went gliding down to a forced landing because of no gas.

At that moment he heard Stacey's voice in his earphones.

"Somebody wouldn't be kidding us, would they, Cran? I mean, the old 'Wolf-wolf' cry, just to see if we can get these things off in a hurry?"

"No," Crandall grunted into his flap mike. "They haven't time to kid in this mix-up. Maybe the Heinkels have . . . Hold it! There they are! To the left front. About three miles. Up and at 'em!"

"You mean, 'tally-ho,' Cran!" Stacey chuckled. "An R.A.F. lad with the D.F.C. was telling me. Tally-ho, sir!"

Crandall choked back the hot retort that rose to his lips, still keeping in mind the big shots listening in at Adastral House. He just rammed the "gate" open wide and sent his Hurricane hurtling across the cloud-dotted sky at maximum speed.

The enemy ships had been just a group of dots when he had first spotted them, but as his three-bladed prop churned through the air the dots grew larger and took on the shape and outline of Nazi Heinkels. In a few more seconds he was able to see that they were Heinkel III bombers, powered with twin 1150 hp. Daimler-Benz engines.

The bombers were flying in loose formation in a general northerly direction, and were now some twenty miles off the coast. Tearing his eyes from them, Crandall glanced down at the surface of the North Sea. For a second he saw nothing but water. Then suddenly far to the north he sighted the smudge of smoke. There was a lot of it, and one glance gave him the answer. A convoy was steaming down England's west coast.

Perhaps the Heinkels were simply chancing upon it, or they might have been tipped off about the approaching convoy. One thing, however, was dead



certain. The Heinkels were about to go all out to blast that convoy and sink some more precious cargoes destined for England's war industries. For England's mouths, too.

**E**VEN as he realized that, the Heinkels dropped by the nose and started streaking down to a more accurate bombing level. The convoy's escort had spotted the bombers by now and the North Sea became dotted with spots of flame—anti-aircraft guns going into action. Black and white gobs of smoke appeared in the sky, but not even close to the diving Heinkels.

A moment later a dozen columns of smoke and water fountained upward a few hundred yards in front of the steaming convoy. That wasn't close either, but as Crandall led Squadron Sixty-five wing-howling downward, he knew full well that the next load of eggs was going to hit a darn sight closer than close.

"Unless we do something about it!" he muttered aloud.

"Same being which we blasted well will!" he heard Stacey's comment in his earphones.

The Heinkel pilots and crews may have been too excited about the cold meat targets below to give a thought to the safety of their own skins. Or too dumb, or too imbued with Goering's hooey about the invincibility of the Nazi *Luftwaffe*. At any rate they didn't seem to wake up to the fact that trouble was heading their way until it was much, much too late.

The moment for which thirteen two-fisted fighting Canadians had trained and studied was now at hand, and they whanged into those Heinkels with everything they could put on the ball. Hunched forward over the stick, Crandall got a Heinkel square in the cross hairs of his Aldis sight and jabbed the button on his stick. Eight machine-guns that were cowed into the leading edge of the wings, four on

each side of the fuselage, yammered and chattered out death at the rate of some nine thousand slugs a minute. A fraction of that number was enough. The Heinkel acted as though it had smacked into a brick wall and been sawed right through the middle all at the same time. It fell out of the sky in two flaming hunks of airplane and disappeared down below.

Hauling back on his stick Crandall zoomed, to give the others a crack at the targets. The sky was suddenly trembling from the savage sound of aerial machine-gun fire. Five more Heinkels spouted flame and smoke, and those of their crews who remained alive forgot all about the steaming untouched convoy below and concentrated on nothing but "hitting the silk" for a watery landing in the North Sea.

That left four Heinkels still in the air. They continued diving down for a sure shot at the convoy ships while the gunners threw everything at the Canadian-piloted Hurricanes except their iron crosses. But those hellions from the land of the Maple Leaf practically brushed the made-in-Germany bullets to one side and sliced in close and pounded their own bullets home.

At the end of two minutes, nothing but a shower of things German was left in the air. And at the end of five minutes all of that was down in the water.

"Nice going, fellows!" Crandall boomed into his flap mike. "That's showing the bums. Anybody hit?"

Hastily Crandall counted thirteen noses, including his own. Then Stacey's voice came over the air.

"By what? Yes, gentlemen, well done! A very, very pukka show. We will now have an odd spot of tea, what?"

"Can it, Jeff!" Crandall growled into his mike, but he was grinning broadly.

The Maple Leaf had been called on to taste fire and, boy, how they had



tasted it! They'd swallowed the stuff right up.

"Formation by flights!" Crandall barked into his mike. "We're heading home."

"For tea, sir?" came Stacey's chuckle.

---

## CHAPTER II

### *Plans for Pilots*

---

A MONTH had passed since King George had paid his welcome inspection visit to Squadron Sixty-five of the Royal Canadian Air Force. Since then the Maple Leaf pilots had hung up a squadron record for even some of the R.A.F. ace units to shoot at. Every pilot had at least two of Goering's air wagons to his credit. Crandall and Stacey had an even dozen apiece.

More important, though, was the fact that not one of the original members was missing. Not even in the hospital with a bullet in a leg, or in some other part that hurt just as much.

Of course that didn't mean the squadron had come through the entire month untouched. Very much to the contrary. Six of the original Hurricanes were not around any more. Three of them were deep down under the North Sea and the Channel. And the other three were charred piles of wreckage that would be carted away to the junk yard in time. Yes, the Germans had nailed six of Sixty-five's planes, but the pilots had parachuted to safety and were back at the squadron within a few hours, ready for more war.

It had been a most satisfactory month as far as Sixty-five was concerned. They had taken part in a hundred or more "shows" and had come out on top on every occasion. Over London, over rural England, over the Channel, or over the North Sea, it

made no difference to them. A German was still a German regardless of his geographical location. And bullets could smack him down out of the air and the war.

The pilots from the land of the Maple Leaf ate it all up. But as the weeks added up to a month, Jeff Stacey's hunch that it was all leading up to something grew stronger and stronger.

"About this hunch of mine, Cran," he said one day as he and Crandall lounged in chairs within ear-shot of the dispersal office. "No kidding, something big is going to pop, and soon."

"Why don't you take that hunch out and drown it?" the squadron leader grunted. "We're doing all right."

"Sure," Stacey agreed placidly. "That's just the idea. We're doing swell. We're passing all the tests they give us. With flying colors. Soon comes the big one."

"Nuts!"

"Boy, how you can think up snappy come-backs!" Stacey growled. "But, seriously, Cran, this is the fourth drome we've used in the last month. Adastral House has shifted us all over the place. We've seen more of England from the air than any six R.A.F. units combined. Why? Why have we been shifted around so much?"

"So we won't get homesick," Crandall grunted and stretched out his long legs. "How's for a drink?"

"In a minute," Stacey said. "But figure it out, Cran. Every other air unit stays put, but we get shifted everywhere. Why? I'll tell you. We're getting the works all in a lump. We're getting a taste of all kinds of war flying—and for a reason."

"So what?" Crandall murmured.

Stacey started to reply but checked himself as he saw the car with staff pennants on the front fenders come sliding around the corner of the end hangar.



"So get on your feet!" he shot out the corner of his mouth. "Here come some brass hats. Now what?"

Crandall didn't bother to reply. They stood up and saluted the two air ministry big shots seated in the rear of the car that was braked to a stop in front of them. They recognized both at once. One was Air Vice-marshal Hammersmith, chief of R.A.F. Fighter Command. And the other was Air Commodore Billings, of the Fleet Air Arm. They returned the salute, climbed down from the car and shook hands.

"**H**OPED we'd find you here, and not out on patrol," Air Vice-marshal Hammersmith said and smiled. "You chaps don't seem to spend much time on the ground, you know."

"Thank you, sir," Crandall acknowledged the compliment. "Would you like a drink, sir, after your ride?"

"Later," the air ministry official said. "We want to have a bit of a talk with you first. You're included, Stacey, of course. Shall we go to the squadron office?"

Crandall nodded and led the way. When they were all comfortably seated Crandall saw the tight grin at the corners of Stacey's mouth, but avoided his friend's eyes. He looked politely at Hammersmith and waited. The air ministry official seemed to take a moment or so to enjoy the mystery that surrounded the sudden visit, then started talking.

"No doubt, Crandall," he began, "you've been wondering why your squadron has been shifted around so much this last month. Well, that has been for a definite reason. We've wanted to see what you chaps could do under any and all conditions. And let me say right here, that you and your pilots have performed brilliantly."

"Magnificently!" Air Commodore Billings chimed in.

"Yes, quite," Hammersmith agreed heartily. "There'll be a medal or two coming to this squadron . . . That's not why we're here, however. Crandall, we've decided to let your squadron tackle a big show. A mighty important show. We think you chaps can pull it off all right."

"We'll certainly do our best, sir," Crandall murmured, and frowned slightly. "What do you want us to tackle?"

The air vice-marshal swung around and stabbed a finger at the huge map that filled up most of the side wall.

"Norway," he said bluntly. "We're going to give Hitler something to think about in Norway. The Germans are making full use of Norwegian fisheries, as everybody knows. They extract fish oil and turn it into glycerin for their high explosives. And also codfish oil for food. At Svolvær, at the head of the Vestfjord in the Lofoten Islands, is where most of these plants are located. Well, we're going to put a stop to that. Picked troops are already in training to carry out a raid to destroy those plants, in coöperation with the Navy. However, before the raid can be attempted, we've got to have a better picture of what we'll be up against. That job has been turned over to the Air Force. And we are turning the job over to you."

Stacey coughed, and Crandall wanted to reach over and poke him one, but he kept his eyes on Hammersmith and nodded solemnly.

"We're honored you picked us, sir," he said. "Speaking for the whole squadron, you can count on us to go the limit. What are your plans, sir?"

"First, pictures," the air vice-marshal said. "The Navy wants good pictures of everything there. They want to know what units of the German fleet they may meet. They want to know if the Nazis have established air fields there, or a seaplane base. They also want to know the exact location



of the plants, and if by any chance troops are quartered there. All that they can tell from pictures, and from your personal reports."

CRANDALL nodded, then frowned. "Yes, sir," he said. "But of course we can't do it with our Hurricanes. The distance is too great, and—"

"You'll do it with Hurricanes," Hammersmith interrupted. "Your planes are to be fitted with extra tanks. And you'll operate from our naval base in the Shetland Islands, less than a four-hundred-mile flight to Svolvær. Fitted with extra gas tanks you'll be able to make it there and back without any trouble, and have at least a full hour in which to take pictures."

"But why not bombers, sir?" Stacey spoke up. "The American-made Lockheed Hudson, for instance?"

"No — Hurricanes," Hammersmith said bluntly. "A bomber would attract too much attention. And speed will be important. In case you meet trouble you'll want to get away in a hurry. Also, we hope the Germans won't suspect that Hurricanes are taking pictures."

"Of course you're right, sir," Crandall said, although he had no such feeling at all. "When do we start?"

"The end of the month at the latest," the air vice-marshal said. "The raid is to be made on the morning of March sixth, but getting pictures depends on you chaps. There is one thing, though, which you and all of your pilots must keep strictly in mind."

"Yes, sir?" Crandall murmured.

"The success of this raid will depend upon the utmost secrecy," Hammersmith said. "I must request that neither of you mention the reason for the squadron transfer to the Shetlands until you are actually there. And the camera flights are not to be made by more than two planes at a time. The important thing is *this!*

Your ships must not fall into German hands under any consideration. If you fall into the sea, make sure your plane sinks, making use of a small time bomb that will be fitted to the gas tank. If you have to bail out over land, touch off the bomb before you bail out. In short, the Germans must *not* find out your plane is equipped with a camera!"

"In other words," Air Commodore Billings spoke up quietly, "any pilot who meets with misfortune must not count on help from his comrades. And he most certainly cannot expect help from the Navy, because all vessels will be under orders to keep clear of that area so as not to arouse suspicion."

"Frankly," Hammersmith took up the thread again, "it is a volunteer job. I said, of course, that we were handing it over to Sixty-five. However, it is perfectly within your rights to refuse the assignment, if you so wish."

"We're not refusing, sir," Crandall said evenly. "We're accepting. And glad of the chance."

"Splendid!" Hammersmith said, and stood up. "Now, you mentioned something about a drink, I believe?"

An hour later the two air ministry big shots drove off. As soon as they left Crandall started to head for the squadron office, but Stacey grabbed him by the arm.

"No you don't, pal!" he said, with a chuckle. "You first admit I was right. The old hunch, see? Sixty-five is heading for the front pages. Canadian and American papers please copy. Right?"

"Still nuts!" Crandall snorted. "Publicity hasn't a thing to do with it. We're just good, that's all. And Adastral House knows it. So naturally they hand the job to us."

Stacey shook his head and sighed.

"Are you an innocent babe!" he murmured. "The perfect build-up, and everything."



"Maybe," Crandall said and shrugged. "But, I've got a hunch, too."

"About what?" Stacey demanded, and gave him a keen look.

Crandall grinned and gestured, palms upward.

"If we meet again when it's all over," he said, "maybe I'll tell you."

Leaving Stacey to figure that one out anyway he pleased, Crandall turned on his heel and walked away.

### CHAPTER III

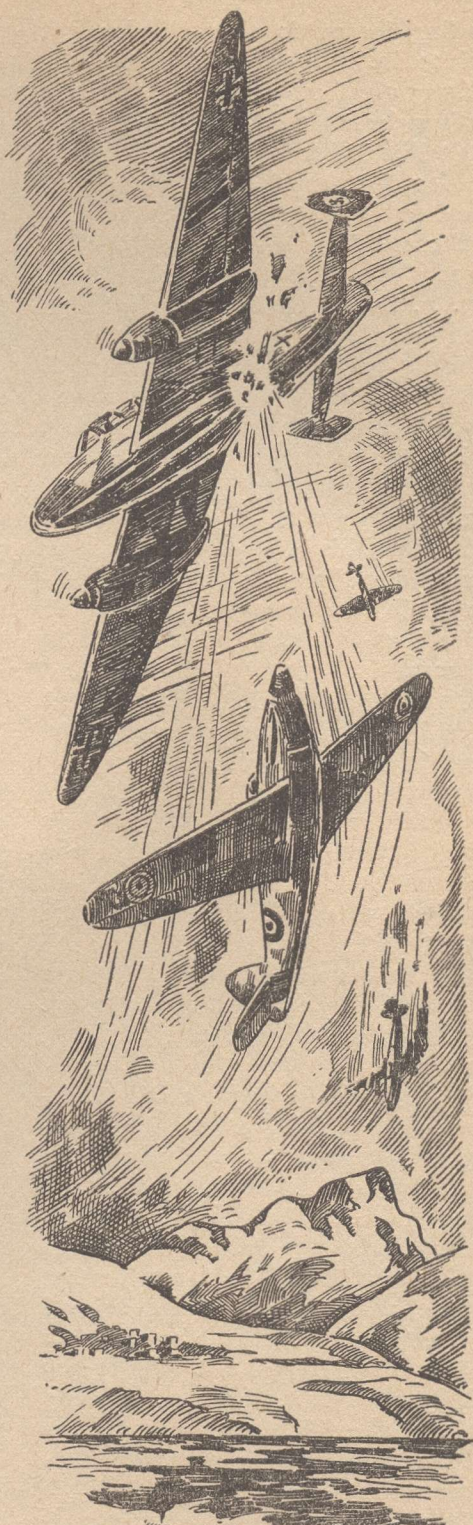
#### *Action in the Arctic*

**P**ERHAPS the first of March, 1941, was a beautiful day in lots of places in the world, but at some fifteen thousand feet over Norway's Lofoten Islands it was twice as cold as an iceberg. From sea up to sky was layer after layer of thin fog that played merry Ned with visibility. But mostly it seemed to seep right through Crandall's "Mae West," and his electrically heated flying suit, and chill him to the bone.

For the last half hour he had been tempted to call off this first camera patrol and go scooting back to the comparative warmth of the Shetland base. What stopped him from making a decision was the continual line of chit-chat from Stacey that poured through his radio earphones.

The flight leader didn't seem to mind the cold a bit. He was in fine spirits. From his kidding talk it could have been thought he was making a joy-hop over his home town of Toronto, instead of a four-hundred-mile flight across the wind-whipped, ice-cold waves of the North Atlantic. Anyway, it helped Crandall to forget his own troubles, and at least prevented him from calling things off.

"Okay, Jeff," he presently grunted into his own mike. "Close the book.



Crandall came up under the 110's belly and gave it all eight guns



Reading lesson is over. We've got work to do. All set?"

"Long ago," came the cheery reply. "Let's make it good, though. The boys didn't like it because we didn't draw lots for first crack. We gotta give them something to shoot at."

"You're telling me!" Crandall murmured. "Maybe that was a dirty trick, but . . . Well, let it slide. Let's go down for a look."

Easing back the throttle, Crandall slanted the nose of his Hurricane down through the thin layers of fog. And as the plane dropped lower and lower he reflected on Stacey's words. In accordance with Air Vice-marshal Hammersmith's request neither of them had spoken a word of explanation until Sixty-five had been settled at the Shetland base and ready to do business.

When he had told it all, right out of the box all of them had demanded the right to make the first camera raid. Crandall had talked them down, half for selfish reasons, and half because he and Stacey had considerably more cold weather flying experience than any of the others. Then there was the idea of leadership. Crandall wasn't the kind of squadron leader to send some pilot out on a dangerous mission that he hadn't taken a crack at first, himself.

He and Stacey had elected themselves for the first patrol. And now they were sliding down through the fog to reach clear air. They hit it at an altitude of about seven thousand feet. Crandall leveled off, made sure that his camera sight was set for that altitude, and that the release was off the shutter trigger. Then he stuck his head out over the side and took a good look downward. A grin of satisfaction tugged at his lips when he saw that they were directly over the southern entrance of the Vestfjord.

"A good start, anyway," he muttered. "Our navigation was right on the old beam."

He touched rudder, slid around and started straight northward. At the end of ten minutes the fishing port of Svolvær appeared from under a thin ground mist. He wagged his wings to attract Stacey's attention and pointed with his free hand. The other Canadian pilot wagged his wings in return and they veered away from each other until a good half mile of air space was between them.

Throttling to minimum cruising speed, they started taking pictures of the rugged snow-capped island group below them. Between shots Crandall made notes on his knee pad of things he spotted. He saw the huge glycerin plant, the storage tanks, the Nazi sea-plane base, and the dozen or so German light naval ships in the harbor.

IT was what he didn't see, however, that brought a puzzled frown to his brows. For one thing, there didn't seem to be any troops in the town. For another, there were no anti-aircraft batteries. Not a single shot was fired at them as they drifted back and forth over the town. And there wasn't the sign of a single plane in the sea-plane base. In short, save for a bit of smoke here and there, Svolvær looked like a deserted town.

"Looks to me like nobody's home, Cran," came Stacey's voice in his ear-phones.

"Could be, except for that smoke," he grunted. "You about finished?"

"All set," Stacey replied. "Let's get out of here. That place down there gives me the creeps. Like a—"

Stacey finished the rest with a wild yell of alarm.

"Trouble, Cran!" he yelled. "Behind and to your left. Look out!"

Crandall let go of his camera trigger and jerked his head around. Even as he saw the six Nazi Messerschmitt 110s rocketing down at him, the snout of each diving plane started spitting out jetting flame and sound. Something smacked hard against his wind-



shield, and for a crazy half second he had the impression that the sky had blown up in his face. Instinctively he jumped on left rudder and went cutting off and away as a shower of metal destruction plowed through the section of air his plane had occupied.

Keeping his ship in its tight left bank he went all the way around, then hauled the stick back and went zooming for the fog layers above. It was not his intention to go streaking for cover, however. It was simply a fake maneuver, and one of the Messerschmitts fell for it hook, line and sinker. The German plane came out of its steep dive and tried to cut across the sky for a broadside blast at Crandall.

In the last split second allowed, the Canadian C.O. dropped his nose, slammed over and down in a half roll, then zoomed once more. The German tried to follow through, only to realize his mistake too late. Crandall came up right under the 110's belly and he gave it all eight guns. The 110 exploded and headed downward in a cloud of smoke and flame.

The instant the 110 went up in smoke Crandall kicked his ship off its zoom and cut around to the southwest. It was then he saw the second ball of fire hurtling downward. For a brief instant fear closed fingers of ice about his heart. Then he let out a bellow of joy as he saw Stacey's Hurricane charging straight up at another Messerschmitt. He put his lips to his flap mike.

"Let it go, Jeff!" he sang out. "This is where we came in, fellow."

Perhaps Stacey heard him, and perhaps he didn't. Anyway, the senior flight leader continued on up after the 110, and in three or four seconds there was one more airplane less in Goering's air force. Caught cold in Stacey's withering fire, the third Messerschmitt came apart in a shower of small pieces.

Crandall's shout of praise, however,

died on his lips. For it was then he saw that six more 110s had arrived. More important than that, however, was the fact that the new arrivals had taken up positions above the two Canadians and to the southwest. One look at them and Crandall knew that the Germans were planning to hem them in so that neither could escape and start the long four-hundred-mile hop back to their Shetland base.

Icy dread gripped Crandall. His throat went dry, and the palms of his hands became clammy. From fear for his life? Not a bit of it! The surprise arrival of the Messerschmitts, and their battle tactics seemed to add up to only one thing. The Germans knew why the two Canadians were over the Vestfjord, and they were under orders to see to it that said two Canadians never returned to their home drome!

**T**RUE, there were only ten 110s up there attempting to block the way home. And one Canadian pilot in Crandall's opinion was a fair match for five German pilots any day in the week. But that wasn't the point. What mattered was the fact that the fire power of the Hurricanes had been decreased to allow for the extra gas load. That, plus the fact that Crandall and Stacey had used up the hour allotted for picture taking. If they didn't pull away soon neither of them stood a chance of getting their pictures and reports back to the Naval Command at the Shetlands.

For a precious moment or so Crandall considered the problem. Then he put his lips to the flap mike again.

"Pull in close to me, Jeff!" he barked, and ruddered toward his pal's plane. "We'll give them the old rush together—try to smash right through."

If Stacey made any reply Crandall didn't hear it. Because at that exact moment a shell from a Messerschmitt 20-mm cannon slammed into his engine and exploded with a roar of



sound. A sheet of flame sprang up in front of Crandall's eyes, and he felt as if his entire body were being pounded by a hundred invisible iron fists.

For a brief instant he was too stunned to move a single muscle. Then instinctive flying sense came to his rescue. Hardly realizing it, he kicked his Hurricane up on wing and let it sideslip viciously downward. That cleared some of the smoke away, and he saw that the whole right side of his instrument panel wasn't there any more. Then he ducked quickly as a stream of engine oil came spurting back at him.

He whipped out his free hand, rapped off the ignition switches, and killed the throttle. Smoke was all around him again and he couldn't see twenty feet ahead. He was through flying that Hurricane and he knew it. There were still two jobs to do, and he stuck to his ship, regardless.

"Bailing out, Jeff!" he barked into his flap mike. "Bust through them, kid, and good luck!"

"I'm sticking with you!" came Stacey's voice. "Those no-good tramps can't—"

"Cut it!" Crandall roared. "I'm on fire! It's up to you, Jeff. Get back there. Them's orders, fellow!"

No sooner had Crandall spoken the last than there was a harsh hiss, and his radio set went silent. He yanked out the radio jack, slammed open his cowling hatch, and rolled the ship over on its back. The last two things he did were to unfasten his safety belt harness and yank a little wire loop fitted to the left side of his cockpit—the release for the bomb fastened to the gas tank. In twenty seconds it would let go and turn the Hurricane into a shower of splintered junk.

Twenty seconds! He repeated the words over and over again in his brain as he spilled head-first out of the pit and let his body free-fall downward. For a year, it seemed, he was floating

in a cloud of throat-gagging smoke and fog. Then suddenly he was in clear air and right out flat on his back with his feet slightly higher than his head. He twisted his head and looked down. There was nothing but rolling gray-green water there, and it looked as cold as the devil.

"Here goes!" he gasped, and yanked his rip-cord ring. "And I sure hope that Hurricane doesn't fall down on top of me."

**T**HE smoke and fog above him was suddenly split in two by a huge knife of livid red flame. Thunderous sound crashed against his ear-drums, and he had the crazy sensation of being grabbed by the feet, whirled around and flung away in the general direction of the North Pole. Sea and sky spun around before his eyes. Then he was swinging back and forth at the ends of his parachute shroud lines, and gradually sinking downward. Reaching up, he grabbed hold of the shroud lines and shifted his weight slightly. He wiped some oil splatterings from his goggles and took stock of his surroundings.

There wasn't much to see. Above him was fog and stretches of gray-white smoke. Below, some three thousand feet, were the uninviting gray-green rollers. Between sea and fog there was only himself. There wasn't a sign of Stacey or of the Messerschmitts.

He pushed up one flap of his helmet and listened intently. For a second or so he thought he heard the drone of distant engines, but couldn't tell for sure. He swallowed hard and buckled the flap back in place.

"It's up to you, Jeff!" he grated fiercely. "You've got to make it, kid. Me, I'm out of the picture for keeps!"

For keeps! The two words echoed tauntingly through his brain as he stared down at the water, glassy-eyed. Of course his Mae West would keep him afloat for awhile, but long before



then the chill of those icy waters would get through his heavy flying garb and freeze him as solid as a cake of ice. Like a million other brave men who had faced almost certain death he was tempted to take out his service automatic and save himself the agony of a slow, horrible finish. He didn't, of course. The flame of fierce hope and belief still flickered in his soul, and he clung to it with all the strength of his spiritual being.

"One more break, Lady Luck!" he muttered grimly as the rolling gray-green swells rose up toward him. "I need one more break, and how!"

He unsnapped his 'chute harness so that neither it nor the silk and shroud lines would foul him in the water. Hanging by one hand he waited until the water was but a couple of feet under the soles of his flying boots, then let go.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Vulture's Den*

**F**OR a long minute Crandall seemed to hover motionless just off the surface of the water. He even had time to see the wind grab hold of his parachute, whip it away and drop it into the water.

Then he didn't see anything. He was down under the water himself. It closed over him like a wave of ice and

pushed him down and down. Bitter cold numbed him from head to foot. It was almost as though he wasn't wearing any clothes at all, the icy water soaked through so quickly.

Suddenly, his head was above water, and only then he realized that he had moved his arms and legs and forced himself up out of the icy depths. He gulped in huge lungfuls of air, but it was so bitterly cold that it was like drawing fire into his lungs. He clenched his teeth hard, breathed through his nose, and slowly and methodically kept his legs and arms in motion. To relax and let his Mae West do the job would be like committing suicide. His only hope lay in keeping his blood circulating. And to do that he must keep his arms and legs moving.

"But why bother?" he ranted at himself. "I'm miles from land. I can't even see a shoreline. Why drag it out? Why . . . Cut it, Crandall! Don't be a yellow-belly. You're not finished, yet! Get that? You're not finished yet!"

The words—or the thought—beat back the growing desire to call off all bets, and just give up. One half of him seemed to go asleep as his floating body rose up one side of a swell and went coasting down the other side. One half, though, remained savagely awake. It cursed him, ranted at him, and forced him with each pass-

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ing second to keep moving, keep moving, and not to *stop* moving for an instant.

Seconds lagged along to total a minute, and the minutes dragged on and on to total a year, or perhaps an eternity. Water, fog, and sky became all one to Crandall. His brain was pierced by a thousand pinpoints of icy fire. His arms and legs became bars of lead attached to his body. He knew in a crazy sort of way that he was somehow managing to move them. Then again, he wasn't so sure. One thing was certain, however. He couldn't keep it up forever. The cold was like a knife that cut away a little part of his body at a time. He couldn't feel anything any more. He couldn't think. He couldn't. . . .

He couldn't see anything, he couldn't feel anything, and he couldn't hear anything. Just the same, instinct suddenly told him that he wasn't in the water any more. He was being lifted up, and up, and up. He was dead at last? This was the sensation after death?

Liquid fire trickling down his throat suddenly knocked all those thoughts into a cocked hat. For a brief instant sanity returned and he knew that brandy was being poured into him. Then for quite awhile every thing became all befuddled and mixed up. He hung in space for a long time. Hung in the middle of space, and fog.

Then, as though somebody had pulled the curtain of fog aside, he began to see things, to feel things, and to hear things. He was on some kind of bunk. He was wrapped in blankets. Four men in dirty, oil-stained clothes were rubbing his arms and legs and body under the blankets and there was nothing easy or gentle about it, either. They seemed to be about to tear him to pieces, and vicious jabs said they would be glad of the chance.

A fifth man, wearing a dirty white cap, was holding a cup of brandy to his lips. In the distance there was

sound. A steady, throbbing note that made him think of a trip-hammer under water. The man in the dirty white cap jerked the cup roughly away from Crandall's lips.

"So, he is all right, now!" the man said, and launched a kick at Crandall's blanket-wrapped figure. "Return to your posts!"

**T**RUTH came home to roost in Crandall's brain then. The man in the dirty white cap had spoken in German. That sound was from Diesel engines. In short, he wasn't "dead" any more. He was safely aboard a Nazi U-boat!

He watched the four sailors walk away, casting glances of hate at him. Then he looked at the one in the dirty white cap, obviously an officer. The German met his gaze and reluctantly held out the brandy cup. Crandall shook his head.

"No more," he said, speaking in the officer's tongue. "And thanks for picking me up. It was devilish cold in that water."

The officer shrugged and placed the cup on a metal shelf.

"The water is always cold in these parts," he said in an emotionless tone. "And you do not need to thank me for picking you up. I was obeying orders. As far as I'm concerned, you could have drowned."

"And thanks for that," Crandall said dryly. "But I suppose saving lives isn't a Nazi hobby, is it?"

The German's eyes seemed to spit fire.

"You will watch your tongue, Canadian *Schweinhund!*" he said in a flat, deadly voice. "I was sent orders to pick you up, but—I could have arrived too late. You understand, eh?"

"Okay, my mistake," Crandall murmured. "Who sent you orders to pick me up? And why?"

The German said nothing. He sat staring at Crandall, stony-eyed.

"Well, here's another question,



then," the Canadian ace said. "Where are we headed?"

"Svolvoer!" The German spat out the word as though he did not like the taste.

Crandall blinked, and forced himself up on one elbow. The room spun for a moment, but presently his head cleared.

"Svolvoer, huh?" he echoed. "Look, Captain, or whatever your rank is, can't we pass the time by talking? I'm your prisoner, but I'm still thanking you for saving my life. So what's it all about? Why send a U-boat out after me?"

The German shrugged again and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

"I only follow orders," he said bluntly. "I never ask why orders have been given. We saw you fall into the water. We were given orders to rescue you. That is all."

"Well, speaking for myself," Crandall said, and studied the lean, unshaven face before him, "it was a lot. Who am I going to see in Svolvoer?"

"*Herr Kommandant*," the German chopped out. "Then, perhaps the firing squad. Well, I see that you are going to live, and I have duties to perform. I will leave you. Do not try to get off that bunk, please. It would be unhealthy for you, I can promise."

A wisecrack retort rose to Crandall's lips, but he let it go unspoken. He simply nodded and watched the U-boat officer step through the bulkhead door. The door was left open a few inches and Crandall could see a couple of sailors working over some machinery in the section beyond. He watched them for awhile, then closed his eyes. The brandy and the warm blankets had done their work well, and had it not been for environment he could easily have slipped off into blissful sleep.

Sharp, stabbing thoughts defeated sleep, however. First, what had hap-

pened to Jeff Stacey? Was he alive or dead? And why had a U-boat been sent to Squadron Leader Crandall's rescue? Why was he being returned to Svolvoer?

ALSO, what about those Messerschmitt 110s? Where had they come from? He was willing to swear on a stack of Bibles that they hadn't come from any air field in the vicinity of Svolvoer. Of course they had slid down unseen out of the fog and the clouds, but who had sent them down? And from where?

A sudden thought came to him and he scowled darkly at the deck plating above his head. Were the Germans in Norway expecting just such a daring raid as the British planned? And right off the bat had suspected that he and Jeff were there to take pictures?

He couldn't get rid of the nagging thought. For such a raid to be a complete washout, because the Germans were waiting with open arms, would be but another feather in Hitler's hat. He had vowed to the whole world that—"Wherever the British touch the continent, we will meet them there immediately!" It wouldn't help British morale any to have Hitler's troops meet a Navy and Marine raid contingent at Svolvoer, and throw them back into the sea.

Thoughts! Hundreds of them, thousands of them, crawled and raced through Crandall's brain. In time they became as a lullaby. A lullaby with a Diesel symphony for a background as he dropped off to sleep.

In time a hand grabbed his shoulder and shook him roughly. He opened his eyes to see the U-boat officer. The man tossed Crandall's clothes on the bunk. They looked as though they had been slept in for weeks, but at least they were dry.

