RAF Aces

True Action Stories of the Men With Wings

Summer Issue

A Thrilling Publication

THE FERRY PILOT
A Novelet of Flaming Glory
By Alexis Rossoff

A BOMB AND A PRAYER
By Laurence Donovan

BUY WAR BONDS AND STAMPS FOR VICTORY!
Keep your batteries ready for emergencies!

Mr. Mockford's experience—like many such others that have come out of England—is typical of the many emergencies that call for the use of a flashlight. Any kind of open flame would have ignited the coal gas, blocking attempts at rescue.

For your own protection, as well as to conserve materials vitally needed elsewhere in this war, follow the suggestions and instructions of your local Defense Council. Reduce the use of your flashlight to a minimum. Make the batteries last longer!
How to Make YOUR Body
Bring You FAME
...Instead of SHAME!

Will You Let Me
Prove I Can Make You
a New Man?

I KNOW what it means to have the kind of body that people pity! Of course, you wouldn’t know it to look at me now, but I was once a skinny weakling who weighed 105! I was ashamed to strip for sports or undress for a swim. I was such a poor specimen of physical development that I was constantly self-conscious and embarrassed. And I felt only HALF-ALIVE.

But later I discovered the secret that turned me into "The World’s Most Perfectly Developed Man." And now I’d like to prove to you that the same system can make a NEW MAN OF YOU!

What Dynamic Tension Will Do For You

I don’t care how old or young you are or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps — yes, on each arm — in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day — right in your own home — is all the time I ask of you! And there’s no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a viselike grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won’t feel there’s even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I’ll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice new, beautiful suit of muscle!

Only 15 Minutes A Day

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"Dynamic Tension" is an entirely NATURAL method. Only 15 minutes of your spare time daily is enough to show amazing results — and it’s actually fun. "Dynamic Tension" does the work.

"Dynamic Tension"? That’s the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was all of 17 to the super-man physique. Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens my way. I give you no gadgets or contrivances to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through Dynamic Tension, you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own body — watch it increase and multiply into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

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RAF ACES

VOL. 3, NO. 3 SUMMER, 1943

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AIR POWER WILL WIN THE WAR

A Message to the Readers
of R. A. F. ACES

By AIR VICE MARSHAL CONINGHAM
Chief of the Middle East Air Command, R.A.F.

THE air striking force in the Middle East has pointed the way to the future, demonstrating to the world the real meaning of the term "Air Power."

An air force is a separate offensive entity, striking at the enemy in cooperation with the Army, untrammled by preconceived ideas, free from glib phrases like "air support" and "fighter assistance."

To the soldier in the front line, there may seem little evidence of the air supremacy of which he has heard. The effect of sinking an enemy supply ship is not an immediate one. Yet one bomb on a storage building may affect the destinies of an entire enemy division.

Likewise the United Nations in the Middle East to a footballer with a shot in each boot, to a boxer with a punch in each hand, and you have an idea of what has happened and is happening.

The air power of today will win the war!
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amount of money. I made
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made an average of $10 a week — just
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Lieutenant in Signal Corps

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certainly coming in mighty handy these days." (Name
and address omitted for military reasons.)

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A second front takes food...food to feed our allies in addition to our own men.

Which do you want—more meat for you, or enough meat for them? An extra cup of coffee on your breakfast table, or a full tin cup of coffee for a fighting soldier?

Just remember that the meat you don't get—and the coffee and sugar that you don't get—are up at the front lines—fighting for you. Would you have it otherwise?

Cheerfully co-operating with rationing is one way we can help to win this war. But there are scores of others. Many of them are described in a new free booklet called "You and the War," available from this magazine.

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A Department for Readers Conducted by THE SERGEANT PILOT

AFTERTNOON, old chaps. Ready for the bonging of Pilot Officer Hadbetter, we see. The blokes from the higher brackets will arrive with the jolly old Oscar in about an hour. Odd bit of heroism, you know. Would make a much better cinema than Mrs. Miniver if we could convince that big chap at Gaumont. Lucky for Hadbetter the Third Earl of Cloves, Clyde Pinkingham of Strickly-on-the-Byres is in the Air Ministry, what? Fancy. The pilot officer took off with Blue Flight in a Spitfire IX and they got into a scramble with the Messups over the channel.

Hadbetter stopped a packet and was in a beastly fog for almost two minutes and when he opened his eyes, there he was over Holland and only six hundred feet from the ground. Landed in a jolly old tulip field with magneto trouble.

Fixed the magneto, picked up what he thought were onions and took off again just as a Nazi patrol came from out of a windmill.

Jolly Old Bermudas!

Leftenant Hadbetter was hungry, you see, and you know how the chap loved the jolly old Bermudas. Bit into one and found out it was a tulip bulb. Landed on the front lawn of the Third Earl of Cloves and the bloke happened to be on leave and playing a neat bit of bowls.

Hadbetter got out of the jolly old Spit and he took the tulip bulbs from his pocket and threw them on the ground. The Earl pounced on the tubers, immediately diagnosed them as rare specimens of tulipa Bybloemen. The Earl embraced Hadbetter, insisted he have tea with the Pinkinghams and meet his daughter Daphne.

You see the Earls of Cloves have won the prize for the best specimens of tulips for the last three hundred years and only last spring, a Heinkel ruined the Pinkingham tulip beds.

A Lift for the Squadron

We realize, of course, that this bonging will be a definite lift for the squadron. We hope you will remember it is the same 87th Squadron your C.O. flew with near Cambrai in 1916 and which Alf Bottomottom made famous by getting decorated twice for great heroism in the service of the King.

We flew with Alf both times but never let on we practically handed him the second D.S.M. Of course this is all hush hush, old fellows, but back in the old fuss we got fed up with Alf claiming our descendus.

We went to the ammo shed one day and painted our bullets blue. That Hun Alf claimed was shot down behind our lines and when nobody was looking, we dug out a blue Vicker's slug with a jackknife and dropped it into our pocket.

Three years later we were in the Savoy with Alf and we showed him the bullet. Said we could summon a witness at any time. Ever since, Alf has been good for a quid or two when we find ourselves short—Corporal Moots, we will not tolerate such a veiled hint at blackmail!

Alf? The last time we saw the chap, he was heading straight up toward the balloon barrage near Fotheringay. Seems a Yank pilot gave him three packs of bubble-gum last week and Alf crammed them into his mouth all at once. You know Alf's asthma. Well, he blew a bubble that made him lighter than air and a wind came up—Alf managed to make contact with a big sausage that was hauled in eleven hours later. Alf had ice on his flippers and was chewing on a seagull he had coaxed in close. The best stories of the war never get in print!

New Oscar from the King

The C.G.M. has been approved by King George. It is the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal and will be superior to the D.F.M. or Distinguished Flying Medal. The C.G.M. will be available for Army personnel engaged in gliding and observing, whether they be officers or non-commissioned

(Continued on page 10)
men and the ribbon will be light blue with dark blue marginal stripes.

What Do You Think?

FLIGHT, England's great journal of the trade, reports that the Nazis, after hammering their master pates against Stalingrad to no avail, tried their oldest method of convincing the enemy that Germany would inevitably conquer the world. The Luftwaffe dropped 100,000,000 leaflets over the stubborn Russian metropolis asking them to see things Hitler's way and stop thinking they could ever beat him.

FLIGHT makes this observation and we quote: "Our Allies in Stalingrad surely found a good use for this free gift of the Germans."

The Blackburn Skua

There have been many arguments, pro and con, regarding the specifications of this British Navy fighter-five bomber. Here they are—right from the feed bag.

The Skua is powered by a Bristol Perseus XII nine cylinder sleeve-valve air-cooled radial engine of 905 h.p. and its top speed is 225 miles p.h. at 6500 feet. Cruising speed is 187 m.p.h. at 15,000 feet, and service ceiling is 22,000 feet.

Armament consists of four fixed forward-firing guns and a single gun mounted in the rear cockpit. It is equipped for catapult and carrier work and has the following dimensions.

(Continued on page 88)
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Name...
Address...
FERRY PILOT HAYDON CEDEWORTH, better known to his mates in the service as “Hayseed,” was resting up between hops to strategically far-flung R.A.F. combat stations. Cigarette ashes on the front of his dark blue uniform helped to identify him as one of those forgotten sky soldiers—a ferry pilot.
to a secret corner of Britain.

Suddenly Hayseed's lean length uncoiled like a live steel spring. A newly installed wall-board marked with the stenciled legend, "Indianapolis, U.S.A.," was the magnet that had pulled him to his feet. It was like a message from home, proof that the folks back in Indianapolis were doing their share.

Looking over the inked lettering Hayseed guessed rightly that the board had originally cased an Allison motor. And at that very moment that Allison might be powering an Airacobra, a Tomahawk, or a Lightning fighter in a successful counter-attack upon some skulking Jerry raider.

On impulse, the Yank searched for and found a stub of pencil in his tunic pocket. Then he boldly affixed his own signature below the legend. The Texans, Californians, and other American ferry pilots in the outfit would laugh at his show of vanity, of course, but what the heck. It would not be the first time the gang, good eggs underneith their hard-boiled outer shells, had enjoyed a few laughs at his expense.

Especially had they razzed him when he had ranted at unkind fate for having doomed him to the drab role of a "shuttle jock." But Hayseed had always come back at them, ready to argue that were it not for his crash scars and warped left leg, lasting reminders that he had been a test pilot in private life, he would now be hawking in company with that select group of Yankee flying hellions, the American Eagle Squadron.

H E HAD protested to the grave members of the medical examining board that the scars were mere surface blemishes. The doctors had been sympathetic and considerate—but final.

In desperation he had cited the amazing case of Wing Commander Bader, R.A.F., who, although minus both legs, had already bagged some twenty-odd Jerry blackbirds.

"Quite so!" the learned medicos had unanimously conceded, but had pointed out that American volunteers seeking admission to the unique American Eagle Squadron had to be one hundred per cent physically sound.

No "cracked mug" or even a slightly chipped one need apply. There was, however, he had been told, a special shelf that had been set aside in War's cupboard for cracked mugs. It was labeled "Ferry Service."

One of the stubborn breed who will never say die, Hayseed had considered, then accepted the proposition. As a shuttle jockey he would never get in on the actual fighting, of course. Still, it was likely that he would catch an occasional whiff of the war. But after six months of ferrying fighters from the source of supplies to the fighting line, he had found few thrills to satisfy his action-craving nature.

A persistent buzzing eventually penetrated the pall of gloom that had settled over Hayseed. With a guilty start he became alert. That buzzing meant that "Mr. Big," the dispatcher, busy at his littered desk over in Operations was impatiently paging him.

Hayseed smoothed the wrinkles out of his jacket. He surmised that his number had come up once more on the duty roster. What kind of a crock, he wondered, would he have to deliver this trip?

Yesterday he had tooled an American-made two-engine Havoc night-fighter through the blue to its destination. The hurt of having to turn the "dark angel" over to a British engineer officer at the R.A.F. fighter station had been lessened when the E.O., a young lad who had a seamed white face, had grown solemnly confidential.

"She's the best nighthawk in the bloody business," declared the E.O. "Give us another thousand of 'er particular feather and old London Bridge won't fall down ever, I daresay." The war-bitten English chap's fire-seared face had taken on a sympathetic light. "Why not put your personal mark on 'er for luck, chum?" he had suggested.

Quick to sense that the well-meaning E.O., a cracked mug, too, was only trying to be nice, Hayseed had declined.

"My luck has been all bad so far," he had said ruefully. "A bus carrying my brand into a scrap would be bound to end up with altitude minus six feet."

"Tosh, me lad, tosh!" the terribly scarred young E.O. had scoffed.

Chuckling, he had strode forward and scratched the letters "H.C." on the new fighter's unmarried side before Hayseed could stop him. . . .

On the way now to Operations, Ferry Pilot Cedworth detoured into the bar-
The Havoc trembled as bullets stitched a deadly line of steel along its tail assembly.
racks to pick up his flying togs. Once he caught himself sincerely wishing that the friendly British engineer officer had not challenged flickle Dame Fortune by flaunting his, Hayseed’s, symbol in the jade’s eyes.