"We dock in a few minutes," the officer grunted. "Put on your clothes."

Crandall did, and noted that his



service automatic holster was empty. When he stood up to button his tunic he was at least a little thankful that he felt no bad effects from his cold-water swim. The officer watched him, narrow-eyed, then nodded when he was finished, and pointed at the companionway door.

"Walk ahead of me, and up onto the deck," he grunted. "And if you don't care for more cold water, make sure you do not act foolish."

With the officer and two armed sailors close to him, Crandall stood on the conning tower bridge and watched the U-boat slide in close and be made fast to one of Svolvær's fishing fleet wharfs. On the wharf a German military car waited, with a driver at the wheel, and two young hawk-faced officers in back. Typical Nazi officers, exuding an arrogance that made Crandall sick.

When the U-boat was made fast the officer led Crandall up onto the wharf and motioned him into the front seat with the driver. The German exchanged a few "*Heil* Hitlers" with two officers in the car, then returned to his boat. The driver shifted gears and got the car under way.

As it rolled along the snow-packed streets of the important fishing port, Crandall was once again struck by the appearance of desertion. They passed no troops at all, and no more than five villagers during the ten-minute drive. Not one of the villagers so much as raised a head to look at the car. Crandall could almost feel the bitter hostility those Norwegians had in their hearts for their "protectors."

When they reached the far side of the port, Crandall saw the towering radio station and the huge power plant that supplied the town. One look at the powerful radio station made him think instantly of that flock of 110s that had suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

He had a pretty good idea where they had come from now. Narvik!

Only forty miles to the north up the Vestfjord. A look-out at the radio station could have brought those Messerschmitts down from Narvik in nothing flat. With that radio station there, the chances of a British raid being a success were a little less than nil!

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## CHAPTER V

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### *The Startling Truth*

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**B**EFORE long, the car pulled up to a stop before a low stone building, and Crandall was ushered inside. Two men seated behind a huge desk eyed him closely as he entered. One wore the uniform of a German colonel of infantry. The other was in civilian clothes, and Crandall didn't need three guesses to know he was the local "Quisling."

The Canadian's officer escort clicked their heels, then beat a hasty retreat at a nod from the colonel. When they had left, the German officer waved at a chair.

"Greetings, my Canadian friend," he said in a surprisingly soft voice which, however, could not cover the undertones of hate and menace. "You have had rather an exciting adventure, eh?"

Crandall shrugged and sat down. He even accepted the cigarette the German offered.

"It had its moments," he said after he had lighted up. "And thanks for ordering that I be picked up. You did order it, didn't you?"

The colonel's eyes widened slightly.

"You speak German well," he observed, then his eyes narrowed. "You have lived in Germany?"

Crandall couldn't resist the opening.

"Two years, B.H.," he said.

"Eh?" the German echoed. "B.H.?"

"Before Hitler," Crandall said.



A violent flush suffused the German's face. He started to speak but seemed to change his mind.

"You would find Germany even better now," he commented eventually. "But about your rescue. You were lost, eh? You could not locate the position of your aircraft carrier?"

With the question, something clicked in Crandall's brain. So that was it, huh? They wanted to know if units of the British fleet were operating off the shores of Norway? He shook his head.

"Yes, we were lost," he said. "But from our Norwegian base, of course."

Both the colonel and the Quisling sat up straight. The Quisling swore harshly and shook his head.

"That is a lie!" he spat out. "The British no longer have bases in Norway. We have long since pushed them all back into the sea."

Crandall shrugged and grinned.

"Okay," he said. "It must be so if you say so."

"You spoke of 'we'?" the colonel snapped.

Crandall just managed to check himself from starting violently. The Nazi didn't know, then, about Jeff Stacey? Had they seen only his, Crandall's, ship from the ground? Had a strip of fog hidden Jeff? Hadn't the Messerschmitts made a report on whether Jeff had skipped away, or had been shot down into the sea?

A tiny hope sprang into flame in Crandall. It was possible that Jeff had made good his getaway, and the Messerschmitt pilots had said nothing about it, in order to save themselves official wrath.

"Sure I said 'we'." Crandall nodded, and touched the rank bands on his tunic sleeve. "I mean my squadron. We were on U-boat patrol and got lost in the fog. Some Messerschmitts attacked me, and I had to jump. And here I am."

"Yes, here you are, my Canadian friend," the German muttered guttur-

ally. Then as an icy glint stole into his eyes, "But I do not think I believe your story. I know a little something about flying. I know a little about the British Hawker Hurricane."

"So what?" the Canadian grunted, but his throat became suddenly dry.

"The exploding of a Hurricane's fuel tank could never do what was done to your plane," the German said. "So there must have been a time bomb in your plane. You did not wish it to fall into our hands, eh?"

"That's right," Crandall said truthfully. "Orders are to destroy our ships when we have to bail out."

THE German's eyes flashed angrily, and he drummed his finger-tips on the desk.

"But a plane that crashed into the water, as yours would have done, would be of no value to us, would it?" he demanded. "Now—tell me the truth!"

Crandall forced a surprised look to his face.

"Truth?" he echoed. "What do you think I've been telling you?"

"Lies!" the Quisling snarled. "Nothing but swine lies!"

The colonel jerked his bullet head around and gave the Quisling a look that burned right through him.

"You will keep in mind, *Herr Stoffen*," he bit off, "that I am *Kommandant* here."

"Of course, of course, *Herr Colonel*," the Quisling stammered, and seemed to shrivel up.

"*Herr Stoffen* is undoubtedly right, however," the German *Kommandant* said, returning his gaze to Crandall's face. "You have spoken only lies. Now, let us be sensible. We are peaceful and contented here in Svolvær. There is no war here, or the things that go with war. I'm sure you will be contented as a prisoner. Good food, a warm bed, and permission to wander about the town. You follow me?"

"Not yet," Crandall said, though in-



wardly he had a pretty good idea of what the German was leading up to.

"Well, it could be much different," the colonel said, with a gesture of his thick hands. "I do not wish to force you to tell the truth. But, it *can* be done. Now, where is your base? Why were you flying over Svolvær? And why did you destroy your plane with a bomb? The answers to those three questions will earn you much comfort and rest, my Canadian friend."

"You already have the answers," Crandall said, and calmly snuffed out his cigarette.

The German glared but said nothing. The Quisling coughed nervously.

"With your permission, *Herr Colonel*?" he said.

"Well?" the German growled, without looking at him. "Go on and speak!"

"The matter we were discussing earlier," *Herr "Quisling" Stoffen* said, talking fast. "If the boats to evacuate our fuel stores and equipment machinery to a new base are to arrive here on the fifth, I must notify Oslo at once. I sincerely suggest that we even speed up the evacuation all we can."

"The fifth is soon enough!" the German shot out of the corner of his mouth. "You would do well to forget your fears, *Herr Stoffen*. However, notify Oslo to have the boats and naval escort here on the morning of the fifth. All the equipment and stores will be ready for transfer by then."

The Quisling got to his feet, bowed stiffly, then flinging Crandall a sneering look he walked out of the room. The German still looking at Crandall now managed to smile faintly.

"Traitors are swine," he said condescendingly. "But they have their uses, so conquerors must put up with them. But, enough of *Herr Stoffen*. I give you one last chance. Bear in mind, it was I who saved your life once. I may not wish to save it a sec-

ond time. So! You will tell me the truth, eh?"

Crandall stared down at the floor as though in deep thought. As a matter of fact, he was, but he wasn't thinking what the German suspected. A date was uppermost in his mind. *March fifth!* On March fifth the Germans were going to remove all the fuel stores, and the glycerin plant equipment from Svolvær.

**C**RANDALL had no idea of the location of the new base, but it was fairly certain that the stores and equipment were being moved because of the fear of British raids. And the British were going to raid Svolvær! On the sixth of the month—the day after the Nazis would have everything moved elsewhere.

"Well?" the German suddenly growled, cutting into his thoughts. "You've thought it over?"

Crandall looked him in the eye.

"There's nothing to think over," he said flatly. "But have it your way."

"I intend to," the colonel said softly, but it would not have been so menacing had he shouted. "By morning you will be eager to talk—to tell me the truth!"

Glowering, the German jabbed a bell button on his desk. The door opened and a big bruiser of a guard stepped inside and saluted.

"Yes, *Herr Kommandant*?" he said in a voice that could serve equally as well as a fog horn.

The colonel stabbed a thick finger at Crandall.

"Put him in the guard room for fool swine!" he snapped. "He wishes to spend a comfortable night in the Arctic Circle."

The guard grinned, showing teeth like fangs. Then, he unholstered his Luger and trained it on Crandall.

"March!" he growled. "I will see that you are made comfortable, as *Herr Kommandant* orders. *Ja*, comfortable!"



The guard seemed to think that excruciatingly funny. He threw back his head and roared with laughter. Only with grim effort did Crandall check his impulse to swing for the man's jaw. Instead he got to his feet, stared at the colonel for a moment, and grinned.

"Ever hear of the town of Dawson, in the Yukon, Colonel?" he asked.

"Of course," the German grunted, but looked a bit puzzled.

"Well, that's my home town," Crandall said. "I'm used to Arctic Circle weather."

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## CHAPTER VI

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### *The R.C.A.F. Is Tough!*

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**YOU** are comfortable, *Schwein-hund*? You are nice and warm in your little room, eh? So! You are asleep, and do not wish to be disturbed?"

The big bruiser of a guard pressed his face close to the bars of the door and roared with laughter. It was like a saw rasping across Crandall's nerves, but he savagely held onto himself. Huddled down on the cot, the only piece of furniture in the six-by-six room, he kept his eyes closed and clenched his teeth and fists against the bitter cold that seemed to tear strips of flesh from his body.

When was it he had been herded into this Nazi "refrigeration plant?" Last night, or last year? From the way he felt it must have been centuries ago. Anyway, he had been thrown in this place just as it was growing dark, and now the light of a new dawn was climbing up the eastern sky.

Time and again his boast to that German colonel had returned in memory to taunt him. A six-by-six room, with no windows and a barred door. A cot and no blankets. It was the

same as sleeping out in the open, save that he was protected from the wind. All night long he had refused to lie down on the cot. Sleep would have brought him welcome rest, but it might also have brought him eternal rest.

So he had kept moving as much as he could. Ten minutes walking six feet this way, six feet that way. Then ten minutes of sitting on the edge of the cot, swinging his legs and arms. And all the time a guard outside the door, wrapped to his ears in warm furs, shouting taunts at him until it was all he could do to refrain from hurling himself at the bars of the door.

Somehow, though, he had survived the terrible night, and with the coming of dawn's meager warmth he had huddled down on the cot to snatch at least a few minutes of complete relaxation. Hour after hour of intense suffering. Enough to break a dozen men and turn them into gibbering idiots. Somehow, though, he had won through. Perhaps it had been due to courage, or perhaps sheer stubborn determination not to give his captors the slightest chance to crow over him. It might have been the combination of many things.

At any rate he was still alive. Bitterly cold, but still alive, and still determined not to speak a word that would be of value to his captors. That had helped him a lot through the long night. His captors were trying to torture him into talking. That meant that they were worried, that they evidently feared a British raid before they could move their fuel stores and plant equipment to some other spot.

And from what Crandall had heard from the colonel's lips, and from that Quisling, *Herr* Stoffen, they would not be able to evacuate this place until the fifth. Today was the second. On the fifth, the place would be evacuated—and on the sixth the British would make their raid!



But the Germans here at Svolvær were worried. At least that was something. If he could keep them that way, they would probably keep him alive. And while he still lived there was hope. The hope he might somehow get word to the British to advance the date of the raid. Hope that he might disable that radio station so that no alarm could go north to Narvik and bring bombers down to destroy the British raiding party. And hope that he could warn the British of those 110 fighters so that they could be handled in case he failed to put the radio station out of commission.

One by one he considered the tasks to be performed, and a wave of bitter despair swept through him. Thinking of things to be done, and carrying them out successfully were two different kinds of fish.

**T**O begin with, he was a half frozen prisoner—helpless and at the mercy of his captors. But why give that a thought? Heck, all he had to do was to get away, get word to the British, take care of the radio station, and two or three other little details. A cinch! Sure, nothing to it!

For a moment he almost gave way. Something in his numbed and tired brain almost snapped. He hung on by the skin of his teeth. Then, as though Lady Luck had arranged it, his mounting tension was eased.

A second guard appeared at his cell door, and a plate of food was shoved through the bottom opening. He heard the scrape of the tin dish on the floor and opened his eyes. For a moment stubbornness tempted him to ignore it, but the steam rising from the warm food and coffee was too much. There was such a thing as being a complete fool.

He crawled off his cot, picked up the dish of food, and returned to his cot to devour it in silence. He remained deaf to the jeers and sneers

of the two guards who watched him through the bars.

The food made a new man of him. Much of the cold left his body, his brain cleared considerably, and determination of purpose was strengthened. In an odd sort of way he was grateful to his captors. Had they not brought him that food he probably wouldn't have remained on even balance for long. He was no superman. He was just a two-fisted fighting man from the land of the Maple Leaf. He could take as much as the next fellow, but he couldn't keep it up forever.

Yes, he was grateful to his captors, but not too grateful. He knew that giving him food had been no act of humanitarianism on their part. Had they suspected how close he was to cracking he would have probably been given a dish of ice, instead. No, it was a fair bet they wanted to keep him alive—simply to make him talk.

He finished his meal, shoved the dish and cup through the bars, and started his cell pacing again. The next move was up to his captors, and until that move was made he would kill time by keeping the blood circulating through his body, and checking and rechecking plans in case he got the chance to carry them out.

After a couple of hours or so the sound of aircraft engines sent him leaping over to the door. The fear that had been lingering in the back of his brain flared up into a bright flame of mental agony. If more Hurricanes from Sixty-five came over on camera patrol, the Nazis at Svolvær would know definitely that something important was in the offing. And once they were certain they would undoubtedly use the boats in the harbor to evacuate their stuff instead of waiting for the ships to come up from Oslo.

As he grasped hold of the cell door bars, peered out and up, fervent prayers were on his lips. A prayer that Jeff had returned safely to the



Shetlands and convinced the British Naval Command that the presence of those Messerschmitt 110s made further picture taking out of the question, and that if Jeff had not returned that the British Naval Command would suspend operations until definite news was learned.

"Don't let those ships be Hurricanes!" he prayed silently. "Don't send these rats scurrying for their holes! I'll get out of this somehow, and—and get the truth back to the British. Please!"

PERHAPS he was heard, perhaps not. At any rate his prayer came true. The planes he saw high up in the sky were not British Hurricanes. They were Nazi Dornier Do. 215s, huge twin-engined flying boats used on long-distance reconnaissance and bombing work over the water. Their main use was against British shipping, but as Crandall watched them head out over the water to the west he had a hunch they were seeking the British aircraft carrier aboard which the Nazi *Kommandant* at Svolvær believed him to have been stationed.

The thought brought a thin grin to his lips. Fair enough. If the colonel still suspected a unit of the British fleet lying off-shore, let the Dorniers search for it. They would find nothing, of course, as it had been arranged for no British naval ships to be anywhere in the area. Finding nothing, the suspicions of the Nazis at Svolvær would be that much lessened. Let the Dorniers search—and keep the Hurricanes away.

Hour after hour he clung to that hope. And hour after hour the hope was kept alive. All through the morning and during most of the afternoon he heard and saw the Dorniers, but not once did a British Hurricane appear in the sky. The absence of Hurricanes made him feel both glad and sad. It could mean that Jeff was still

alive and had cautioned the British command at the Shetlands against further camera patrols. Or it could mean that Jeff was dead some place in the icy waters of the North Atlantic, and the British at the Shetland base were simply waiting.

When the sun was low down in the west once more, the big bruiser of a guard appeared at his cell door, unlocked it and kicked it open with his foot.

In his big right fist he held a Luger, and the Luger was pointed straight at Crandall's middle.

"Come out, *Schweinhund!*" he snarled. "*Herr Kommandant* will speak with you again!"

The Canadian air ace walked slowly out onto the packed snow, propelled by a vicious push in the back. Temptation to take his chances against that pointed Luger were strong, but this wasn't his moment to make a break for freedom—if such a moment was to be given him. So he permitted the snarling, cursing big Nazi to herd him down the street and into the low stone building that served as the *Kommandant's* office.

The warmth of a blazing log fire surged about him like a soothingly warm blanket. Ignoring the twisted smile on the German colonel's lips he stepped close to the blaze and held out his chilled hands. He didn't know what was coming next, and for the moment he didn't care. The warmth of that log fire was the most wonderful thing he had ever experienced in his life.

"It feels good, eh?" the Nazi colonel suddenly broke the silence to say.

"Very good," Crandall said, without turning around. "Nice of you to invite me in."

The German laughed harshly.

"I thought you'd enjoy it," he said. "And I am hoping the difference makes an impression on you, eh?"

Crandall turned his back to the blaze and looked at the man.



"You can repeat that," he said. "I don't get it."

The German gave him a hard stare.

"You are very stupid, Canadian," he said. "Or you are very stupidly clever. Last night was to show you how foolish it is to be so stubborn. I do not believe the story you told me yesterday. I want the truth. It may prove to be of small importance to me, but we shall see. Telling the truth, however, will be of great importance to you. It can be the difference between being a live prisoner of war, and being a dead one! Is the reason for your flight yesterday more important than your life?"

CRANDALL almost nodded but stopped the move swiftly. Above all he must not give the German a single impression that his flight over Svolvoer meant a thing in the general picture of war. So he sighed heavily and shook his head.

"This sounds like a record," he grunted. "For the umpteenth time—you got the truth yesterday. And by the way, those Dorniers didn't find a thing, did they?"

"That means nothing," the German growled. "Your aircraft carrier could easily have retired during the night. So you still wish to continue to lie, eh?"

"Have it your way," Crandall said.

The German stared at Crandall and anger, triumph, and hate took turns skipping across his face. Then presently the German sighed also—and smiled, tight-lipped.

"I am an officer of the Gestapo!" he suddenly shot out. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"You'd be surprised," Crandall said evenly. "So what?"

"So this!" the German spat out. "Guard!"

Crandall started to spin around, but he was not half quick enough. The big German guard moved with the speed of light, and his ham-sized fist

exploded on Crandall's jaw. The Canadian felt himself rise straight in the air, turn around, then go crashing down on the floor. That blow did what the bitter cold had failed to do. It turned his immediate world into a world of vivid red.

He came up off the floor like a bouncing ball and hurled himself at the guard. He heard a hoarse laugh, then another fifteen-inch shell exploded on the side of his head. For a brief instant he was paralyzed from head to toe. He found himself on the floor unable to move, but able to clearly see the guard towering over him. From out of the crackling red haze he heard a voice.

"Well, Canadian, do you wish to talk now? Or do you still think you're tough chewing, as they say in your country?"

Crandall had the vague impression that he shouted something in reply. He wasn't sure. He only knew that he was up off that floor again, and that the guard's booted foot was arcing up toward his groin. He staggered to the side and avoided that foot somehow. Then he pivoted, and crashed home his own fist.

It was like hitting a brick wall. White flame leaped from his knuckles clear up to his shoulder socket. Through the red haze he saw the blurred silhouette of the guard stagger back a pace or two. Fierce joy blazed up in him, and he lunged forward to follow up his staggering blow.

Only it hadn't been as staggering as that. Crandall saw the fist and tried to duck, but that fist followed his movements and caught him just under the left ear. In the next split second he was sure that his head had gone flying off in one direction and the rest of his body in another. Once more he found himself on the floor, only this time the floor seemed to be sinking away from him, as rolling waves of darkness swept over him.

Terrific pain in his left side beat



back the black waves. Pain from the guard's swinging foot. He groaned, rolled over and forced himself up on his hands and knees. His head felt split in two and there was a salty taste of blood in his mouth. He crouched there on the floor, fighting for the strength to lurch clear of the next kick coming his way. But he couldn't move hand or foot. He could only crouch there and wait and curse his own utter helplessness.

Then through the thunder in his head he heard the colonel's sharp order.

"Enough! Take him back to his cell. We will do some more later. There is a Messerschmitt landing. I must see what that is all about."

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## CHAPTER VII

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### *The Messerschmitt from Nowhere*

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**M**ESSERSCHMITT landing? Crandall's pain-filled brain fumbled with the words. What was a Messerschmitt? What did it mean, Messerschmitt landing? It should mean something. He was sure of that. But his head and his whole body were too filled with pain to think what.

The strength flowed out of his arms and he fell forward on his face on the floor. In a dull, abstract way he knew that the guard had reached down and gathered him up like a wet sack of meal. He felt himself flung head-down across the guard's shoulder.

As the guard carried him through the open door, cold air hit him. For an instant the sudden change seemed to drive him straight down into a pit of whirling blacks and whites. Then a curtain was pulled aside in his brain. The haze before his eyes drifted away, and the pain became less. Most important of all his brain became crystal clear.

From off to his left and up he heard

the purring whistle of a plane sliding down to a landing. Painfully he turned his head and looked, his gaze directed at the flat square of snow close to the deserted seaplane base. Suddenly a Messerschmitt 110 floated down into his line of vision. There was a pilot at the controls, but no radioman or rear gunner. He saw it sink down, level off, and land in the snow. Then it was lost to view as the guard walked in front of a building.

Messerschmitt landing! That made sense now, and how! He held his breath for fear his thumping heart would be felt by the guard who lugged him along. A Messerschmitt 110. An airplane. And he was a pilot. If only he could—

He didn't even dare consider the thought. A man tackling a million to one chance didn't stop to consider the pros and cons. Thinking was just inner argument. And he might argue himself out of a slim hope of success. Right! When in a tight corner, act first and think about it later.

He counted the steps the guard took as the German stamped along the street to his prison cell, joggling him roughly. When they reached that cell the guard held Crandall with one hand and pushed open the door with the other. Then he turned and started to jerk backward so that Crandall would go tumbling in through the door.

In that instant, though, the Canadian acted. He became a whirlwind of savage, furious action. His right hand whipped down and snaked the guard's Luger from its holster. The other arm he hooked about the guard's neck. The guard stumbled, off balance, and both went spilling down onto the floor inside.

Even before they hit the floor, with Crandall underneath, the Canadian had slugged the guard on the head with his own Luger. The German growled with pain, and Crandall slugged him again. That blow stunned



the German for a moment. A lucky moment for Crandall. It gave him time to lunge out from under the guard sprawled across him. He was on his hands and knees when the guard started to get up.

"Nix!" Crandall said hoarsely. "It's my turn to play now."

He swung the Luger for the German's jaw and connected for a crushing blow.

"And how I love to play like this!" he panted, and clouted the German once more.

The guard's eyes rolled up until they showed only the whites. His jaw sagged open and he fell back limp on the floor.

"Never hit a guy when he's down, not much!" Crandall grated and cracked Luger barrel down on the guard's nose. "There! Sleep tight, you lug."

Getting to his feet, Crandall dragged the unconscious German to a far corner of the cell room and stripped him of his tunic, fur cap, and boots. He used the man's belt to lash his wrists and ankles behind his back. Then hastily he rammed a wad of cloth in the guard's mouth and tied it in place with his handkerchief.

**I**N moments he was garbed in the German's warm but badly fitting clothes, outside, and locking the cell door. He stared at the key for a moment, then turned and flung it far out into the snow.

Night was stealing swiftly across the Arctic sky by the time Crandall reached a corner of one of the seaplane hangars and peered out across the snow-covered land plane field at the Messerschmitt. It had not been taxied in to the hangar yet, but the twin props were stilled which gave Crandall a momentary pang of frustration.

But he forgot that as he studied the five men gathered at a wingtip. Three of them obviously were

mechanics awaiting orders to wheel the ship in. The fourth was the Nazi *Kommandant* of the area. He was talking with a fifth man wearing flying clothes.

The pilot had his back to Crandall, but without seeing the man's face, Crandall was conscious of something familiar about the man's height and his mannerisms as he talked with the Nazi colonel. Familiar, yet foreign. Crazy as it seemed, Crandall had the feeling he was staring at the back of somebody he knew.

Then suddenly when the pilot turned and started walking toward the hangar with the colonel Crandall got a good look at his face—and came within an ace of letting out a wild bellow of amazement. For the man in pilot's garb was Jeff Stacey!

Impulsively Crandall drew a hand across his eyes as though to blot out a mirage. It was no mirage, however. The pilot was Jeff! Jeff Stacey in the uniform of a German pilot, and landing an empty Messerschmitt 110 on the Svolvoer field!

Thousands of crazy thoughts whipped and slashed through Crandall's brain as he watched his squadron pal walk step for step with the Nazi colonel, talking to him all the time. For moments after the pair passed from his view Crandall still crouched there in the growing dusk, dumbly wondering if he were sane, or just plain insane.

Jeff up here at Svolvoer? It was screwy, absurd, absolutely impossible. Only it was true. It wasn't any dead ringer for Jeff either, no Nazi who happened to look like Stacey. The way Jeff hunched his shoulders when he talked, and the way he made certain gestures with his right hand were all too firmly fixed in Crandall's memory for him not to be sure beyond all doubt that the recent arrival was his best friend in the R.C.A.F.

"But I don't get it!" he whispered desperately. "Sure, I know he can



“speak the Nazi lingo. Better than I can. But what’s he doing here? Where did he get that 110? And what in name of all that’s screwy is he doing here?”

Questions! Hundreds of them played ring-around-the-rosy in his brain. In an abstract sort of way he watched the grease-balls wheel the 110 into the hangar, and start refueling operations. Then his thoughts jerked back to that Messerschmitt. He was going to swipe that plane and high-tail for the Shetlands. Its arrival had stuck a bomb under his well thought out plans, and had substituted in their place just one plan. The plan to swipe that 110 and make sky-tracks for the Shetlands.

That, too, was now knocked higher than a kite. True, he could wait for the mechanics to fuel the plane, and then try to get away in it. But that was out. Jeff was here at Svolvær. And Crandall wasn’t going to leave until he knew why, until he had contacted Jeff. Something was obviously afoot. Something completely daffy and screwy. For the present he’d have to slam the door on any and all plans. Jeff Stacey being in Svolvær turned everything upside down—and how!

“And how!” he repeated aloud. “Yeah! And how am I going to get close to Jeff? Blest if I know. But I’m going to try. Let’s see? Yeah! That Gestapo bird’s office. That Nazi probably has taken Jeff there.”

**A** PLAN of maneuver firmly fixed in his brain, he straightened up, patted his pocket to make sure the Luger hadn’t dropped out into the snow, and began a cautious detour through the town that finally brought him to a dark niche between two houses directly across the narrow street from the *Kommandant’s* office. From there he could look through the office window at Jeff and the colonel seated at the desk.

Jeff had taken off his outer flying clothes, and he was in the uniform of a Nazi Air Force captain. Right at the moment he had a glass of brandy in one hand, and a huge sandwich in the other. The colonel was also eating and drinking. Crandall silently cursed them both for their good fortune.

He not only cursed them once but many times during the next hour while he was forced to stand in the snow and watch them through the window. And during every second of that time his amazement and curiosity mounted to a point dangerously close to wild decision to burst right into the office and demand an explanation of his friend. To see Jeff Stacey eating, drinking, and laughing with the Nazi *Kommandant* at Svolvær almost drove Crandall completely nuts.

Finally the party broke up. Crandall saw the colonel stab the bell button on his desk, and saw the flunkey enter through the door at the rear of the room. The colonel said something to the orderly and pointed at Stacey. Then he turned to Stacey, smiled, and held out his hand. As the two clasped hands Crandall clenched his teeth at the sight. In his mind, it was as if Jeff had been polluted.

Jeff Stacey and the orderly came out onto the street. They went along to the right for some six houses and turned into the seventh. In a few more moments a light was turned on in a rear room on the ground floor.

Crandall waited until the orderly came out and walked briskly away. Then he stole forward, cut across the street and slipped between two houses on that side to the rear. Two minutes later he was crouching in the snow, watching Jeff through the window. There was no smile on Stacey’s face now. There was a grim, hard look, and Crandall saw him take a Luger from his pocket and examine it closely.

Reaching out his hand, Crandall gathered up a bit of snow,



wadded it into a little ball and whipped it at the window. It struck, squashed out and started trickling down the glass. It had not made much sound, however, for Stacey continued to examine his Luger. Crandall made a bigger snow ball and put more steam in his throw. It made a sharp crack as it struck the glass. Inside Stacey whirled, shot up his free hand, and jerked out the light.

Crandall stole forward until he was hugging the wall of the house. There he waited with straining ears. In a moment he heard the window slide up softly. Then he saw the faint blur of head and shoulders coming out.

"Jeff!" he breathed softly.

The silhouette stiffened. Then the head was slowly turned his way. Crandall eased forward a step.

"It's me, Jeff!" he whispered. "Crandall. What the devil?"

He thought he heard Stacey catch his voice in a sob. Then came the whisper:

"Thank God, Cran! Hold everything. Stay right there. Want to lock the door. Is *this* a break!"

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## CHAPTER VIII

### *Cold Vigil*

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**J**EFF STACEY ducked his head and shoulders inside and was gone for a moment. When he got back Crandall was right under the window with his chin on a level with the lower sill. Stacey placed a hand on his shoulder and squeezed hard. Crandall winced and pushed the hand aside.

"What are you doing here, Jeff?" he whispered. "What's the idea? Where did—"

"Pipe down," Stacey cut him off. "I'll explain! I sold the British Naval Command at the Shetlands a couple of loads of goods. First, that they

should call off the camera patrols. The guys here are wise to something being up. They saw you and me and radioed for those 110s to come down from Narvik. That Nazi colonel told me that. I'd already figured it that way, and convinced British Naval Command that more camera patrols would give the show away. Besides, the pictures I took back turned out pretty good. The Navy boys seemed to learn a lot from them. But I had to sell them another load of goods, because they were deciding to call off the raid on this joint. Too many unknown factors and all that kind of junk. Well, nuts! When I start something I like to see it go through to a finish. And—well, you know how I get crazy ideas now and then."

"You're telling me!" Crandall whispered, and grinned in the darkness. "That Messerschmitt 110?"

"Yeah, that 110," Stacey said. "It was one that had been brought down in the Shetlands. I happened to see it in one of the hangars. It gave me ideas. So I gave the British Navy boys a pep talk. I said I'd fly it up here and fake a forced landing, and put over a story about a tough scrap and losing my radioman and gunner at sea. I'd say they didn't have their belts fastened and fell out, but were saved by their parachutes and a British destroyer. Oh, it was to be a good story, all right. But my main idea was to come up here and get a look at what was what. To see if it was okay to pull off the raid, anyway. Also, and I guess it was the main idea, to see if I couldn't get a line on you. I had a hunch you might be brought back here."

"Hunch?" Crandall echoed. "What do you mean, hunch?"

"I saw that U-boat break surface and head for you," Stacey said. "I kidded around with those dopey Messerschmitts until I was sure you'd be picked up. Then I shook 'em off and lit out for home. But, Cran, that



Nazi lug was telling me about how they played rough with you, giving you the once-over. He thinks the British fleet is off-shore, and that you're from an aircraft carrier. He tried to make out that he's not worried about what the British might do. Hinted at some plan he had that would fool them. Said he was going to get the truth out of you tomorrow even if he had to kill you. Boy! Did that bum come close to getting his face shoved in! I was waiting for things to quiet down, then go hunting for you. How come you're here, Cran?"

"I started to play rough, too, and for keeps," Crandall grunted. "Listen, Jeff, here's the picture. They're going to evacuate the fuel stores and plant equipment, here, on the fifth. Get it? The day *before* the British lads plan to raid! Evacuation boats are coming up from Olso. They've got the wind up a bit, here, but not too much. A British raid on the fourth, say, would catch them with their pants down. There's just one tough nut to crack."

"So we'll crack it!" Stacey said. "What?"

"The radio station here," Crandall told him. "They'd have a swarm of 110s and dive bombers down here from Narvik ten minutes after they sighted the British boats sneaking into the harbor. The raid would be a wash-out unless they can be prevented from sending the old SOS to Narvik."

**S**TACEY breathed excitedly and gripped Crandall's shoulder tighter.

"Then it's in the bag!" he vowed. "You and I will put a crimp in that radio station tonight, and then grab my 110 and bust back to the Shetlands with the good news. Boy, were the British lads bright to pick on a good old Canadian outfit to get this job all taped up pretty!"

"Maybe — but *you're* not being bright!" Crandall growled. "Do you

think these bums would just laugh it off if we wrecked the radio station and breezed off in the 110? Use your head, Jeff. They'd be putting their stuff aboard what ships they got in the harbor now before we even arrived at the Shetlands. It would be the perfect tip-off to go scurrying for their holes."

"Okay," Stacey muttered. "I can be wrong. What's *your* idea?"

"What's the score with you and that Nazi colonel?" Crandall asked. "How long are you supposed to be here?"

"Until tomorrow morning," Stacey said. "I sold him the idea of resting up here tonight, and going on to Narvik tomorrow to get the bus fixed up a bit. Bullet-holes and stuff, after that scrap I was supposed to have had. I told him I was from the Bergen base. But, nuts, Cran! You and I can both leave in that ship, and—"

"That's out, sap!" Crandall growled at him. "Look, Jeff, there's just one way to play this thing. Tomorrow morning you take that 110 in the air, get out of sight of this place, then cut for the Shetlands like a bat out of the big furnace. Tell British Naval Command the facts, and get them to make their raid in the early morning of the fourth! The day after tomorrow. Meanwhile I'll keep out of their way, here, and sometime late tomorrow night put that radio station out of whack. I'll get in there somehow and wreck their equipment so's it'll take 'em a month of Sundays to get it fixed. Then the British can slide in here and have everything their own way. But you've got to get back and get them to raid on the morning of the *fourth*! I'll take care of things at this end."

"I don't like it," Stacey growled. "What happens to you?"

"That's not important," Crandall said with an impatient gesture.

"Maybe not to you!" Stacey snorted. "But it is to your creditors, and to



me. Plenty! Supposing you stub your toe? Suppose you don't put the radio station out of whack?"

Crandall was thoughtful a moment. Suddenly he reached up and grabbed Stacey's arm.

"Is the carrier *Ark Royal* at the Shetlands?" he asked.

"It was this afternoon," Stacey said. "So what?"

"So in case I stub my toe it'll still be okay," Crandall said. "Get them to take you and the boys aboard the *Ark Royal* up north a ways on the night of the third—tomorrow night. Then maintain a two-plane patrol within sight of Narvik all the time. If you spot Messerschmitts and dive bombers taking off, give the others the old SOS. It'll mean that I've stubbed my toe. You and the boys can stop those Nazi ships from getting down here to break up the raid. That okay?"

"It has its points," Stacey said grudgingly. "But you're counting on me to convince British Naval Command on a lot of things. Maybe they won't like my face."

"You convinced them about force-landing that 110, didn't you?" Crandall argued. "You know darn well you've got the smoothest line east of Vancouver! You not convince anybody on anything? Nuts! Why I remember a hotel bill in London just after we arrived that you—"

"Skip it!" Stacey cut in. "I'm fixing that next pay-day. And why shouldn't the guy trust me? Okay, I'll do my best, but on one condition."

"Shoot!" Crandall said, after a long pause.

"Did you notice that emergency field about a mile or so south of the seaplane base?" Stacey asked. "Near that thin neck of land covered with woods?"

"Yes, I know where it is," Crandall said. "So?"

"So whether you win, lose, or draw, be there at early dawn the morning after tomorrow," Stacey said. "Early

dawn the day of the raid. I'll be along in something to pick you up."

"Nuts, Jeff! I—"

"Nuts to you!" Stacey snapped. "That's my one condition. You use your head, Cran! Suppose I don't sell British Naval Command on the idea? Suppose you flop on busting their radio station? Suppose they start smoking out this place for you? Anyway you look at it, you'll be behind the eight ball unless you get out. And this country is too eternally cold this time of year for cross-country hiking. You promise to be there, Cran, as I say—or I'm sticking right here."

CRANDALL started to shake his head, started to open his mouth to argue, but suddenly thought better of it. There was sense in Jeff's proposition in more ways than one. After all, he was calmly counting on everything moving smoothly along to a complete success. If things should happen to break wrong it would help plenty to have a contact with the British through Jeff. Then, too, it *would* be nice to get out of Norway by air instead of on foot through the snow.

"Okay, Jeff," he said, and reached up his hand. "It's a deal. I'll be there waiting. . . ."

\* \* \* \*

Black night shrouded snow-covered Norway. At regular intervals, though, waves of shimmering color fluttered across the heavens from the region of the North Pole. To anybody at peace with himself and the world the display of Northern Lights was something to drink in deep, and to remember forever. To Squadron Leader Crandall, it didn't mean a thing. There was too much on his mind, and he was too cold to take any notice of the majestic beauty of the Arctic heavens. He would gladly have swapped it all, plus ten years of his life, just to sit on the Equator for five minutes.

Hours ago he had seen Jeff Stacey

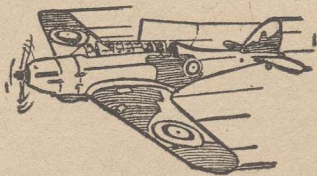


take the bullet-scarred Messerschmitt 110 into the air and climb high in the sky in the direction of Narvik. The most fervent and sincerest prayers of Crandall's whole life had gone with Stacey. And they were in his mind, now.

Hours ago! A lifetime! Hours of hiding out in the wooded fringes of Svolvoer, waiting for time to pass. At least he had had some much needed rest before starting this ordeal. Last night Jeff had insisted that he get some sleep in his bed, while he stood watch in case anybody came near.

It had been a risk—a risk that might have turned out plenty bad for both of them. But he had taken it because to have hidden out in the snow too long would have sapped his strength and endurance too much. So he had crawled into Jeff's bed and soaked up four solid hours of strength-restoring sleep.

Just before dawn he had slipped out the rear window and made tracks to the wooded outskirts of the town.



Later he had seen Jeff take off. And with that moment had begun this ordeal of waiting, and thinking, and worrying, and battling all over his brain with his thoughts.

"It seemed so simple, talking it over with Jeff," he thought, and stared at the lighted room of the radio station not twenty yards from him. "But, ye gods, the angles! Did Jeff make it back to the Shetlands? Did he sell a bill of goods to British Naval Command? Will I be able to fix that radio plant? Supposing I catch one and don't show up to meet Jeff? He's just crazy enough to start taking this town apart single-handed, looking for me. Blast it all! I shouldn't have agreed

to meet him. But he wouldn't have pulled out if I hadn't. And— Oh nuts! Shut up! The play has been made, and you can't do a blessed thing to make it any different! Skip the whole thing and tend to your knitting."

He glanced down at his waterproof wrist-watch with its radium-painted dial. The hands told him it was twenty-three minutes after four o'clock in the morning. Four o'clock on the morning of the fourth. Impulsively he raised his eyes and stared westward toward the North Atlantic. Was the British raiding party out there some place off-shore waiting for the dawn light to show them the way up the Vestfjord? And was the *Ark Royal* carrier out there, too, with Jeff and the rest of the boys of Sixty-five aboard?

**H**E prayed plenty that the answers to both questions were "Yes," and lowered his gaze to the town. Several lights were burning, and every now and then he heard the sound of voices. He smiled grimly. Ever since dawn the Nazis had been hunting for him. He had seen searching parties on snowshoes head out in a dozen different directions.

One party had passed within twenty feet of one of his various hiding spots during those hours. That bruiser guard had led it, and a look at the big tramp's battered face had given Crandall more satisfaction than he had felt about anything in a long time. That Nazi's face would be aching for days—and plenty.

He stared at the lights some more and widened his grin.

"Stick around for another half hour!" he breathed. "Then maybe I'll give you something else to get excited about. Man, if I could only blow that radio station up, instead of going at it with my bare hands! But there must be some gas or oil in there—and we can have a fire."



## CHAPTER IX

*Satan Never Waits*

CRANDALL took another look at his wrist-watch and made a face. Just two minutes had ticked by since the last time he looked at it. He put it to his ear to make sure it was going. It was.

And then he forgot all about the wrist-watch. Somebody carrying a flashlight was racing madly up the snow-packed path to the radio station. Almost instantly Crandall recognized the big figure of the Nazi *Kommandant*. The man's wild haste struck a note of dread in Crandall. Impulsively he got to his feet and started moving through the snow toward the radio station.

"This is bad news!" he groaned softly. "I—I can feel it!"

Even before the hurrying Nazi reached the place, Crandall was hugging the side of the small building, and just clear of the light that came through one of the windows. He heard the door on the front side slam open, then heard the Nazi *Kommandant's* bull-like voice.

"Get me the *Kommandant* at Narvik, at once!" he thundered. "We cannot find that swine prisoner, and I have decided not to delay any longer. But, first! You have heard from Narvik of that lost pilot who took off this morning?"

Crandall strained his ears to catch the reply of the radio officer.

"No, *Herr Kommandant*, not a word. Very good, *Herr Kommandant*, I will contact Narvik at once."

"No, wait!" the Nazi colonel shouted. "Get Bergen first. The air base. Ask if they have a pilot—a Captain von Steubber. *Gott*, what a fool I've been not to have done this before! Get Bergen, at once."

Crandall glanced at his watch, scowled and bit his lips. He had

planned to make a one-man capture of the radio station before five o'clock. That would give him time to reach his meeting place at the first crack of dawn. But it would be too late for the Nazis to get across to the mainland by boat and reach Narvik by radio from there. By then the British would be landing at Svolvær. But if they contacted Narvik now—

It was a cinch the Nazi *Kommandant* was worried. That he had decided to take no chances and was going to ask for air protection while he evacuated what he could with the boats in the harbor.

"Your move!" Crandall told himself and started moving around front. "You've got to just keep them here that extra half hour, that's all."

As he reached the front door he heard the Nazi colonel obviously talking with the air base at Bergen.

"What's that?" the German's voice cried. "You have no such *Luftwaffe* pilot by that name? There wasn't one of your pilots lost yesterday? What? The whole base was grounded by fog? So! No, I'm too busy to explain now. Later, perhaps. Signing off!"

There was a hissing click, and then the *Kommandant's* voice again, barking at the radio officer.

"Narvik at once! There has been a trick! Tell them to send all available planes at once. Tell them we are starting to evacuate right now. Tell them I have reason to believe a British raid will be made soon. Tell them—No, I'll speak personally. Get Narvik!"

At that moment Crandall shoved open the door, stepped quickly inside, and kicked the door shut behind him. The two officers spun around at the sound. A snarl rose up in the colonel's throat but it died in a gurgle as he recognized Crandall in the stolen clothes. His jaw sagged, his eyes popped wide, and his face went flaming red.

"*You!*" he hurled at the Canadian.



**C**RANDALL nodded and moved over to where he could cover them both with the Luger in his hand, but yet could not be seen through the window from outside.

"Right!" he grunted. Then flipping the Luger barrel toward the radio officer. "Keep your hands in sight and away from the switches. If nobody's told you, a bullet in the belly hurts plenty."

The radio officer paled, but didn't say anything.

"You swine!" the Nazi colonel snarled. "You'll die a thousand times for this! You'll—"

"Shut up, and sit down!" Crandall rapped at him. "We're keeping each other company for the next half hour. I'm giving you a break in case you don't know it. I could plug you, cold-blooded, but I'm not one of your breed. I'm letting you keep your lives for what they're worth. It's up to you if you want to make me change my mind. Oh, yeah. Just hold steady."

Crandall took a few quick steps to the door, slid the locking bolt home and returned to the spot in the room where he could not be seen. The Nazi colonel followed his every move with a glare of deadly hate in his eyes, but he did not move an inch in his chair.

At that moment the radio panel speaker made crackling sound, then came a crisp staccato voice speaking in German.

"Narvik calling Svolvoer! Narvik calling Svolvoer!"

Crandall jabbed the Luger out and took a quick step forward.

"One yip, and you're both dead men!" he whispered, tight-lipped. "So help me, you'll get it through the heart!"

The radio officer froze stiff, but for one awful second Crandall thought the Nazi colonel was going to make a grab for the radio mike. If it were possible at that moment Crandall would have moved forward and jerked

the mike jack-plug from its socket. But it was too great a chance. He would have to step between the two men and turn his back on the colonel to do so. He stood tight and held both Germans with his eyes, and the Luger.

"Svolvoer!" the speaker thundered. "Can you hear me, Svolvoer? Come in, Svolvoer! *Ach, Himmel!* The static is bad tonight. It is those *verdammter* Northern lights!"

The radio crackled once more and went silent. Crandall let out the cramped air in his lungs and relaxed. The Nazi colonel looked at him out of eyes that glittered like polished steel in the sun.

"They will wonder what is wrong, swine!" he snarled. "They will come down here to find out, and—"

"And let them come!" Crandall snapped him off. Then motioning with his Luger at the radio officer he said, "Reach up your right hand slowly and pull out that mike jack-plug—or when they come down here they'll find you a corpse."

The colonel cursed the radio officer through clenched teeth, but the man was too terrified to hear. Slowly he lifted his right hand, grasped hold of the jack-plug and yanked it out. Crandall glanced at his watch. The hands said a quarter of five. Fifteen minutes more to go before it would be impossible for the Nazis to get across to the mainland and notify Narvik in time to stop the British raiding party from steaming into the harbor. Only fifteen minutes! He was tempted to start wrecking the radio now. One look had told him that it would be easier than he thought. He had only to smash those huge transmitter tubes, and throw a couple of switches. Short circuits would do the rest.

**B**UT it was better to wait. A fight now might draw other Nazis to the place. And there *would* be a fight. That colonel might be a Nazi, but he



was blazing to do battle. But why not drill both of them, now, and make sure there would be no trouble?

Crandall toyed with the thought for a moment. It was the simplest way, but he just couldn't bring himself to drop men in cold blood, even if it meant saving his own hide. No, he didn't fight that way — and never would. Besides, there wasn't much longer to wait.

"So, it is true?" the Nazi colonel suddenly broke into his thoughts. "That other swine was a spy, eh?"

"Your figuring is good," Crandall said, with a tight grin.

The Nazi trembled with rage, while fear and worry lighted up his eyes.

"So it is also true," he muttered, as though talking to himself, "that the swine are going to attempt to raid Svolvoer, as I half suspected."

"Wrong," Crandall said with a chuckle. "They're not going to attempt to raid. They're going to *do* it. Now you get the idea of all this? There'll be no bombers down from Narvik to stop them."

The German said nothing. No expression at all showed on his face. Crandall stared at him hard, and a tiny thread of doubt started weaving through his own brain. He had expected the German to fly into a fit of defeated rage. Yet the man had taken the news with no show of emotion at all.

"And I'm not kidding!" Crandall suddenly barked.

"I do not believe that you are," the German said slowly. "And so—we shall see!"

The German snarled the last and came lunging out of his chair with the speed of a striking rattler. Crandall jerked up his gun, but in the last split second refused to pull the trigger. He still didn't dare risk the sound of a shot. Instead he leaped lightly to one side, avoided the German's clawing fingers, and caught him a terrific blow on the side of the temple. The

man stumbled and went sprawling onto the floor.

In what was really a continuation of the same movements of his body Crandall leaped over the colonel and swung the Luger again. The fear-frozen radio officer had his jaw in the way. He fell out of his chair like a log.

As Crandall spun around to keep an eye on the colonel, there came a loud banging on the door. That banging decided all matters for him. He swung back, grabbed up a chair and flung it against the row of transmitter tubes. They instantly exploded like rifle shots. Flame and acrid smoke belched out in all directions.

The door was shaking and shivering on its hinges. As Crandall grabbed up a broken section of the chair he half twisted and fired two quick shots at the door. He wasn't sure whether he heard a scream of pain from beyond the door, and didn't bother to make sure. He crashed the leg of a chair against more tubes, then leaped forward and threw a couple of switches.

In an instant the whole panel was a sheet of blue flame. The lights in the ceiling flared up and went out, leaving the room filled with the weird blue light of the burning radio panel.

A hoarse shout behind him, and the sound of the door crashing open sent Crandall diving for a rear window. Shots cracked out and he heard the whisper of death that snicked past inches from his head. In one continuous lightninglike movement he flung up the window and, dived out into the snow. Bouncing up like a rubber ball he crouched and emptied his gun in through the window. Screams, shouts, and curses were added to the bedlam of sound inside.

**T**HE instant the last bullet left the gun he turned and started racing through some woods, away from the scene of chaos. His lungs began to burn, and his head started spinning



around, but he kept on going. Every now and then he plunged headlong into a drift. Cursing and sobbing, he scrambled out of it and plunged onward. He glanced at his watch and was faintly surprised to see that it was almost half past five. Three quarters of an hour since he'd last noted the time! It hadn't seemed more than three minutes.

He slowed up his pace a bit. One reason was because it was now impossible for the Nazis to get to the mainland and obtain aerial protection before the British arrived. And another reason was that he just had to slow up or burn himself out, pitch down into the snow and stay there. So he eased up, and by the time he reached the snow-packed field where he hoped to meet Jeff Stacey the first faint gray lines of dawn were moving up out of the east.

He sank down under the protection of some shrubs and peered up at the sky. There was a heavy fog off-shore but it was just thin stuff over the land. He strained his ears and thought he heard the faint calling of voices in the distance. He swallowed hard and prayed that Nazis hunting him wouldn't be able to follow his tracks in the snow. He prayed, too, that Jeff had convinced the British Naval Command of what should be done. He prayed the British were on the way. And he prayed that Jeff was on his way, too.

"But it's all just hoping!" he grated bitterly. "I don't know if any of it is going to come true. Maybe I've just staged a cock-eyed one-man's war that doesn't mean a thing. Maybe—"

The sound of a roaring airplane engine cut into his bitter thoughts. Instinctively he glanced up into the sky, but in that same instant he realized the sound hadn't come from the sky. And then he saw something that sent his hopes and his heart crashing down into his boots. From the direction

of Svolvær, a lone Arado AR-95 left the ground and went zooming up and off toward the north. Crandall stared at it bleakly and clenched his fists in helpless desperation.

"The seaplane base, of course!" he groaned. "The hangars weren't empty as we thought. That Arado is one of their aircraft carrier jobs. And, now—now busting up that radio was just a long foul ball!"

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## CHAPTER X

### *Canadian Capers*

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NARVIK would now be warned, and German bombers would come thundering down to prevent a single British sailor or marine from setting foot in Svolvær. The light raiding ships would most certainly be driven off to sea, and probably sunk.

The thought cut through Crandall's brain like a knife of fire as he watched the Arado lose itself in the thin fog to the north. Failure unless—unless Jeff had succeeded in getting the British to send the *Ark Royal* north so that a look-out patrol could be maintained near Narvik, and the rest of the carrier's fighting planes ready to jump on any Nazi bombers that started heading south. Failure, except for that one slim hope. And as Crandall stared up at the sky off-shore that tiny hope seemed to die. With that pea-soup fog hanging around it was quite possible that not a single plane would be sent up from the carrier. At least not until the weather was better. And by then—it would be too late.

"A swell plan you cooked up!" he raged at himself. "What a dope! You didn't even give a thought to them maybe having a plane around. You had it all fixed swell, yes you did. Ye gods!"

Perhaps Lady Luck was simply



waiting for his spirits to hit a new low. At any rate, no sooner had the last thought bored in than he heard the familiar roaring whine of a plane slicing down in a power dive. He held his breath and peered up into the fog until his eyes ached. Suddenly a spinning propeller cut down out of the bottom layer of fog. Engine, fuselage, and wings followed it.

Crandall leaped to his feet and raced out across the hard-packed snow. The diving ship was a British Boulton-Paul two-seater "Defiant," and the gunner's cockpit was empty. Only one man in the world would be flying that ship, and that one man would be Jeff Stacey!

Skidding to a halt, Crandall started waving his arms to give Stacey wind direction on the ground, then he raced over to the side to get out of the way. As Stacey cut his engine and came swinging down and around, Crandall prayed hard. The snow was packed as hard as ice, but if one of the Defiant's wheels should hit a soft spot, it would be all over—and no shouting.

There was a real pilot in that Defiant, however. The kind of pilot who could fly through a brick wall and not even scratch his wing surfaces. Stacey set the Defiant down on the packed snow like a feather touching velvet. And before he had hardly braked the plane to a stop Crandall was scrambling into the rear cockpit.

"Jeff!" he shouted. "The carrier! Are planes on patrol? I stubbed my toe! The radio was wrecked but they had an Arado here. It took off ten minutes ago."

Stacey's grin died, and alarm leaped into his eyes.

"The carrier's off-shore, but they didn't want to chance putting planes up in this stuff!" he shouted. "I practically stole this bus to keep my date with you. Narvik is being warned? . . . Hey! Hang on fast. Make use of that Lewis gun back there. Com-pan-y coming!"

Stacey could have saved his breath. Crandall had already spotted the squad of Nazi soldiers that came bursting out from the woods on the other side of the field. Bracing his feet, he grabbed the twin Lewis guns fitted to the rear gunner's mounting and swung the guns around as Stacey sent the Defiant rocketing forward. He saw darts of flame spurting toward him. Then he pressed his own triggers.

The twin Lewis guns yammered out their song of death and the running Nazi soldiers stopped running. They stumbled and went tumbling down on the snow like ten-pins. A moment later Stacey had the Defiant off and was prop-howling for altitude. Crandall let go of his guns and leaned forward toward Stacey.

"THE carrier's got to launch those planes!" he shouted. "We've got to stop the bombers if they come. Get the carrier on the radio. Tell them what's what. Make them send at least my squadron into the air! Tell them I'm with you. Get on that radio, Jeff! Contact the carrier and get them to send Sixty-five into the air. The devil with a little fog! We've got to block off those bombers and stop 'em! We've—"

He cut it short as he suddenly spotted movement on the Vestfjord below him and to the south. He took a good look. Thin fog made those moving objects slightly blurred, but he saw five British destroyers and two transports sliding north up the Vestfjord toward Svolvær. He thumped a hard fist on Stacey's shoulder.

"The raiding party!" he bellowed. "It's coming up the Vestfjord, right now! Contact the carrier and get action. Tell them you and I are heading Narvik way!"

Stacey nodded and made a little gesture with his free hand for Crandall to shut up. He was already talk-



ing rapidly into his flap mike. Crandall watched him with anxious eyes and cursed the fact there were no helmet phones and radio jack-plug in the rear pit. The seconds seemed as hours while he watched Stacey speak into the flap mike, and bob his head around, and gesture. Suddenly Stacey nodded for the last time, and twisted around toward Crandall. His eyes were bright, and when he lifted up his flap mike to speak he was grinning from ear to ear.

"They see it our way!" he called out. "The boys are probably getting off right now. I told 'em we'd hold the fort until they showed up, and—"

"And we start right now!" Crandall cut in, and he pointed to the north. "There's the first of them. Those dots! Up and at 'em, Jeff!"

Stacey yanked the nose up through the thinning fog and Crandall swung around to man his guns. He glanced down into the pit and smiled with relief. Every one of the ammo drum racks was filled. He had plenty of slugs to sling for the glory of the good old Maple Leaf.

Straightening up, he fixed his eyes ahead and on the group of dots. They were too high, and too far away, for him to tell the type yet. He made a rough guess that he and Stacey would tangle with them far out of sight of Svolvær. Chances were the British raiding party wouldn't even know Nazi bombers were being held back from dumping loads of body-blasting TNT upon them. That is, *if* the bombers were held back.

"Nuts to the odds!" Crandall shouted at himself. "Jeff and I will smack them around until the rest of the boys show up! We've jolly well got to!"

Perhaps three minutes later they were within gun range of the leading plane of a ten-plane formation of Heinkel bombers. Behind, and high above the Heinkels were half a dozen escorting Messerschmitt 110s. Cran-

dall shot them a worried look and absently wondered why they didn't come piling down. There seemed to be only one answer. The Nazis must be taking the Defiant for a German plane. They probably weren't even dreaming that a couple of Canadian aces would pile into them single-handed.

They found out different in a few seconds, however. Stacey dropped his nose slightly, and went wing-howling down on the leading Heinkel. His guns opened up with their song of death. A short but withering blast, and the Heinkel fell out of the sky like a dead duck. The instant it started to lurch Stacey jumped on left rudder and arced off to the side. That gave Crandall a perfect field of fire, and he was ready. He had a Heinkel in his right sight in nothing flat, then his bullets were practically cutting the German bomber in two.

**C**AUGHT flat-footed, and unquestionably smacked with the surprise of their lives, the rest of the Heinkel pilots suddenly became like so many sheep in a thunder-storm. They broke formation and scattered in all directions. Stacey ripped the Defiant into their midst and got a third victim. An instant later Crandall's guns sent a fourth careening crazily off on one wing with smoke streaming out from its belly.

"Now for some fighting!" Crandall heard Stacey roar. "Here come the 110s!"

Crandall glanced up into a foggy sky that was spewing little tongues of flame down at him. A white-hot coal slid down his left arm, but he hardly felt the pain. He swung his guns around and pointed them up. Crouched down in the pit as solid as a stone, he brought his sights to bear on those stabbing tongues of flame.

From then on time ceased to exist. The sky became filled with twisting and turning planes. Filled with chat-



tering sound, and stabbing tongues of flame. And a network of wavy tracer smoke made a backdrop for it all.

The two Canadians worked like a well oiled machine. Stacey charged at anything German and fired point-blank. Then he would swerve off to give Crandall a good crack at something else. Crandall's guns grew so hot he could hardly hang onto them. When he changed the drums it was like picking up red-hot stove covers. But he didn't stop for an instant. Stacey was doing his job up front, and so he would do his job at the rear.

Then suddenly a new sound seeped through his dulled senses. It was like the roar of the world coming to an end. Wings flashed past his sights. His trigger finger stiffened, then relaxed. A wild shout burst from his lips. That streaking plane wasn't German! It was British! A Boulton-Paul Defiant.

An instant later he saw a brace of Hurricanes flash by. One look at the markings and the greatest joy of his life was at hand. The boys from Sixty-five had arrived to get in their innings!

"Come on, Sixty-five!" he screamed at the top of his voice. "At 'em, Canada! Smack 'em down! Bust 'em to glory! Come on, Sixty-five! This is our day! Give it to them, Canada! Give it . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

Crandall slowly opened his eyes and blinked at the stretch of white over his head. He stared at it out of eyes that ached and burned. There was a dull, constant throbbing in his head. Yet perhaps it was coming from miles away, as far as he could tell. What the devil? Why all that white? He was on his back, and . . .

Holy smokes! He was in bed!

At that moment the grinning face of Jeff Stacey seemed to float into view. Jeff's lips moved, and Crandall heard words.

"Howzit, Cran? Just take it easy,

pal. You're okay. The doc swore it on a stack of Bibles."

"Doc?" Crandall heard himself mumble. "Where am I? What goes on, anyway?"

"Nothing goes on, Cran," Stacey said, with a grin. "It's all over. A week ago. You're in a hospital in Glasgow. They brought you down here from the Shetlands yesterday. The rest of the gang are outside waiting until the doc says its okay for them to come in."

**F**OR a moment or two more Crandall's brain remained a perfect blank.

Then memory came sweeping back like a flood-tide.

"The Svolvoer raid!" he gasped, and tried to push himself up on one elbow. "Those Nazi bombers! What—"

"Hold it, Cran!" Stacey said, and forced him back on the pillow. "Everything turned out jake. Not a Nazi plane got through. And did the British lads make a mess out of those store tanks and glycerin plants at Svolvoer! I sneaked down for a look after the Heinkels and Messerschmitts had given up. I mean, those left. Boy! What swell fires! The British lads were there over five hours they say. The destroyers plastered every ship in the harbor, and took a mess of prisoners. The colonel had beat it, though. Probably in that Arado you saw. But, man, did you give me a fright! I turned around to say something, and there you were spouting blood, and out like a light. I stopped sight-seeing right then and there and made tracks for the carrier."

"And I've been out a week?" Crandall murmured.

"A week." Stacey nodded. "You stopped a lot of lead, Cran, and living out in that snow didn't help. The doc, though, says it'll be a cinch for a tough egg like you. Funny thing. The papers were full of that raid, but there wasn't a word about us. I guess



I've got the British wrong about sticking Canada on the front page to help recruiting back home."

"That was the hunch I was telling you about." Crandall nodded. "England doesn't have to puff up what we do. She knows Canada is behind her to a man. No, I have a hunch that raid was for home consumption. The British public's been taking it on the chin plenty, and not letting out a peep. After France, and Dunkirk, and those London bombings it helps

to read about their own boys smacking back. No, we just set the stage, Jeff. Those British sailors and marines did the acting. That's the way it should be. They deserve every blessed bit of glory that can come their way—and more, too."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," Stacey said soberly. "You set the stage, anyway. Me and the boys were just the hired help."

"And what a help!" breathed Crandall, and drifted back to sleep.

FOLLOW THE BREATH-TAKING EXPLOITS OF  
THE WORLD'S MOST DARING AIR FIGHTERS

IN

## BRITISH WINGS

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

NEXT ISSUE'S FEATURED COMPLETE NOVEL

Get this, men, if you have trouble

With tender skin and wiry stubble:

Those Thin Gillettes—four for a dime—

Give slick, clean shaves, save dough and time!



New kind of edges  
on steel hard enough  
to cut glass



Produced By The Maker Of  
The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

4 for 10¢  
8 for 19¢

Save Extra Money! Get The Big New Economy Package, 12 For 27¢



# TRUE PICTURE-STORY OF AN R.A.F.



**1** An eye specialist is using the electric ophthalmoscope in scanning the retina to see whether internal structure of the eye is normal.



**2** To measure the capacity of his lungs, would-be pilot fills his lungs. Then, while holding the nose, exhales steadily through mouthpiece of spirometer.



**3** Will he be air-sick? The candidate inclines his head, the chair is rotated ten times in twenty seconds. Reactions are noted. He is asked if he is ever sea-sick.

## THE CAVALRY

*The Inspiring True*

"The Heavens are their battlefield; they are the Cavalry of the Clouds. They are the true knighthood of this war. High above the squalor and the mud . . . they fight out the eternal issue of right and wrong."—David Lloyd George.

**W**ITH all of the combat and patrol work that the R.A.F. is doing, not only over the British Isles, but in the Mediterranean, East Africa and the Far East, it is no wonder that the true story of the Royal Air Force is more thrilling than any story that the most imaginative writer could conceive. However, the requirements of military strategy secrecy make it impossible for the man on the street to understand what is behind the terse official communiques released by the Air Ministry and published in the daily newspapers.

These official veils can sometimes be partly lifted, so that the people on the Home front and in the overseas

parts of the English-speaking world can appreciate the valor of these young men and some of the obstacles that confront them.

Since German submarine raids on

### By CHARLES

*Author of "Flying Versus Fever in*

Atlantic shipping are an important part of the Axis war plan, R.A.F. bombing attacks on submarine bases in Germany and occupied France are constantly taking place. In these official communiques we usually get a direct report, only the bare facts. For instance, I have before me Air Ministry Bulletin No. 2203, which reports the action in four brief paragraphs. They read:

## The Stirring Argosy of the Man Behind the



# PILOT'S INITIATION INTO SERVICE



**4** He is asked to raise board, on which is balanced a rod, from table level to his shoulder, and replace it. Test shows co-ordination of mind and muscle.



**5** The candidate stands with feet together, then bends one knee. He closes his eyes and tries to remain in position for fifteen seconds.



**6** He must be able to hear a forced whisper at twenty feet. With one ear plugged, he listens to one examiner using words of high and low pitch components. [Turn page]

## OF THE CLOUDS

### *Story of the R.A.F.*

Lorient, the enemy-occupied submarine base on the Brittany coast, was heavily bombed last night.

The target areas included a power station, naval shops, barracks near the dry-dock, shipbuilding slipways and the railway approaches to the base.

## S. STRONG

*Nanini," "South to Capetown," etc.*

Many tons of bombs were dropped on these objectives and fires which were started were still visible when the aircraft had been flying for half an hour on their homeward journeys.

Notwithstanding powerful enemy ground defenses, large concentrations of searchlights and attempts at interception by Messerschmitts, the raiding force returned without any casualties.

### Preparing a Raid

The average reader, seeing an article of this kind in his evening paper

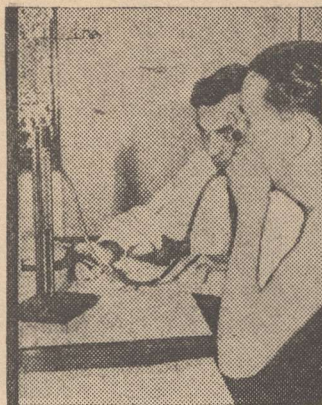
while riding home from a quiet day at the office, probably has a picture of R.A.F. pilots hopping into their ships and haphazardly heading for France. If the clouds happen to break over Lorient and they can see something that looks like a target, they dive in and bomb it. But present-day bombing isn't done that way. Let's go behind the scenes for a few moments, to study the preparations of the R.A.F. for a raid like the one on Lorient.

For one thing, you can be pretty sure that if an air squadron reports hits on a power station, naval shops and barracks, when they left England they knew they were definitely headed for those individual objectives. Before the planes take off from England, the crews have complete information—latitude and longitude, surrounding landmarks such as buildings, chimneys, open fields, winding brooks,

## Machine-Gun in Britain's Air Armada!



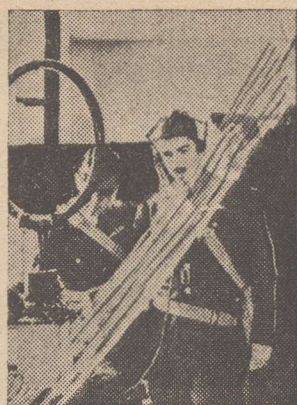
# HERE ARE THE EARLY STEPS IN



**7** With pulse taken every five seconds, the candidate blows mercury to 40 mm., keeps it there as long as possible to assess efficiency of heart and lungs.