Any other ferry pilot probably would have derived a pleasant lift from knowing that his mark, at least, was destined to ride into battle. But not Haydon Cedworth. Lady Luck had long since turned against him.

Mr. BIG glanced up from his paper-strewn desk when Cedworth tardily limped into Operations. “Hello, Hayseed,” he greeted gruffly. “That Havoc you delivered yesterday turned out to be a flyin’ coffin. Just got the report on her, via teletype. A Jerry bomber blasted both the Havoc and the pilot to Kingdom Come last night.”

Mr. Big threw out his hands in a fatalistic gesture. A Yank, he was fiercely loyal to all things American.

“I’ll wager it wasn’t the plane’s fault,” he growled. “Chances are the pilot was a green hand.”

Shaken by the bad news, Hayseed fumbled with the zipper of his coveralls. He was tempted to tell his grizzled chief how he, a stepchild of Destiny, was partly responsible for the disaster. He was even groping for the words when the head man whose job it was to keep them flying spoke again.

“Ferry another crate out to that outfit of Bats at the Landhead station. And Hayseed, you might tell someone in authority down there that it reflects badly on the old U.S.A. when an American-made crock gets knocked off on her initial flight.”

Hayseed winced at the chief’s use of the word “initial.” He was so sure that his own initials were responsible for the crack-up.

A moment or two later he slowly climbed the ladder to the cockpit of another waiting Havoc while a bird-herder or groundman whom he recognized was administering a final wiping off of the black paintwork with a ball of waste. He was doing it carefully for, from Mr. Big down to the humblest grease monkey on the drome, the transplanted Yanks never missed an opportunity to praise or look after their own American handiwork.

So Hayseed patiently waited until the zealous bird-herder finished his dusting and had scrambled to safety.

Seated at the controls, Hayseed expertly fed the soup into the pots. The twin engines roared throatily for a minute or two. Meanwhile a smaller Mohawk fighter was allowed to hop off ahead of him. Then followed the all-clear signal.

Looking out through the corners of his goggles, he saw the watching groundman give him the “V” sign in farewell, waved back, and was off.

Within the same hour Hayseed was circling above the distant R.A.F. station, awaiting the necessary invitation to come on in. There was a short delay while scurrying antlike figures easily removed what appeared to be boulders of impossible sizes to be handled by men from a level stretch of ground. Camouflage had indeed been developed to an important art. The snooping crew of a Jerry picture-taking bus would not waste a second look on such a seemingly rock-littered barren.

Visibility being good, he was not radioed down to the drome, lest the ethereal whispering carry to hostile ears. A white flag waved in signal gave Hayseed his cue. He made child’s play of landing the Havoc.

No sooner had the night-fighter rolled to a stop than a ground crew took charge and handrolled the plane down a ramp to an underground nest, with the pilot still sitting tight inside his greenhouse.

When Hayseed raised the lid he was in the electrically lighted man-made cavern. The same fire-branded engineer officer who had spoken to him yesterday was waiting at the foot of the short ladder to greet him. A wave of resentment surged through the American.

“Warned you I was a jinx, but you wouldn’t heed me,” he said harshly as the Briton came up to him, smiling.

“Tosh, me lad,” the English cracked mug stoutly disagreed, smiling his grotesque smile. “This may sound rather cold-blooded, but nevertheless it is true. Reggie Foy, our chap who last evening rode the thunderbolt to his journey’s end, was flying on borrowed time, so to speak. And Foy overreached himself badly when he elected to trade blows with an escorted Jerry bomber. Luck, good or bad, played no part in Reggie’s Foy’s demise.”
A CREW of armorers were busily swarming over and around the new Havoc, preparing the night-fighter for its coming debut in Death's arena when the English cracked mug guided the glum Yankee to the upper regions. But, over a bottle of beer in the outfit's mess, the E.O. succeeded in persuading the ferry pilot to spend the night as guest of the Bats.

“What with the Jerries hightailing back and forth overhead you won’t be able to sleep a wink, though,” he warned. “The bothersome beggars consider this particular air sector an open door to London.”

Darkness settled wetly over the remote advance station. Standing in the dark chill outside the camouflaged hut a little later, the Yank pilot watched gnomelike figures pop up from underground caverns to strip canvas overcoats off fighter planes parked nearby.

“It’s a lovely night for a murder,” volunteered the engineer officer as he came up behind his American guest. “It was on just such a night as this that I came a cropper.”

He seemed to want to go on telling of it, but before he could the alarm for the defense area shattered the night’s stillness.

Running pilots churned through the moist underfooting. Hayseed knew that the dispersal stations are first into action.

It was a surprise to him, though, when concealed loud-speakers began broadcasting calls for extra flights.

“Gad!” exclaimed the excited E.O. “The cursed blackbirds must be coming over in droves this evening. We’ll have the devil’s own time trying to stop the rotters! Just haven’t got enough pilots to pull off the job proper.”

The Yank revolved in the mud. Not enough pilots? The smoldering embers of hope inside him produced a small flickering flame. He could fly a Havoc as well as any pilot on the lot—better than most.

Also, he was anxious to gamble his life on it that he had a counter move for every Jerry maneuver.

Again the velvet black backdrop of the distant horizon searchlights were marching like ghosts, undismayed by the fiery bursting of ack-ack shells. One long thin finger of pale blue light groping in the upper darkness happened upon a moving something. Then two more fingers instantly reached up as if from an invisible hand to clutch the marauder in a revealing grip.

To Hayseed’s staring eyes Heaven and Hades seemed suddenly to change places. A devil’s garden of murderous exploding toadstools blooming poisonously in the towering field had the now frantically darting Jerry for a centerpiece. A blinding flash that burned a great hole in the night abruptly climaxed the show.

“One bandit less for our chaps to contend with,” the engineer officer laconically commented.

Orderly confusion reigned on the drome. Roaring, the advance flight of R.A.F. night-fighters, all fitted out with weapons and equipment that were strictly “hush-hush” soared over the mess shack and climbed swiftly into the sky.

“I’d give a year of my life to be with ‘em!” the Yank ferry pilot bitterly broke his silence.

“You and me both, laddie,” the E.O. answered, a wistful note in his voice.

The English chap stroked his seamed face and eye that had been rated “vision zero.” He had paid a stiff price for his brief fling at the Jerry bandits, but it had been worth it.

Abruptly he realized that his companion was ranting at the tough luck that was keeping him out of the air fighting. That would never do. The warlike Yank who believed himself cheated by the god of chance might blow his top.

“Let’s push along to Operations,” the worried E.O. said, as he took charge. “Behave yourself and I may be able to wangle you into the controller’s office.”

CHAPTER II
Death in the Air

FOUR hawk-eyed senior officers grouped around a table map of England, did not glance up when Hayseed and the E.O. entered the room.

The very atmosphere was changed, tense.

Hayseed stiffened at the sound of a detached voice, crackling out of a loud-speaker suspended above the table.

“Flight Lieutenant Porter reporting, sir. Patrolling at seven thousand. Our
own flak is giving us fits. Suggest, sir, that you contact the batteries and have them lower their range to five.”

In the adjoining offices phones were buzzing like bees in an overturned hive. A clerk approached the officer group on noiseless feet and placed a colored patch on the spread map. The sector controller instantly picked up a handy microphone.

“Porter! Enemy aircraft in force crossed coast at Dover. Flying at fifteen thousand. Your interception course is two—two—one. Take action. Will direct B flight to join you.”

Hayseed felt his companion’s fingers close on his wrist.

“That Porter chap is a rum’un,” the E.O. softly volunteered. “Careless as they come and all that. Forever thumbing his nose at danger. By the by, he’s up there splittin’ the wind in the Havoc you brought up this afternoon.”

The Yank nodded. It was at least comforting to know that the rash Porter was not winging into a scrap on wings besmirched with a bad luck brand—Hayseed’s brand—that had marked that other Havoc.

The group commander, one of the four officers huddled over the map, raised a second mike and spoke into it tersely.

“B Flight, prepare to take off. Merge with advance A under Flight Lieutenant Porter. Good luck, gentlemen.”

The minutes dragged on interminably. Hayseed, aware that he was an uninvited guest, had awkwardly backed up against the wall. The tension snapped when the unmistakable clattering of gunfire, punctuated with ominous thudding of exploding shells weirdly drummed out of the loud-speaker. One of the unseen night-fighters had its radio turned on at the “send” position.

The group commander’s strained face took on a grayer tinge under the pitless glare of the overhanging lights. Then the flight lieutenant’s voice cut clearly through the clamor of battle noises.

“Porter reporting. We have spotted the enemy and are about to engage them!”

The sector controller’s hand trembled when he seized his mike.

“Can you hear me, Porter?” he sent the query into space. “Don’t come to grips with the bandits until B Flight joins you, which should be any second now.”

There was no answering response from the fight-loving flight lieutenant. The listeners maintaining the vigil, however, heard Porter exhorting his mates with reckless banter.

“Last one to bag a bandit buys the drinks all around, me lads. Bless my eyes, chums, there’s no less than thirteen blackbirds in the covey. Three for me, and a brace each for the rest of you. Splendid sport, gentlemen.”

The sector controller pushed back from the futile microphone and groaned.

“That young fool heard me, but he deliberately chose to disregard the order!”

The savage pounding of an aerial cannon suddenly and completely filled the receiver. Hayseed’s sponsor, the E.O., twitched and jerked in accompaniment.

“That’s Porter’s cannon!” he shakily interpreted the booming note in the cacophony of conflict for the Yankee guest’s enlightenment. “Nice kid, Porter, for all his faults. Makes it a habit to leave his radio turned to ‘In’ when the blasted bandits are about.”

IMAGINATION carried Hayseed up there in the night sky. He could picture the dramatic, breath-taking maneuvers in that grim, unseen sky battle.

Suddenly it occurred to him that the loud-speaker had gone dead. Also, the brass hats were standing erect, poised and waiting tensely.

Then a listless, fading voice came over the air.

“Flight Lieutenant Porter reporting.”

The sound of that voice was as if the speaker had lived a lifetime in a few seconds, had sped from vibrant youth to feeble old age. What had done that?

The controller’s voice was one of anxious inquiry as he spoke into his mike.

“Porter, have you been hit?”

A hollow, bubbling laugh, followed by a fit of coughing heralded the pilot’s return to consciousness.

“Begging your pardon, sir. It was not cricket of you to call me back. Was about to step through the Pearly Gates when you gave that shout. Like a good soldier I felt honor bound to respond.
 Been hit pretty bad, I daresay. Dead from the neck down."

The group commander snatched the microphone from in front of the controller.

"Porter, don't funk it!" he barked. "There's a field within two minutes of you. Course two—seven—three. Hop to it! Get going!"

The skipper dropped the mike with a sigh.

"Lord, forgive me," he muttered, his voice strained.

A laugh trickled faintly out of the hanging speaker.

"No hands—no legs—they've turned to lifeless clay. I'm only a voice." There was a pause, then, "Fancy meeting you this soon, Reggie."

The pilot was talking in his dying delirium to Reggie Foy, the friend who had preceded him into the Great Beyond by a scant twenty-four hours.

"I owe you an apology, stout fellow," they could hear him say. "Remember those fiery little imps you described for me with your last earthly breath? You said they were dancing on top of the wings of your bus. Cute little rascals of cold light. Well Reggie, old boy, the nasty nippers are now doing that very thing on the opposite edge of my own wing spread. Leave it to our jolly American cousins to add something, eh, chum?"

Another short break followed, in which the listening men could say no word, then Porter's voice droned on.

"Sorry, Reggie. I was about to say somebody should inform the fun-loving Yanks that their clever little innovation, the ignited imps, have a tendency to detract a pilot's attention from his more important work. Worse, the Nazi bonders are bound to see 'em too. Makes cold meat targets out of us."

The horrible bubbling cough interrupted, along with the rising whine of air shrill.

The group commander wrenched off his cap in a gesture of helplessness, twisting it into a shapeless mass.

"Gad!" he muttered. "His bus is out of control! He's plummeting down!"

Across the table the controller's fingers were hesitantly creeping toward the mike again. The G.C., sensing his subordinate's purpose, sharply arrested the moving hand.

"No more of that!" he ordered gruffly. "The boy has suffered enough without being made to watch his own disintegration."

For a moment the room was deathly still, then the ghostly whisper again came out of the ether.

"'Lo, Reggie, me man." That was Flight Lieutenant Porter's husky voice again. That young flight lieutenant required a lot of killing. "Wasn't sporting of me to blame the dancing devils on our Yankee friends, came the barely heard mutter. "Rather you'd forget I said it. What's more, the imps have now vanished. They might have been corrosant—that atmospheric or electrical phenomenon that the salty sailors—call it!—St. Elmo's fire. . . . Feel better now. . . . Meet me inside the Gates, Reg—"

The air shrill, piercing now as a banshee's wail, snapped at its highest note. An Intelligence officer quietly turned to a telephonist.

"Notify the rescue launch, even though Porter must have been dead before his plane went into the Channel," he instructed. "Advise the officer in charge to pick up every particle of wreckage he may find on the surface. Intelligence orders it."

The odd command served as a distinct shock to the silent Yankee ferry pilot standing nearby. The coldly efficient B. I. chap must suspect that the American-made plane had been tampered with. That called for a challenge.

Hayseed resolutely confronted the Intelligence officer.

"Haydon Cedeworth, Ferry Service," he grimly introduced himself. "It was I who delivered the pair of ill-fated Havocs to this station. Your pilot officer, Foy, had the misfortune to come to his end in one, while Flight Lieutenant Porter—"

Hayseed stopped abruptly. He could see how vividly fresh both incidents were in the minds of the room's occupants. He felt himself flushing and hesitated before clasping the hand offered him by the momentarily disconcerted B. I. man.

"Quite a piece of luck attached to your being right here on the scene, Cedeworth," murmured the Englishman. "Hope you won't resent my asking you
a few questions? Part of my job, you
know.”

Hayseed's temper cooled off. They
couldn't think anything wrong about
American-made planes.

"Commence firing when you are
ready," he said laconically.

The B.I. man gave him an approv-
ing nod, then led the way into the
sound-proof cubicle that shut out the
loud-speaker's gruesome reporting.

“You heard what Porter said prior to
his giving up the ghost.” The Intelli-
gence Officer came quickly to the point.
"Now prepare yourself for a bit of a
shock. Those dancing devils so minutely
described by the deceased pilot were
not a figment of imagination conjured
up by his sick brain. I base that state-
ment on the last words spoken by the
late Reggie Foy, which were almost
identical. On those words, and a sup-
porting written report filed by Number
Five, a fighter pilot of the same section
who also sat in on the weird show, in
company with Pilot Officer Foy."

The B.I. man thumbed through a
sheaf of papers.

"Here is Number Five's report," he
resumed. "He states that he and Foy
had teamed up in what he describes as
a tiered formation with Foy's Havoc
flying at the lower stage for an attack
on a heavier enemy bomber. He reports
that they had the big bandit nicely
sandwiched between them when Foy
suddenly broadcast the announcement
that he had been badly hit. Hovering
on his higher perch, Number Five in-
stantly peered down into the dark,
though he did not expect to see his
stricken partner's blacked-over Havoc
in the night. But see it he evidently did.
Here is the written report. Read it,
please."

The B.I. handed over the report and
Hayseed read:

Without benefit of searchlights or dropped
flares the Jerry whom Foy and I planned to
bag was spurring steel at Foy's yawning
Havoc with deadly accuracy. I distinctly saw
the enemy's tracer burst and splatter upon
striking Foy's plane although the bus itself
was almost invisible in the surrounding black-
ness.

Meanwhile, my own radio at the "Receive"
was bringing Reggie Foy's voice into my ear-
phones. He was babbling something about
treachery little devils dancing on the wings
of his bus, thereby revealing his position to
the bandits.

Watching and listening, it belatedly dawned
on me that Foy was speaking the truth. There
were actually a half-dozen fiendishly glowing
spots flickering like moon moths on his
Havoc's wings. With the plane so converted
into a lighted target, Foy did not have a
chance.

Grave of face the Intelligence officer
took back Number Five's report from the
stricken Hayseed, and allowed it to
drop from his hand.

“I will add," he said, "that although
it had no particular bearing on the mys-
tery, that Number Five eventually got
the bandit who had done for Reggie
Foy."

THE Yank ferry pilot's wildly rev-
vived thoughts went out of control.
Dancing devils and moon moths! Im-
possible in a war of stark realism.

The Jerry bandit who had riddled Foy
might have switched on its landing lights
and held the doomed Havoc in the reveal-
ing beam. That was it! But before
Hayseed could express the thought the
next words of the steady-eyed B.I. man
shattered that as fallacy.

"Of course, you know that the
latest types of enemy aircraft are no
longer equipped with landing lights,
in the strict sense of the term."

Hayseed blinked. Was it possible that
the calm chap seated at the desk had
read his thoughts? But what he had
said made Hayseed remember the vague
rumors that had recently furnished his
fellow ferry pilots with considerable
food for conversation.

According to the "grapevine" Ferry
bombers and night-fighters were now
outfitted with secretly devised ray pro-
jectors designed to cast invisible infra-
red beams of so-called black light earth-
wards. Those beams, upon coming into
contact with special chemically treated
markers or studs set out in long parallel
rows on blacked-out enemy dromes,
casted these ingeniously made guide
lines to glow visibly for an instant like
unrolling ribbons of light.

Hayseed's associates had agreed that
the newest Jerry stunt, if true, would
add no difficulties to a trained pilot's
task of safely landing his crate. In ad-
dition, black-out landings would work
to the advantage of homecoming Jerry
raiders inasmuch as they would consid-
erably lessen the danger of being
pounced on by daring R.A.F. fighters
who made it a practice to patrol over enemy-occupied France with eyes alert for the betraying flash of old-style landing lights.

Ferry Pilot Cedworth, his spontaneous enthusiasm for his own solution of the mysterious dancing devils completely evaporated, shrugged.

"No comment," he gloomily admitted. "The Sherlock Holmes stuff is not in my line."

Smiling an enigmatic smile the B.I. man, with deliberation in his movements, deposited a flat, jagged-edged scrap of blacked-over metal on the desk between himself and Hayseed. The American looked at it and flushed guiltily. The black surface was crudely marked with letters 'H' and 'C.'

"This was salvaged from the wreckage of Pilot Officer Foy's Havoc," the Intelligence officer informed. "It struck me that the H.C. and your name, Haydon Cedworth might possibly be connected in some way."

EYES clashed in a swift duel. For the first time Hayseed really saw the relentless "hush-hush" hunter poised under the concealing mask of disarming frankness.

"Don't call up the firing squad until after I've testified in my own behalf," he ironically requested.

The inscrutable investigator raised his hand in a deprecatory gesture.

"Ghastly thought. Nevertheless I am all ears."

In a straightforward manner Hayseed presented his version of the prankish act that was responsible for his initials being inscribed on dead Reggie Foy's be-deviled plane.

"I'm quite confident the engineer officer will verify the truth of my story, if you will check with him," he suggested.

The B.I. man, for reasons of his own, did not at once act on the suggestion. But he did put down a memo on a convenient pad as a reminder to thoroughly investigate one Ross Andrews, attached as an engineer officer to Nth Squadron.

Without further word on the subject he arose to again shake hands with and further discount Hayseed.

"Pleased to have met you, Cedworth," he said, with a sincere ring in his voice. "You can forget the firing squad angle for the time being."

Having let down the barrier for a surprising moment the Britisher as quickly raised it again.

"There's a war going on," he said crisply. "I suggest we return to the control office loud-speaker and resume our pardonable eavesdropping."

But Hayseed did not rise to the invitation. The haunting memory of gallant Flight Lieutenant Porter giving up the ghost still lingered.

"If it is all the same to you, I'd rather not," he begged off.

A shrug was the Intelligence officer's answer. He sensed what lay in the back of the ferry pilot's sudden show of reluctance, and silently indicated another exit for him.

CHAPTER III

Grounded

HAYSEED was grateful for the concealing darkness outside. Of the fierce bird battle only the distant drumming of mingled gunfire and engine noises remained.

The eerie quiet aided in restoring a semblance of order inside the American's buzzing head. But important facts that could not be overlooked were still to be considered. Two R.A.F. pilots had met death in a manner mysterious and suspicious while flying Yankee-built Havocs. Furthermore he, Haydon Cedworth, a Yankee, had delivered the fatal funeral crows to the British fighter station without mishap.

The unfortunate combination of events was like a dangerous wedge that might in time part the strong bond of understanding existing between English and American volunteer airmen.

It was imperative that he clear himself of the suspicion linking him with the mystery of the little devils that had danced on the death ships' wings. It was no simple matter to dismiss the memory of having heard himself declared a suspect by the blunt-spoken B.I. officer.

His keen sense of hearing told him that the unseen bird battle was now being fought over a wide circular course.
That could mean but one thing. Outnumbered, but not outgamed, the British Bats had forced the Jerry bandits to turn tail and head for home.

Hayseed began walking hurriedly in the general direction of the fighter outfit’s blacked-out mess. He had no desire to join with those who would hopefully count the homecoming “dark angels.” The terrible silence that would ensue when Flight Lieutenant Porter failed to answer to his name would bring ominous angry mutters from Porter’s comrades.

When the ferry pilot reached the mess shack he rapped loudly on the door before entering, in accordance with custom. Should lights be turned on inside the building those within the room must be allowed sufficient time in which to “douse the glims” as the precautionary procedure is known.

“Pop in, and make it snappy, whoever you are,” a muffled invitation finally came through the heavy door.

Hayseed quickly sidled through the narrowest possible opening. He heard someone fumbling around, then a tunic that had served as an impromptu lamp shade was removed from a lighted lamp suspended by its cord from the ceiling.

“Hullo!” the lone occupant of the room said. “You’re the American shuttle jock. The chap who fetched up the haunted Havoc which served one of our best lads, Reggie Foy, as a casket.”

The next instant found the loquacious English birdman gazing into a pair of raging eyes less than a foot removed from his own.

“Oh, come now, I say,” he made haste to apologize. “No insult intended. Entire personnel of this outfit when speaking of the incident refer to it as the ‘Haunted Havoc.’ Also, I saw the whole ghostly show. Happened to hold down the Number Five in Foy’s section.”

Hayseed’s ire slowly subsided. Unaware that the American was already familiar with the details, Number Five repeated his eye-witness description of the epic happening.

“Uncanny fails to describe the thing,” he shudderingly assured the attentive listener. “Why did the flaming devils have to select the wing surface of Foy’s bus for their dance floor?”

Hayseed saw that the affair of the illuminated imps had jangled Number Five’s nerves badly, which also indicated a reason for the pilot being on the ground at the moment.

“Perhaps you are thinking that I’m bunty in my crumpet, old boy?” Number Five challenged.

“Nothing of the sort,” the Yank gravely assured him. “Truth is, the dancing devils worked the identical trick on your Flight Lieutenant Porter just a while ago. I was in the controller’s office and heard Porter’s last words come out of the loud-speaker.”

NUMBER Five’s face took on the hue of dead ashes. But what he saw in Hayseed’s face brought him to himself.

“Don’t look shocked like that, chum,” he said quickly. “What has happened to Porter is a break for me, in a way. You would not be knowing it but I am more or less under arrest while our Intelligence endeavors to decide whether or not I had a finger in Reggie Foy’s finish. The reason for the action is that I was unlucky enough to be flying top-side of Foy’s plane when the little demons put the lighted finger on it for the Jerry bandits to see it.”

Hayseed dropped a sympathetic hand on the pilot’s sagging shoulder.

“Don’t let a little thing like a brush with B.I. get under your feathers,” he consoled. “It’s their job. Fact is, one of your Intelligence birds has just finished tightening the screws on me. But my chin is still up, and I’m free to roam wherever I please.”

Number Five flashed the Yank a pitying smile.

“That’s what you think,” he commented dryly.

Hayseed was in no mood to argue.

“By the by, can you by any chance direct me to where Ross Andrews, your engineer officer, is holed up?”

The grounded pilot pretended to examine the toe of his boot.

“Andrews is where neither you nor I would jolly well care to contact him,” he hinted darkly. “Split second before you barged in ’ere the engineer officer chap barged out, summoned by Intelligence to undergo a rather unpleasant cross-examination. I gathered from his parting remarks that he was about to join our select group of suspects.”