**8** If legs are less than 39 inches and height less than 64 inches he may be tested in a service air-craft to see if he has an unrestricted view in the cockpit.



**9** The instructor demonstrates wireless direction-finding aerial. By this they find their positions from ground staff; can find target using radio.

highways and other natural and man-made contours. In addition they are told the best way to approach a base like Lorient.

When the French bases were originally occupied, a bland German General Staff optimistically believed that attacks from England would come from the west, because England was in that direction. The unaccommodating R.A.F. pilots, though, began flying over their objectives at high altitudes, turning around and coming back from the east and south, where the anti-aircraft defense was considerably less formidable.

British Intelligence and Operations officers have complete and detailed information on the locations of these anti-aircraft guns, the spotting searchlights, and pursuit, interceptor and attack airdromes of the German *Luftwaffe*. In the case of Lorient and other important bases, they can also calculate the exact number of men working in the power stations, quartered in the barracks, or busy in the shipyards.

Thus, when the R.A.F. fliers go over on a bombing raid, they have complete confidence in their own skill. They know that their planes are among the

best in the world and they realize that their immediate job has been simplified for them as far as it is humanly possible to do so.

## How Does Intelligence Work?

The Intelligence officers at the bomber stations have two jobs. They must see that the crews can locate the target with the least difficulty and attack it with the greatest possible damage. The second job is to make certain that the crews are protected and that their safe return is assured.

Naturally the Intelligence and Operations officers have done much of this groundwork before the flying officers are aware of the operation. But before the men climb into the ships, there is a conference which is known as "briefing." The men are given their actual operations orders. Then the Intelligence officer delivers a short talk, in which he gives in capsule form the entire factual data at his disposal regarding the area of operations.

One of the questions that occasionally comes from the layman is: "How does the Intelligence officer discover these things?" We immediately have



# THE TRAINING OF BRITAIN'S FLYERS!



**10** Spheroscopes are part of a day's work, devoted to mathematics, meteorology, navigational instruments and D/F and W/T as applied to navigation.



**11** In navigation school he learns to plot his course for blind flying, which enables him to chart his position according to his speed and strength of wind.



**12** "Taking a sight" of the sun. A flying man tries his hand at charting his position when flying high with thick weather hiding the landmarks below.

visions of spies and their attractive feminine associates, getting into the confidence of members of the German General Staff and heading for the nearest frontier with valuable maps and documents. But this movie and fictional version of modern espionage is a relatively unimportant means of gathering information. Because of quick-moving military units, constant changes in defense operations and up-to-the-minute offensive movements, the glamorous but cumbersome spy system is too slow.

The most effective information collected comes from the R.A.F. pilots themselves. When the raiding crews come home from one of their missions, they appear before the Intelligence officer for what is known as the "interrogation." The crew of each ship is interviewed separately, as soon as it comes in, and records are kept of these reports. These interviews provide a variety of information and also serve as a check on the results of the bombings.

## The Interrogation

There are times when, because of fog or other adverse weather conditions, R.A.F. bombers will have to

cover hours of night-flying by instruments. Coming in on objectives, to reduce the target for anti-aircraft and searchlights, the planes will usually attack one at a time at intervals of about fifteen minutes. Therefore the reports will vary according to the time element.

As an example of what goes on in one of these "interrogations," let us look in on a typical session. Generally the questions asked by the Intelligence officer will include three essential points—time, height and place. We will see just how these factors are important in checking results and planning future operations.

The first crew is before the officer and the interrogation is under way. The pilot-officer reports:

"Our ship reached the target at 0235 hours (2:35 A.M.). We came in over our objective and unloaded at 4400 feet. We were off the target at 0250 hours. As we headed for home we saw great fires burning and a number of explosions were visible in the bombed area."

The Intelligence officer notes these facts and then interviews the next crew to come in. The spokesman for this group announces:



19 "We arrived over the target at 0252 hours. The area was in complete darkness. The enemy detectors spotted us. Just as the searchlights opened up, we spotted barrage balloons scattered about at 6000 feet."

21 Immediately the Intelligence officer realizes that something has gone wrong. If the second bomber arrived over the scheduled target only two minutes after the first one left for home, the fires would still be burning. Also, if there were barrage balloons scattered about at 6000 feet, the first bomber would not have been able to bomb at 4400 feet.

23 During the course of this interrogation, the Intelligence and Operations staff will have determined which of the two crews bombed the incorrect objective and just where that particular crew went wrong.

### History of the R.A.F.

25 So much for a few glances behind the scenes with the R.A.F. Now let us consider the make-up of this most effective Air Force in the world. Then perhaps we can see a few thumbnail sketches of the work they are doing in their different branches or "Commands."

27 The Royal Air Force assumed its present name and form at the close of World War I. In the fall of 1918, the name of the organization was changed from the Royal Flying Corps. The officers became responsible for their own activities and for the tactical development of airplane power as an important offensive and defensive weapon. This means that the R.A.F. has been knitting itself into the cohesive and pliant unit that it now is, for more than twenty-two years.

29 Compared with the six years of intensive development that Air Marshal Goering has been able to cram into the members of the *Luftwaffe*, it is easy to see that tradition, training and equipment development are factors

definitely favoring the Royal Air Force. During this period of development, the Royal Air Force has seen various kinds of activity in all parts of the world and under conditions that have seldom presented themselves to the German High Command.

At the present time the Royal Air Force is divided into six Commands. These include the Bomber, Fighter, Coastal, First Training, Second Training and Maintenance Commands. The executive control of the Royal Air Force's operations is in the hands of the chief of the Air Staff.

You will get a definite idea of the rigorous examination undergone by candidates for the R.A.F. by a study of the picture series at the beginning of this article.

The names of the various commands are sufficiently descriptive to give us an idea of their work, but a close-up of the lives of the men in these groups will demonstrate that work in action. We have already seen something of what the Bomber Command does, and we know from our daily papers just how well they are doing it. One question that comes up from time to time, however, is: "How does the bombing by the R.A.F. compare with that done by the German *Luftwaffe*?"

### Effectiveness of the R.A.F.

In order to determine this for their own information, the Royal Air Force checked a one-month period recently. It determined that while the Germans were dropping 6500 bombs on Great Britain, the R.A.F. dropped more than 37,000 bombs on German targets, or more than six times as many bombs as were showered on the British Isles.

An interesting commentary on the R.A.F. bombing seems to merit consideration at this time. To the armchair strategist, the bombing of various objectives may seem to be rather scattered and disorganized. Actually it follows a pattern that we can readily understand.



Let us assume, for instance, that the R.A.F. bombs the "invasion ports" on the Atlantic and North Sea coasts. During the course of the bombing operations, stores of munitions, oil, food supplies and other equipment are destroyed. Naturally the first thing the German High Command will have to do is replace this material. With two million men drawn up along the invasion coastline, the concentration of supplies will be a colossal one.

This means that the German Service of Supply must begin to gather freight cars, locomotives and other necessary rolling stock. The chief concentration point for this equipment is generally considered to be the important railway junction of Hamm. So the R.A.F. next makes its bombing raid on Hamm, conscientiously giving the Germans time to load up the freight cars, to make sure the loss will be that much greater.

The next cycle of bombing activity may be aimed at the airfields in occupied France, Belgium and Holland. Assuming that the damage is of such proportions that the Germans must send up replacements, the R.A.F. then waits until such squadrons have been assembled in Germany. Then long-range bombers head for those reserve concentrations.

From these two parallel instances, it is easy to see just how a carefully planned bombing routine can wreak the most havoc upon the Axis powers, especially with the British naval blockade making replacement of raw materials almost impossible.

### Attacking Enemy Battleships

One of the chief operations in which readers are interested is the crippling of the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. An instance of how detailed Intelligence insists on having its information is the bombing of the *Scharnhorst*.

An English bomber squadron was ordered out to bomb the *Scharnhorst*.

The Intelligence officer at the bomber station was forwarded his orders at 2 P.M. The members of the bombing crews were to go through their briefing at 6:30. Before that he had to check all available data on the *Scharnhorst*. He discovered that he had nothing up-to-date on the German battleship except its location.

He had to know a great deal more than that. Was the ship tied up with its bow or stern toward the open sea? What was its relationship to the floating drydock? How close to land points was the craft moored? Where were the defenses located?

By the time the Intelligence officer had formulated the questions he wanted answered, it was almost three o'clock. By telephone he notified the Command that he needed more information. The afternoon went by. The pilots gathered for the briefing at six-thirty, as scheduled. The conference went along for half an hour. Before it was finished, a Spitfire landed at the station.

The pilot climbed out of the craft with a dozen still-damp photographs taken only an hour or so previously, showing the position of the *Scharnhorst*, the location of the other items in which the Intelligence officer had shown interest and a complete picture of all the surrounding details. Command had sent over a fast bomber with a camera crew to take these pictures. Now they were on the briefing table for discussion in planning the attack.

As a result of this activity, when the complete squadron roared away, one of the bomb-aimers was able to get five direct hits on the big vessel.

### Behind the Pilots

With the members of the Fighter Command, careful preparation for individual action must be confined to supplying carefully trained pilots with carefully serviced ships and capably attended armaments. This is



due to the fact that, except when on escort service, a Fighter Command usually goes into action at a moment's notice. Warning posts along the British coastline can give only a short period for preparation. It is up to the interceptors of the Fighter Command to make the most of this advance knowledge.

If you are able to get the necessary passes, you may be seated at a table, playing cards with R.A.F. pilots, observers and gunners when the first warning of a raid on Britain takes place. In a single-seater Fighter Command the pilots will combine all three duties. Into the midst of this relaxed group comes a terse announcement over the loudspeaker.

"Enemy aircraft, ten miles off Code Red Arrow. Proceeding in a south-westerly direction. Intercept."

Almost at the same moment that this announcement comes to the pilots' room, the aircraftsmen on the field are on the job. As the men climb into their flying clothes, the air is shattered by the din of twelve 1,000 horsepower engines. While the pilots hurry to the ships, parachutes are ready on the tail planes. Aircraftsmen are shuttling back and forth, aiding the pilots with their straps while they snatch up their helmets and adjust their oxygen masks.

One hundred and eighty seconds after dropping the four aces or the full house, the whole squadron is roaring into the air. The duty pilot, left alone in the rest room, is the only one who hears the loudspeaker relaying the message that will also go to Command and to London.

"Twelve Spitfires of X Command take the air 1422 hours."

### Battle in the Air

Less than ten minutes later the Spitfire squadron is more than fifty miles away and patrolling between 20,000 and 25,000 feet. One of the pilots

suddenly spots the invading German pilots. His crisp words crackle through the telephone:

"Bandits three o'clock below."

Three o'clock is the clock face convention for right center. Without further preliminary the pilot who has discovered the enemy swoops at 450 miles per hour and the ships to right and left accompany him. As soon as he receives the clipped report, the squadron leader checks to make sure that there are no enemy aircraft above. Then he thunders down with the rest of the formation.

As the Spitfires dive, the squadron leader estimates the number of enemy aircraft in order to determine what reinforcements, if any, may be necessary. An example of the British élan can be gathered from a squadron leader's comment. After his appraisal, he spoke quietly into his telephone.

"About seventy of them. That's only five to one against us. Just fine!"

Retelling the exploits of these R.A.F. pilots who come up against odds of five to one day after day and enjoy the scrap is not within the sphere of this article. Your newspapers and the R.A.F. bulletins on other pages of this magazine will give you some of the stories of these activities.

Back at the airdrome after the scrap has ended, the pilots discover that the whole operation has taken a little more than half an hour. Shortly after the planes have come to rest the fuel trucks, known as "bowsers" roll up and the planes are refueled. Armorers swarm over the wings and unscrew the gun panels. The electric starters are attached to the engines and the ships are made ready for the next "flap."

Of the twelve planes that went out to bag fourteen Messerschmitts out of the seventy, two have failed to return. But a quarter of an hour later, both ships are reported and the pilots are unhurt.



In the R.A.F. there is only one Command that takes along its lunch regularly—the Coastal Command. When we consider that the giant twenty-six-ton Sunderland flying boats of the Coastal Command carry enough fuel to take them across the Atlantic from England to Newfoundland, we can understand why nutrition must be carefully considered. Every day in the week, these ships take off in all kinds of weather, on thousands of miles of patrol, searching for submarines, looking for enemy aircraft and convoying ships.

The wardroom of the incredibly huge planes is about as big as the living room in your apartment. The cook's special quarters are larger than most modern kitchens and he has facilities for cooking almost any kind of meal. The control room on the upper deck of the flying boat accommodates the pilot, the second pilot, the navigator, radio operator and engineer, yet it is large enough to give them plenty of room to walk about.

### Bringing in Convoys

The usual task of these ships is convoy work. One of the Sunderlands will load its crew, bombs and ammunition from tenders and head out to pick up a convoy. It seems to be an established fact that convoys are never where they are intended to be. Therefore, after a navigator has determined where the ships ought to be, his next job is to make the proper corrections to north or south to determine where they actually are.

From the air these freighters and liners look like toy ships. Naval escorts are darting around them protectingly. All communication between freighters, warships and aircraft are carried on with blinker lights and lamp flashes. Radio is used only on urgent messages, because such signals would be picked up by German under-sea or surface raiders. When the ships are counted and checked by the Sunderland, it is necessary to radio the

total to the base. But in order to decoy possible German raiders, the Sunderland will often fly as much as two hundred miles from the convoy before sending the message.

### All Work Is Important

When the convoy is located, the really important job begins. Vast areas of the ocean must be patrolled and careful watch kept to spot shadowy shapes that may be submarines, innocent single-traveling surface craft that may be armed raiders. Every unescorted ship spotted in this survey is photographed, carefully checked and reported on. Not long after the Coastal Command plane has turned in its report, a British naval vessel will overhaul the craft and check its papers, unless its name, identity and location are already properly recorded.

Although the Sunderland carries a ton of bombs as its principal armament, there are enough machine-guns and other weapons aboard to justify its title of the battleship of the air. Its firing power is about six thousand rounds a minute.

Maintenance is perhaps the most prosaic of all the Commands in the R.A.F., but its job is fully as important as those of any of the other groups. Without the proper maintenance and servicing of the ships, guns and equipment, the high measure of performance of the R.A.F. would be impossible.

The Training Commands have a task that lends color to their lives. Some of their work is carried out in England and Scotland, but this is usually post-graduate work for pilots, observers, gunners and aircraftsmen who have already taken their preliminary work in other parts of the British Empire.

The chief source of material passing through the Training Commands flows from the Air Service Schools in the Dominion of Canada. Sizable



training schools, though, are also maintained for the Royal Australian Air Force in the Dominion down under and by the Royal South African Air Force in the Union of South Africa.

The training system for the R.A.F. is known as the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, and Canada considers it as her greatest single enterprise. She is providing 80 per cent of the pupils for the program, in addition to using the greater part of the personnel of the Royal Canadian Air Force as administrators and instructors.

### Source of Supply

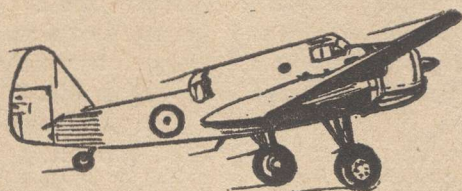
One of the vital parts of the Commonwealth Air Training Plan is the manner in which civilian and military groups are cooperating. After a rookie has enlisted in the Air Force and has been sent through one of the three Manning Depots, he is sent to one of the three initial training schools for a four-week course in fundamentals. His elementary flying training is then gained from one of the twenty-six elementary flying training schools, most of which are operated through facilities of member clubs of the Canadian Flying Clubs Association. Students take seven weeks of instruction under civilian

flying instructors, both in the air and in ground school.

After this preliminary work under civilian instructors, the future pilots then go to a Service Flying School, which is their first consistent contact with the military. From these training schools their progress to the Air Pool and the R.A.F. is rapid and supplies the fighting forces with the most alert and finely trained personnel in the world.

With Britain's desire to aid the countries in Europe that have been overrun by the Axis powers, the R.A.F. is fast adding flying groups that maintain separate identities, while cooperating effectively with the British fliers. These include the members of the Royal Norwegian Air Force, who maintain their own training school at Toronto Island Airport, the Royal Norwegian Naval Air Service, the Polish Air Force, the Free French Air Force and more recently members of the Yugoslav and Greek Air Forces.

The demands of war have made the R.A.F. a more colorful foreign legion of the air than the French were ever able to assemble in North Africa. The life of the R.A.F. is the symbol of youth in action, carried forward by its determination to build a better world.



COMING NEXT ISSUE

An American Pilot Flying for Britain Outwits a Fiendish Nazi Plot to Kill the Key Figures in England's Battle for Democracy!

## DEATH WRITES THE ORDERS

A Thrilling Action-Packed Complete Novelet

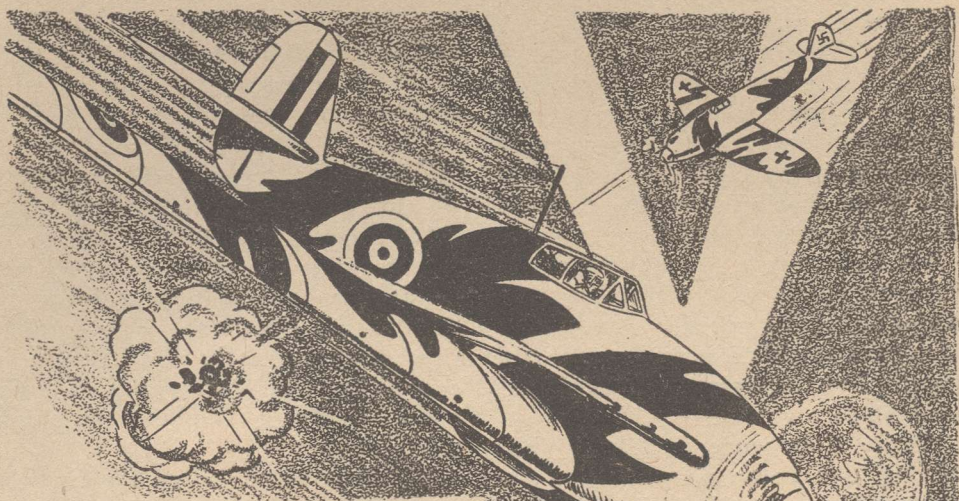
By **ALFRED H. IBBOTSON**



# BASHFUL BUZZARD

By ORLANDO RIGONI

Author of "Payment Deferred," "Locked Wheels," etc.



In the Wake of a Mystery Pilot's Amazing Coups for the R. A. F., Beano Rides the Sky Trail to Glory!

**W**E were all grouped about the bulletin board reading the green sheet. It was an order signed by Major Cummins for all pilots, gunners, and bombardiers to report for an urgent investigation in front of the officers' lounge at the west wing of the mess hall.

"What do you think he's tiffed about now?" Lieutenant Levers asked me, wrinkling his pug nose, and trying to hold a cigarette in the hole where his eye-tooth was missing.

I shrugged. "Reckon it's the same old gag, pal. Some nit-wit straying off against orders and raising the devil in the wrong graveyard."

"But, Beano," Sergeant Tremaine objected—meaning me, "Beano" being my name because I came from Boston where beans are supposed to be the staple diet, "you must admit that the lone wolf is stirring up a lot of vinegar for the Nasties."



A screaming Messerschmitt was zooming straight at us



"Yeah, sure," I groaned, "it's nice to win battles, but it's the devil and all to disobey orders, and that's what all the fuss is being raised about."

Levers spat out his fag. "He can yap, the old slick-pants," he grunted. "He don't have to go out and face the muck. He stays at home back here and feels righteous and smug, because General Orders forbids key men to fly in combat duty. He'll give us the old razz about discipline, pride, glory of the squadron and all that bunk."

But Levers was wrong. When we lined up outside the officers' lounge, Major Cummins paced before us, his deep eyes smoldering as though with anger. But there was no anger in his hard, sincere voice.

"Group Commander at Haversley is ranting like Satan on a holiday because some unidentified pilot attacked the munitions dumps out of Calais all by himself," he said. "The lone ship was reported by a cruiser in the English Channel, and also by spotters at Folkstone. The plane couldn't be identified, except that it appeared to be a Spitfire with a peculiar rhythm in the Merlin engine. But it is suspected it belongs to this squadron here at Tipley. Do any of you men wish to confess to being that pilot?"

Of course there was no answer. Cummins continued his pacing, with a slight limp in his right leg. He had almost lost that leg in a Camel during the other war, but the medicos had fixed it up. Now, he turned abruptly and glared like a bull.

"I expected no reply to my question! Group has insisted that I make every effort to discover the lone attacker. I'm not asking you to confess to a murder. I understand that certain honors are to be conferred upon the lone raider in token of appreciation for his courage and modesty. Will any of you step up and claim a V.C. with promotion?"

Still there was no answer and Cummins looked squarely into the faces

of all the pilots. I stared back, for I was piloting a Hampden Bomber and it certainly couldn't be mistaken for a Spitfire. The fighter pilots were down toward the end of the line, but they never carried bombs on the Spits and it was difficult to see how they could cause any great damage with their eight guns.

**T**HEN the major made a remark that brought me to my toes.

"Of course," he bit out, "the observers might have been wrong. After all, it was dark, and the ship might have been a Hampden. The peculiar rhythm of the motor could have been caused by twin Merlins out of alignment. Sergeant Whitacre, step forward, please!"

Whitacre was a shrimp of a guy who manned the lower, forward gun turret on Number Eighty-seven. He was like a kid, naïve and honest, and when the major began to question him, we held our breath. I seemed to recall that I had failed to keep track of Number Eighty-seven on our bombing foray over Ostend.

"Whitacre, at what time did you pass over Folkestone last night?" the major asked.

Whitacre started. "Why—why, sir, we didn't pass over Folkestone."

"Very good."

There were more trick questions, but no one would admit to being guilty of having set the fires at Calais. At last the major dismissed us, with a grim smile.

"At least," he said, "Group Headquarters can't accuse me of not trying to find the guilty party."

We all sat about sipping beer that afternoon, and wondering who the devil was so averse to accepting honor and glory. I made up my mind to keep a close eye out on our next trip, but Fate intervened in the form of muck, and blood, and death and general calamity.

We loaded up at dusk for a long



sashay to Coblenz. There were certain gasoline stores at Coblenz that must be destroyed. I noticed when we rolled the bombers out that the major was on the line watching us closely, and listening to the roar of our engines. I could hear nothing unusual about the thundering exhausts. I sat in my bucket watching the tachs until the exhausts smoothed out. Then I looked at the rest of my crew.

Levers handled the Vickers K gun in the top turret. Tremaine was the bombardier, and a little runt by the name of McCharles handled the guns in the belly blister. I controlled the fixed guns myself with electric buttons on the dash.

I got a kick out of McCharles because he was always cracking wise, and making up rotten poetry about his girl in Scotland. One of his favorites was:

She's a bonny lass,  
Wi' eye o' glass,  
And leg o' hickory.  
Her hair is from a doggy's back,  
Her hands are filled with line an' crack,  
Her kisses always make me smack,  
For she's full o' trickery!

It was punk poetry but it got a laugh, and sometimes got him a drink, and that was all he needed. Now, he grinned up at me with his blue eye cocked.

"I'll bet ye, sor, I frazzle a couple o' Mister Hitler's pets."

"Sure," I agreed. "I'll bet you twenty bob!"

"The marker's down, Beano—give her the gun!" Tremaine yelled from his position in the bomber's cradle. "For Pete's sake make a straight run when you pull the selector!"

**I** JERKED a look along the line. Our ship was Number Eighty-one. There had been twelve of us two weeks before, but now there were only eight. The other four had ended up you-know-how. We tried not to think too much about those things, somehow

believing that we would never be victims.

Captain Bancroft, the flight officer, was harooming his ship down the field. His was Number Ninety, with a skull painted on the side. The head looked lurid on the sand and spinach when the "blindlers" spotted it. But the searchlights couldn't hold any of us long for the Hampdens were plenty fast.

I was fourth off. We circled up—up—up into the black hole of the sky. I lined out in back of Bancroft and to the left. We used no radio, and only shaded blinkers that couldn't be seen from the ground.

I remembered Major Cummins' third degree, and turned my head to look for the other ships. They were all there, lined out in perfect order.

It was dark by the time we reached the Channel, and the earth below looked like a black hole. The roar of our engines was like thunder screaming across the sky. Bancroft took advantage of the clouds, but on reaching the coast of France searchlights sprouted in splendid bouquets of brilliance like diamonds tumbled under a light. The AAs spewed up their muck, and the air seemed to shudder and twitch under us. I felt one shell explode so close that my left wing was swept up by the concussion.

Finally we pulled out of the muck, headed a little south. I had to trust Bancroft for direction. Suddenly, the darkness below us sprouted more jewels. Bancroft flicked his lights and I knew we were there. Coblenz!

The muck started for us as we screamed down to ten thousand. McCharles was singing at the top of his voice. Tremaine was lying on his stomach with his eyes glued to the glasses. Levers was sitting like a mechanical man in the top coop, hugging the Vickers K gun.

The muck got real bad as we swung around in a circle to pick up the target. The AAs couldn't touch us when fly-



ing in a circle, but when we should line out for the target—well, anything could happen.

Bancroft was pulling off to the left. He flicked the signal that told us we were on our own, that we were to pick our target and let go our sticks of bombs.

The first two Hampdens had gone down to four thousand and scattered incendiaries and flares. In the glow of the fires, I picked out what looked like a gasoline tank farm, and yelled at Tremaine. He caught them, yelled at me to set a line.

It was then it happened. Messerschmitts and Heinkels were coming up in flocks to drive us off. I saw one of our bombers go down on fire, and tried to catch the number but I couldn't. The crew was bailing out, batting and clawing at the air as they fell.

I gritted my teeth and headed the Hampden in, holding it as steady as I could. The AA muck was smacking all around us, but none of it made a hit. Though it did make it hard to hold the big ship on line.

Then I heard the runt, McCharles, banging out cupro from the bottom guns. I jerked my eyes off the instruments long enough to look down. A screaming Messerschmitt was zooming straight at us with the 20mm cannon roaring fire from the prop hub. We were dead center for the bullets. I screamed at Tremaine to let go all the bombs as I jerked the selectors. All Tremaine had to do was push the buttons and the sticks would fall!

**I** FELT the plane jerk up as the weight of the bombs let go. Then I gutted the column, kicked hard on the rudder bar—but I was too late. I heard McCharles let out a ghastly scream. I tried to look down, but it was dark down there. I heard him threshing about, and then silence. I jerked the Hampden out of the crazy half-loop.

But another Messerschmitt was cramming down from above us. My wild maneuver had made it impossible for Levers to fire. Now, he was swinging the K gun. His tracers cracked out, smashed a hole—a fiery, ragged hole in the belly of the Schmitt, a hole from which dropped a riddled and bleeding body.

Tremaine cheered that shot. I saw another Schmitt ahead of me, and hosed out a blast from the fixed guns. But a Heinkel had sneaked down on Levers. Levers shouted at me to hoik the nose up to get the Heinkel out of the small blind spot behind the stabilizer. I pulled up too fast for Levers to get in a shot, but the Heinkel splattered his blazing fire right into us.

I could hear the slugs smash through the top turret. Could hear Levers' grunts of pain and dismay as the slugs battered into him. I could count them by his ghastly, choking yells. Then I forgot to count anything. I felt something pounding me, like a blunt stick. I felt the shock of two blows, felt fire knife down my back. Then the warm smear of blood drooled down my side. I was hit!

My only thought was to yank the Hampden out of the light beams.

I horsed the Merlins to the last ounce of power and sent the battered ship screaming ahead. Tremaine crawled up out of the bay and slid into the seat beside me.

"You—you hurt bad, old man?" he asked.

I gritted my teeth and nodded my head.

"Go take a look at the runt, and at Levers," I said.

Tremaine hesitated, like a man who fears a horrible duty. Then he ducked down, but he looked up almost at once.

"No use," he gritted. "He's done for—face shot off."

"And Levers?"

"I wish I didn't have to look at him," Tremaine said stiffly, for Levers



was a special friend of his.

He climbed up into the turret, and all the time I was pounding the Hampden for home. Soon Tremaine came back, excited and tense.

"He's alive! I could feel a pulse but he's losing blood by the peck."

"Get up there and stop it," I snapped, feeling woozy myself and realizing that I, too, was losing blood.

Tremaine was gone for what seemed ages. I tried to hold the ship on course. I was dimly aware of another Hampden to my left, and one below us. The others were as scattered as the contributions in a Scotch congregation.

Tremaine was climbing down as we neared the coast of France. I felt strangely vague by that time. I kept forcing myself to stay awake, but my body seemed so empty, so light. Suddenly, below us I saw fire—a vast, boiling pool of fire. I saw searchlights stabbing the sky, and I cursed. The crash of the AA muck beefed us in once more.

I found myself wondering who could have started all this ruckus. Certainly it couldn't have been one of the Hampdens. Or could it? The sky was a blaze of light, now. My eyes were bleary, my side aching like a boil. I managed to scan the ships in sight, but they were so scattered I couldn't even count them.

**T**HEN, looking down, I could have sworn that I saw a Spitfire, down close against the ground blaze, heading as fast as easy money for the Channel!

I tried to point it out to Tremaine, but almost fell off my bucket seat. Tremaine caught me, tried to take over, but I shoved him away.

"I flew her out, and I'll fly her back," I said fiercely, thinking of McCharles, dead, and Levers almost the same.

I managed to pilot the crate back to the field, but banged ground so hard I ruined an oleo strut. I don't

remember taxiing up to the hangars. The next thing I knew I was in the infirmary. . . .

I came out of a coma, felt the pull of bandages and saw Tremaine grinning down at me.

"You old mule," he grunted, "you were worse off than Levers. He's practically up and around while you had to have a couple of quarts of blood pumped into that carcass of yours."

I managed to grin, but felt anything but happy.

"Your blood?" I asked.

Tremaine colored a little. "No, not mine. I volunteered, but I was the wrong type."

"Whose blood have I got in me?" I asked, having a queer feeling that the transfusion must bring me into some blood relationship with the donor.

"The major's. Cummins came in late from a jaunt to Group Staff, found you needing blood and dished out some of his own. He was rather fagged out, too, before the transfusion. Must have had a session down at headquarters."

I didn't know what to say, and mumbled:

"I'd like to thank him for the blood."

"He's down at the lounge trying to find out who fired the Nazis at Ostend last night. He figures that one of our squadron dumped its load on Ostend instead of taking it to Coblenz as we were ordered. He didn't tag anybody, but he raised the devil of a lot of smoke."

Tremaine went out, and no sooner had he gone than the door opened and Major Cummins came in. He looked a little washed out, but his face was grim. He came to the cot and stared down at me.

"Group Commander is still demanding the surrender of the man or men responsible for the raids on the coast ports, Lieutenant Coombs," he said crisply. "What do you know about them?"



"Not a thing, sir. But I do know you're one square guy for giving me some of your blood. I'll not forget it, sir."

Cummins colored a little, cleared his throat.

"That was nothing," he grunted. "I wish somebody would confess to those raids, and take their decoration so that Group would leave us alone."

It seemed peculiar that a man should dodge glory and I said so, suggesting that the hero might be at another drome. But the major shook his head.

"Group is dogged in cases like this, and they claim to have traced the offender to this vicinity," he insisted. "It's rather a nuisance to me."

When he left I took his hand again, and felt a peculiar attraction for him. After all, I had his blood in my veins, hadn't I? It was all nonsense, perhaps, yet the strain and tension of war gives men strange viewpoints.

**W**E had a week of blow and muggy sky and I was secretly glad, for I wouldn't miss much of the fireworks. The big ships were grounded and even the Spits went up only for brief observation and had to fly in zero-zero weather.

I was up and around when the weather broke up, but I was still on the sick list. I watched the Hampdens take off that evening, feeling strangely lonely and out of sorts. I was moping back to the medico's hut to scare up a swig of Scotch when I saw Major Cummins lugging two heavy suitcases toward a Spitfire that was warming up. I remarked it to the doctor, and he nodded.

"Another trip to Group Headquarters, most likely," he said. "He's been trying to get special permission to fly with the boys. He's old, and valuable, but he's tough, and made rather a record at free-hand bombing during the last war."

I gulped my hooker of Scotch, and had started to go back to my cot when

I heard the major taking off. The Spitfire hoiked up straight for the stars, then twisted southwest toward Haversley. Almost at the same time the orderly came running from the major's office waving an order—an official pink sheet.

I ran over and stopped him. He shoved the paper at me.

"It's blimed himportant, sir. Orders from Colonel Stokely to have the Hampdens assigned to Channel Patrol. Big movement of surface craft heading down from Scapa Flow."