The poorly banked fires of Hayseed’s temper flickered again. He scornfully
turned toward the door. He planned to confront the B.I. bloodhound in his kennel and demand a show-down.

"Douse the glim," he coldly requested.

Number Five's tunic once more did duty as a lamp shade. Resolute, the Yank strode out and entered the now deserted controller's office. Unerringly he selected the correct passage from the many that branched out from the central room and followed it to the Intelligence Officer's individual cubicle.

"Come into my parlor," said the spider to the fly," the B.I. man laughingly invited. "Or would you be Daniel coming to slay the British lion in his den—if you will pardon my bad play of words?"

Hayseed, one hundred seventy-five pounds of dangerous Yankee fighting man, strode forward until only the narrow width of the desk separated him from the smiling man-hunter.

"Cut out the clowning," he crisply advised. "I'd like to return to my own outfit, tonight! Any objections?"

Unperturbed by the American ferry pilot's pugnacious attitude, the Intelligence officer picked up a phone.

"Operations," he drewled into the mouth-piece. "Ready a bus—a two-seater. The passenger will give the pilot orders as to destination and so forth. This is Major Kilgrew. I will be responsible."

The unpredictable B.I. man, still smiling, turned back to Hayseed.

"Does that answer your question?" he asked pleasantly. "The passenger will be you, of course."

Still suspecting that the entire thing would turn out to be a hoax the Yank warily thanked the Intelligence man and withdrew.

Not until the speedy two-seater had put miles between him and the British fighter station did the uneasy Yank relax. Well, anyway, that B.I. bloodhound could no longer keep him under close surveillance.

The visiting two-seater, having identified itself, had hardly followed the guide beam down to a safe landing on Hayseed's home drome before the Yank was out from under the lid and making tracks toward his chief's office. Closeted with Mr. Big, the ferry pilot submitted a verbal report on the strange case of the Haunted Havocs.

THE chief listened intently, then leaned back in his chair. When he spoke his voice held a worried note.

"Your story checks with one I previously received from British Intelligence, about a half hour ago," he said. "And incidentally, Cedworth, it's hard for me to tell you this, but you're grounded until further notice."

Stunned, Hayseed's knuckles showed white through the taut skin of his hands. So the suave, smiling B.I. man was enjoying his ironic joke at his, Hayseed's, expense!

"Do I understand, Chief, that I am under arrest?" he asked, his voice dangerously calm.

Mr. Big cleared his throat uncomfortably. He had a genuine liking for the uncomplaining cracked mug from Indiana.

"Yes and no," he vaguely answered the pilot's direct question. "That is, the order delivered to me via teletype specified that I was to ground you—nothing else."

Hayseed prepared to arise, and the

[Turn page]
chief quit his chair along with him, his glance sympathetic.

"Don't take it to heart, boy," he advised. "The English are a notorious race of skeptics, but they're also the first to admit it when wrong. And Hayseed, I won't even mention this mess to the rest of the gang."

The grounded pilot warmly thanked Mr. Big.

"And maybe there's something more than shows on the surface in being a skeptic," he said grimly. "From now on yours truly is going to have a second look at everything."

It was all of four days before Haydon Cedworth's comrades in the Ferry Command first commented on his peculiar behavior.

"Hayseed's away off his beam," the pilot's cubicle mate confided to a group of idling shuttle jocks. "Only recently he was walking around with his head in the clouds while sounding off on the subject of what he intends to do to the Japs, after he resigns from the Ferry Command. I had him figured as being one of those birds who always has an ear tuned for the call from beyond new horizons. But last night Hayseed told me he has changed his mind about answering the call of the Far East. He even hinted that he's expecting something big to happen right here on this forsaken spot."

The amused group of ferry pilots indulged in grins and chuckles. Only one of them preserved a graven mien. He and Hayseed had worked together as test pilots back in the States.

"You may be laughin' too soon, fellows," he warned. "Hayseed has an uncanny knack of being able to see what waits on the other side of the border."

No one commented on that, but after a while one of the men raised another question.

"Why don't the Allies adopt and improve on the Jerries' latest wrinkle for landing planes at night on blacked-out dromes?"

The invisible infra-red landing lights of which he spoke had already saved more than a few home returning bandits from being knocked off by lurking R.A.F. night-fighters. The answer came from a veteran shuttle jockey, a man known as "Oracle," who insisted that he had the straight dope from an R.A.F. interceptor pilot.

According to the Oracle the wreckage of a not too badly shot-up blackbird bomber, bagged by the R.A.F. interceptor pilot who had told him the story, had been transported intact to a nearby laboratory. There it surrendered its secrets to the scientists working with the R.A.F.

"You can believe me," the Oracle declared, "that those so-called invisible landing lights will be standard equipment on all R.A.F. planes before long."

Hayseed did not hear that prophecy, for he avoided all such impromptu gatherings of his fellow pilots. There were two reasons for his actions. First, he did not wish to publicize the fact that he was officially grounded. His second motive was a new interest in the work of assembling the American-made air fighters pouring into England in a steady stream.

HAYSEED spent his free time wandering in and out of the machine shops, sheds and engine-testing beds. Seldom was he seen to devote a second glance to the Mohawks, Lightnings and other assorted day fighters. But let a Douglas Havoc get started along the assembly line, and Hayseed would accompany the craft step by step, asking questions of the mechanics.

"I'll bet you could put one of the dark angels together blindfolded," an inspector remarked to the ferry pilot on the seventh day of his restless vigil.

Hayseed transferred his fixed gaze from the formidable night-fighter. A painter armed with spray gun and air hose was performing an expert job of blacking over the Havoc.

"Hardly!" he replied. "Just when I think I've got all the details fixed in my mind, I discover that something new has been added. For example, what are those unfamiliar-looking new gadgets installed underneath each wing?"

Surprised, the inspector honored the pilot with a wink.

"Nothin' wrong with your eyesight," he conceded. "But then, you're one of us, so there's no harm in sharing the secret. Them gadgets, as you called 'em, are infra-red ray projectors designed to produce a responding glow in certain objects that have been processed and treated previously with certain chemicals."
Hayseed nodded and hung around until the freshly blackened Havoc had been handrolled under a camouflaged canvas roof and there left to dry.

A second dark angel that was being gassed and checked on the apron in front of a great hangar next captured his attention. The sleek fighter job was scheduled for an early debut in War's arena.

But he was content to watch the craft from a distance instead of mingling with the swarm of bird-herders busy with last minute preparations.

Besides, Hayseed had escorted the debutante from the packing cases to this final stage. He was now anxious to know whether or not he had wasted the time. He was ready to swear that no foreign substance, fiendishly designed to conjure up dancing devils of light similar to those that had betrayed the presence of Reggie Foy and Flight-Lieutenant Porter to the Nazis, had been slipped into the Havoc's works.

CHAPTER IV
Showdown in the Sky

UNTIL just a single groundman was left to tend the poised night-fighter, Hayseed practised patience. Then the ferry pilot recognized the covered figure of the same conscientious workman who had made the humble job of wiping dust off planes a labor of love, and approached the groundman.

"For the life of me I can't see the point in having a man detailed just to keep the sleek beauties nicely dusted and polished," Hayseed remarked idly. "Someone ought to remind Mr. Big that once a plane gets to moving the breeze will brush her clean, and at no cost."

The wiper, plainly ill at ease, awkwardly rolled the great handful of cotton waste he was holding into a loose wad.

He tried to shove it offhandedly into a hip pocket which already held a similar wad.

"Oh, it's not part of my duty to wipe down the newly assembled planes," the bird-herder finally commented. "I'm rated as an instrument mechanic. But maybe you know how it is when a fellow has a spot of eagle blood in his system. I'm nuts about flying and planes. Can't keep my hands off them—love to see them bright and shining."

Hayseed hit the earnest kiwi who aspired to be a hawk a friendly slap across the seat of his coveralls.

"There's no law against a guy being balmy over airplanes," he encouraged. "And you can take my word for it most of the early birdmen get their starts doing just as you're doing. You have what it takes to be a flyer."

The unexpected praise seemed to make the ambitious groundman a little uneasy.

"Thanks," he mumbled. "But I guess I'll be pushing along now."

Hayseed watched him until he turned the corner of the hangar, trying to decide whether the queer bird was high-strung, easily embarrassed, or just plain nervous. If he was nervous—why?

Since time was hanging heavy on the ferry pilot's hands, he looked around for something to occupy him. He found it by subjecting the Havoc that would be going out the following morning to a cursory inspection.

He found the controls free and sensitive to his touch, the panel gadgets all in place and okay. Gun-mounts were in order, and only lacking the guns with which the R.A.F. would outfit her. Everything seemed fit and ready.

Hayseed's camera-keen eyes missed nothing. Only thing needed, he decided, was a set of the new-fangled infra-red landing lights. Too bad the projectors necessary to shoot the beams of so-called black light were not yet being manufactured in mass production. He decided he would hike over to the experimental shop later and learn what he could about the landing light device from the technicians still working to perfect it.

Out of habit Hayseed checked upon the night-fighter's power-plant last. A bit stiff, was his verdict. But then, the ground crew would have worked the stiffness out by hop-off time.

Finished with his inspection, the ferry pilot glanced at his oil- and grease-blackened hands, and swore softly. Then his eyes settled upon a familiar-looking ball of cotton waste. No doubt, the slap he had administered to the seat of the earnest bird-herder's coveralls had dislodged this bit from the fellow's pocket.
He retrieved the bulky wad and put it to good use. But he didn't like the make-shift towel. It was damp and sticky, giving off a strong and offensive odor of phosphorous. What was this? Something new? So far as he knew it was not one of the familiar odors associated with an airdrome.

Hayseed moved away from the Havoc as a number of mechs came straggling toward it, intent on working the feather edges off the engine's new parts with a long warm-up. And the lone straggler tailing behind them was the instrument mechanic who had professed such a great love for planes.

Still wiping his hands on the messy ball of waste, Hayseed yelled a greeting to the bird-herder. When he turned away he was not aware that the mech stared, halted, then followed him unobtrusively at a distance.

Hayseed strolled across the field and into the outfit’s experimental lab. At unexpected transition from the twilight outdoors to total darkness inside he came to an abrupt stop.

“Who's that?” a voice lanced out at him.

The pilot gave his name, then asked a blunt question.

“Why the total blackout, chum?”

His unseen challenger laughed. “Total blackout? That's what you think, guy. I’m actually holding a light in my hand. You just can't see it.”

Hayseed got it then. He guessed he was being introduced to infra-red, or invisible light.

“Watch here.” The voice in the darkness spoke again. “I'll direct it upon its affinity, an object made responsive so because it was painted previously with a special formula.”

Hayseed saw a shapeless, inert form mysteriously take on a definite glow in the darkness. Using the strange spot of cold light for a guide, the curious ferry pilot approached it. When he was halfway to the spot the beacon flickered off, then on again.

“You walked right through the beam and disrupted its continuity for an instant without realizing it,” the voice explained to him.

His interest aroused, the pilot halted in close proximity to the dimly looming object. Properly impressed, he reached out his hands seeking to discover the direction of the invisible ray—and got the surprise of his life.

Silvery flashes of brilliance, reminiscent of a sportive butterfly, briefly appeared to detract attention from the main lighted object. A low, surprised whistle issued from the gloom.

“Hey, that was your hand that lit up!” the man in the dark declared. “But that's impossible! There are only two persons who have access to the small store of special chemical paint. The skipper and myself.”

Cold shock rolled through Hayseed, and he felt his eyes narrowing in the dark.

“Turn that infra-red ray on me again,” he requested puzzled.

The man manipulating the infra-red projector mutteringly obliged. This time both of the pilot's hands glowed weirdly. It was as if they were detached from the rest of his body.

He was lost for an explanation and about to admit it, when the solution to the maddening puzzle struck him like a blow between the eyes. Without warning the other occupant of the room switched the electric lights full on, but Hayseed had already started a stumbling rush in the direction of the door.

“Got to ask a guy about a wad of cotton waste!” he yelled back over his shoulder, and vanished.

Outside in the deepening twilight he remembered having last seen his man in the vicinity of the Havocs. The growling thunder of warming engines carried to his ears. The pilot had started for them on the run when some hidden instinct warned him of danger.

He started to turn. A savagely swung pistol gripped tight in the hand of a stalking covered figure that had slipped up behind him, struck with a sickening thud.

Hayseed owed his life to that instinctive half-turn. The murderous blow, however, did spill him face down on the hard ground. His attacker leaped across the prostrate form and broke into a swift run.

Clambering dizzily to his knees, Hayseed shouted at the top of his lungs, waving wildly toward the fleeing figure.

“Stop that man! He's a saboteur!” As loud as he shouted, though, the rumbling of the engines drowned out the
sound of his voice. Though all but stunned the ferry pilot got up on his feet and lurched in pursuit of the man who had downed him.

He could see that the fellow was heading straight for the Havoc night-fighter that was ticking over on the concrete apron. Hayseed saw the masquerading Nazi waving his pistol, scattering a small ground crew. Then he bounded up the short ladder and tumbled into the Havoc's cockpit.

The ferry pilot left far behind started to groan, but the groan changed to a shout of triumph as he saw a second Nazi who had done devilish things with an innocent-looking ball of waste! Nothing could stop him now.

Pandemonium reigned on the field as the first Havoc to take off knifed through the dusk. Then a dark angel fled from the earth, standing on her tail.

Hayseed was in his native element now. Try and stop him! The runaway Nazi held his bus in a steep, slanting climb. Relentlessly Hayseed grabbed for and secured valuable altitude. The respective planes were equally matched, and if Hayseed was a crack pilot, so was the Nazi.

They were winging along at full gun

**"Snoopy" Wanted to See Some Real Action**

THAT'S why he asked for a transfer from Malta to Libya—but he changed his mind when he heard the rumor of a coming offensive.

BUT they were only planting a bee in Snoopy's bonnet—to keep him at Malta. For Michael Leverington, better known by his nickname, was mighty handy to have around! However, you'll find out who gets stung—in MALTA COURAGE, a zooming action novelet by Don Tracy.

*Coming Next Issue!*

Havoc, a freshly painted one, and the first to be equipped with infra-red landing lights. Not that the latter was important in the face of the present emergency, but it was noted subconsciously.

Some grease monkey had started her engine, too, no doubt thinking that a more rapid stirring of the surrounding air would expedite the process of drying the paint.

Hayseed abruptly changed direction, pounding toward the Havoc. A jabbering groundman sought to interfere.

"Hay, you're not allowed to take a bus off! Chief's orders."

With a sweep of his arm the infuriated ferry pilot shoved the protesting obstruction to one side. Chief's orders—nuts! He was hot on the trail of a when they ran into a formation of Nazi Heinkel bombers which had swooped in across the Channel from Occupied France. Protecting the bombers was a fleet of swift Messerschmitts.

At the very moment that the German fighter planes discovered the two Havocs in the sky and peeled out of formation to attack Hayseed and his quarry, the starlit night sky was torn to shreds by the howling tracer fire of roaring Hurricanes, Spitfires and Havocs swooping into the fray.

Instantly Hayseed knew that British listening posts must have warned the nearest R.A.F. base of the approach of the Nazi bombing party, and these fast interceptor planes had gone into immediate action to keep the bombers from
reaching their objective. For whether the Germans knew it or not this dogfight was taking place dangerously close to the hidden corner from which planes were ferried to R.A.F. combat stations.

Nazi and British planes scooted through the sky. Machine-guns laced the gloom with ruby tongues of fire. Off to the west two flame-spitting Hurricanes dived down at a Heinkel, then slid past. A moment later the Heinkel plunged into a twisting spin, leaping red flames enveloping its steel-clad length.

A Messerschmitt swooped past Hayseed’s nose, then came up beneath him. Guns chattered, and the Havoc trembled as bullets stitched a deadly line of steel along the tail assembly. Another German ship raced toward him, aerial cannons thudding, but missing their mark.

His face grim and lined, Hayseed calculated his chances of survival. They looked slim. Both his Havoc and the one flown by the Nazi spy were without guns, since they were armed only after delivery to R.A.F. combat bases. Now both were at the mercy of the blood-hungry Messerschmitts.

Death faced Hayseed, and he knew it. Yet he was not worried about dying if he could somehow bring about the ruin of the Nazi spy he had never left out of his sight.

Climbing steeply into the clouds, then diving headlong through snarling, battling planes, Hayseed eluded the two Messerschmitts and streaked after the spy’s Havoc. He saw the Nazi pilot dodging frantically, trying to escape the hot, leaden death in the sky.

ESP A I R was beginning to harass him when a sudden inspiration came. There was a chance he could trap that spy and with luck force him to land! And he had to do that. For only by making the fake mechanic a prisoner could he hope to clear himself from suspicion.

Feeding the Havoc all the juice it would take, Hayseed thundered to a spot directly above the Nazi. Four Messerschmitts spotted them and came screaming toward them. Desperately Hayseed held his position. Then he thumbed a switch on his dash, his cheek pressing hard against the side glass while he watched. For an instant nothing happened. Then directly down in front of Hayseed’s Havoc ghostly moon moths began to dance on the upper surfaces of the other blacked-over Havoc’s wings.

Hayseed kept the invisible twin beams of his plane’s infra-red landing lights trained on the target, darting and twisting like a thing possessed of a devil. A score of brightly glowing spots, placed there by a wand of chemically treated cotton waste in the hand of the saboteur, winked through the gloom.

Tracers streaked toward that clearly outlined British plane, and aerial cannon burst against its metal framework.

Hit badly, the spy’s Havoc lurched off into a crazy spin. The Messerschmitts started to pursue it, but a half dozen Hurricanes swooped down out of the clouds to intercept them.

That was all the chance Hayseed needed. He saw the saboteur miraculously pull the Havoc out of its spin. Grimly he shot down past the nose, then zoomed up beneath the belly of the crippled plane.

In the momentary ruby glow of a plummeting Nazi plane that had caught fire, he saw the spy’s pain-racked face. Machine-gun bullets had shattered the cockpit, found their mark in flesh and bone, and the man was barely able to tool the ship.

Hayseed gestured grimly for the Nazi to fly back the way they had come. And the spy, dreading death more than exposure and capture, complied.

Somewhere they flew clear of that raging sky battle. Yet even as they did the Yank ferry pilot caught a glimpse of the Nazi air raiders turning tail to flee across the Channel.

Hayseed took no count of time, but suddenly both Havocs were above their secret base. The Havoc stolen by the spy swung into the wind, came down careeningly and landed with a jar.

Landing right behind it, Hayseed watched the saboteur’s craft plunge along the ground, then tip over on its nose.

Dark shapes were running across the field as Hayseed leaped from his plane and dashed to the half-wrecked ship from which a staggering shape fell to the ground. The Nazi spy tried to run away, but Hayseed’s flying leap brought him to the ground.
Suddenly a crowd of men were all around them, and the chief's booming voice drilled through the night air.

"Hayseed! What's the meaning of this? You had your orders to stay on the ground."

"Sure, I know it," grunted Hayseed, smiling warily. "But I've just brought back the sneaking spy who's been responsible for tampering with the Havocs so that in combat they are outlined clearly for the Jerries. Look in his pocket! You'll find a ball of waste cotton. It's full of phosphorous. All the while he was pretending to wipe the dust off the planes, he was spotting the wings with phosphorous so they'd glow when the Nazis turned on their infra-red landing lights."

The Nazi saboteur was cursing savagely, attempting to deny the charge, but Hayseed gripped him and pulled out the ball of waste.

Abruptly the fight went out of the wounded man and he began to blubber a confession. When he had finished, some of the ground crew on whom he had held the gun while making his get-away, pushed forward to support Hayseed's story. Excitedly they told how they had seen him pursue the fake mechanic across the tarmac.

By the time the entire story of the chase, and the miraculous escape from the dogfight had been told, the Yank was the center of an admiring throng.

"Blast it all, Hayseed!" said the chief. "I knew you weren't the guy, but when you took off in that Havoc I'll admit I had my suspicions. You've saved a lot of lives tonight. We are sure glad you're with us."

"I won't be for long, though," said Hayseed. "I'm quitting to go after those back-stabbing Japs. I would have left sooner but I had this job to finish first."

For a moment no one spoke, yet every man was conscious of what was going on in the Yank's heart. New horizons were calling to Haydon Cedworth. It was a high call in his blood and he had to be on the move.

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Next Issue: SUICIDE TARGET, by Robert Sidney Bowen

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I've found a blade that's just the thing
For fast, smooth shaves—no smart or sting!
These Thin Gillettes last long as well—
You save real dough, your face looks swell!

Produced By The Maker
Of The Famous Gillette
Blue Blade

Easy Way To Get Even More Shaves With Every Gillette Blade

1. WASH FACE thoroughly with hot water and soap to soften beard and eliminate accumulated grit that dulls shaving edges
2. APPLY LATHER or Brushless Shaving Cream white face is wet. If lather is used, dip your brush in water frequently
3. TWO EDGES double blade life. Marks indicated above identity edges, enabling you to give both equal use and get extra shaves
4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then running in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges
WE SCOUR THE SEAS

By AIR VICE-MARSHAL
G. B. A. BAKER

RAF Coastal Command

Comparatively little of the work of Coastal Command receives the limelight of publicity because what happens at sea is not everybody’s business until long after it has ceased to be spot news. As a result, less is known of the duties of the aircraft of the Coastal Command than is the case with other Commandos of the Royal Air Force. It is commonly thought that their rôle is defensive, their main objective the protection of the coasts of the British Isles.

In point of fact, nothing is further from the truth. The Coastal pilot passes over the British shores on his outward mission, to return, hours later, to his aerodrome or anchorage. In the meanwhile, he may have been operating anywhere on the coastline of Germany or German occupied territory from the North of Norway to Gibraltar—or far out over the Atlantic, 600 miles or more.

First Duty

The first duty of the Command is reconnaissance, searching for the enemy on the sea, under the sea and in harbor. But the matter does not end there, for, once he has been located, the enemy is attacked with all means available. The Command is equipped not only with long range flying boats and reconnaissance aircraft, but also with aircraft capable of bombing or dropping torpedoes, in addition to long range fighters.

Many of the types used are of American origin—the Hudson, which has done yeoman service throughout the war on medium range general reconnaissance and U-boat hunting, the Catalina and the four-engined Liberator.

What then are the problems with which Coastal Command has to deal? There is a German Navy, which is powerful enough to cause considerable trouble if it gets out of control and breaks into the crowded Atlantic trade routes. The escape of the Gneisenau and Scharnhorst in March, 1941, resulting in the sinking of at least 19 merchant vessels, provides an example of the damage which major naval units are capable of inflicting.

Hunting Down the Bismarck

The Bismarck set out on a similar voyage which ended less happily for her. After sinking H. M. S. Hood, she tried desperately to make a port in the Bay of Biscay in a damaged condition. In the bad weather she had shaken off the following British fleet, and her chances of escape were favorable.

And then a Catalina of the Royal Air Force

In Fair Weather and Foul,
Rugged Planes of the Coastal Command Dominate Channel,
Atlantic and the North Sea

Consolidated Catalina Flying Boat
broke cloud a few hundred feet above her. Those on board the Bismarck had no illusions as to what her presence meant. Every A.A. gun and some of the main armament as well opened up. The aircraft was hit, a shell fragment passing up between the two pilots.

But the sighting report was made none the less, and the lost contact re-established. The Scharnhorst in 1940 and the Lutzow in 1941 both attempted to break out. But their freedom was shortlived, and they returned to port for prolonged repair as the result of encounters with Coastal Aircraft.

The fortunes of war ebb and flow, and at times the dice are too heavily loaded. Later the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau broke out of the run at high speed under cover of bad weather, and relays of shore-based fighters concentrated over them throughout the passage in overwhelming numbers. They effected their escape, not without damage, in circumstances which clearly favored success.

**Strafing Nazi Sea Lines**

Such actions are incidents which stand out against a background of weeks and months in intensive reconnaissance of the harbors and dockyards in which the German Navy shelters, and which provides the necessary information on which to anticipate projected movements. In addition, patrols must be maintained to search for and locate convoys of merchant ships which pass up and down the North Sea Coastline.