"What did the major have in those suitcases?" I asked. "Where was he going?"

"H'im not sure, sir. 'E said something about going to Group Headquarters, but when I mentioned the fact to them, they said there must have been some mistake. Hi didn't want to cause no trouble, sir."

It was all as clear as mud to me, but I was beginning to see a glimmer of light. I grabbed the order and without stopping to do more than drag on a flying coat over my scanties, I dived for a Spitfire on the line. I yelled for service, grabbed a handful of five-pound demolition bombs and half a dozen thermites. With the chief mechanic still protesting, I took off and started out after the speck of the major's ship, sky-hopping against the clouds.

I had a screwy notion that I could catch the major and warn him to turn back. If he should barge in on Group Headquarters while this order was back at the drome and ignored, he would get it, plenty. I also figured that if I couldn't catch the major, I might beef up the Spitfire and catch the Hampdens.

Both ideas were crazy, and deep down I knew it. But I had the bombs, and secretly I was hoping for a chance to pull one of those lone raids everybody in the squadron had been accused of, and yet, nobody would acknowledge.



Suddenly I realized that I was gaining a little on the major, but we were no longer headed toward Haversley. The major had made a wide turn, and was slowly, surely, heading for the Channel, and at a height that no official ship would tackle on a routine trip. I followed him, expected to see him turn again and at least head for London.

But he didn't turn, and the next thing I knew the straits of Dover were crawling out of the fog below. Darkness came fast then, and I kept track of Major Cummins by the blue flame of his exhausts. He seemed to bear to the south until I saw the gloomy shore of France below us.

**I** DIDN'T know exactly where we were, and I wondered if the major was lost. What could he be doing over France with two suitcases and a fighter ship? As though in answer to my thoughts, I saw the blue halo of Cummins' exhaust stacks dive for the ground.

I dived with him, but not as steeply, hoping to cut across his path as he came down past me. But he was too fast for that. He was diving the Spitfire as if it were a Stuka, and I could hear the wail of his engine above the roar of my own backwash.

Even as Cummins streaked down, the earth came alive with shooting, sweeping, blinding light! The AA muck began to spray up in great mushrooms of exploding shrapnel. I yelled for the major to pull out of the pit of destruction, but he headed right on—and it suddenly dawned upon me who the mysterious raider was!

The major, himself, was the man he had made believe he was searching for. The major, yearning for battle, and yet denied the official right to fight, had been sneaking out on these bombing forays of his own. And he couldn't own up to being the lone hero without also admitting to having disobeyed orders!

It took a moment for the full import of the situation to sink into my head. At first it was hard to believe the truth, but the next instant a wild, vicious explosion shuddered the very air, and I saw the Spitfire zooming up out of a white flame of exploding gasoline. The fool, the crazy, brave fool! He had hit some tank cars on a siding. I could see the whole scene below now, lit up by the madly burning fire.

The next instant I was in the thick of it, with AA blasting past my wings and screwing me around like whiskey on a sour stomach. I saw Cummins heading his ship down for another attack, and I spilled my own Spitfire!

Cummins had given me some of his blood—we were brothers in a way. He was facing death and destruction, and I had to face it with him. I sent the sleek ship down—down—down! I fumbled with the sky-hatch clip, got it loose and slid the cowl back. I had to have a chance to get rid of my store of bombs.

The wind moaned past my open pit like ten thousand devils in the travail of death. The Merlin was screaming in a crescendo of released power. The mighty tornado of air hissed off the trailing edge and shook the trimmers on their hinges.

I was dimly aware of ships roaring up to attack us. I pressed my electric trips without thinking. I missed my target, but the German hoiked off lest I smash into him. He twisted over and sent his streams of Madsen slugs into Cummins' diving ship.

Cummins made no move to dodge the bullets. He was hurling his Spitfire for a warehouse near the railroad. I kicked my own ship out of the dive. I had to save the major! I sent a wall of slugs at the German in the Heinkel, but missed again. I cursed. My vane sights were hard to read in the shadowy darkness.

Once more I rectified. I could see the German's bullets pecking holes in Cummins' turtleback. I yanked my



nose up an inch, and jabbed the throttles to the last notch. I heard my own voice hissing in the screaming wind:

"God—oh, God, don't let him die!"

It's funny what war will do to a man. Somehow he forgets his own safety or his own danger. Some part of his ego refuses to admit that he, himself, might die—might become nothing but sodden flesh.

CUMMINS was heading down against the flames. The German in the Heinkel was string-straight on his tail. I caught the shadow of the German's head against the flare on the ground.

Tensely I whip-sawed my Spitfire and punched the trips. The eight streams of cupro snaked the tortured air with a wild ragadood of death. The coop on the Heinkel seemed to explode. I fancied I heard a scream, and then a blazing fire was lazily spinning for the earth!

Cummins hadn't even looked back. He was bellying out at three thousand, hurling out his last bombs. I realized, now, what those heavy suitcases had contained. Bombs!

I thought of my own five pounders, and cursed by some frenzy over which I had no control I hurled my Spitfire down the long slant into perdition. I saw an AA battery near a freight yard and headed for it. I didn't pull out until I was so low I could see the faces of the men at the gun.

Those faces were like bull's-eyes. I grinned. One of my hands was trying to work the trips while my other snatched up the five-pounders and hurled them down like throwing rocks on a duck pond. Still I didn't pull out. I saw men trying to release the brakes on the roofs of the freight cars. I strafed them, saw some of them roll off like dummies.

Suddenly I realized that I was going to crash. I gutted the stick, with my heart against my teeth. The Spitfire

cracked and groaned. My guts flattened out against my belt and my head seemed thrust into a vast, empty darkness.

Then the roaring of my ears stopped. I was smashing across the tops of the cars, straight for a tall building beside the tracks. I hoiked the Spitfire up, slammed the stick across the pit and prayed. My prayer was answered, for I missed the building by inches and zoomed wildly up and away.

There were Heinkels ahead of me, but I saw the other Spitfire clearing the way for me.

We broke through the German ships, stabbed into black clouds and headed back for home. . . .

Major Cummins hit the tarmac just ahead of me and he was waiting for me on the line when I rolled out. He was talking to the orderly, but turned abruptly toward me.

"I say, Coombs," he began earnestly, "I want to thank you for saving my jacket back there."

"You did the same for me, sir," I countered.

"About that blood I gave you, Lieutenant. It does sort of make us brothers under the skin, eh? I want you to do me a small favor. See that big car up at the office? That's from Group Headquarters. Stukely and some of his pigeons are up here to make a fuss. Let me do the talking, Coombs, and don't contradict me."

"It's your privilege, sir," I answered, puzzled a little by the request. I was eager, anyway, to get away and spill my yarn to the rest of the fellows—eager to tell them what a trump the boss was. But Cummins asked me to accompany him to the office.

Colonel Stokely jumped up when we entered, and even his tailored serge couldn't hide the growing bulge in the midsection of his fuselage. His eyes were fiery under their gray thatch.

"Well, what's the meaning of this, Major Cummins?" he said sharply.



"You've been forbidden to fly a fighting ship in battle—"

"Wait a minute, Colonel." Cummins grinned, breaking right in on the old man. "I didn't disobey that order, not exactly. You seemed so intent upon getting the name of the strange fighter who has been raising Cain along the French and Belgium coast that—"

"Did you get him?" Stokely glared.

I was about to pop off, but Cummins stopped me with a look.

"Yes sir, I did," he went on. "I saw a plane sneaking off and trailed it. I saw that plane attack some city, presumably Calais. I saw that plane dive through a flock of Nazi birds, saw it slam right down into the AA muck and searchlights and blow eternal damnation out of the railroad yards. It bellied so low it almost hit the buildings—and came away almost untouched. It was mad, it was glorious, it was genius! Here, sir, is the man who piloted that plane—Lieutenant Coombs! Beano to his cronies!"

I caught my breath, and felt my eyes pop out. Cummins was robbing me of my triumph. I started to speak, but I remembered my promise, and thoughts flocked into my head. Cummins was a square guy who was entitled to a fling at the nasties now and then. With me

fronting for him, he could get in his licks hereafter without any danger of court-martial. I felt like a heel, though, letting him foist this glory upon me. I was a bad liar, but the colonel helped some when he asked:

"Is this true, Coombs? Did you bomb Calais in the manner described by your superior officer?"

I grinned. I told the truth when I said, "Yes sir."

"Very good, Coombs—er—Beano." The colonel chuckled over the name. The old boy was thawing out, now that he was sure his orders to Cummins hadn't been entirely disobeyed. "You have been cited for a decoration, and I'd like to bestow it before the whole squadron. Then I've recommended that you be given a month's leave to tour the Islands and make personal appearances and all that. It has to do with the morale of the home forces, you know—show them that the R.A.F. is on the job."

I could already imagine the disgust on Tremaine's face when he watched me take the decoration. Another thought made me grin. I winked at Cummins. The old war eagle would have to warm his chair while I was gone on the tour, for he wouldn't have me to stooge for him. That would really hurt. He sure was a bashful buzzard.

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# ADVENTURES OF

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A PILOT OFFICER OF  
THE EAGLE SQUADRON

I EXPECT it must seem a long hop from guiding visitors round the movie studios in Culver City to fighting in an eight-gun Spitfire over London. But that's just how it happened to me and all within a little more than a year with some exciting adventures in between.

It was only my second air fight when I helped rout Goering's mass attack on September 15. And I had the good luck to shoot down my first raider.

During the battle, the air over Surrey, Kent and Sussex was full of bombers and fighters. At 20,000 feet I met a formation of Me's 110. I gave one a burst and saw him giving out smoke. But I lost him in the clouds before I could press home my attack.

## My First German Victim

Then below me I saw a big Dornier 215 bomber trying to seek the safety of some clouds. I followed it down and gave it a long squirt. Its left motor stopped and its right aileron came to bits. Smoke was pouring from it as the bomber disappeared in a cloud. I followed. Suddenly the clouds broke and on the ground I saw a number of crashed aircraft. It was an amazing sight. They had all crashed within a radius of about 20 miles from our fighter station. My Dornier was there too. I was quite sure I could see it. A little later I learned that the Intelligence Officer's report on the damage to the crashed Dornier agreed with my own, so I knew I had claimed my first definite German victim.

That was a great day for England. I thought this little island was going to sink under the weight of crashed enemy planes on that day. And was I proud to be in the battle! It was the fulfillment of a year's ambition.

But let me go back and tell you the story of this momentous year.

## Hollywood Pilot

My home is in Hollywood. It was in the wonderful Californian climate that I was born, educated and learned to fly. I don't suppose there are more than seven days in a year when you can't take the air in California. I learned to fly at the Mine Fields, Los Angeles. I was always pretty keen on flying and whenever there were no classes at school I hurried out to the airfield to put in all the time I could learning about aircraft and their vices. My instructors were mostly army people. I went through the various graduations and by July last year I was a fully qualified charter pilot.

For nearly two months last year I flew parties up to the High Sierras in California on hunting and fishing expeditions. It was pretty tricky flying, because you get some fierce down draughts and you can't be too careful.

I had a civilian job, of course, in the M.G.M. studios at Culver City; I finally acted as guide for visitors to the studios. I used to meet all the film stars and found them nice ordinary folk. But my studio jobs didn't keep me from my flying and in the winter of 1939 I took a course in aerodynamics at evening school.

## Another Escadrille Lafayette

Then a number of us met Colonel Sweeney, whose name you will know from his association with the Escadrille Lafayette in the last war. With him we decided it would be a grand idea to form a flight and go out and fly for Finland. But, I guess, that war was over before we could get going.

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**A**FTER a great air battle in which the German Air Force lost 185 aircraft, one of the heroic pilots taking part, an American, wrote this stirring account of his experiences. This true tale gives the "inside" of the formation of the famous Eagle Squadron of which all Americans should be mighty proud. We are happy to present "Adventures of a Fighting Yank," in this, the first issue of RAF ACES, for we believe it will take its place among the outstanding stories of the war.

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# A FIGHTING YANK



AMERICAN MEMBERS OF THE EAGLE SQUADRON

In May of this year we decided to form a squadron of all American flyers, another Escadrille Lafayette. The adventure was on.

Several of us went by train from Los Angeles, through the States to Canada. Finally we finished up at Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we got split up. I joined a large French motor vessel, which was part of a big convoy sailing for France. My boat could do about 16 knots, but she had to travel at only six. In front of us was a boat with 400 mules on board. The stench from the mules was something awful and so was the weather. We had pursuit planes, bombers, and munitions of all sorts on board, cargo worth in all about  $7\frac{1}{2}$  million dollars. We rolled and pitched all the way across the Atlantic and were mighty thankful after 17 days to tie up at St. Nazaire.

## That Old Shirt!

All our plans went haywire at St. Nazaire. I had no passport and had lost my birth certificate. Naturally the French treated me with suspicion.

Incidentally, there's a story about that birth certificate. In all my journeys up and down France, I stuck to an old shirt just in case I wanted a spare one any time.

Only last week I took out that shirt and from it dropped my birth certificate.

The next thing was to get to Paris and meet the rest of the boys. I took  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days to reach the capital and there I met my friends who had disembarked at Bordeaux. Just outside Paris while in the train I had my first experience of being bombed. The scream of the bombs dropping on the suburban houses from about 20,000 feet was awful.

## Paris Evacuated

We made our way to the French Air Ministry, saw high officials there, and were given our physical examination. The French didn't hurry, and we were in and out of the Ministry for three days. They kept telling us that all would be well and that we would be flying any day soon. Actually we spent a whole month in Paris, doing nothing, for nothing could be done for us.

Then suddenly one day we realized that Paris was going to be evacuated. As the Air Ministry had gone, we made up our minds to get going as well to—Tours. A pall of smoke—which might have been a smoke screen—covered the city and you couldn't see more than a block away. There must have been 10,000 people at one



station, all patiently waiting for trains to take them to safety — staunch solemn queues all around the station, men, women and children.

It took us a day-and-a-half to reach Tours and it was an awful journey. Sometimes we had to ride between the cars to get a breath of fresh air. But there was no panic among the refugees, just fear and depression. We didn't lose a bit of luggage on this journey. We spent a week at Tours and were bombed by Heinkels and Dorniers every day. There was a pretty big party of us by now, most of them belonging to the French Air Force. We left Tours by bus for Chinon about an hour's ride away. We got away just in time, for the Nazis bombed and machine-gunned the main bridge out of Tours just as it was packed with refugees. The bridge was completely destroyed and very many refugees were killed.

Things weren't looking at all good. We were tired and food was getting scarce. We set out for Arcay, about 400 of us of all ranks, and from there walked another 15 miles to Air Vault. Our boots were completely worn out, and we had no food and no water. Dog-tired, we lay down in some fields at Air Vault, but not for long. At nearly midnight we were ordered by an elderly French Officer to get going once again, this time to Bordeaux.

It took us  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days in a packed train to reach Bordeaux and when we got there we found that the French Air Ministry could do nothing for us. We Americans were pretty sore by this time and thought that the best thing we could do would be to take some aircraft and fly to England. But that little plan didn't come and we began our travels again, determined to get out of the country.

### Crowds of Refugees

Our little bunch went by bus to Bayonne. The British consul had left. We had no money and were starving. Eventually we made our way to St. Jean-de-Luz and were lucky enough to get the American consul. He was a fine guy and treated us pretty handsomely. But he told us the situation was pretty bad and advised us to quit.

There was a crowd pouring into St. Jean-de-Luz and the quayside was crowded with refugees. They came any old way they could, in cars, on motor cycles and cycles. The cycles they did not bother to park but simply threw them in the water.

We boarded a British ship, Baron-Nairn, a little old timer of 7 knots. We were a mixed crowd on board. Our number included 700 Polish refugees. A tragedy occurred as we were going on board. We had only one suitcase between our little bunch. The handle came off and into the water she went with all our belongings. All the extras I had then were a pair of shorts and a couple of shirts.

We sailed across the Bay of Biscay. It

was a 3-day journey and all we had to eat was dog-biscuit—even the one dog on board wouldn't eat them. The boat had no cargo and rolled pretty badly. But the crew were rather kind and did all they could for us.

Eventually we made Plymouth, although I thought at one time we were bound for South Africa judging by the ship's course.

### Not Too Popular

I guess we weren't too popular at Plymouth. We had no papers and we were evacuated straight away to London. We were put in an ice skating rink and had to stay there for three days. We weren't allowed out at all.

We rang up the Air Ministry, who sent around an officer to see us. He was very kind but didn't hold out much hope that the Air Force could use us at the moment.

We talked it over between us and made up our minds to return to America. We rang the Embassy who sent around a representative to see us. He got our particulars, checked them over with Washington, fixed us up with passages to America and lent us £15 for food and clothing. It looked as if the adventure was over.

Then, I forget how, we met a very kind English lady, who, after hearing our story, told us she was sure that a friend of hers, a well-known member of Parliament, could do something for us. We met him next day in the Houses of Parliament and he sent us to the Air Ministry. We were given our physical examination at once. All passed, and so were in the Volunteer Reserve of the Royal Air Force for the duration of the war.

We felt pretty good when we went to the American Embassy, but the officials there were mad with us at first for upsetting all the arrangements but we soon smoothed that out. Things moved rapidly. Three of us, all in R.A.F. uniforms, were sent north to an Officers' Training Unit. I had not flown for two months, but after 20 minutes in an advanced trainer I was put into a Spitfire.

### Fit to Fight

After 20 hours flying in Spitfires I was attached to a station in the south, just in time for the opening of the big Blitz. But I had several weeks' training before I became operational, that is, fit to fight. And I guess my first fight was lucky.

I was patrolling high over an English port on the south coast when I saw some Me. 110's. I went into them and hit the first guy with my first burst. He was quickly lost in cloud. Then another Me. 110 shot ahead of me. I gave him a long burst and saw my stuff entering his fuselage. He climbed steeply then, and then as steeply dived in a sort of spin. I couldn't turn on oxygen and suddenly had what they call over here a black-out. I went into a sort of dream from which I



awakened when I was only 1,000 feet from the ground. I think I heard myself say "you'd better come to, you're in trouble." Anyway, I landed safely with two probables in my "bag."

### Our Own Squadrons

And now, we Americans are a separate squadron. We wear R.A.F. uniforms with the American Eagle on the shoulder. It's a grand idea, this Eagle squadron of all American flyers. We must try and make a name for ourselves, just like the famous Escadrille Lafayette.

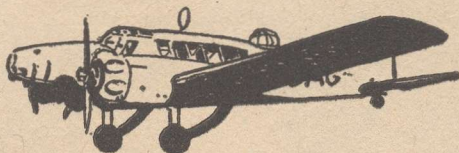
After all, we're all on the same side and all fighting in the same cause. The fellows in the squadron come from various parts of America—New York, Idaho, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Illinois and California, we're all flyers and very keen. We have got a lot to learn yet, of course, and that is why I'm so glad to have been with an English fighter squadron first. These English pilots certainly know their fighting tactics.

My old squadron has brought down at least 100 German aircraft. The German airmen may be pretty good formation flyers, but the British pilot has got the initiative in battle. He thinks quickly and gets results. He knows how to look after himself.

And are we lucky with our fighter planes! I guess the Spitfire is the finest fighter aircraft in the world. It's rugged and has no vices. I'd certainly rather fight with one than against one.

We like England and its people who are cheerful and very easy to get on with. I miss the California weather, of course, and if I could only have the English people and the California weather combined, everything would be grand. Everyone in the Royal Air Force is most kind to us all. They somehow seem to understand us and go out of their way to be helpful.

It's grand to say hello to everyone on behalf of the Eagle squadron. You can be sure we will do our very best, because we're in this business to try and do a little job of work for England.



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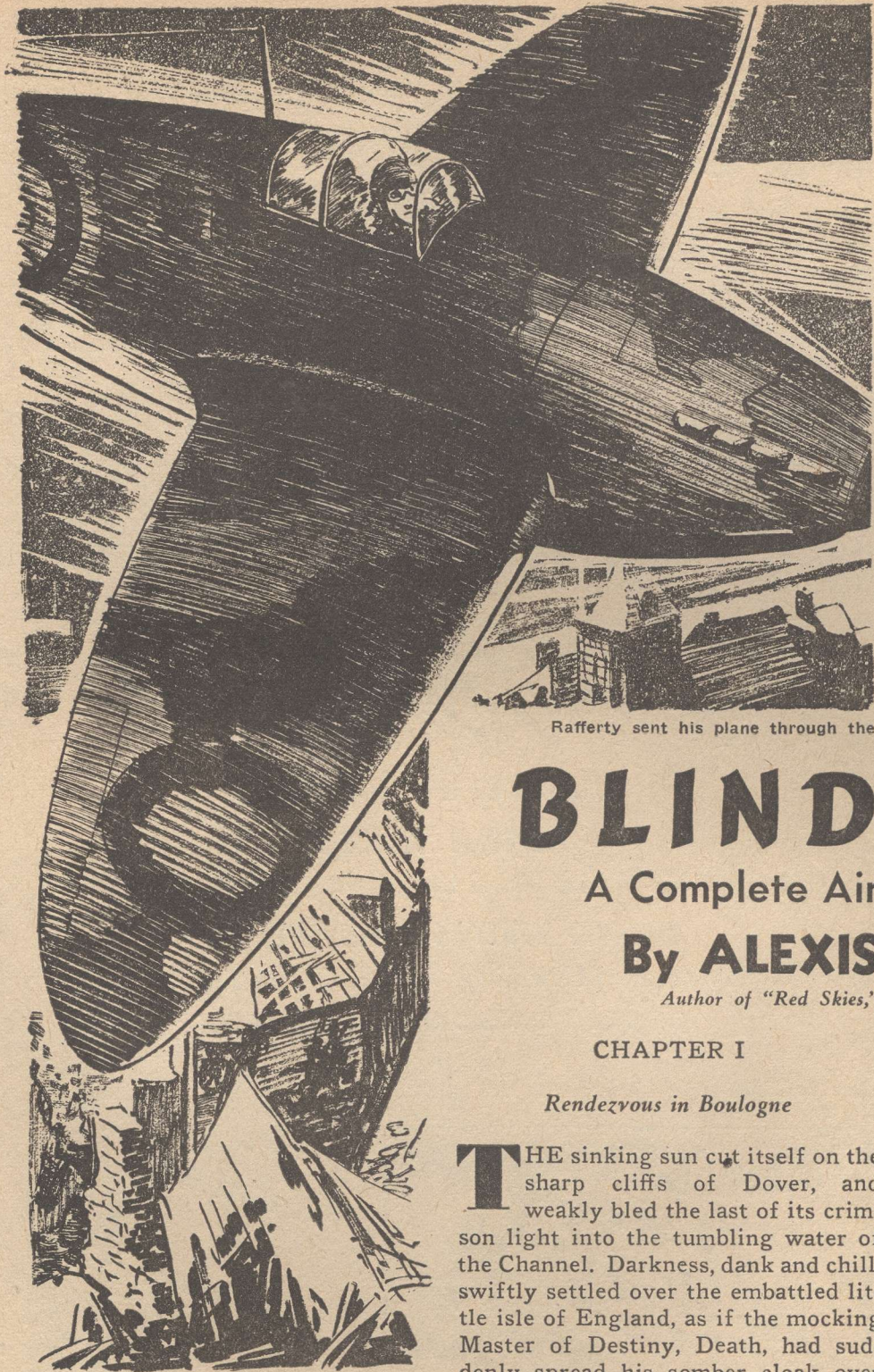
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Rafferty sent his plane through the

# BLIND

A Complete Air

By **ALEXIS**

*Author of "Red Skies,"*

## CHAPTER I

### *Rendezvous in Boulogne*

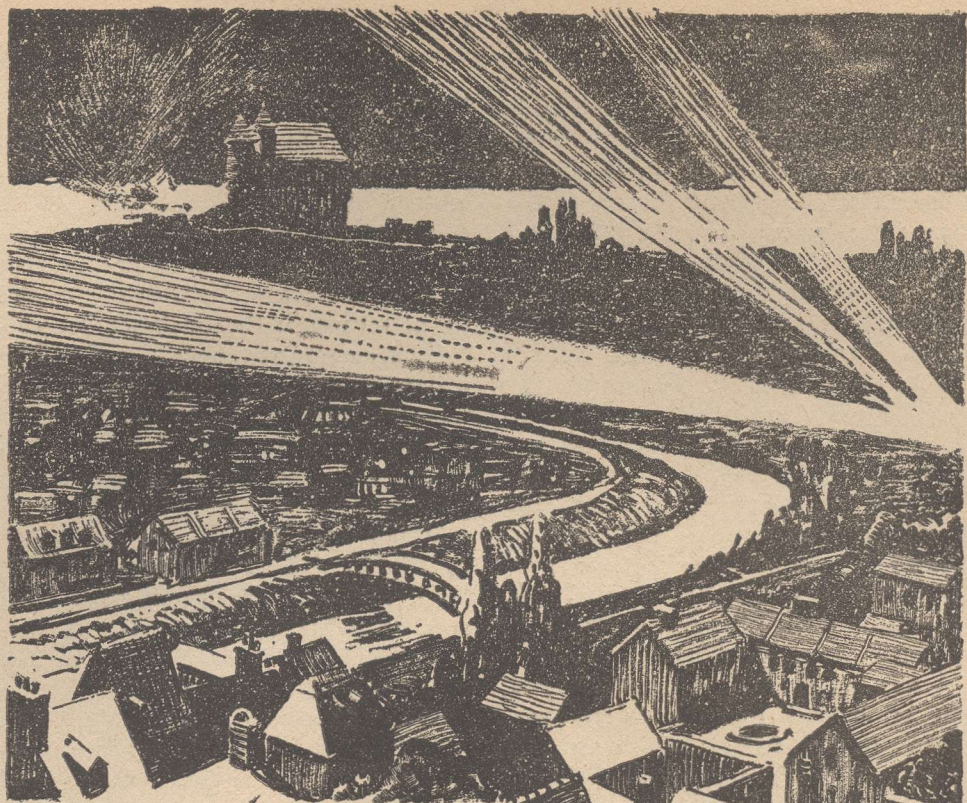
**T**HE sinking sun cut itself on the sharp cliffs of Dover, and weakly bled the last of its crimson light into the tumbling water of the Channel. Darkness, dank and chill, swiftly settled over the embattled little isle of England, as if the mocking Master of Destiny, Death, had suddenly spread his somber cloak over

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His Own Life Means Nothing When Spook

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night sky to a grim rendezvous

# DATE

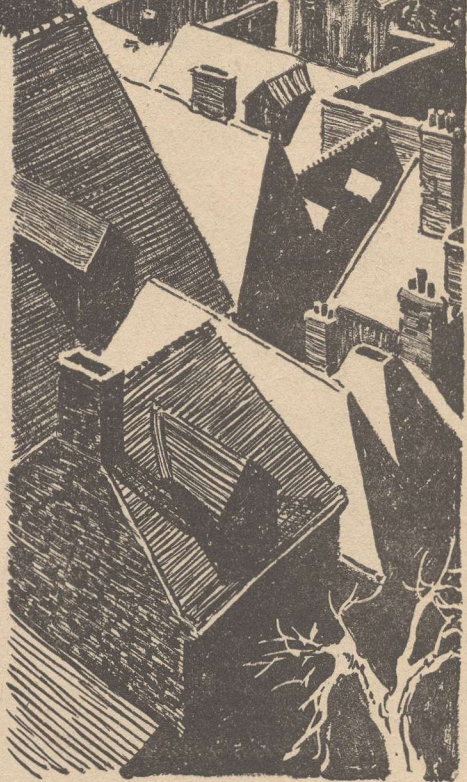
Action Novelet

## ROSSOFF

*"Strange Teammates," etc.*

the scene in a tardy gesture of remorse. Perhaps thinking to conceal the vulnerable target from hostile Nazi eyes.

Across the Channel—Britain's first line of defense—at enemy-occupied Gris Nez, a long-range gun thundered a macabre note, beginning its nightly hymn of hate. The night wind fetched the ominous boom, its tone muted by distance, into an isolated hut on the rock-bound lip of the wild Kentish coast. Four men who had been idly



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## Rafferty Takes on a Solo Sky Assignment!

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passing the time at cards, tossed their hands and pushed back from the table. There was work to be done. Pilot Officer Rafferty, better known to the immediate group as the "Spook," glanced at his watch.

"Adolf sounded off right on the dot tonight," he said, in light contempt for the Nazi gun.

The four waited. But not for long. Somewhere in the surrounding blacked-out area the anticipated explosion materialized.

"Futile as a dictator's promise," the Spook muttered, for the far flung shell seemed to have been ineffective.

A weird chap — Spook Rafferty. Fate had modeled his face in the likeness of Satan, and added little imps to dance in his disturbing pale gray eyes. But whimsical Fate must have repented, for inside Rafferty's saturnine outer shell there ticked and throbbed a set of inner works that would have done credit to a saint. The Spook had never been known to raise either his voice or hand in anger against a living creature. That seemed hardly understandable in the face of the evidence that Pilot Officer Rafferty was an important and steel-like feather in England's wings. The R.A.F. had a record of what he had done, and could do with a powered kite. Rafferty's strange pale eyes could unerringly direct gun lead to rend any designated target. Yet the Spook had once calmly confessed to a senior officer that he lacked the necessary incentive to shoot a man even in the heat of combat. Yes, he violently disliked the Nazi blackbirds, who were bent on turning Britain into a red shambles, but—

He would do anything asked of him, short of killing. Even die, should the sacrifice aid in stopping the bestial bombings. And the shocked squadron leader had found no trace of fear in Flying Officer Rafferty's inscrutable Mephistophelian mask.

THE perplexed S. C. had passed the problem to an air vice-marshal. The lengthy report described the young pilot officer as a topping good pilot. In the end, however, it was the name Rafferty that swayed the air vice-marshal. Grand lot of scrappers the Irish—if delightfully eccentric at times. The V-M had a deep admiration for the race that was like quicksilver. Given time, that chap Rafferty would soon enough shed his qualms about jousting against the Jerries.

When Intelligence was contacted in Flying Officer Rafferty's behalf, B. I. admitted an urgent need of a man with his qualifications. A special "hush-hush" detail was in the process of being formed.

With practically no delay, the transfer had been made. Wondering what it was all about, Rafferty had taken his leave of the Spitfire outfit. Stout lads all! They had ribbed him, joked about a mythical benefactor who had whispered in the Prime Minister's ear to secure a "cushy nest" for him. Usual luck of the Irish!

A lot of powder had been burned since that eventful day in Pilot Rafferty's military career. He had not burned any of it, though, despite the many hazardous round-trip flights he had made to Nazi-controlled air sectors and back.

Now once more, he had his orders to put his phenomenal luck to the test. An officer, a specialist in his line, got up and crossed to a teletype machine that had started clacking.

"Last minute weather, Spook," he sang out. "Not good—not bad. But good enough, I daresay."

Little devils danced in Spook Rafferty's pale eyes. Even the worst was counted good enough for men assigned to Intelligence.

With steady fingers he was jerking up the zipper of his flying togs, when an ear-jarring rumbling and staccato barking drowned out all other sound.



The occupants of the dimly lighted room betrayed no concern. Only a sky-bus being readied to take the Spook places.

**R**AFFERTY took a final look at his orders. They read:

At Area 8. At seven-zero-zero hours,  
G. M. T.

He committed the instructions to memory, then tore the official flimsy to shreds. Should he be knocked down somewhere on the wrong side of the war, the Jerries would not find anything to identify him as a cog in the wheels of British Intelligence. The light in the ceiling suddenly blinked out. Someone about to enter the hut had pressed the precautionary black-out button outside the door.

"All set, Spook?" a voice called.

"Righto!" came his answering chirp.

"Thumbs up!" somebody else called.

"Bring her back whistling!" said another voice, while still others bade him God-speed.

The Spook smiled thinly as his well-wisher alluded to the whistling sound given off by the gun vents in a fighter's wings. Those vents, lightly pasted over with thin cloth, were noiseless at take-off. A burst of fire, however, would start the uncanny shrilling that is the ghost-song of the Spitfires.

Spook Rafferty chuckled dryly. That chap should know it by now, that P. O. Rafferty hoped to do his bit for Britain without resorting to gunfire.

Joining the waiting engineer officer in the outer darkness, they sloshed through an ankle-deep stretch of water that cleverly concealed a bottom of colored concrete. Intelligence had thought of everything when setting up this hush-hush drome. An aerial photograph would reveal only a dilapidated shack, marooned in the middle of a sprawling puddle.

The Spook bucked the swirling gale of the Spitfire's prop wash.

"I say, she's a doll!" the E. O. shouted admiringly.

Rafferty nodded, pleased. Not every pilot could say he had tooled a Mark 111 Spitfire. The thunder of the drab-green bus' new Rolls Vulture 2,000 h.p. power plant was something! And she packed a deadly stinger—a one-pound shell cannon, though Spook regarded the armament as unimportant to his way of fighting the war. The automatic moving picture camera—Spitfire equipment—would never testify that he had blasted a Jerry into oblivion—he hoped.