Shipping plays a substantial part in the German economy. It eases the overloaded German controlled railways. It carries supplies of food and ammunition to German troops abroad and brings back from the occupied countries spoils in the form of iron ore, farm produce, fish and other necessities for the German people and their war effort.

Bitter experience has taught them to arm their ships heavily and to form them into convoys closely escorted by flanked ships mounting A.A. guns and covered by shore-based fighters. Nevertheless, they are continually harassed and attacked by day and night, at times not without losses, with the result that many a ship carrying a German cargo lies at the bottom of the North Sea.

The convoys make their journey in stages, putting into harbors along their route. But even here, protected by shore defenses, they ride uneasily at anchor, alert for the drone of aircraft engines growing louder in the night air. The attack at Aalesund is perhaps typical.

In November, 1941, nine Hudsons attacked at mast height shipping in this small harbor deep in the Norwegian fjords. Four enemy ships were sunk or left sinking. A fifth was left in flames, and an escort vessel was severely damaged.

A fish oil factory was set ablaze, and a power station and German barracks were bombed. To complete the night’s work a lorry was hunted along a road and forced to crash into a ditch!

**On the U-Boats’ Trail**

Behind all these activities lies the Battle of the Atlantic—that grim war which goes on ceaselessly and relentlessly against the U-boat, waged to keep open the supply lines essential to the Allied war effort.

U-boats leaving or returning to their harbors in Germany or the Bay of Biscay are forced to travel submerged while within the range of aircraft or take the consequences of being caught on the surface. This means a prolonged passage and less time on actual operations, and so the U-boat tends to take a chance even when actual necessity does not force him on top of the water.

But he is a small target and a wary one. Many hours of flying in all weather conditions are necessary to sight him. Again, there are convoys to be protected when threatened by the U-boat pack.

Experience has taught that no more effective antidote to sinkings exists than the maintenance of air escort through the threatened zones. In this, as in all its operations, Coastal Command works in the closest co-operation with the Admiralty. That so many convoys arrive unscathed is a tribute to the effectiveness of this teamwork.

**Just a Few**

These are but a few of the activities of the pilots and aircrews of Coastal Command—space prevents little more than their mention, and others, such as the work of the Long Range Fighter Squadrons, Meteorological Flights and Air Sea Rescue, must be passed over.

The coats-of-arms of the Coastal Squadrons hang on the walls of the Mess at Headquarters. Their devices are numerous, their mottoes are many—but the latter are summed up in that of the Command.

“We search and strike.”

Day and night, in fair weather and foul, the pilots and aircrews of the Command have been flying on operations since the first day of the war. It has been computed that already more than 50 million miles have been flown, or approximately 2,000 times round the world.

This has not been carried out without cost, nor has it been without successes, as well perhaps as disappointments. The Command will so continue with increased numbers and increased effort until the day of final victory comes.
To Canadian-born Vernon Ayer it was like Heaven to have the R.A.F. on the offensive over Malta. As he flew with another Spitfire above that never-say-die fortress of the Mediterranean it was good to be the one out looking for trouble. No more sitting around like duck decoys waiting for the Nazis to come. The Allies were doing the hunting now, breaking up Axis air supply lines to Tunis where American, British and Fighting French troops were giving the Jerries a licking on all sides.

Ayer looked across to the sturdy, five-foot-four American pilot flying so close to him and smiled. At first it had been hard to believe that American planes and equipment would appear so soon after the United States had been blasted into the war. But they had arrived, and with them American pilots like Shorty Tobin. Now they were all flying side by side to rout the Nazis and Italians from the air above Mussolini's private lake.

Shorty Tobin handled a Spitfire as if he'd been weaned in the cockpit.
There was that certain sureness about every little twist his plane made that showed its pilot understood the air.

Now they were heading out toward Sicily, from where the Nazis were trying to supply their hard-pressed men in Tunisia.

Ayer saw the enemy planes first—a big Junkers transport and two shepherding Heinkels. He grinned, banked off and talked to Tobin through the radio.

"Red leader calling Red Two. Bandits off the port wing. You wanted action, Shorty, and here it is. Get that transport."

Ayer was setting his gun sights for the wing spread of the Heinkels when Tobin’s voice came over.

"Calling Red Leader. Red Leader, the transport is yours. I’ll keep the buzzards busy while you nail it. Good luck."

AYER grunted affirmation. There was no use arguing. He knew that Tobin’s idea was to let him take the major glory of knocking down the Junkers.

They were spotted and the two Heinkels came upstairs very fast to give battle. One darted toward Ayer, but Tobin came zooming down with his guns spitting, and the Heinkel hastily switched course. Ayer calmly reset his gun sights to accommodate the much larger wingspread of the Junkers. He settled more comfortably in his seat and went into a dive.

Getting the Junkers should not be too hard, although there was a tail gunner on these newer models who could throw out a lot of punishment. But Ayer wanted to force that Junkers down, on Malta preferably, even Sicily would be good enough. These new transports were still a mystery. G.H.Q. would love the chance to inspect one of them.

A Heinkel came darting down at him, but Shorty was so close on its tail the Nazi pilot didn’t fire a shot. He had to veer off to avoid being shot up by Shorty. The second Heinkel was maneuvering somewhere high above, waiting for a chance to pounce. He’d probably find that chance as Ayer went into a long dive toward the Junkers.

It was just in time. Ayer saw the Junkers start dropping toward the sea, where it would be safer against diving attacks. And the big plane was turning its nose for home. Sicily was only a short distance away.

Ayer banked after it, switched his firing-button safety to off, and gave her almost a full gun. The other Heinkel would be coming down now. It was Shorty’s job to nail it or, failing that, beat it off.

Ayer watched the Junkers grow bigger and bigger in the sights of his gun. Lips drawn back slightly, he whistled through his teeth, hauled back a little on the stick to keep astern of the huge ship and got set to open fire.

He was close enough to see the gunner in the tail blister. The snouts of two cannon were maneuvering to cover Ayer and he knew what those guns could do if the gunner got his chance.

Something flashed just below Ayer. He could hardly notice it, but knew it was a Heinkel falling into the sea, with Tobin riding hard on its tail. Score one for Tobin.

Ayer forgot everything but his purpose. He must get that Junkers down somewhere in good enough condition to fly back to the R.A.F. base.

As he came out of the long dive, his hands felt heavy and his jaw sagged. He knew he wasn’t far from blacking out. He began to yell at the top of his voice. The blood slowly flowed back into his brain and the weakness left him.

He veered sharply. He was almost in the backwash of the big Junkers, and if it ever caught him he’d probably bounce into the sea. The margin of space between him and the water was precariously small.

The rear gunner opened fire first. Ayer saw his cannons winking red. Once he felt the Spitfire jolt. That meant a mild hit, probably on a wing tip. He paid no attention to it.

He could make out the features of the rear gunner, see the snarl of hatred on his face. Ayer grinned broadly, moved the stick slightly left, then to the right, alternated foot pressure on the rudder, kept the German straight in the sights of his gun.

It was time. His thumb caressed the firing button for a second and pushed. The eight guns opened up. He saw the plastic blister smash, the gunner fall
forward and the cannons stopped their blasting.

Ayer overshot the big plane, raced ahead and then banked to come back. Now he had a good chance to view the sky. The second Heinkel was running like mad, with Shorty Tobin after him. Ayer felt safe now. Unless more enemy fighters arrived, this transport was at his mercy.

He banked once more, got on the tail of the Junkers and headed down again. As he neared the big ship, those cannons started blasting once more. Ayer swore and brought his eight machine guns into action. He knew he could hammer anybody in the tail of the Junkers.

Flying just above, he ripped bullets through the entire length of the fuselage and concentrated his fire on the pilot's greenhouse. The big ship wobbled. One engine started to smoke badly. It was apparent that either the pilot was injured or the plane was about out of control.

The shores of Sicily slid beneath Ayer and he raced ahead of the transport. It would attempt to land at some field and he must stop this. Glancing to the left, he saw Shorty Tobin, serenely flying beside him.

"Red Leader to Red Two. Nice work, Shorty. Help me make this blasted Junkers sit down some place where we won't be bothered as we have a look at it. Remember—she's probably full of soldiers. I machine-gunned them, but they won't all be dead."

A curt okay came from Shorty. The German ship made a lumbering turn to the north. Ayer shot down, guns spitting. The Junkers straightened out again in a hurry. They were flying at furious speeds and already the populated coastal areas had disappeared and there was nothing but vast stretches of field below.

Ayer decided this was just about the right place. Since no aerial cover had come up to protect the Junkers, he decided the Heinies didn't know what was going on. He slid down again in one of those long dives. This time it wasn't so easy.

As the pilot's quarters loomed up, he fired a burst. If the pilots were killed, the plane was bound to crash and that wouldn't be good. Yet he had to chance it.

The Junkers wobbled so badly he thought it would come apart in mid-air. Then the big plane began losing altitude very fast. A moment later its landing gear hit the bumpy ground, and by some miracle the plane came to a stop.

Ayer was already coming in for a landing himself. He zoomed over the tree tops of a forest, hit the ground and rolled crazily along it. His Spitfire stopped about five hundred feet from the Junkers. Ayer kept his thumb on the machine gun firing button and waited. If any Heinies were still alive, they should be coming out now. Yet there were no signs of life.

Ayer knew the risk involved in approaching that plane, but time was limited and he wanted to take that machine back to Malta. Shorty was still airborne, circling slowly at a dangerous level. Ayer clambered out of his plane, drew the gun at his hip and started moving toward the Junkers.

As he did the door of the big plane opened and six men hopped out. Each one held a submachine gun and started shooting. Ayer dropped flat and was hidden by foot-high grass, but those Nazis were bent on vengeance and kept coming closer and closer. Apparently they were so intent on killing this British pilot that they had either forgotten about the Spitfire overhead or else their ears were still drumming so much with vibrations that they failed to hear Shorty Tobin's Spitfire above.

Shorty came down, his guns spitting. A couple of the Heinies dropped, but Shorty had overshot his target a little. He fought for altitude and came back. This time the Heinies started shooting at him. He was very low, well within reach of their submachine guns. Ayer groaned as he saw smoke eddy from the Spitfire's engine.

Ayer got up and ran toward the two remaining Germans. He shot one through the head. The other dropped his gun and began running. Ayer took careful aim, fired, and the fight was over.

Only then did he have time to see what happened to Shorty. He'd heard his crash. Well behind him, the Spitfire had come to earth and was be-
ginning to burn.

Shorty was still at the stick when Ayer reached the plane, his bloody head slumped low on his chest. Flames were beginning to seep all around.

Ayer covered his face with one arm, jumped onto a wing and slid back the cowling. He reached inside. Fire licked at his arm, but he only winced and reached in to secure a grip on Shorty. It took all the strength he could summon to pull the unconscious man onto the wing. He dragged him to the ground and pulled him well away from the blazing plane.

Ayer made a quick examination. Shorty had caught a burst from the Nazi Tommy guns. There was so much blood it was difficult to determine the exact number of wounds, but his shoulder seemed to be the worst. His right side was punctured at least once. Ayer lifted him and staggered back toward the Junkers. At least Shorty was still alive, but it was evident he’d die if he didn’t get some medical aid quickly.

Ayer put him down gently and approached the big Junkers. There were eight soldiers inside, all dead. The pilot and co-pilot were dead, too, but apparently one of them had lived long enough to pancake the plane.

Ayer dragged the bodies out as quickly as possible. He put Shorty inside, and returned to his Spitfire, intending to put an incendiary into the fuel tank. He hesitated—it seemed a shame to ruin a perfectly good plane.

Ayer looked around, jumped into the plane and taxied it toward the forest. He scraped wing tips, almost knocked his gear off a couple of times, but finally managed to worm the ship well beyond the initial fringe of that forest where the trees were scattered, but the brush fairly thick. For the time being, at least, it was hidden.

Ayer rushed back to the Junkers. He felt comparatively safe because he knew they were on a very isolated section of the Italian island. Working fast and using every bit of skill he possessed, he finally managed to get the lumbering German craft off the ground and into the air.

On the way back, Shorty regained consciousness and dragged himself forward to the pilot’s seat. Ayer slipped earphones on him.

“We did it, pal,” Shorty said, weakly. “Maybe I’m going out, but I took plenty of those Jerries with me.”

“You’re not going out,” Ayer said grimly. “I know what you did for me, Shorty. I won’t forget it. You knew those machine gunners would either get me or you.”

“It’s okay,” Shorty mustered a grin. “What difference does it make who takes it—Yank, British, Russian or Chinese—as long as the score is on our side. Just gets my goat, that’s all. I wanted to strut my stuff for the Yanks when they closed in on Tunis. That’s out, I guess. Even if I live, I’m so shot up I couldn’t fly again.”

“Shorty,” Ayer spoke softly, “if it works out you can’t help take Tunis, I’ll go in your place. It will be you behind my guns. The C. O. will give me permission. After bringing in this Junkers, he wouldn’t refuse. Now see if you can sleep. I’m heading for home.”

“Don’t forget,” Shorty said, “you’re in a ship with a black cross on the wings. Better contact Battle Control at Malta so they won’t send up a flock of Spits to knock you down.”

Later Ayer talked to a doctor. Shorty wouldn’t die, but he was to be invalidated home, his flying days over. He couldn’t even see anyone for a long time.

Ayer was pacing up and down in front of the hospital, many feet beneath the rocky surface of Malta, when the announcing system called all pilots. Ayer ran to the assembly room.

WING COMMANDER DAYMOND looked very serious as he stepped before the men.

“Gentlemen, our Intelligence units have advised us that the enemy expects to try and bring reinforcements to Tunis. They’ve tried it before and we have stopped them, but this time the situation is so desperate that they are taking all measures to insure the safe arrival of the convoy. Instead of a fleet of small cargo ships, they have assembled the largest craft they own.”

He stepped to a map, picked up a pointer and began to trace a route.

“They will be provided with extremely heavy anti-submarine craft, an intense umbrella of air power and the large ships they use are some of the fastest in the world. They will hug
the shore to Italy, dash to Sicily and try a quick run across the Mediterranean to Tunis at night. That convoy must be destroyed.”

Some of the pilots glanced at one another. They knew the risk involved. The Germans were taking more and more of their best fighters from Russia to aid the beleaguered and all but conquered armies in Africa. This time it would be hard for the bombers and torpedo planes to break up their air umbrellas.

Wing Commander Daymond maintained silence and advanced to the edge of the platform.

“It won’t be easy. There doesn’t seem to be any way, other than a pitched battle, to get at those very large transports and supply ships. I am open to suggestions.”

Ayer’s mind was jumping hurdles while Daymond spoke. He rose quickly and stood at attention.

“There is a way, sir. The Junkers transport we got this afternoon. The enemy doesn’t know for sure that it was captured. They are probably out hunting for it now.”

“I see what you mean, Lieutenant.” Daymond nodded slowly. “Please accompany me into the briefing room. The rest of you at ease.”

Over maps, Ayer eagerly pointed out his plan.

“With some very fast work we can repair the Junkers enough, sir. We can rig bomb racks, install a sight. That plane is able to lift a terrific load of bombs. Give me a bombardier and I’ll meet that convoy somewhere east of Sicily. I’ll be flying very low and they’ll think it’s a friendly plane, sir.”

Daymond stroked his chin. “It could be done, of course, but whoever handles the job will be in a tight spot.”

“Let me handle it, sir,” Ayer begged. “I’ve an especial reason. The American who flew with me this afternoon and was shot up feels badly because he can’t help his fellow Yanks in Tunis. I promised him I’d try to arrange something to take his place. This is my chance, sir. We must cooperate and it will make Shorty—that is, Tobin, sir—rest easier.”

Daymond chuckled.

“I’ve no doubt it would,” he said. “Very well, then, the job is yours, but I have a few suggestions. Listen carefully.”

Until just before dawn there was terrific activity in one of the underground hangars.

First the big Junkers had to be photographed and her secrets learned. While this went on, a repair crew patched up the motor, repaired the smashed glass and had her ready barely in time.

A bombsight was rigged into place and a crude bomb bay installed. Finally the heaviest bombs were packed into the ship in such quantity it seemed she’d never be able to take off. A full fuel tank was reported as Ayer and his bombardier arrived.

ELEVATORS brought the plane to the surface. Ayer listened to last minute instructions and got into the plane. His bombardier, a little redhead from London, grinned impishly and patted the side of one big bomb. Ayer lifted the plane off the island’s biggest runway and headed her out to sea.

Things had to come off on the split second and he watched his air speed carefully. There was no communication with Battle Station now—the ship was on its own.

Flying very high, they were over the Italian mainland. Twice, searchlights cut loose, but didn’t spot them. As dawn lit the sky, he was squarely on a route the Nazis used in traveling to and from Tunis. He could see Sicily, like a shadowy bank of clouds in the distance. Directly below were Italian shores.

“Sir,” the bombardier called over the inter-coms, “I’ve sighted our objective. Six of the biggest tubs I ever laid eyes on. Must be fifty Italian destroyers and sub chasers around them. And here come the bandits, sir. Lor’ bless me, must be two hundred.”

Ayer banked slightly and roared away from the scene. It was still too early for action. The sun was in his favor and those enemy planes couldn’t have seen him. If the Italians below had him spotted as he cruised along, they’d certainly recognize the insignia of a friendly plane.

He kept looking at his watch, cursing the slow movements of the sweep second hand. He knew to attack ahead of
time would only end in disaster. He got back on the regular transport route again, but far behind the convoy and its accompanying umbrella. The convoy would run behind the protection of Sicily, wait until dark and then make a stab for Tunis. Its Air umbrella would protect them during daylight hours. The armada was an exceptional one. Hitler was gambling a lot to keep the Yanks stalled in Tunisia and Rommel’s army from being entirely wiped out. Any submarine that tried to attack his fleet would be committing suicide. The only chance of getting at any of the ships would be when they came within reach of the fighter planes waiting somewhere in Libya. When attacked, the escorting Nazi flyers would go into action, risking all to protect the convoy.

Ayer’s watch crept around to the exact time. He revved up the motor a little and called to the bombardier to

“Bomb bay doors open, sir. Ready,”
“Coming onto the target,” Ayer said, adding air speed, wind drift and height. The big plane surged upward a bit. That would be the first of the bombs dropping.

Below, one of the great liners which had once won speed records crossing the Atlantic, was suddenly covered by a dense black fog. Flames leaped up through the smoke. Ayer grinned happily and went down closer.

A cruiser got the next burst, squarely amidships. Ayer could see the men leaping from the decks into the water. They got a second transport both on the stern and forward.

STILL no ack-ack rose to blast the big, lazily moving transport out of the sky. Ayer knew the Germans and Italians believed the bombs were coming from the big planes in the stratosphere.

Flying Fool Chuck Ronney Proves There’s Method in His Recklessness—in SUICIDE TARGET, Exciting Novelet by Robert Sidney Bowen Next Issue!

stand by for action. He dropped a thousand feet and deliberately cruised above Italian anti-aircraft on the coast. When he spotted the convoy again, he saw that he flew well below the aerial umbrella. Now he must have been seen. In a few moments they’d try to contact him by radio and when he didn’t answer, some of those buzzards would come down to see what was wrong.

Three miles ahead the convoy was stretched out, proceeding at a slow rate of speed, literally killing time until darkness. As Ayer watched, the Nazi planes suddenly spread out all over the sky and started to climb rapidly. By craning his neck, Ayer saw a number of minute specks above. Those would be British and American heavy bombers flying in the stratosphere.

Ayer spoke into the radio.

“I can’t give you a run to gauge the target,” he said to the bombardier. “Do the best you can and I’ll fly low enough so a miss will be practically impossible. Ready?”

They were too high to be seen and none of the surface ships carried anti-aircraft which could hope to reach their height.

The convoy’s fighter escort was busy gaining altitude to beat off the bombers above. They, too, must have figured them the source of the attack.

Ayer felt the Junkers lurch again and again. The bombardier was singing gayly, interposing his song with vivid language when he noted a miss.

Of the six giant vessels below only two were unhit. Ayer laughed out loud. The Nazis must be thinking in terms of new bombsights on those high-flying bombers. They couldn’t see the bomb bay doors open on the Junkers. They had been too carefully camouflaged.

The fourth ship got a stick of bombs amidships and burst into flame. That was all. The Heinkels came flashing down out of the sky, finally conscious of what was really happening. Ayer gave his plane a full gun and turned its nose into the sun.

A Heinkel flashed across the bow,
guns spitting. One of the Junker’s motors promptly conked out. They were over Sicily now and ack-ack started throwing up a terrific barrage that constantly hurled the big plane off course. The starboard motor was in flames.

“Brace yourself,” Ayer called over the intercoms. “I’m going to crash land. I know a field we can make. As we land be ready to jump out and follow me. Watch out the Jerries don’t strafe you.”

Ayer put the plane into a sharp dive. The Heinkels came swooping down after him, but he was too close to the ground now and they had to break off, regain altitude and come in for an attack.

Tree tops snapped as the landing gear brushed across the top of that same forest where the Spitfire had been hidden. Land came up with terrific velocity, and the Junkers nosed up a small canyon of earth. Her props corrugated. Glass broke all around Ayer. As he unstrapped his belt and flung himself to the floor.

The Heinkels came down, guns lashing out to make sure nothing still lived in that plane. The slugs smashed all around him, but Ayers drew nothing but a flesh wound in his right thigh.

As the Heinkels veered off, he crawled aft and found the bombardier intact except for slight wounds, and able to proceed under his own power. They rolled out of the plane, hit the ground and stayed there. The Heinkels didn’t come back apparently believing nobody could have escaped the strafing. Soon, however, ground forces would arrive. There was no time to lose.

Limping, Ayer led the way to where he’d left the Spitfire. It was still there. With the bombardier helping they wheeled it to the edge of the clearing. The bombardier got in first, slumped as low as possible in the seat and Ayer sat on top of him.

It didn’t have too much fuel and even less ammunition. Ayer would have to get into the sky and streak for home as fast as possible. The plane bumped across the ground, made a take-off with dangerously little space to spare. There was a muffled cheer from somewhere.

Ayer felt like cheering too, but there wasn’t time. He had to keep his eyes open for enemy planes. He circled the field once, dived and fired a burst of incendiaries into what was left of the Junkers. It was dusk, but he could still see the bodies of those soldiers and pilots whom he’d killed in the first battle.

The bombardier’s cheers turned into grunts as time elapsed. The grunts became plaintive groans for air. Ayer grinned. Shorty Tobin would like this—Shorty, who had willingly risked his life that Ayer’s would be spared had been avenged, What was left of that convoy wouldn’t dare another crossing.

Ayer had never seen a sunset so beautiful as the one in the sky that evening as he streaked for the rocky island he’d called home for more than a year.
HERE are more stories of the brave exploits of British pilots everywhere that redound to the glory of the R.A.F. and offer a glimpse of the heroism that can never die!

These are true tales and they are told with no empty literary flourishes. They RAF ACES has won nation-wide commendation. Hundreds of readers are enthusiastic about these terse straight-from-the-shoulder accounts of feats performed in the service of democracy.

These are true tales and they are told with no empty literary flourishes. They present, we think, an inspiring picture of our allies in the struggle against Axis tyranny.

ONE DAY’S OPERATIONS

HERE is a typical combat report of a Royal Canadian Air Force Fighter Squadron, of one day’s operations:

“The Squadron left at 1405 hours as close escort to a formation of Blenheims. The French coast was crossed. The bombs were seen to burst in the wood where heavy Flak was experienced.

“Two minutes after leaving the target, a 109F dived from starboard through the bombers without firing. Pilot Officer Pentland, on the port center of bombers, followed this aircraft down, giving a 10-second burst with ample deflection at 250 yards range.

“He saw pieces breaking off the aircraft’s port wing from the root to the tip. The 109F then passed out of view to the rear and Pilot Officer Pentland resumed his position. (This 109F is claimed as damaged.)

“As the formation left the French coast, Sgt. McClusky, warned the ‘Beehive’ that three Me. 109Fs were coming in from dead astern being chased by Spitfires. One of the aircraft peeled off to starboard, and Sgt. McClusky attacked from quarter astern to dead astern, with a 5 second burst from 150 yards.