Coolly, he went aboard and settled himself in the seat. While feeding the engine its ration of soup, he eye-checked the gadgets on the dash. A dainty dish, the Spitfire—a bit of all right. He palmed the throttle, and orange and blue flame spewed forth from the exhaust. The slim job started its forward surge. Wheels speeding over the water-hidden, concrete runway gave off twin curtains of spray. Her tail lifted. The Spitfire went upstairs like a homesick angel.

Always methodical, Rafferty put fifteen thousand feet of life insurance in between himself and solid substance. It was fixed in his mind that when the time came—and it probably would—when he would have to bail out and rely on his "brolly"—parachute—the more room the better.

His course fixed, magnetic, zero-seven-two, the Spook let the engine have it. The short jump over the black strip of water was quickly negotiated. Ugly toadstools of flame were blooming down in the devil's garden that was occupied France. The R.A.F. was doing the Nazis with some of their own medicine, with interest.

Pilot Officer Rafferty approved of the bombing. The bombers and their fighter escorts did not know it, but



in creating so devastating a diversion, were co-operating with him. That five-alarm raid was certain to draw all Nazi Messers from surrounding quiet areas in an attempt to beat off the daring raiders. Kiting along at 300 m.p.h., the Spook was thankful to his former chums in the R.A.F. for lighting such a jolly fine candle. Moths to the flame, and all that. He would now be comparatively free to prow about in Jerry's backyard.

A searchlight beam cleaved the upper darkness like a saber. Alert, the Spook avoided its slash. He had no wish to be detained by a Jerry fighter. He had a blind date over Boulogne.

Rafferty nosed the Spitfire up in a climbing reach for top altitude. There he cut his speed, and idly bugged along the ceiling. He was two minutes early for the appointment arranged by Intelligence, and he stood a chance of living longer by dallying here, rather than over Boulogne.

Mr. Big, of B. I., had stressed importance of success in this mission of his, and his superior had shown anxiety. But as Spook saw it, his small contribution to the mystery play was something of a holiday jaunt, even if the worst should happen, and a covey of Jerries rise up from nowhere. He was confident that he could flip the Spitfire's tail in the enemy's gun-sights and run away. The really important chap was the unsung hero doing his bit for Britain somewhere down there in Nazi-occupied Boulogne. To him belonged the accolade. A wrong move or word in an unguarded moment and he would be violently ushered out of the world. The Spook shuddered. A firing squad made a nasty mess of a fellow.

**EYES** on the dash dials, he tooled his bus through the black. It was like paddling about inside a bottle of ink. Were he one of the fighters, he could locate his objective by dropping a flare. But not this night of

nights, Josephine! No game of touch-tag now with the jittery enemy ack-acks. Chances were that the Nazis were already in a sweat due to the beat of his alien engine so high overhead.

The Spook buckled down to business. Area eight. That would be the northeast corner of bomb-battered Boulogne. He allowed for "drift" in his careful calculations, his thoughts turning now on how best to identify himself properly to the unseen blind date.

Young Rafferty's thoughts revved in pace with his engine. There was a thrill in his job after all. This business of making himself known to a blind date now . . . Before the war he would have gayly stuck a bright red rose in his buttonhole when he had sauntered forth to keep a rendezvous with a blind date. But the fella, Hitler, had changed all that.

Playing the age-old, adventurous game to the new war rules, the Spook daringly gunned his idling engine into roaring life. Three times he blasted her, then bent a searching downward gaze into the soupy blackness. The racing of the engine would have to serve in place of the identifying red rose of peaceful times. Everything depended on whether or not the unknown second party to the blind date would recognize the British voice of the power plant, and understand.

Off the Spitfire's left wing ghostly blue fingers of searchlights instantly reached skyward, groping for him. Spook Rafferty swore at them roundly.

In another minute the surrounding sky would be laced with exploding steel stuff.

Of a sudden he tensed, his jaw tight against the plastic glass. An answering pinpoint of light was glowing like a diamond against the dark velvet cushion of the black-out!

It winked up at him—three times!



## CHAPTER II

*The Message*

THE Spook needed no further invitation. His blind date at Boulogne had not stood him up.

Reckless now, literally thumbing his nose at danger, Rafferty killed the engine. He gently nosed the Spitfire down in a spiraling circle, keeping the tiny winking light for a center hub. A long wink and a short wink. Dot and dash! Concentrating while gliding down the invisible air hill he copied the blinker's urgent message on the pad strapped to his thigh. Dash-dash-dot!

Afraid? Not while the dead game un' below in a Hades of Nazi making was fearlessly setting him an example. Resolutely writing, the Spook's one hope was the message would reach an end before he and the Spitfire ended up with altitude minus six feet.

A final extra long flash that could mean, "Cheerio." Not any too soon! The Spook dropped the pencil and grabbed a handful of controls. He was positive that he had been flirting with the rooftops of blacked-out Boulogne.

Oily, lemon-colored tongues of fire were viciously licking out of the darkened void. Mobile pom-pom units, he told himself. Spiteful brutes! He gave the Mark 111 a grueling workout in driving her back upstairs. Though sucking wind when nearing the top, the sleek green bus finally won temporary respite in the high-hanging mist. Luck of the Irish! For seconds later, Jerry interceptors were savagely raking the spot where the Spitfire was seen to vanish.

Trusting to instinct, the Spook leveled off and high-tailed out of there. Where to? No matter, just so long as it was not Boulogne.

The Spitfire had been stepping it off at a neat 350 m.p.h., for all of a

minute before he dared bullet her out bottomside of the fog layer. He was gambling that the hunters, if any, would be expecting him to pop out on top.

A quick look-see, and he treated himself to a natural breath. Boulogne and the furiously fussing ack-acks lay aft of the Spitfire's empennage. It had been a proper narrow squeak. Had he lingered, more than likely he would have been compelled to swap steel compliments with the meddling Messers.

That thought set his lips to vibrating like wasp wings. Dash it! Considering his devilish knack of slinging steel straight, he might have shot the ships out from under a Messer pilot, or two. The Spook's troubled conscience described a guilty nip-up, but P. O. Rafferty, oddest bird of an odd lot, devoted nary a guess to what his own fate might have been had the Jerry blackbirds caught him in their gun-sights.

Riding high, he roared off in the direction of Britain. He was close in when a night-flying Defiant, equipped with the newest magnetic detector devices and individual searchlight, rose up, wraithlike, and looked him over. The Spook grinned in the cold reflected light of his dials. Comforting, meeting up with a bird of a feather.

He hummed a snatch of, "There will always be an England." A fine ditty, that. The tunesmith who turned it out really had something there.

Tossing off altitude in a long, stretched-out glide, he safely returned the Spitfire to its hush-hush nest. No sooner had he lifted the lid and ladled himself out onto the ground than the E. O. was plucking at his sleeve.

"You gave us a bad mo' of it, Spook," he confessed. "Watchers on the cliffs, along with the Coastal Command lads, were constantly relaying in reports that there was quite a 'to-do' stirring



in the vicinity of Boulogne. Reports didn't dovetail with Mr. Big's earlier instructions to the R.A.F. to steer shy of that particular invasion port while you were prowling about."

**Y**OUNG Rafferty, shrugging the cockpit cramps out of his muscles, chuckled.

"Wasn't really much of a show," he said. "Splashes of ground fire. And a zealous Jerry blighter or two winged up. So I promptly nipped off into the fog." Just as quickly he dropped his bantering tone. "How's the war going over here?" he demanded.

"Same old hit and run from the Jerries," the phlegmatic E. O. informed. "At least London bridge ain't falling down yet." But even as the engineer officer spoke, sudden memory struck him. "Lor' love a duck!" he exploded. "There's an Intelligence chap cooling his heels in the dispersal hut. A proper brass hat, he is—and waiting for you."

The Spook angled a glance at the Spitfire. Now in the hands of the efficient mechs, she was being hand-rolled down the ramp to her underground nest.

"A ruddy shyme, I calls it," one bird-herder complained. "A perfect weapon for an 'ace,' and 'e persists in fetchin' 'er back, time after time, same as she was the day she was 'atched out of the incubator."

Spook Rafferty's keen ears heard. The devils in his eyes stopped dancing. He was sorely tempted to tell off the disrespectful critic, but swiftly realized that the mechanic's opinion was shared by many others. Anyhow, he had neither the time nor inclination to explain to everyone who criticized him that, while still a pin-feathered fledgling in the R.A.F., he had seen his oldest brother turned into a flamer, that dark and never-to-be-forgotten day over Dunkirk. With his very soul seared with agony the Spook had watched Tommy, whom he idol-

ized, ride the thunderbolt to his journey's end. Some might believe that with such an agonizing memory twisting his soul, that Spook would have sworn vengeance against all Nazis. But to Spook Rafferty, the stark tragedy had been so poignant that he had known from that moment, that should he attempt to make a flamer of every Jerry he happened upon, it would be merely to twist the knife of memory in his own heart. Each time he would see Tommy again flying into the Great Beyond on wings of fire.

The Spook pulled himself together with a jerk.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" he snapped at the uneasy E. O. "Even an Irishman can ill afford to try a B. I. brass hat's patience. Might get away with it with the P. M., or even the King—but never with an Intelligence chappie."

Silently, the E. O. fell in step at his side. He, too, had overheard the grumbling mech giving the gun to his loose-wagging jaw. A thoughtless bounder.

The Spook was hardly inside the dispersal hut before the Intelligence officer was pumping his hand. "Gad, man! You've turned a neat trick for our side this night." His hand-clasp emphasized his compliment.

Embarrassed, Rafferty shifted from one leg to the other.

"That's spreading it on a bit thick, sir," he mumbled. "A routine flight best describes my contribution to the evening's work." Chap over there in Boulogne really did the job."

The brass hat's fingers were eager as he took from Spook the important dot-and-dash-covered sheet of pad paper.

"Oh, yes, yes, quite! Chap in Boulogne—if the helpful party is a chap? We wouldn't be knowing about that." His muttering seemed to hold a riddle.

Avidly the eager Intelligence man perused Rafferty's copy of the coded message.



"I say, but this is strange," he finally said. "Our unknown agent at the opposite end blinked this off in plain everyday Morse code. Look!"

He showed the message which read:

HEAVY CONCENTRATION ENEMY  
BARGES AND MECHANIZED TROOPS  
AT ARSAT SUR MER RUMORED AT-  
TEMPTED INVASION KEEP IN  
TOUCH

The Intelligence man was moving toward the telephone.

"The whole of it may yet turn out to be bait," he gave us his personal opinion. "Lure the R.A.F. to Arsat Sur Mer, and hop on 'em with a superior force. Still, the final decision does not rest with me."

He unhooked the instrument. There was no delay, for a direct wire to Intelligence had been held open for him.

The Spook patiently waited. The brass hat's reference to the mysterious chap in Boulogne as "our unknown agent" had made Rafferty's natural bump of curiosity itch. Intelligence was supposed to know everything—especially the identity of its own individual cells spotted throughout Naziland.

Mayhap the bright brass hat had anticipated that the Spook would ask bothersome questions about the blind date arranged for him by B. I. But Spook Rafferty had not been unduly interested. He was interested now, though. And moreover he resented the Intelligence officer hinting that B. I. had no record on the agent in Boulogne.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, when the brass hat turned around. "Did I understand you to say that the party who handled the blinker over there a little while back is not an Intelligence's roster?"

"Right you are," Mr. Big's clever assistant gravely assured him. "Rather irregular, unorthodox and the like, too. First inkling we received of his existence was night 'fore last. With

devil a mind for his own safety he dared, with his blinking light, to flag down a group of our bombers returning from a raid. Just on a hunch our lads refrained from dropping a stick of eggs astraddle the fella's noggin, and instead received information we discovered to be truthful. And there you have the story as we of Intelligence know it. Oh, yes! One of a bomber's crew had the presence of mind to note the exact position of the weird blinker on his map. It was included in the report on the strange incident. Bless me! We have a crying need of a trusted agent in the invasion area. Even though the connection be but a one-way one."

"Thank you, sir!" The Spook stepped aside. "But for the life of me, sir, I can't figure how the unknown managed to work his light in a blacked-out area. The Nazis do not hesitate to rub out any one who so much as strikes a match."

The man from Intelligence was obliging. "There are ways, Mr. Rafferty," he said, smiling. "Simple ways that elude the German mind, because of their very simplicity. My guess is that our free lance agent hustled into a convenient fireplace inside his hideaway, soon as he recognized the rolling beat of your Spitfire's engine. After that he had only to hold an electric torch up inside the chimney and work the button. Its flashing was completely concealed from all persons abroad in the streets."

The stunt did seem simple enough in the telling. But what, the Spook was thinking, if a prowling Jerry had happened to bucket over the chimney-top at the moment when the volunteer British agent was hard at his incriminating blinking? By now the Nazis would have put his lights out permanently, for the courageous chap.

**F**LYING OFFICER RAFFERTY absent-mindedly shook hands with the man from Intelligence who



was saying:

"Must toddle along now. Good night, Mr. Rafferty—and the rest of you gentlemen."

The door opened and shut with a bang. Young Rafferty fumbled for his smokes.

"We live and learn," he mused aloud. "Used to look upon the war as a messy business of mud, blood and duds. With myself in the personally despised dud class. Then comes up a blind date. I'm thrown into contact with two other duds—a sturdy lad in Boulogne, and our visitor, the brass hat."

"Which proves what, Spook?" someone asked impatiently. Rafferty grinned.

"Which proves that dud brains are as important as bullets in this scrap. I shall hold my chin up in the future."

"Brains versus bullets!" suggested a laughing member of the hush-hush detail. "Why not pepper the next Jerry who crosses your path with thought pellets, chum? Or, better still, knock twenty of the blighters out of the fighting via remote control thinking. That should win you your spurs as the ace of brains."

Pilot Officer Rafferty could take it. "It's an idea," he said, grinning. "I may take a flyer at it."

"Come, come now, maties," protested the engineer officer. "Spook is Irish, remember. Dare an Irishman and he'll jolly well try to do anything."

A roaring and thundering overhead abruptly terminated the jesting. All eyes turned toward the ceiling. Death, the Grim Reaper, was sharpening his scythe. But for whom?

"Our chaps—bombers with fighter escort," Spook Rafferty said tersely, and relieved the strain. "Probably on their way to check up on that reported enemy barge concentration at Arsat Sur Mer. Another hour and we'll know if my blind date is to be trusted. He was peeling out of his flying suit.

"What say you all to a sup of beer? I'd like to drink to a thorough scrambling of the Nazis' plans for a boat ride across the Channel."

"A toast to that—aye, a proper toast, Rafferty!" someone else loudly urged when the drinks were before them.

With mock gravity, the Spook raised a foaming beaker high, and cleared his throat. His voice roared out:

Here's to ol' Hitler, the limburger cheese,  
Britain will beat him down to his knees.  
He'll break his black heart on our Channel  
line  
And in Hades burn moaning *Die Wacht  
am Rhine*.

Heads nodded in hearty approval. The hush-hush crew were unanimously agreed that the Spook, for all his queer quirks, was a droll lad.

## CHAPTER III

### "Death Watch"

EMPTY glasses suddenly started jiggling on top the table. Fascinated, the group stared in silence. The building itself took its cue from the giddy glasses and joined in the strange dance. A picture fell from the wall with a tinkling crash.

A young ground officer jumped. Spook Rafferty, his pale eyes giving off sparks, smiled.

"Boulogne!" he clipped. "And from the rumbling I judge the bomber chaps are treating Jerry to a proper combing."

"Might be the other way around," the more practical engineer officer cautiously reminded. "Our recent guest, the brass hat, mentioned 'bait' designed to lure the R.A.F. into a trap."

The Spook's patience slipped a cog. "Dash it, why did you have to bring that up?" he complained. "I was look-



ing ahead with pleasure to another rendezvous over Boulogne with my blind date." Muttering, he stalked out into the night.

"Barmy!" the E. O. declared without malice. "Bunty in the crumpit! That's what he is. Refuses to clip the tail feathers of a single Jerry blackbird. And yet he's eager to wing solo into the enemy blighters' own bailiwick, inviting them to take free pot-shots at his reckless head."

In the direction of the French Channel coast, searchlights marched like a parade of ghosts to the thundering applause of ack-ack and pom-pom bursts. Great fires roaring along the waters edge formed an awesome base for the pyrotechnical display. To Spook Rafferty it appeared as though all creation had violently swapped ends. Inferno was disrupting the peace of the high places.

Deliberately, he turned his back to that flaming horizon. Men were being seared with flame there, turned into ashes perhaps, as his brother had been. A rotten mess, war!

With seething torment rioting within him, Pilot Officer Rafferty walked in a large aimless circle. By the time he was again approaching the darkened dispersal hut the raw night wind had cooled his hot eyes. Somewhere overhead spinning props flailed a defiant note. Returning bombers beating back to Britain!

The Spook hesitated with his finger on the black-out button that would darken the hut's interior. He was not a practised praying chap. Still, he couldn't see any harm in trying. Impulsively he swept off his cap and bowed his head.

"Please bring them all home safe! Amen," he whispered. Slightly fuzzy around the edges, his homely little prayer, but none-the-less sincere. He was smiling again when he ducked inside the hut.

Except for the communications officer on duty at the miniature switch-

board, the main room was empty.

"Party broke up early tonight," the communications man explained. "Not so much as an enlisted man stirring in the caverns underground. Every last son tucked away snug in his little bunk, I daresay. It's a rum war we're fighting. And when I signed up I hoped to win a piece of tin to wear on my chest!"

The Spook yawned. "You're lucky at that," he drawled sleepily. "Odds are you would have the precious bit of tin *inside* your chest by now, if you hadn't been assigned to this detail. Hard lines, of course, for a chap who wants to be a hero. But that's the way the dice roll in this blinking row. Lads who fire the bullets and the bombs would be a total loss if it were not for the brains that plot the targets for them to aim at. Take this brainy lad in Boulogne, now—"

**A**MUTED mechanical buzzing at the communications officer's elbow interrupted. Deftly he plugged in.

"Thirty-nine," he said into the transmitter. "Yes sir! Yes sir! Right here, sir!" Quickly he fingered a switch-key, and swung back to the Spook. "For you, chum. Zero calling. Take it on the wall phone."

Wondering, Spook unhooked the instrument. "Hello there, Rafferty!" a familiar voice barked crisply in his ear. "Relish telling you this. Our chaps found the concentration of enemy equipment at Arsat Sur Mer. Like goldfish in a bowl." A chuckle, then the speaker went on: "They smashed it into a jolly fine mess. Grand evening's work. All got back safe." A pause, then, "Party in Boulogne is utterly reliable. Must get lonesome there in those beastly surroundings. Do the decent thing and visit him again."

The Spook understood the thinly veiled command. "Right, sir! With your permission, I shall give him an-



other buzz tomorrow."

"Sporting of you, Rafferty," said the voice at the other end of the wire. "Good night!"

The Spook hung up, smiling.

"Pretty good egg, that brass hat," he commented to the communications man. "Fixed it up for me to be winging out under the stars tomorrow evening to another secret rendezvous with my blind date. And it's lovely she is, I'll vow. Hair, black and soft as an Irish wood elf's cloak. Eyes of a blue that'd make the bluebells of Scotland droop with envy. England's roses blooming in her cheeks—"

"Bird dust!" the soured communications man rudely silenced him. "Likely your Boulogne buddy is a huge muscled ogre, with a lusty zest for danger."

The corners of the Spook's expressive mouth turned downward. "Tch, tch! There's no romance in this ruddy ruckus, or them fighting it," he chided mournfully. "A curse on this mechanized war where everything is done according to blue prints."

He yawned prodigiously and angled a contemplative glance at a jazz armchair, made out of an old bucket-seat. The watching communications man sensed what he was thinking.

"Now don't you be parking your romantic carcass there!" he bleated. "I've reports to get out, and if I have to listen to you mooning, I'm likely to include an 'X' for a kiss for Mr. Big."

Spook Rafferty grinned. "Why not?" he suggested. "And close the message, 'With love and hisses, Adolf.'"

His answer was a handy magazine scaled at his head.

Spook laughed and nimbly ducked into an adjacent cubicle. The cot beckoned invitingly. And only a short time later, a steady purring carried to the ears of the communications officer on the other side of the thin partition.

"Snoring! the blighter!" he muttered, and told himself he would risk a quid on it that with Spook's engine ticking over like that, the romantic Rafferty was off on a dream flight to Boulogne.

Decent sort, the Spook. If he could only conquer his squeamishness about potting Jerry blackbirds he could win a piece of prized tin as a decoration for his tunic in no time. The veteran communications officer, hardened to the horrors of war, after six months active duty with the B.E.F. in Belgium, was confident that Rafferty would change after a close-in tangle with Jerry. Once the enemy got to tugging his feathers, he would either have to tug back in self defense, or else.

The next day brought dud weather. A swirling fog of blanket thickness completely blotted out all air activity. Nevertheless, the Spook saw to it that the Mark 111 Spitfire was groomed for a dash to Boulogne, though his hush-hush pals strove to talk him out of it.

"**I**T ISN'T a fit night for man or beast," the engineer officer argued. "You'll jolly well end up with the engine on top of you for a tombstone. Why, you can't see your hand in front of your face, let alone see your blind date's blinker."

Chuckling, Rafferty zipped his jacket closed.

"Man or beast, maybe," he scoffed. "But I'm a shadowy spook, a slinker who flits through the darkness with ghost guns silent." His hand closed on the E. O.'s arm. "Give a thought to that chap, living on borrowed time in Boulogne," he softly suggested. "Someone has to let him know that England appreciates what he's doing. He'll die easier, when his number comes up, for knowing that."

Shortly after, Spook Rafferty knifed up through the mists, and was gone.

Back in the dispersal hut, three



scowling hush-hushers who liked him a lot, though vowing that they did not understand his eccentric ways, sat down to watch the clock.

Thirty minutes! Three-quarters of an hour! Barring accidents the Spook should be back over Britain by now, groping around for a hole in the impenetrable fog. The odds were overwhelmingly against their safely bringing the brash fool down to earth on a beam. And much less the chances of "talking him in."

Ears strained while the hands of the timepiece appeared to move with devilish speed. Two hours! Unable to endure the suspense, the engineer officer muttered something and stumbled out of the room.

The others perked up when a signal flashed on the switchboard. But it was only the enlisted man on duty at the "Electric Ear" post reporting that all was quiet upstairs.

A pile of smoked cigarettes grew in the center of the table. Those keeping the lonely vigil were determined to sit the night out. Death watch! Eyes raised when another signal flashed on the board. Perhaps that was the brass hat from Intelligence calling. Quite likely the swivel chair soldier would ask matter-of-factly to speak to Rafferty, with never a thought about the unsurmountable obstacles he had placed in the pilot's path.

The gloom-burdened death watch saw the back of the communications officer's neck turn red in anger. If he should fly off the beam and tell the cold-blooded brass hat a stinging earful, they would lie like officers and gentlemen in his defense. Yes, stand up and swear that the important brass hat must have been listening in on a crossed wire.

The red crept up to the communications officer's ears until they were threatening to give off sparks. Tension increased. Then without so much as a "Good-by" the officer pushed back

his head set, and slowly faced the others.

"That was—the Spook!" he grimly announced. Stunned, they gaped at him.

"So help me! Our little playmate is in London, about to have a high old time for himself, I judge. Insists that after he blasted out 'cheerio' on his engine to the chap in Boulogne, he promptly got lost in the fog."

One of the mourners jerked to his feet and threw his cap at the inoffensive clock.

"I know what you were about to say," he shouted angrily. "Rafferty flew and flew. At last he came to a hole in the mist. He dived into it, and when he tumbled out the bottom he found himself right over Croyden airdrome."

The communication officer's head wagged sagely.

"You took the words right out of Rafferty's mouth," he solemnly confirmed.

**T**HE four hush-hushers pooled choice vituperation in condemning the absent and very much alive Spook who had been the object of their earlier grieving.

"Only an Irishman would do a trick like that," one of the premature death watch said, as he bitterly wept into his flat beer. "Strike me pink, if he didn't have it planned to fly off on a solo binge! Us eating our hearts out here, and him laughing at us in London."

Grumbling, the hush-hushers stormed away to their cots.

The first thin, watery light of dawn revealed a sky cluttered with hurrying splotches of wind-blown scud, much like terrified refugees fleeing a dictator's wrath. Sudden and commanding, the throaty growling of an all-out engine added to the illusion.

Inside a drab, weather-beaten hut, that existed only because Jerry black-birds scorned to waste a bomb on so



worthless a target, sleep-drugged men sat up like automatons on their bunks. The persistent ringing of alarm bells jarred them into wakefulness. Clad in pajamas, the red-eyed communications officer rushed wildly to his switchboard.

"Listening post reporting, sir," he heard. "Plane heading this way fast, and flying low. Have buzzed the gun position to stand by."

The communications man gruffed a terse, "Carry on! I shall maintain contact here."

Seconds dragged. Then, "All clear, sir! Strange craft is powered with a Rolls Vulture. . . . There she shines! It's our bus, sir. The Spitfire, Mark Hundred and eleven!"

The sleepy communications officer rolled his hands into fists. He had a strong yen to box the prodigal Spook's ears.

The Spook shot the Spitfire into a landing much like a tardy nocturnal bat returning to Hades. Chipper as a lark, he bounced in on his assembled fellows.

"Hi, Puritans!" he airily greeted the dour-visaged group. "Got homesick for you graybeards after a night of it in London. Could hardly want to get back."

"Hear the dissipated bounder, with his eyes looking like poached eggs in blood," the engineer officer jeered. "Homesick, 'e says. Sneaked off on us, the selfish ingrate, to burn the candle at both its ends."

The Spook grinned. "Burned it in the middle, too," he said cheerfully. "What a night! Talk and tiffin with the lads of my old Spitfire outfit. And then between the blankets at the stroke of ten."

"A shameless prevaricator," one of his skeptical mates accused.

"Cross my heart," Rafferty solemnly insisted. "Why I'd never cheat on my Boulogne steady date."

The hush-hushers gave up in great disgust.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Ace or Joker*

**R**AFFERTY stole through perilous sky to keep a tryst at Boulogne again that evening. Danger lurked at every turn—from Jerry blackbirds swarming to vent their fury on England for having bombed and blasted the Nazi invasion fleet.

How had the R.A.F. learned of the carefully worked out concentration at Arsat Sur Mer? Spook's guess was that the frantic *Fuehrer* would cheerfully give away a generous slice of Poland in exchange for the information. But Rafferty himself would part with a year's pay just to know the unknown who had worked the mysterious blinker.

A thick pall of poisonous smoke overhung Boulogne like a funeral canopy. The Spook despaired. Even the powerful enemy searchlights failed to penetrate the red-tinted blanket of noxious gases. The talking blinker would not blink tonight.

Rafferty, however, was doggedly determined though to carry on at his end. Instrument reckoning guided him to his destination. All dramatics were out. This was his job. The one and only job suited to his code of silent guns.

A gray-eyed ghost riding a shadowy ship, he threw off as much altitude as he dared in a deep dive. As the bus hurtled down the invisible air-hill, angry fire-red eyes opened up all around. Searching orbs of the smoke blinded Nazi ack-acks.

The Spitfire plummeted to a quieter strata in the deadly game of blind-man's buff. Enemy antis were left flinging futile vengeance into the empty higher regions. Spook leveled off. Once, twice, three times he jiggled the throttle, causing the engine to bellow forth three short, sustained



roars. Britain's greetings to her brave son in Nazi-occupied Boulogne.

The message delivered, Rafferty high-tailed for home.

He was hopping the Channel when a new worry filtered into his consciousness. The coldly efficient Nazi Gestapo might have tracked down the free-lance British agent and erased him. The thought jarred the Spook, for he had been building up a genuine admiration for the unknown blinker chap. Fate owed the courageous agent a fighting man's finish, not a cold-blooded volley of bullets at dawn.

Death, when tapping a brave recruit for Valhalla, should at least let the warrior ride to the "Great Perhaps" on a soldier's ticket. Tommy Rafferty, Spook's brother, had been extended such a privilege when summoned to take his place in the Phantom Legion. Rafferty's hush-hush mates were quick to detect the change in him when he returned to the nest. They recognized the symptoms. The war, at last, was beginning to snipe at the young pilot officer's code that was contrary to the age-old rule of kill before you are killed.

"It'll get him, just as it gets us all," the war-wise communications officer grimly prophesied. "Spook'll be given his choice of two cards—ace or joker! I'm hoping he turns up the first one. Because a joker in this rum go is destined to end up nuttier than a fruitcake."

Four nights of visibility zero, brought about by fog, smoke and ground mists, played hob with the fretting Spook's heretofore admirable self-control. He could not sleep for thinking about his blind date at Boulogne. Each evening had seen him wing off like a loon to keep the rendezvous. Yet not once had a message been winked out to him that all was well.

Rafferty ceased to regard his job as purely a trip in the interest of

B. I. It had developed into a sacred mission, a struggle to stay the relentless tapping finger of the Master of Destiny from claiming another too courageous recruit for the spirit host. The Spook was not afraid to take out a stack in the deadly game that up unto now had seen the Grim Reaper rake in all the chips. He would gamble much to win one lone blue chip—an extended lease on life for the agent in Boulogne.

There came a night when the Spitfire limped back to the nest, shrapnel-battered and riddled. Rafferty silenced the curious bird-herders with a blunt:

"Solder up the holes! And no marking the wounds with swastikas. The blighters couldn't help but lose a bird that all but flew down their throats."

The mechs exchanged knowing glances. Signs indicated that the passive pilot officer was commencing to cook up a mess of no-good for Jerry. Any day now, they expected to hear Rafferty's Spitfire gun-muzzles a-whistling when he returned.

The dud weather stretched into the following week, and the Spook acted like a caged hawk. When he took to shunning the company of his mates, the hush-hushers decided to do something about it. They actually pleaded with him to soft-pedal the risky business of trying to renew contact with the Boulogne blind date.

"Like as not the chap lit out while the lighting was good after the R.A.F. scuttled the Nazi barges," the E. O. argued. "Nimble lads, the B. I. agents. Hop right out from under your thumb like fleas."

"Quite so!" Spook Rafferty conceded. "But I've a feeling that our little confederate, the barge-buster, is no highly trained intelligence agent. His blinking out what he had to say in simple Morse code points to that. In my book he's a stray Tommy Atkins doing the best he can for king and empire. Therefore, it's not for me to be letting him down."



Convinced that the soft-spoken Spook was fast becoming rather hard to handle the engineer officer tossed the grave matter back onto Fate's lap. After all, who was he to think that he could weave Rafferty's strange string into the crimson pattern of the war god's making?

Darkness came and reckless Spook Rafferty again set forth on the fog-shrouded sky road that led to Boulogne. A black mood was upon him. On two previous nights the Nazis had created steel-centered storms in his path. Hard lines, that! Lucky for somebody that the cursed mist-veil had concealed the annoying ack-acks. Ground gun crews were not exempted in his book as were the flying Jerries. Should he be forced to strafe a too persistent anti-battery, he at least would not have to bask in the glow of a human torch.

Beetling along, the brooding Spook suddenly buck-jumped clear of the seat. Ghostly mist tentacles were no longer clutching at the speeding Spitfire. The fog field was breaking!

Rafferty boosted his bus upstairs. He would have to work fast. The Jerries would soon be up and patrolling. Cutting corners off caution, the Spook hit in over Boulogne, howling like a hawk on a spree. He hoped that the blind date would hear him coming. No time this to be horsing around with signaled "hellos" and "cheerios."

An exploding puff-ball served notice that the ack-acks had been expecting him. Three bursts detonated top and bottom of the Spitfire. Rafferty thought grimly that it would take a lucky shot to do him in. And up until tonight the Boulogne Nazis' luck had been bad. He had a trick up his sleeve, too.

**H**E rocketed over the area with throttle all out and roaring as if bent on business far beyond Boulogne. Spook was gambling on it that Nazi ears had identified him as a lone

fighter plane, hardly worthy of extra attention.

The gamble proved to be a good one, when the antis ceased their spiteful grumbling, seeing that he was not an egg-laying bomber. The pompom throwers were satisfied to leave him for their flying comrades patrolling the back areas to deal with.

Rafferty changed direction and stole back to the rendezvous. Engine muted, he gentled the Spitfire down from its high perch. No winking eye welcomed him. Trailing an exhaust-made funeral plume behind, the Spitfire continued to spiral down.

In respectful memory of a blind date, the Spook was turning saddened eyes to the graveyard below—when it happened. Glittering bright like a diamond in a jeweler's showcase, the tiny light flickered in the surrounding black-out. Rafferty pounded the control in a sudden frenzy of joy. The star of the brave was shining its message to him.

The Spook had his glove off, and his pencil poised over the pad in an instant. What he wrote, though he copied it down faithfully, was only secondary in importance. The really big thing was that the unknown mysterious agent still had a whole skin. A question of borrowed time, of course, and not for long at the most. Still, who could say for certain that the stout fella would not pull it off?

Spook continued to write feverishly. The chap was getting a proper load off his chest. Then Rafferty's pencil jerked at sound of an unmistakable thud. The pesty ack-acks had located the Spitfire again! Splintering steel ominously clanged against the armored protecting shell. Couldn't afford to thumb his nose at the Nazis. But what with working the controls and pushing a pencil a chap would have to have three hands. Spook cursed them for being ignorant bouncers who horned in on a private conversation.



A particularly savage salvo set the Spitfire to pitching and bucking like a cantankerous polo pony. A string of "flaming onions" sprouted dangerously near the careening bus. It was no longer possible for the Spook to distinguish the winking blinker in the sputtering maze of gun-muzzle flashes down there. The blighters were throwing everything but the Boulogne docks up at him. Spook Rafferty chuckled it, and fled.

A formidable British fighter escort beating home after a bit of bombing business converged on him over the invasion coast. The hard-pressed hush-husher gladly joined the flying armada. Riding snug as a bug under an eagle's wing, the Spook bent an eye to the pad still on his thigh. In his pin-feather days he had mastered the simple Morse Code. Believing it to be no violation of military law he strung the dots and dashes together to form words. Words that started icy little feathers of fear brushing up and down his spine. Gad! He was reading the unknown agent's slightly premature obituary! For what he read was:

ENEMY SUSPECTS ME, ONLY A  
MATTER OF HOURS. HOPE TO  
CHEAT FIRING SQUAD. TONIGHT  
AT TEN I SHALL WALK OUT TO THE  
VERY END OF PAR-SU-QUAY JETTY,  
TURN MY EYES TO ENGLAND AND  
KEEP RIGHT ON WALKING. CHEER—

**A** SOB shook the Spook. A ghastly way to disappoint the Nazi executioners—but that British agent would see it through! His chin up until the fatal second, he would exit smiling, as the swirling English Channel waters closed over his head.

Par-su-quay jetty, at ten! Rafferty groaned in his anguish. The scene and time were set, waiting for the principal actor to walk on stage in the last act of the stark drama.

Par-su-quay at ten!

Half-crazed, Rafferty suddenly twisted the Spitfire out of the droning

formation. He still had his hole card to turn up in the deadly game against the mocking master, Death. Ace or joker!

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## CHAPTER V

### *With Guns Whistling*

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**S**POOK RAFFERTY all but scared the hush-hushers out of their wits when he slanted the Mark 111 in to a jarring bounce-landing.

"Don't put her to bed," he snapped at the startled bird-herders.

They stared after him when he splashed his way to the dispersal hut. Within a minute he was crouched over the bewildered communications officer at the switchboard.

"Gad, man, hurry!" he roared. "Get Zero to the phone! It's a matter of life or death. And if you dare to ask me what's new about that in a war, I'll brain you."

Quite convinced that he, Spook, had finally blown his blooming topper, the communications officer's fingers flew.

"Thirty-nine calling Zero. Imperative! . . . Thirty-nine calling Zero. Imperative!"

The urgent request was quickly relayed to the very heart of B. I. and the communications man relinquished his seat to the agitated Spook. Yet for all his pent-up excitement, Rafferty talked like a man possessed of all his mental buttons. Once he pounded the switchboard with his fist for emphasis.

"You've got to do it, sir! Regulations be hanged!" He defied the brass hat, Intelligence, and the whole of the Empire's forces. "If you insist it can't be done, I shall jolly well try to pull it off myself! So help me! I'll kite my crate back to Boulogne and set her down on the chap's front lawn."

When Rafferty spoke again it was in a more respectful tone.



"Fully aware of the danger, sir. It's a suicide detail. Sorry you won't let me go along. Yes, sir, Par-su-quay jetty at ten. And God bless you, sir!" The connection severed, Spook Rafferty's head sank down on his folded arms. The silent communications officer let his hand drop on the young pilot's shoulder.

"I wouldn't be knowing what it is all about, chum, but I'm in your corner," he softly pledged.

It was all of five minutes before the Spook looked up. Then, for the want of something to do, he shared the fantastic story with the communications man. He went so far as to show the hastily jotted-down code message.

But even as the Spook was talking, a sleek, powerfully engined "skeeter" boat, running without lights, and with a picked landing party on board, got under way. A bone in its teeth, the speedy hull cut through the waves. The friendly white cliffs of home dropped rapidly astern. Seventeen miles, as the gulls fly, to snatch a game 'un from under the noses of Nazi Gestapo agents. A suicide mission to prevent a suicide. Ironical!

Intelligence having put the machinery in motion, was now ordering all air warcraft to remain out of the area, lest they attract Jerry blackbirds to a surprise feasting. B. I. could do no more.

Spook Rafferty finally got up from the switchboard, to restlessly pace the floor. He froze in stride when the stuttering beat of Jerry bombers, high up, seeped in to the dispersal hut.

"Some of them will be winging back to their bases before long," he said. "It'll go hard with our 'fish' should the blighters sight it."

The communications officer was left open-mouthed when Rafferty suddenly dashed out of the hut. No good would come from trying to stop a madman, so the officer sat tight. Great waves of thunder rocked the hut, then all was quiet on the hush-hush drome.

The communications officer looked up and smiled when the engineer officer stamped into the room.

"Wager tuppence that the ghost howls tonight," he offered. "Comes back with his guns whistling."

A COIN spun from the E. O.'s fingers and bounced on the table.

"Guns silent or whistling, just so he comes back," he said grimly.

Spook Rafferty climbed the Spitfire to a watching-post well out and above the wide strip of dull liquid silver, to stand guard there. Twice he was compelled to beetle off and hide in the high-up haze. Jerry blackbirds were making a bombers' holiday of it. A lone fighter plane would not stand a chance in an attack on those birds of ill omen. Too, he was bound to his code of silent guns.

Spook was flying the back leg of a triangle for the sixth time when a tiny dark object moving at the point of a rippling "V" crawled into the range of his vision, on the surface of the water. Was it *the* boat? If he dropped down to see, he would be inviting a storm of machine-gun bullets. The suicide crews made it their habit to shoot first and investigate later. But on the other hand, the craft wave-hopping toward England might be a Nazi raider ferrying a desperate landing party.

The neutral moon that owed allegiance to no mortal, touched off the hidden fireworks with a darting shaft of cold light. A Jerry fighter streaking back to its base, spotted the watercraft in the brief but revealing flash of moonlight.

Rafferty's first inkling of the flying enemy's presence was when a dropped flare, like some falling star, suddenly dissipated the surrounding darkness. A geometric pattern of white-hot chalk marks instantly formed upon the blackboard that was the Channel's surface. Tracer! Green flame flickered on gun-muzzles in answer to the div-



ing Jerry's challenge.

Spook now had his answer. A duel to the death between "tin fish" and an armored bird! The odds favored the Nazi. Rafferty's trembling fingers inched toward his own gun-trip. It would be simple for him to line-up the unsuspecting Jerry and rub him out of the war. But the sickening memory of a flaming torch that had been his brother, Tommy, froze the Spook's moving hand. If only they would not burn after being dealt the fatal finisher!

Rafferty shut his eyes on the horrible picture conjured by his own thoughts. When he opened them the horror had become real and alive. A second Jerry had careened in from nowhere to assist the first one. It was not in the cards for the skeeter boat crew to survive so relentless an attack.

An ominous crackling electrified the air. The surface craft started a frantic zigzagging, seeking to escape from the flare-lighted area.

Something snapped in the Spook's mind. Ill-starred Jerry sons! They were not going to play cat-'n'-mouse with his blind date and get away with it! Rafferty, the heretofore flying robot, came to life.

Blazing, fighting mad, he plunged into the brawl. The element of surprise worked to his advantage. He sensed, rather than saw, the wing guns spit steel like driving hail in an early spring storm. The diving shadow that he in turn was diving on continued right on down to a watery grave, and into it.

Spook pulled the Spitfire out of the dive, stood her on her tail in a straining climb for fighting room. The remaining Jerry pounced on him in the darkness. It was as if some unseen hand had overturned a bee-hive inside the Spitfire's cockpit. Angry insects buzzed by the raging Rafferty's ears. One bounced from the dash and came to rest, hot and stinging, against his cheek.

Rafferty's snap-roll developed into an aerobatic zoom. Cheap, swagging exhibition, perhaps, but it shook off the buzzing bees. And he now had the black bulk of the Jerry Messer exactly where he wanted it.

The 37-millimeter cannon thudded out hammerlike blows. Rafferty watched the blackbird yaw wildly under the heavy pounding. He switched back to his wing guns.

Perhaps it was just as well that the Spook could not see the result of his own deadly handiwork. Vengeful steel opened little red eyes in the trapped Jerry pilot. And each eye wept crimson tears. With a dead hand on her stick the broken Messer spun into oblivion.

Rafferty scanned the black expanse of water in search of the skeeter boat. Gone! She had been granted a reprieve under the protecting mantle of his no longer silent guns.

**S**LANTING down to the home nest, the Spitfire triumphantly whistled the personnel of the hush-hush detail to attention. As the Spook ladled out he answered to the many excited inquiries:

"Just a brush. The story will sound much better if varnished with a sup of beer."

The gang could take a hint. They escorted him to the hut like a returned conquering hero.

A proper binge was blooming when uninvited guests arrived in a staff car. Gallant hush-hushers made haste in arising as the slowly brightening black-out lights revealed a wisp of a girl bundled in a much-too-large army overcoat. Chuckling, her escort, the by now familiar Intelligence brass hat, made the introduction.

"Pilot Officer Rafferty, Mademoiselle Ricaud, of Boulogne." The B.H.'s right eye winked discreet-like.

Dazed, the Spook could only stare. After all the clowning and joking his Boulogne blind date was really a girl!



"Gad, I just can't make myself believe that you winked out those blinker messages to me!" he haltingly whispered.

Mademoiselle Ricaud dimpled prettily under his direct gaze.

"*Oui, monsieur*, I enjoyed that honor," she shyly assured the awed pilot. "But you are to know that someone else was at my side, directing me. *Oui*, another *bon pilote* even as you are, *mon brave*. The Nazis had made a *descendu* of him during the terrible evacuation from Dunkirk." The French girl shuddered, then bravely resumed. "The *bon pilote* suffered a wound, *m'sieur*. *Le bon Dieu* led me that day to where he lay so horribly tangled up in his parachute." Mademoiselle Ricaud proudly tilted her firm little chin. "I am a true daughter of the France that will never die, *m'sieur*. The wounded English *pilote* was helped into my home, and hidden there. Loyal friends brought me information about the Nazis' intention to invade England. Surely, you know the rest of it, *m'sieur*!"

The French girl's story ended on a note of fatigue. Her ordeal of the hectic earlier evening had been a trying one.

The Spook glanced around the circle. Soldiers and gentlemen of England, they took the cue and solemnly raised their glasses.

"To the *entente cordiale* that has its

roots in Boulogne," Pilot Officer Rafferty proposed, "May it flower and thrive here in England. Mademoiselle Ricaud, of France, and the *bon English pilote*, Pilot Officer—" A blank look crossed the Spook's face.

"Embarrassing," he sheepishly admitted. "But for the life of me I can not recall the jolly fine chap's name."

The French girl smiled at his apparent bewilderment.

"The apology is mine to make, *m'sieur*. I did not speak of your *pilote* brother by name. It is Rafferty—Tommy Rafferty!"

**T**HE glass fell from the Spook's upraised hand. It was if a voice had spoken from out of the tomb of eternity.

Tommy—alive?

"Have pity on me, mademoiselle!" he appealed. "This awful suspense will crucify me!"

"*Non, m'sieur*, this is the resurrection," she gently corrected. "Tommy, your brother, is waiting outside in the car to greet you."

Some one had the presence of mind to push the black-out button and open the door. Spook Rafferty walked from darkness into the shining joy of a reunion with Tommy, returned from the dead.

Birds of a sturdy brood, the Raffertys. The Jerry blackbirds could testify to that.

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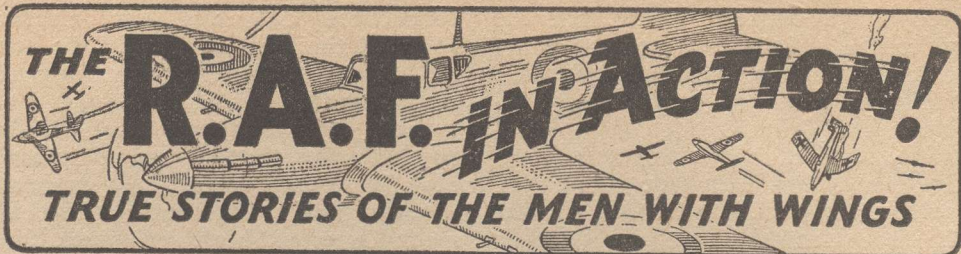
By **LIEUT. SCOTT MORGAN**

Plus Other Stories and Features

# AIR WAR

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# THE R.A.F. IN ACTION!

## TRUE STORIES OF THE MEN WITH WINGS

**T**HE stories below are all taken from the news letters of the British Air Ministry. They present an unforgettable round-up of the brave efforts of British pilots everywhere that redounds to the glory of the R.A.F. and offers a glimpse of that do-and-dare spirit which can never die! Inspiring, heroic and vivid, these true experiences of war deserve a high place in the world's literature of combat.

Written tersely, with no empty flourishes, no rhetoric, sticking closely to the facts, these little yarns tell the tale and sing the song of today's struggle against brutality! In their raw, vital, stark simplicity they reach the heights of the sagas of old.

With events happening as swiftly as they do today in the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of war, we could not hope to fashion these items into an up-to-the-minute picture. We do, however, present these utterances as deathless expressions of England's determination to win—and as stories that are important not only for the day and hour, but for all time!

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### HEAVY ATTACK ON BERLIN

**T**O attack the center of Berlin one night, aircraft of Bomber Command had to make their way through an intense box barrage.

"I was quite over-awed," one of our pilots said, "by the amount of upward evil there was."

But in spite of this attempt to protect the heart of the city, a large force of our bombers crossed and recrossed the German capital. Some flew along the Unter den Linden (within a mile or so of which, there are five of the main railway stations of Berlin), keeping on a steady course in order to take their aim.

Others directed their bombs at fires which the first wave of our aircraft had started, and others attacked goods-yards and factories to the south of the city.

Polish crews took part in this operation, their first attack on Berlin.

The night was dark, with some haze and low patchy cloud; but many of our crews had often made the trip before, so that they were familiar with the whole layout of Berlin, and all were determined not to return until they

had dropped their bombs on the most vital part of the city.

When the fires began, navigation was easier, and as they came in the crews of several aircraft saw a red glare in the sky which guided them directly to their objectives.

Thousands of incendiaries were rained on the city, and some of our heaviest high explosive bombs were used as well as a great load of high explosives of medium size.

In the areas selected for the main attack a great number of bombs were seen to explode, some in the center of the target. The flashes of the larger bombs lit up the factories at which they were aimed. Fire after fire sprang up, glowing red with a suffused glare through the mist.

On the way back from Berlin several of our aircraft passed over Hanover, which was also attacked in force on the same night, and the pilots saw fierce explosions in the heart of the city.

At Hanover the weather was rather more favorable for the observation of results, and fires were clearly seen in



every stage of their progress, from the white lights of the first outbreak to the sullen red, which showed that they had spread to every part of the buildings that had been hit.

In one district our pilots watched nine small fires thrust out their tentacles among factory buildings until the flames merged into one another and became three immense conflagrations.

Beside these two heavy attacks on the enemy's industrial organization, squadrons of bombers were also despatched to play their part in the battle of the Atlantic by attacking docks and shipyards in the great naval base of Kiel. In the teeth of bad weather and

formidable defences, our aircraft dropped their bombs within the area of the docks and other essential parts of the port.

From high explosive bombs which burst in the shipyard, seven strong fires took hold. Other pilots reported equally good results both from their incendiaries and high explosives. Two other ports, Bremen and Emden were also bombed.

Outside Germany there were other attacks on ports used by the Germans. At Calais the docks were raided, and at Den Helder there were many fires. This last attack, though on a small scale, was definitely an unqualified success.



## RECORD OF A ROYAL GAME

**W**HEN the King and Queen recently visited an R.A.F. fighter station in the East of England, Her Majesty was intrigued by the game of "shove halfpenny," a popular pastime in every officers' mess. She asked to be initiated into the game, and a young Flying Officer, incidentally one of the station's "aces" at the sport, became her opponent.

Now this particular station numbers among its most prized possessions a miniature "shove halfpenny" board, made by an airman, on which an inscription recording the fact of Her Majesty's game is surrounded by the five halfpennies she used in playing it.

The miniature board has been presented to the Station Wing Commander and today is proudly displayed to every visitor.



## R.A.F. FIGHTER THINKS HE EARNED THE IRON CROSS

**T**HERE is a British pilot attached to an R.A.F. night fighter squadron who thinks he has earned the Iron Cross. He knows just how it feels to be a German pilot over Britain in a blitz and it is an experience he does not want to repeat.

It was the British anti-aircraft batteries which gave this pilot the most unpleasant moments he has had in the air. He was caught in that most deadly form of anti-aircraft fire, the box barrage.

Here, in his own words, is what happened:

"I got a sight of one of the Huns, but unfortunately lost him at about 7,000 feet. Then the guns below suddenly opened up, and I was caught in a barrage.

"Shells—there seemed to be hundreds of them—were going up all

round me and I realised that I was trapped in a box barrage. I went first to the North, then to the East and all round the compass but I simply could not penetrate that terrifying curtain of shells.

"I wirelessly 'home' to see if they could help me but they told me in effect 'you got yourself into the barrage now get yourself out.' Not a bit cheering!

"Then I bit on a plan. I can't tell you what it was because the Germans might copy me, but believe me, it was a hair-raising experience and any Hun going through it certainly deserves an Iron Cross. It felt just as though the anti-aircraft boys below were wrapping me up in a shroud of shell bursts and weren't going to let me out.

"I have seen these barrages from the ground and they look bad enough



down there but they are just fireworks displays compared to what they seem like when you are actually in one."

This pilot officer was also flying a night fighter during a series of heavy raids on provincial centers. During one of these raids he flew over the damaged town with several other

British fighter pilots, and when the guns eased up, he helped to chase a number of German machines away. A pause in the gunfire helped him also to tackle the German machines over another town.

That night he was in the air for nearly six hours.



## A LIFT IN THE DESERT

**T**HE Royal Air Force tender speeds along the straight new road over the desert. On all sides, as far as the horizon, stretches a wilderness of sand and hummocks of limestone, relieved here and there by patches of camel thorn. In one direction, refreshing to the eye, sparkles a phantom lake that only a mirage could create in that arid waste.

A speck appears on the road, and as the car nears, resolves itself into a Bedouin. No popular novelist's hero, this, with hawk-like countenance and flashing eyes, such as fas-

cinated the maiden readers of "The Sheikh's Bride."

Still, a genuine child of the desert, perhaps he has never seen a motor car before, thinks the driver, as he slows down.

The Arab cranes eagerly forward. He extends the right arm, forearm upright, and, with closed fist and pointing thumb oscillating gently in the direction in which the car is traveling.

The hitch-hiker's signal has come to the desert.



## FIGHTER PILOT'S TWO-MILE DROP

**O**NE of the R.A.F.'s leading fighter pilots, baling out at 17,000 feet after destroying a Heinkel which damaged his machine, dropped over two miles before he pulled the ripcord. He purposely delayed the opening of his "chute" just to see what it felt like.

The pilot, who now holds a commission, was formerly a sergeant pilot and it was he who chased and shot down the Heinkel which bombed Buckingham Palace last year. He has already been credited with 23 confirmed and 10 unconfirmed victories, and has won the D.F.M. and bar.

"After finishing off this particular Hun," he said, "I realised that my ma-

chine was badly damaged and was thinking about getting out. Suddenly my mind was made up for me, for I was thrown out as the machine fell into a steep dive.

"I was just going to pull the ripcord when I thought I'd see what it felt like to fall through space.

"I found myself in a diving position with my head down and quite enjoyed it.

"At 5,000 feet, having fallen from 17,000, I thought it was time to pull up so I reached for the ripcord. Then my troubles started. The movement of my arm set me spinning like a top, but I got out of the spin and landed without a bruise."



## BRITISH BOMBER'S SALUTE

**O**N a recent dark and unpleasant night, a British bomber set off for a definite objective in enemy-occupied country.

Because of very bad weather, the bomber crew were unable to find the target. They flew around for some time searching for it, but finally had to give up.

Before they reached their alternative

target, however, they found themselves mixed up with a formation of German bombers which were presumably returning from a night raid on Britain. They turned and followed the Germans.

The enemy bombers soon reached their own aerodrome which lit up for them as they began to land. The British bomber,



being mistaken for a German, also received the landing signal.

So the pilot obligingly flew down as though to land.

Then his crew signaled on the flash lamp

"Heil Hitler"—and dropped a stick of bombs clear across the illuminated enemy aerodrome.

Our bomber then climbed again and came home.



## POLES MAN THE BALLOON BARRAGE

**T**HE exploits of Polish fighter pilots with the R.A.F. are well-known, but little is known of the Poles' other activities in the defence of freedom.

Now there will be a Polish detachment of the balloon barrage, under its own officers, in one of the most important target areas in Scotland.

Part of this detachment has already been in operation for some time and is so successful that it is this week being doubled, and many more crews are to be trained.

The present detachment came to Britain with many years' experience of balloons—the kite and observation type. In the words of an eye-witness, "Their rope and tackle work is an education to watch and they undertake major repair work on the barrage balloons."

But even more outstanding is the confidence with which they tackle the many difficulties a balloon can get into. For balloons are not always the docile things they appear, bloated and asleep in the sunny heavens, at the end of a cable. High winds and particularly blustery weather, like that of the present month, play havoc with captive barrage balloons and turn them into aggressive, vicious, uncontrollable monsters.

A wild elephant on the warpath is nothing to the fury of a balloon gone berserk.

At such times they can break men's limbs, the guy-rope catching a member

of the crew, picking him up like a straw in the wind and throwing him down again.

The whole cradle to which the balloon is attached is sometimes torn out, and even the heavy winch and balloon tractor has been plucked up and thrown down like a tiny toy.

The knowledge and skill, born of long experience, which the Poles possess, enables them to handle such situations with the least risk of damage to the balloons or to themselves.

The Polish officer in charge was with the Warsaw Balloon Squadron and took an active part in the defence of his country's capital. When it fell, he escaped into Rumania where, together with many Polish pilots, now in their own squadrons with the R.A.F., he was interned. He escaped through the Balkans to France and after the capitulation of that country came to Britain. All his men, he says, had similar adventures.

Few branches of national service afford so arduous a life as balloon command. Balloon crews are on duty 24 hours a day. A storm might require them to work all night, but even a change of wind may mean calling them from their beds. For that reason members of balloon crews cannot leave camp when officially off duty but are voluntary prisoners at the balloon site. Each man gets away for one day in ten but otherwise, for 24 hours a day, he must never be out of sight of his balloon.



## "PORPOISE PEDRO"

**"PORPOISE PEDRO,"** Italy's ace aerobatic pilot in East Africa, has been captured.

Pedro, who flew a CR42, earned the nickname from his amazing display of gallivanting in and out among the clouds, always just out of range of the guns of our bombers.

His stunting career finished when two South African fighter pilots sighted him and his companion and fired long bursts into them. One CR42 immediately burst into flames. From the other jumped Pedro, and when introduced later to the pilot who shot him down, he congratulated him, and gave



him the pilot wings which he tore from his own tunic.

Pedro often accompanied British bombers for miles, entertaining them with his trick flying. When he took to his parachute his aircraft soared, made two perfect loops as

if giving a spectacular farewell to the sky, then crashed earthwards.

The South African who shot down the other CR42 had already destroyed an S79 the same morning, bringing his personal total to thirteen.



## SIXTEEN YEARS IN THE SUDAN

**O**NE of the bomber squadrons of the R.A.F. has been stationed in the Sudan for sixteen years. In that time it has learned all the tricks of flying and maintaining aircraft in dusty desolate country, and ever since Italy entered the war, it has been hammering relentlessly at the enemy's colonial Empire.

Its aircraft are aloft incessantly night and day, and have flown more than five hundred hours in actual operations against the enemy. More than fifty tons of high explosive have been launched by them upon Eritrea and Abyssinia, and thousands of incendiaries have been rained down on enemy dumps and military buildings. Kas-sala, Biscia, Barentu, Agordat, Asmara, and Keren have trembled beneath their bombs.

Their chief activities, however, have been in Abyssinia, where they have given invaluable help to the military mission. The famous flight with a British officer and a Patriot chief in order that an important conference might be held with the heads of the

Emperor's troops was made by a pilot and observer from this squadron. The difficulties overcome in that flight and the landing on a nine thousand feet high plateau were recorded when the pilot was awarded the D.F.C.

Money, munitions and supplies have been dropped for Patriots from aircraft of this squadron, which has moved relentlessly after the retreating Italians, bombing their lines of communications, forts, troops, gun positions, and aerodromes.

The squadron has now earned three D.F.C.'s and three D.F.M.'s. One of the D.F.M.'s, a sergeant air gunner, continued to fire his gun at the enemy with coolness and accuracy after he had been wounded five times. On another occasion he shot down an Italian fighter.

The Italians have come to know and fear bombers of this famous squadron which has shot down several of their fighters and whose aircraft roar daily through anti-aircraft barrage to add still more devastation to their crumbling empire.



## ARMORED CARS OF R.A.F.

**T**HE Royal Air Force is fighting the battle of Libya not only in the air, but on land and sea as well.

Supporting the bombers and fighters, who constantly harass the retreating enemy, is a small company of armoured cars, a company with a long record of service in the deserts of Arabia and Sinai. Manned by R.A.F. personnel and commanded by a squadron leader, these armoured cars have been hundreds of miles forward of our main troops. Co-operating with a famous army mechanized regiment, this Royal Air Force company has won the admiration of their army colleagues.

On sea, the R.A.F. high-speed launches, fast motor-boats in the design of which Lawrence of Arabia played a part, have maintained constant patrols in the war area in the Mediterranean.

These craft, capable of a speed of thirty knots, with their three, five hundred horsepower engines "flat out," have braved rough seas, mined areas and sandstorms at sea, in their constant endeavours to locate aircraft down in the sea.

The "R.A.F. Navy" has lived up to its slogan: "We bring 'em back alive" in the battle of Libya.





## SOUTH AFRICAN PILOTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

**D**AY after day lynx-eyed young men sit in cockpits of the finest fighter aircraft in the world, and scour the whole of Eritrea "looking for trouble." They find plenty to do, but day after day they return to their base and enter up in log books "no enemy aircraft sighted."

Since their arrival in the Sudan, this squadron has been responsible for the destruction of nearly 80 Italian aircraft, and today an Italian plane is a rare sight in their sector. The squadron is one of the S.A.A.F. units, and must be given chief credit for Britain's air superiority over the Italians in East Africa. All young, some regulars, some volunteers, these South Africans have wrought havoc with disregard for danger, among Italy's Air Force.

In the air, they were shooting down (while they lasted) Cr 42's at almost every sortie. On the ground they ferret out the anti-aircraft barrage just a few feet "off the deck," with their guns blazing, and leaving a trail of flaming twisted wreckage.

One captain—their ranks are like the army's, since the S.A. Air Force is part of the army—has fourteen enemy aircraft to his credit, six of them shot

down in combat, while another lieutenant, who destroyed four, recently, was promoted on the field to the rank of captain for "gallantry and devotion to duty," and was subsequently given an immediate award of the D.F.C.

His brilliant flying and consistent success in ground strafing raids against transport, gun positions, petrol dumps, and troop columns has been so marked, that the Italians must recognise his flying when this young giant descends upon them.

Another captain holds the D.F.C., awarded to him for brilliant work in the battle for Eritrea.

The squadron has accomplished a giant's task. Wrecked Italian aircraft lie all over Eritrea on the enemy's aerodromes and in their hangars—the squadron has a special technique of shooting through the hangar doors from a very low altitude, and pulling their fighters up over the roof just in time—and in the bush.

Thousands of machine-gun bullets have been fired into enemy objectives. Seventeen thousand bullets from one aircraft in one day is nothing unusual. Italy must curse the day this S.A.A.F. squadron came to the Sudan.



## RAIDERS CHASED OFF BY FIGHTERS

**E**NEMY activity over this country during daylight was slight and in all cases where visibility permitted the enemy was intercepted by Fighter Command pilots.

A more detailed story of how a Czech sergeant and a South African Flight-Lieutenant from a famous fighter squadron played "cat-and-mouse" with a Junkers 88 before shooting it down is now available. It was a dumb show from both pilots' point of view, for the Czech sergeant does not speak English. The Flight Lieutenant made his attack and then "stood-off" while his colleague went in.

The German bomber was almost blown to pieces by the accurate fire from the two Hurricanes, who intercepted the raider at 10,000 feet above thick cloud. What was left

of the bomber crashed in flames near a Sussex town.

The Czech sergeant was on his way back to base to re-arm after this encounter, when he sighted an HE. 111, and though his ammunition was almost exhausted, he immediately attacked. He gave the German all he had and severely damaged it before returning to his base.

An officer of a Canadian squadron saw a JU 88 slightly ahead. He immediately attacked and only a three-second burst was needed to send the raider down in a steep spiral dive. The Hurricane pilot followed the enemy down from 15,000 to 7,000 feet, firing all the time. At 7,000 feet the raider swung into clouds over the sea and was not seen again.





## SHARP ATTACK ON COLOGNE

**T**HE attack on Cologne by aircraft of the Bomber Command was short but very sharp and in an hour's time, between about nine and ten in the evening, as much damage was done as in many longer raids. Operations by other formations of our aircraft were cancelled because thick ground fog made flying impossible from many British aerodromes.

The main weight of the attack fell on the railways and the industrial quarter of the east bank of the Rhine: although there was some ground haze there was no cloud and the weather was good enough to let our crews see exactly what their bombing had done.

They could see great factories ablaze from end to end, the flames lighting up other buildings and making them an easy mark for the heavier high explosive bombs. Many of these hurtled down among dockside buildings and one stick of bombs exploded across an important goods yard.

Other bombs fell beside a railway junction and very near the Hohenzollern bridge. Two long lines of fire ran across a wide area of the industrial

quarter and continued to blaze with unabated fury.

Opposite the suspension bridge, a little distance from the Hohenzollern Bridge there was an enormous fire; elsewhere a big "L" shaped factory was ablaze and columns of black smoke beside a railway showed that a great store of oil was now lost to Germany. As the fires spread they reached explosive material: the flashes were of terrific violence and, as one of them went off, the crews of several aircraft saw a very large building collapse in flying fragments.

The glare of another explosion was so intense that inside the cockpit of an aircraft flying over ten thousand feet it was, for a moment, as bright as day.

Aerodromes in the Low Countries, where German aircraft were seen to be taking off and landing, were also attacked.

At one aerodrome in Holland, there were two shattering explosions after the bombing, and a succession of smaller explosions lasted for some time.



## BOMBER PILOTS AS SHEEP FARMERS

**R**IVALRY appears to be developing between R.A.F. stations as to which can grow the most food.

The success of some Fighter Command stations with pigs, poultry and spring cabbages has already become famous.

Now bomber pilots have gone back to the land with gusto. At one station it was decided to acquire sheep instead of other livestock.

The flock has been installed in wire enclosures round some of the defense works.

At the same station airmen are hard at work turning over an acre and a half of ground. The main crop is to be potatoes, but spring cabbages are to be grown as well.

At another station one of the airmen is a market gardener in civil life. He began work

on spare ground last year and has already grown seven tons of potatoes. This winter he and his helpers have been busy bringing more land into cultivation. They hope to raise a crop of 40 tons.

Every stretch of coarse grass land, even to the smallest scrap of waste space, is being eagerly seized for the plough or fork. Volunteers for the work have been plentiful and enthusiastic. The acreage of rich brown well-tilled earth at the stations of Bomber Command has risen to formidable proportions during the last few weeks. Soon this will all be planted and turning from brown to green with young potatoes, cabbages, beetroot, peas and beans.

The crops so raised will be sold to the N.A.A.F.I. after supplying the immediate needs of the growers.



## BREMEN BATTERED AGAIN

**W**ITHIN a few days of their last heavy raid on Bremen aircraft of the Bomber Command went again

last night to attack the industrial center of the city and important docks and ship building yards—shipyards



in which the liner Bremen, now reported by the Germans themselves to be burning fiercely, was originally built.

So little are the German authorities able to conceal the widespread destruction in Bremen, that a joke about it is now being whispered all over Germany: it is said that when Hitler and Goering were on their way to England in an aeroplane, Hitler looked down and said, "Just look, my dear Hermann, how our men have smashed up London. It looks awful." Goering put his finger to his lips. "Hush, Adolf," he answered, "we are over Bremen." Nor does this exaggerate the truth.

Last night the weather was as clear as during Bremen's last raid, the visibility was remarkably good, and there was only a little ground haze which gave our pilots no trouble. Within one minute of the explosion of some of the first bombs on the docks fires sprang up, and after a quarter of an hour the sky was red over the city. Heavy, high explosive bombs went off in the ship yards, and along the quayside.

Warehouses by the edge of the docks were blazing, and a direct hit on a large factory set the whole build-

ing alight. Another large factory burned with blinding white flames and all around another fire there was a circle of continuous explosions.

Towards half past four in the morning the ground mist began to get thicker and the pilot of one of the last of our aircraft over was having some difficulty in pin-pointing his exact position, when a sudden clearing revealed his target. Another stick of bombs was at once dropped on it. Ten minutes later a fierce explosion came from the direction of the works.

On the way back from Bremen one of our aircraft came down to fifty feet to attack searchlight and gun pits near Oldenburg: one of the searchlights went out with a sudden flash and the crews of the guns were seen running wildly in all directions. The defences of Bremen were very active and night fighters were up again: one of them, a Messerschmitt 110, after a brief combat was shot down in flames and exploded when it reached the ground.

The dockyards of Wilhelmshaven were also attacked and here, too, there were fierce and extensive fires, while at Rotterdam bombs fell among oil tanks and set a number of them alight.



## A PENNY A HEAD—FOR ENEMY AIRCRAFT

**A** CHELMSFORD road-car company has decided to give to Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund one penny for each enemy aircraft destroyed.

Each month a return is made of enemy aircraft losses, whether German or Italian,

in all theatres of war, and a cheque for that number of pennies is sent to the Secretary of the Benevolent Fund.

This excellent lead will help the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund to meet the increasing calls on its resources.



## GETTING THROUGH TO COLOGNE

**O**N the outward journey to Cologne, about a hundred miles from the Dutch coast, one of our heavy bombers was attacked by a Messerschmitt 110. The Messerschmitt came in three times to attack at close range, but the bombers escaped without damage and went on to Cologne. The Messerschmitt was hit and is claimed as probably destroyed.

One of the bomber's observers has told the story of the flight.

"It came at a point where the Ger-

mans were putting up a barrier of searchlights. There were three huge cones of light, each cone made up of a great many searchlights and each being about five miles across at the base. The lights came together at about the height we were flying. Quite suddenly the first lot of lights caught us.

"We twisted and slipped and all that sort of thing, but we were held for about ten minutes. All the time there seemed to be fresh searchlights coming on and passing us along from



one to the other. There was no flak, so we suspected fighters, and after about three or four minutes the rear gunner said he thought there was an enemy machine on our tail; then he called up again and said he was certain.

"Our pilot started taking evasive action, and the second pilot, looking out from the astro hatch, kept up a running commentary, telling us the enemy's position all the time. The fighter made three separate attacks closing right in before he broke away. The rear gunner was banging away at the Messerschmitt each time it came in, and whenever it turned away again, the front gunner had his chance to open fire.

"Our rear gunner said that the enemy almost came so close in, no more than twenty yards, during the third attack that he didn't even have to use his sights: the enemy almost

blocked his view and he just pumped bursts of fire into him.

"When we had got rid of this nuisance the captain made a check up on petrol gauges and so on, and made sure that we hadn't suffered any damage: then he called out, 'We'll fly on.' We set course again, heading for Cologne. Thirty miles off the city we could see the fires there—dull, reddish fires, low down in the sky because the haze was keeping the light down. When we got nearer we saw our bombers dropping flares all over the place.

"There were a good many fires and I noticed a large building ablaze which looked like a factory. We made two runs: on the second run we flew directly along the Hohenzollern Bridge from bank to bank. We let our bombs go, and saw them burst just where they were aimed. Then we came home."



## GUNNERS FED BY PARACHUTE

THERE was keen competition as well as co-operation between Royal Air Force squadrons in Greece and Army anti-aircraft batteries to keep Italian raiders away from front-line aerodomes.

The British gunners had a hard time recently when a squadron moved forward. The

gunners had to manhandle their guns over snow-capped mountains in a blizzard which raged for three days.

The men were cut off for a week and food was dropped to them by parachute by the squadron which they defended from the ground. They got through with the guns.



## BURMA SQUADRON LEADER SHOTS DOWN DORNIER

A FIGHTER pilot took off this morning on a local weather survey and within less than half an hour landed back at his station having shot down a Dornier 17 into the North Sea. He is the leader of the Burma Squadron of Fighter Command, holder of the D.S.O. and D.F.C. with bar, and this was his 22nd confirmed victory.

"I had gone up to test the weather because I wanted to send up one of my sections in which I had a new boy," he said when he returned.

"While I was up there I had word that an enemy aircraft was flying off

the East Coast. I gave chase and sighted him about seven miles ahead going north. At first I thought it was a speck of oil on my windscreen, but as I drew nearer I recognised it as a Dornier 17.

"When I got within range I gave him two short bursts. After the first, one of the crew baled out, and the second burst silenced the rear gunner. I then made three attacks from opposite sides, and saw the Dornier go down in a steep glide to crash into the sea."

The squadron leader's mechanic is now busy painting the 22nd swastika on the fuselage of the fighter.





## CANADIAN SQUADRON'S FIRST YEAR

**A** SQUADRON of the Royal Canadian Air Force now serving with the Army Co-operation Command of the R.A.F. has just celebrated the first anniversary of its arrival in England.

Officers and men of the squadron had dinner with "a real Canadian menu."



### ONE CROWDED HOUR

**I**T was 4 o'clock on a March afternoon and a pilot officer, out with his Spitfire squadron over occupied France was hoping the Luftwaffe would answer the challenge.

For 20 minutes the Spitfires flew up the French coast looking for trouble. Suddenly three Me.109s streaked over, and seven more came at them from almost straight ahead.

The fight was on, and here, in the words of the pilot officer, is what happened:

"I pulled straight up and opened fire on the leader, the target changing from semi-head-on to full broadside into the enemy aircraft's belly. Almost instantaneously there was a great burst of flame aft of the pilot.

"My machine stalled and I let her spin until I had lost about 5,000 feet. I then climbed again after the enemy formation, which had turned North. There were only five machines now, and they were descending.

"I opened fire on the rearmost aircraft and got in three bursts. The enemy aircraft turned right and half rolled.

"Faint white mist came from un-

der the starboard wing root. I was forced to break contact when the remainder interfered.

"As I was flying back over the Channel I saw a Me.109 stalk and shoot at the squadron leader's Spitfire, and then do a climbing turn to the left. The enemy aircraft had not observed me, and I opened fire when some way off, closing to point blank range.

"This Me.109 had large black numerals and a bright green nose. I turned to continue the engagement, but broke away on seeing the enemy aircraft emitting dense clouds of black smoke and flames from its starboard side.

"The enemy aircraft appeared to be out of control and burning fiercely."

It was 4:45 p.m. when the pilot officer landed, 45 minutes from the time his adventures began. The remaining 15 minutes of the hour had their excitements too, for after landing the pilot officer learned that a sergeant in his squadron had shot down another of the Me.109s, that his squadron leader had made a forced landing on the coast and that, though wounded, he was safe.



### BOMBED KITTEN AS MASCOT

**A**IRMEN, passing a bomb shattered house after an Italian air raid on Suda Bay, Crete, heard the mewing of a cat in the ruins. Villagers said it had been there for three days.

For three hours the Royal Air Force men dug deep down among the ruins, rescued the kitten, and dressed its wounds. It is now a happy member of the squadron.

Another squadron in Greece has a mascot

which answers to the name of "Blenheim Mark Four."

He is one of a litter of eight puppies which were born in the cockpit of a Blenheim bomber on the aerodrome.

Anti-aircraft gunners at another R.A.F. aerodrome in Greece, have adopted a baby donkey, which, so they declare, brays only at the approach of enemy aircraft—and the dinner hour.





## FLYING BOAT RESCUES ITALIANS FROM THE SEA

**I**T is an unwritten law of the Royal Air Force to save enemy crews shot down in combat whenever humanly possible. Another example has just come to light during operations in which the Fleet Air Arm engaged recently an Italian Flying boat (Cant. Z501) and shot it down in the Mediterranean.

The enemy aircraft struck the water and two members of the crew of five were unable to extricate themselves and were drowned. The other three, a naval sub-lieutenant, a sergeant-major and a wireless operator managed to scramble into the Cant's collapsible dinghy.

Their chance of survival was exceedingly remote as their dinghy quickly developed a leak.

A Sunderland flying boat on patrol spotted the tiny boat and as it was so far from land, decided to investigate. Although there was a nasty swell at the time the Sunderland alighted on

the sea, but efforts to get alongside the dinghy were unsuccessful. Eventually a rope was thrown to the Italians and one by one they were hauled on board the flying boat.

This incident of rescuing Italian airmen could not be allowed to interfere with the normal reconnaissance of the aircraft which was then carried out, but the British crew saw to it that their prisoners were provided with hot food and dry clothes.

Later on when the Sunderland had finished her patrol the prisoners were landed and expressed their gratitude for the chivalrous manner in which they had been treated.

The officer said that they had often been told in their own messes that the British treated their prisoners well. "Now we have seen for ourselves that is perfectly true," he said. "We thought that our end had come. It was all so sudden. The British machine gun fire was overwhelming."



## HOW THE W.A.A.F. GOT ITS UNIFORM

**W**OMEN of the W.A.A.F. very nearly did not have Air Force blue for their uniform—but khaki, like their comrades of the Auxiliary Territorial Service, of which they originally formed a part. And they only just missed losing their chosen peaked caps in favour of a hat on the lines of that worn by the W.R.N.S.

When, some months before the war started, what is now the W.A.A.F. still formed part of the A.T.S., the only distinguishing feature in the uniform of the "R. A.F. Companies" was an R.A.F. eagle embroidered in red on each shoulder of the khaki jacket. The decision at that time not to dress the R.A.F. Companies in blue, taken with great reluctance, was due to the dearth of blue cloth, all of which was required for the rapidly expanding Air Force.

It quickly became evident however that the Women's Service working with the R. A.F. must have a separate identity, as did its predecessor of the last war—the Women's Royal Air Force. And even before the R. A. F. Companies were finally severed from the A.T.S. and formed into the W.A.A.F., it was felt that somehow the women must have Air Force blue, even if they had to wait a long time for it. The final word came from Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal—then Air

Member of Council for Personnel. He said "It must be blue."

A new style uniform was then devised, the authorities wisely giving consideration to the women's own point of view. The result was the present distinctive blue uniform, with its slightly flared skirt and a tunic and cap which follows as closely as possible that worn by officers and airmen of the Royal Air Force. A special feature, unique in the uniforms of the Women's Services, is that badges of rank, as well as cap badges and buttons, are identical with those of the fighting Service to which the women are attached. This is regarded as a high honor. At first there was some doubt whether the cap badge and buttons of the R.A.F. could legally be adopted by the W.A.A.F., but this was settled when it was shown that similar badges and buttons were worn by the P.M.R.A.F. Nursing Service.

When Royal approval for the uniform was sought it was suggested that a different headdress might be an improvement. But, as this was a very special case, the King left the choice to the members themselves. They asked to be allowed to stick to their peaked cap, and His Majesty was glad to let the ladies have their own choice.

*(Continued on page 110)*



# THE CAMOUFLAGE KID

By

**KENNETH L. SINCLAIR**

*Author of "Squared in the Sky," "That Cougar," etc.*

**When Squadron 43 Needs  
a Shot in the Arm, a Clumsy  
Yank Uses a Machine-Gun  
as a Hypodermic!**

**N**AZI wings slanted across the bright Channel sky. On the great map-boards at Central Fighter Control, lights were blinking frantically. Men were shouting into microphones. But up over the Channel there was only Forty-three Squadron—eight Hurricanes against the armada of Heinkels and Messerschmitts—nervously looking for an opening.

The leader of the Nazi fighters wagged his wings. The Messerschmitts wheeled as a unit, grabbed altitude, poised to go into action and cut the R. A. F. squadron to pieces. They'd done it often enough before.

Forty-three, feeling sorry for itself as usual, thought it was quite alone against the e.a. But it wasn't. Far above, scudding through wisps of cloud, a single Hurricane lurked. It was the ship assigned to Joe Bogle, newest of the calamities that had befallen Squadron Forty-three.

Bogle was a Yank—a big, drawling guy from Georgia, with a vacuous grin and a way of stumbling in everything he did. He couldn't even handle his feet, let alone a fast fighting aircraft, without getting all balled up. Some ghastly slip-up of red tape had given him a pilot's commission and had posted him to Forty-three.

Cotter, serving as temporary O. C. in the interval between the death of



Angrily they rushed to the Yank

the last one and the arrival of the great Bentley, had taken one look at Bogle's flying and grounded him. The guy flew like a ruptured duck on a barn door. He could remain with the outfit until Bentley, the fighting ace who was going to perform the miracle of putting Forty-three's morale back together again, finally arrived. At that time Bentley, no doubt, would deal with the Yank firmly and conclusively.

The great Bentley was the famous ace who had raised the merry devil with the Nazis over the Maginot line. He was the guy who had knocked down fifty e.a. In short, Bentley was



a demon on wings.

Forty-three's wishful thinking cropped up in almost every sentence they spoke. They'd lost more men than any other outfit in the London Defense Area. They'd been cut to pieces. They were harried, bewildered. They weren't cowards, but they were badly knocked about, demoralized. If only they could hang on until Bentley showed up! He'd save them. He could save any outfit.

All that was in spite of the fact that the great Bentley was an American and how could a "dashed Ameddican" have any outstanding ability in sky-generalship? A race of blustering wild men, you know, hot-headed, winged maniacs who hurled themselves blindly into combat and lacked the aloof viewpoint necessary for the precision maneuvering of modern sky-battle.

Ah, but Bentley would be different. He'd be a little tin Houdini, or something. He'd save them.

Bentley had not shown up, however. Instead the cruel fates had dumped Joe Bogle, who also was an American, into Forty-three's lap.

**N**OW Calamity Joe stood on his rudder controls, slashed down the sky in a vertical power-dive. His Merlin dealt out a banshee screech that shook the heavens. His Brownings let go a short burst, just to clear their throats for more earnest conversation.

Over the sleek nose of his ship he saw that the Messerschmitts were slashing systematically at Forty-three. The R.A.F. outfit by making that nervous and half-hearted pass at the Schmitts, had given the Boche a neat opportunity to strike back and put the Hurricanes on the defensive.

That was exactly the sort of a licked-before-we-start stuff that had wrecked Forty-three and Jerry was making a picnic of it. The Nazi worked as a unit, a great, wheeling

pinwheel that gouged into Forty-three and dealt out death. Tracers stitched their shrouds about the desperately fighting Limeys. Straining wings, missing each other by inches, filled the sky. The Nazi fighting machine cut off all retreat as it went about its grim work of destruction.

Bogle saw a Hurricane, hit by a nose-cannon shell, suddenly crumple into a mass of crazily spinning wreckage. Flame licked out, eagerly wrapped itself about that *descendu*. . . .

Bogle's throat hurt. Fury blazed in his eyes. Those poor dopes! One gone. Seven left now—not counting Joe Bogle, of course—against a dozen Schmitts.

Joe Bogle wasn't grinning now. He went down. He plunged, not into the Forty-third to join their faltering formation, but into the heart of the Messerschmitt group!

That blunder was enough to tag him. Sloppily he leveled. His Hurricane shook to the violent chatter of his Brownings. The guns sprayed tracers and lead into empty air. He wallowed around like a dazed bull suddenly waking up and finding itself in the middle of a dozen murderous toradors. Anybody with half an eye could recognize him.

The Boche knew an easy mark when they saw one. They took him in their stride. Lead blasted into his wings. Tracers whipped past his windscreen. But somehow, every time a Kraut got set for the kill, Joe Bogle wallowed away, to put himself under another Nazi's guns. His ship, Brownings, still shooting up vacant sky, quivered in a lethal blizzard of lead. The stick jerked in his big hand as bullets chewed into his flippers.

Frantically he looked around for help. It was on the way. Forty-three, after all, had the right stuff in it. The boys couldn't stand by and see a member of their outfit cut to pieces, without doing something about it. And



his presence here, against orders, was enough to make anybody hot under the collar.

If that had not been enough, his blundering and his sloppy airwork certainly were. He was a disgrace to the R. A. F. and the colors his ship bore. He was a nuisance who needed to be saved, not so much as an act of kindness to dumb animals, but to get him back to the Chichester base in one piece, so he could face the court-martial he so richly deserved. Bloody blundering Yank—

HE saw all that, written on the red, twitching face of Cotter as the temporary O. C. whipped past him, gesturing furiously. He gave Cotter an airy salute and chuckled, when he saw that Cotter wasn't alone.

Sanders and Leighton and the rest of them were slashing in, to pull the squadron's lame duck out of the spot he'd blundered into. Mad clear through, they'd clean forgotten their taut-nerved, grim got-to-hang-together-or-die attitude. They'd loosened up. Without realizing it, they'd shifted from defensive to offensive.

Joe Bogle smiled. There was nothing vacuous about his smile. Then he opened his bag of tricks. He pounced upon the first Nazi that came handy and there was nothing sloppy about his airwork now. His old blundering personality had dropped from him like a discarded cloak.

He tore into his opponent. His Brownings let go a short, sure burst. The Schmitt bucked like a shying horse, jerked upward, fell off on one wing with flame blossoming from its motor cowl.

Another Nazi bored in at him from the side. He yanked his Hurricane up and over. Sea and sky swapped places, flipped around in mad kaleidoscope, jerked back into place. Suddenly his ship's nose was ten paces behind the Schmitt's twin rudders. His guns began blazing.

The Nazi gunner crouched behind his weapon in startled terror. The muzzle winked red, then abruptly went dark again as the gunner collapsed and lolled over the coming of his office. The pilot's scared, white face jerked around. This wasn't the kind of merry party they usually had with the Chichester outfit. This was murder!

The Schmitt sagged down, one wing torn free by Bogle's nose cannon. The Yank zoomed, looked around. The men of Forty-three, too busy now to indulge in astonishment, were getting in their licks. Two more mangled Messerschmitts were going down. Another, with the gunner's hands held high and a Hurricane watchfully following, was giving up. The rest were being hotly kicked around by the re-born fighting spirit of Forty-three.

The outfit *could* dish it out, after all!

All in all, it was quite a neat party there over the Channel. The Heinkels had got away, but other interceptor outfits would be rising to receive them.

The rest of Forty-three was already on the ground when the Yank circled the tarmac and put his Hurricane down. He taxied smoothly to the line, got out of the ship. He didn't stumble.

In a tight, purposeful group, the pilots headed for him. Anger still was in their faces, but it was diluted with wonder, admiration and the bright flush of victory. Leighton, who'd caught a blighty, was limping, wincing with pain. But he kept up with the rest. He wasn't missing this for anything.

Before the group could reach the Yank, however, Colonel Searle of Wing H. Q. stepped out of his parked car, legged across the barrier and pumped the Yank's hand.

"Captain Bentley," the brass hat exclaimed, "I congratulate you! Quite! I've had word of the show on the wireless. Your idea worked to perfection, what?"



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The pilots heard that. They stopped in their tracks.

"You mean," Cotter blurted loudly, "that 'Joe Bogle' doesn't exist? You put on that imposture just to deceive us? You came here and deliberately—"

"Steady, fella," Bentley said. "I'm no magician and no one guy could have led you fellows out of the spot you were in. You had little enough faith in Americans. If I'd come here in the open and failed to perform the miracle on the first patrol, things would have been worse than ever. The trouble was in your own heads. You were fighting on the defensive, letting Jerry whack at you instead of carrying the fight to him.

"Every time you lost a man, you tightened up still more and worried about your defense. Simplest thing in the world, but it was inside you and you couldn't see it. Only way to change it and make the change stick was to jar you into changing it yourselves. The thing was to get you mad enough to forget your viewpoint and

cut loose, so you'd find out what you really could do."

Cotter slowly relaxed. His face brightened. He looked around at his fellow-pilots, then grinned at Bentley.

"I say, sir," he admitted, "the tactic seems to have been correct, you know. I believe Forty-three really is a bit of all right—with your leadership."

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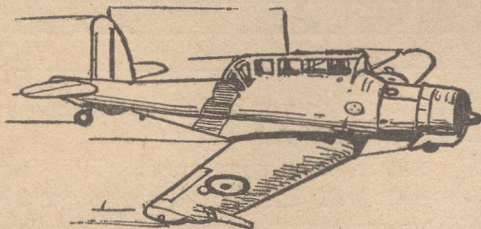
**By WING COMMANDER L. V. FRASER**

OF THE R. A. F.

**B**RITISH reserves of aircraft, fighters and bombers, ready for immediate operations, stand at record high levels. They are kept in secret storehouses all over the country.

This revelation by Lord Beaverbrook draws attention to the work of a little known but vitally important part of the Royal Air Force—Maintenance Command.

Maintenance Command stands ready to supply all equipment from a nut to a new aircraft ready to take the air in Britain's increasingly heavy offensive. This is its inside story. Maintenance Command is the universal provider for operational stations. It covers the United Kingdom. It serves overseas Commands. They ask, Maintenance Command responds.



Thousands of men and women, masters of almost every trade ever practiced, are working at full speed, with concentration and skill to keep aircraft in the air; or, should they come down in an unserviceable condition, to restore them to service without delay.

In Maintenance Command, one Group deals with general equipment, barrack stores, clothing, etc., another deals with complete aircraft, a third with ammunition, fuel, oil, and explosives, a fourth with salvage and repair.

The Repair Depots are great workshops which deal expeditiously with every repairable piece of equipment used by the Royal Air Force. Into those workshops come engines which have received honorable scars on service. Sometimes they come in like masses of dirty, greasy metal, hard to recognize. Within a few hours the mass of waste has taken on a new appearance. It is put through degreasing machinery and then sorted, after being dismantled.

Various parts are buffed up to new condition, faulty parts are replaced, and as the trollied racks carry the parts round the shop the engine begins once more to take its accustomed shape; new and bright and perfect, to leave the workshops, still with its own number and as good as ever.

Instruments damaged in service go through a similar process, but in a different workshop. They, too, move from hand to hand, perfect again after the last inspection, whatever their state on arrival.

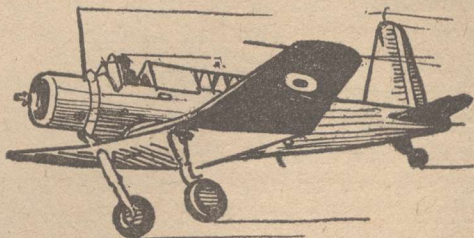
Within the depot is a foundry where scrap metal is "boiled down" to be reshaped in the casting bed and built into new tools and machinery.

The Salvage Section is ever alert. For every hour of the twenty-four, mobile crews are standing by, ready for any call. Should any aircraft, including the enemy's, crash, a unit moves off at once. The crash is located, picked up, and either repaired or reduced to scrap, "produce" as it is called in the service, to be reconditioned according to the nature of the casualty.

Though an aircraft crashes on the side of a mountain, the salvage crews will dismantle it, move it with care, and send it to its proper destination before they finish. Not a scrap of metal or the part of an instrument is wasted.

The people of Britain gladly gave their aluminum pans to make aircraft. The service sees to it that not a scrap of good metal is wasted.

Up mountains, where neither horse nor tractor can go, the salvage party climbs, dismantling aircraft that have to be carried by hand to the place where transport can get. In bogs, during bitter winter weather they worked throughout the night; on treacherous ground during the day, that caved in even as they excavated;



in solid frozen earth at night with numbed hands bitten by piercing cold and shrieking winds; but the salvage was completed.

In a sense, Maintenance Command is the commercial side of the Royal Air Force.

It operates a large and closely knit system which will follow a tiny part of an aircraft, or a whole new squadron, from the time it has been ordered to the time it is delivered to its destination—and keep a correct check on every move that is made from manufacture to write off.

Throughout the country are depots



stocked with every conceivable item; a new engine or a new filing cabinet, a hot plate for the mess or a cold press for air-screws. Three quarters of a million different stores are known by name. Any one can be obtained by sending a message no more than a dozen or so words long.

The greatest civilian business houses have been combed for experience, and sometimes for executive staff, to deal with the vast wholesale and retail distribution the Command undertakes.

Great stores were investigated for their quick delivery systems, their postal trade—the "mail order business"; industrial combines were examined for points of value in decentralization and efficient servicing. The world's carrier systems were looked into and modified to meet a greater business combination than even they handled.

Stocks to hundreds of millions of pounds in value are stored, shipped, checked and listed.

A gigantic fleet of cars and lorries constantly moves over the face of Britain, delivering supplies. A hundred thousand tons of equipment and ammunition are handled monthly; the road transport covers a million and a quarter miles a month. The total effort is equivalent to moving seventy million tons around the earth in the course of a year.

In the ammunition depots an unending vista of heavy high explosive bombs constantly changes in appearance as consignments come in and out; earnest of the weight of the blows that are being rained on Germany. In aircraft storage depots are mighty reserves to be brought into action.

One equipment depot alone averages nearly 50,000 postings of stock each month, and among the civilian staff working with the service is a strange assortment of people, all intent on their work, all efficient.

A house demolisher is in charge of a section of china storage; a famous footballer, who has won 20 cups, a messenger who won the Victoria Cross, nurses, travelers, clergymen, miners, carpet weavers, have taken on the work of keeping the records of the Royal Air Force up to date and immediately accessible.

Elsewhere is a check on the production of the various works supplying the necessary goods, and the state of the contracts in hand. Every unit is tied to every other. If one cannot supply immediately, it is known which one can, and in a few seconds, the order is sent to that unit. Nobody waits a moment longer than is necessary for supplies.

Little known, but vitally important, the Maintenance Command carries the business end of the R. A. F. on its shoulders, and there is a keen, powerful body of men at the head, all experts in their own sphere. They look on, around, and forward. The Royal Air Force is never in doubt of the service behind it. The weapons are there, the ammunition is there, the aviation spirit and the fuel. Expansion increases, but needs have been foreseen, and in steady order the requirements are anticipated and met.

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## THE R.A.F. IN ACTION

*(Continued from page 103)*

And so was born the modern uniform of the **W.A.A.F.** proudly worn by many thousands of women from all walks of life, of whom many have added to the laurels of the Flying Service by deeds of valour whilst serving at **R.A.F.** Stations.

## HOW THE "EAGLES" SHARPENED THEIR TALONS

**PILOTS** of "Eagle" Squadron, the first all-American Squadron of the Royal Air Force, which recently took its place as a fully fledged unit of Fighter Command, had the experience, unique under present day conditions, of undergoing their "operational training" as a complete squadron under their own squadron commander.

Normally pilots in the **R.A.F.** go through the famous "four stage" training system—Initial Training Wing; Elementary Flying School; Service Flying School; Operational Training Unit. This system is designed to transform the completely untrained young men into the highly skilled service pilot ready to take his part in a squadron on active service.

But when "Eagle" Squadron was formed last October, all its members could already fly. Some had seen service with French or British Squadrons; others were pilots with American civil air lines; some student fliers at their Universities in the States.

What they mainly needed was collective training, flying together as a squadron in modern war conditions, so as to achieve that flexibility and unity which is the hallmark of the fighting squadrons of the **R.A.F.**

For the past few months "Eagle" Squadron has been sharpening its talons, going through all the tactical training and exercises which ordinarily is given at an operational training unit. In a comparatively quiet sector they have been hard at work, learning all the "tricks of the trade" under instructors with first hand experience of modern air fighting.



Films taken with cine-camera guns fitted to their Hurricane fighters and operated by a touch on the firing button recorded the "interceptions" and "attacks" made during practice flights which closely resemble the real thing. Afterwards, in a darkened room, the pilots would re-live the "battle," noting the degree of success each achieved, or perhaps the mistakes which would have enabled an enemy to get away.

Gunnery practice, firing from an aircraft on the ground with its tail chocked up into flying position, and in the air at air-towed targets; quick take-offs by day and night; formation flying by flights and as a squadron; tactics, and control in the air from the ground and from the formation leader; specialised instrument training; these are some of the things pilots of "Eagle" Squadron have been working at through the winter months.

Now, full-fledged and trained to the minute, "Eagle" Squadron lines up with the other Hurricane fighter squadrons of the R.A.F.—British, Dominions and Allied—ready for the fight.

## WEST AFRICAN JOINS THE R.A.F.

**A**MONG the many hundreds of young men from the Dominions and Colonies who have volunteered for service in the Royal Air Force is a 26-year-old West African from Nigeria—the first representative from this Colony. His name is Babatunde Alakija, but he is known as Ali to the other cadets at the Receiving Wing in Flying Training Command where he has just started his training for air crew duties.

Alakija first came to England in May, 1930, to finish his education at Shoreham Grammar School. Three years later he won the Public Schools' high jump, clearing 5 feet 8 inches at the White City. He then took a course of shorthand and book-keeping, toyed with the idea of taking up dentistry, but finally decided, on the advice of his father, to study law. Then war was declared.

Alakija went to a Combined Recruiting Centre to say that he wanted to join the R.A.F. Unfortunately illness prevented him from being enlisted until some months later, when he was called up and sent to do general duties at a flying training school.

Three months there, with aircraft taking off and landing almost every minute of the day, and with embryo pilots in their flying kit all round him certainly whetted Alakija's appetite for the day when he could start his

[Turn Page]

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training. And now that day has come. And Alakija's face is one broad smile—his white teeth in contrast to his jet-black skin.

Alakija's father, the Hon. Adeyemo Alakija, C.B.E., is a member of the Legislative Assembly at Lagos, and managing director of the "Daily Times."

Locally he is known as the Chief Bariyum of Ake. Alakija's father and his uncle, the Alake of Abeokuta, represented Nigeria at the coronation of King George. He has a brother and sister in this country, who are studying medicine at Glasgow University.

# FLYING BOAT'S ICELANDIC ADVENTURES

AFTER making a forced landing in Iceland, a Sunderland flying boat of the Coastal Command has returned to its base in Scotland with a crew who consider that they know a good deal about surmounting difficulties.

Bad weather forced the pilot to seek refuge in Iceland. He had encountered severe snow storms and clouds of grey lava-dust from the Icelandic mountains which stuck to the wind-dows.

It was getting dark when he decided to land in a fairly sheltered fjord, but there was a strong tide running and he could not accurately gauge the depth of water. The aircraft landed safely, but grounded on a shoal before finishing its run. It struck the shoal at about 60 miles an hour but, thanks to the strength of its construction, it suffered no damage.

Fishermen from a whaling station rowed out to the stranded flying boat, and greeted the crew with their best and only English phrase—"Velcome to Eceland." Fortunately, an Icelandic who had been in the United States Air Force in the last war turned up and acted as interpreter.

The bombs were made safe, lifted out by the crew, and taken ashore in the fishermen's dinghy. That night the crew remained on board and in the early hours, when the tide rose, the flying boat went afloat. By using the port and starboard engines alternately, she yawed off the shoal into deeper water.

When daylight came the pilots surveyed the take-off area. They had a run of approximately 400 yards, but at one part of the fjord was little more



than 50 yards wide. The span of a Sunderland is nearly 38 yards.

In the afternoon the pilot made his attempt. With the help of a strong wind and a full throttle he got the flying boat off the water after a run of only 150 yards, and cleared the narrow part of the fjord with a few yards to spare on each side.

The Sunderland went to another part of the Iceland coast to seek fuel.

"We had to use petrol tins out of an old barge," said the second pilot. "We formed a human chain and sent them up by hand. It was bitterly cold and sometimes chips of ice would fall into the tanks. There was water in the bottom of the barge and it looked as if some of the tins were leaking. We were afraid we might have trouble—and we did. When we started up next day, the engines ran for a little while, and then stopped. There was nothing for it but to empty and clean out the entire petrol system.

"Our wing commander, who was with us, had helped in the refuelling, and now he got busy with the rest of us in taking out the big tanks. He spent hours on the wings with screw-drivers and other tools covered with grease and dirt. It took four days to complete the clean-out, and then we refuelled with some petrol which we took good care to see was free from dirt or water.

"The next day, off we went, only to run into a severe electrical storm with visibility nil and ice-forming conditions. Back again to Iceland. That night we had 27 degrees of frost and the next morning the Sunderland was completely covered in a layer of snow on top of ice. We brushed off the snow and tried to chip off the ice with axes, screw-drivers, and anything handy. Then I managed to get help from a trawler with a steam hose-pipe. That melted the ice where we could not reach to chip, and the water ran down and formed icicles where we could get at them.

"The temperature rose that night, and the next day we flew to Scotland. We learned a lot that trip."

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