“The 109F drew rapidly away and down to port, pouring out blackish smoke. Sgt. McClusky again took up his position and saw this aircraft on its side close to the water and a few seconds later saw only a smudge in the water. This is confirmed by Flying Officer Foster. (This 109F is claimed as destroyed.)

“Later 4 Me. 109Fs came from starboard across the front of the bombers. F/Lt. Crease, fired at 300 yards from three-quarter astern at the leading aircraft, a 2½ second burst. F/Lt. Morrow and Sgt. Magee, fired a 2 second burst full beam attack all without apparent effect except that the formation broke up and away. “Halfway across the Channel, a Me. 109F and a 109E flew from starboard across the bombers in a shallow dive. F/Lt. Morrow gave the leader a 4 second burst, and strikes were seen on the engine and fuselage. The enemy aircraft dived away and then climbed again.

“About the same time Sgt. G. D. Robertson saw a 109F diving on the last Blenheim to starboard of the bombers, which seemed to lag behind. The 109F was slightly below and astern of the Blenheim, and Sgt. Robertson was abreast and to starboard of the aircraft. Sgt. Robertson then turned to attack the aircraft who immediately turned toward him.

“Sgt. Robertson gave him a 3 second burst as he passed at 50 yards range using 20° deflection. The enemy aircraft promptly turned away, bringing Sgt. Robertson dead astern at 100 yards. Sgt. Robertson fired a 4 second burst as the enemy aircraft drew away to 150 yards.

“The 109F shuddered and gave out heavy black and white smoke and continued in a shallow dive turning to port. Sgt. O’Neill reports seeing this enemy aircraft in a flat spin definitely out of control with black smoke pouring out. (This 109F is claimed as destroyed.)

“Later F/Lt. Morrow, saw a 109F on the tail of a fighter of another Squadron. This 109F then pulled up to fire at the leading bomber and broke away to port as F/Lt. Morrow gave it a beam attack from above, the pilot having a plain view followed by dead astern, in all a 12 second burst from 20 yards ending at 250 yards. The enemy aircraft was last seen in a shallow dive going towards the English coast. (This 109F is claimed as destroyed.)
"Sgt. Bayly, saw an enemy aircraft climbing to attack rear bomber from astern; tracer from the bomber appeared to hit the enemy aircraft who then flew level 100 feet below the bombers. Sgt. Bayly got in a 2 second burst from half astern.

"The enemy aircraft climbed and opened fire at the leading bombers as Sgt. Handley attacked it with a 3 second burst from 50 yards. Tracer was seen to hit along the fuselage and the enemy aircraft was last seen skidding to port with white smoke trailing behind. (This 109F is claimed as damaged.)

Our Casualties: Nil.
Enemy Casualties: Destroyed 3 Me. 109Fs.
Damaged: 2 Me. 109Fs.
F/O Pendland, Sgt. Handley.

FORMER AIRLINE PILOT WINS D.F.C.

For a series of brilliant exploits in Malaya before and during the Japanese invasion, Flying Officer Peter John Gibbes, of the R.A.A.F., formerly a well-known civil airline pilot of Melbourne and Sydney, has been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

On one occasion in January, 1942, while carrying out a low level attack in a Hudson, Gibbes attacked an armed Japanese wireless ship at mast height and scored four direct hits with his bombs. The result was not observed at the time, but the wireless ship was not sighted again.

In the following month, Gibbes took off from Palembang, Sumatra, to reconnoitre a Japanese convoy and escort assembled at Anamba Islands. He made a sketch of the dispositions of the enemy ships, successfully evading the defense weapons of the escort. He then landed at Singapore, where he delivered his report to Headquarters of the Far Eastern Command.

On another occasion, when the Japanese were attacking Malaya and had occupied an aerodrome at which Gibbes was stationed, Gibbes ran a gauntlet of fire from the enemy to reach his aircraft. The Japanese were supported by tanks and motorcycle troops armed with machine guns.

Gibbes started his aircraft while lying flat on the floor to avoid the machine gun bullets, and immediately his engines started, flung himself into the pilot’s seat, opened up his engines, and took off across the dispersal area, which was dangerously littered with craters.

Just before he became airborne, Gibbes opened up his front guns, killing a motorcyclist who was continually firing at the aircraft with a tommy gun.

Gibbes, who is 27, received his first flying instruction at Essendon in 1935-36. He later joined Australian National Airways and worked up the ladder to command the biggest aircraft in their most important interstate services.

He enlisted in the R.A.A.F. in December, 1940, and was posted to Malaya. On return to Australia he was posted to a bomber-reconnaissance operational training unit as an instructor.

CATALINA TURNS UPSIDE DOWN BATTING ATLANTIC STORM

Involuntary aerobatics for which the great patrol bomber was not intended were indulged in recently by a Catalina Flying Boat while flying from Bermuda to Britain over the North Atlantic. One of a squadron of four patrol bombers, all of whom got through safely, this ship and her mates ran head-on into one of the worst Atlantic gales of the year, fought it for twenty-four hours.

The captain, a pilot with thirty-seven Atlantic crossings to his credit, described the experience as the toughest of his career. The
crew jettisoned everything but the fuel supply and themselves in order to outlast the storm. So badly was one of the ships in the flight damaged that when it landed, the metal covering was almost stripped from the tailplane.

Icing was exceptionally bad and, to quote the pilot, pulverized the propeller hub and the engine ring. "George," the automatic pilot, was out of commission for seventeen hours, thanks to the fury of the gale.

"About fifteen hundred miles out we really hit it," says the wireless operator. "Something struck the kite then, and for the next minute or so, what happened was unbelievable. We went up five hundred feet, then dropped six hundred, apparently simultaneously.

"In any event, everything loose inside the fuselage began flying through the air with the greatest of ease. We found ourselves ducking out personal luggage, spare parts and everything else. We were all splattered with oil that came splashing out from everywhere it could splash from."

"And that wasn’t all. I was sitting in front of the wireless set when it suddenly started shooting out blue flames. I don’t know whether it was static electricity or whether we were hit by lightning diverted through the aerial. The same blue lights danced along the top of the wing."

"For a few desperate minutes, we flew upside down. But the pilot righted us and decided to try to fly above the storm. We had no oxygen equipment, but we climbed to nineteen thousand and stayed there for almost an hour before we got over the hump."

Seventeen hours out, the bomber sighted the southern tip of Ireland, which was hundreds of miles off her course. So the pilot put out to sea again rather than fly over neutral Eire and ran into more storms. It took them five more hours to get to their base, after 23 hours and 58 minutes aloft.

AIR OBSERVERS SAVE FLYING FORTRESS

A FLYING FORTRESS, colossus among American bombers, is one of the most recent Allied aircraft which owes a safe landing to the initiative and prompt action of members of the Volunteer Air Observers’ Corps at a North Australian observation post.

The aircraft was heard approaching from the east after a severe midsummer storm, which had apparently affected the plane’s means of communication, as it was unable to contact its base. The ceiling was limited to 500 feet by heavy clouds, and the Fortress flew over the post in wide circles. The observers reported to Headquarters and were instructed to give the bomber every possible assistance.

The chief observer then flashed the name of the town through the darkness of the stormy night with a torch. An answering flash came from the aircraft. The observers then flashed out directions for reaching the nearest aerodrome, and by another flash, the Fortress confirmed that the crew understood the message. It then flew off through the clouds and landed in safety a quarter of an hour later.

Another instance occurred on the same evening, one of the worst of the whole year in this area. An aircraft was noticed to be in difficulties over a V.A.O.C. observation post, and after confirmation of its friendly character efforts were made to help it.

The weather was so bad that signals from the ground could not be read in the aircraft. However, arrangements were made for all the lights in the nearest town to be turned on, and the aircraft made a safe emergency landing by their glow.

GALLANTRY IN OPERATIONS OVER ENEMY TERRITORY

FOR the conspicuous part he played in a number of sorties over enemy-occupied territory in Europe, Squadron Leader Hugo Throssell Armstrong of Perth has gained an award of a bar to his D.F.C.

Early last year, Armstrong, while attached
to an R.A.F. squadron, damaged a German ship off the French coast during an offensive patrol. While on shipping reconnaissance he saw an enemy vessel sailing north, and Armstrong, with other Australians, opened fire with cannon and machine guns.

On another occasion, Armstrong bagged one of two German Focke-Wulf 190s which were shot down by an Australian Spitfire Squadron escorting R.A.F. bombers on a raid over Northern France.

Later, Armstrong was awarded the D.F.C. for gallantry and devotion to duty during many operational sorties over enemy territory as a member of the Basutoland Squadron. His bag at that time included five enemy machines destroyed and two others damaged.

In October last year, Armstrong was appointed Commanding Officer of the West Lancashire Auxiliary Fighter Squadron, was the first Empire Air Scheme trainee to command an R.A.F. squadron in the United Kingdom.

Born in Perth in July 1916, Armstrong was a salesman before enlisting in the R.A.A.F. in May 1940. He was trained in the United Kingdom.

**RAF MEN WIN AMERICAN SOLDIER’S MEDAL**

TWO RAF men along with seventeen members of the USAAF were recently decorated in Cairo for “extraordinary heroism” when an American bomber crashed into a building on the edge of an aerodrome and burst into flames. Hundreds of gallons of petrol were spread over a wide area.

There were eight men in the plane and others in the building, all of them seriously injured and struggling vainly to escape through the small ocean of flames surrounding them. To add to their difficulties, over 3,000 rounds of scattered tracer, incendiary and ball ammunition began to explode.

Without regard for their personal safety, the men who received the medal entered the burning area and brought all endangered personnel to safety. Major General Louis H. Brereton, Commanding General of the USAAF of the Middle East, made the awards. One of the heroes was Sergeant Harold J. Jackson, an American Indian.

**AIR FLIGHT COMMANDER “GROUNDED” ABOARD SHIP DURING COMMANDO RAID**

THE bridge of a British Naval craft provided a novel “control tower” for the flight commander of an R.C.A.F. squadron which supplied an “umbrella” for Commandos raiding German-occupied Norway. In well synchronized forays, Blenheim bombers rigged as long distance fighters, and manned by R.C.A.F. personnel of a coastal command squadron, operated in close harmony with naval craft and the hand-picked troops detailed to carry out the raids.

Squadron Leader E. H. McHardy, D.F.C., an R.A.F. flight commander of the R.C.A.F. squadron, found himself in an excellent position to observe the entire operation from the bridge of the ship where he was directing and controlling long range fighters by radio telephone.

“It was curious to be approaching the Norwegian coast at a snail’s pace instead of flying into it,” Squadron Leader McHardy observed afterward. “The Hampden bombers woke the place up. Immediately on our arrival the whole area became a mass of smoke and flames as the guns from ships and shore began to fire.

“A Messerschmitt dived on us and we ducked behind the bridge. But radio instructions quickly brought the Blenheims on his tail. Then the Beaufighters joined the battle. During the day they shot down four Heinkel 111s.”

Right in the fore-front of the opening attack were Pilot Officer E. W. Pearce of Winnipeg, Sergeant Pilot J. T. McCutcheon of Montreal and Sergeant W. H. Cleaver of Toronto, an air gunner.

They were in the thick of fierce aerial combat as they came to grips with ME 109s. Pilot Officer Pearce nearly had a head-on collision with a Hun who flew straight at him. Both Pearce and McCutcheon engaged in bristling dog-fights with Huns. Their guns had telling effect. The fight broke off when Pearce appeared on the scene just as McCutcheon and an ME 109 were maneuvering for position. And the German beat a hasty retreat.

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RETRIBUTION OVERTAKES JAPS—ATTACK ON HOSPITAL REPAYED WITH INTEREST!

SWIFT retribution overtook a Japanese bombing formation which, ignoring rules of warfare, bombèd an Allied Field hospital in New Guinea, and killed wounded men.

Honor for vengeance goes to Airacobras. Eight of them were patrolling over Buna when they spotted a Japanese formation flying low toward their hideout. There were seven dive bombers and two escorting Zeros. This number and a check up of times coincide with the vicious attack upon the Red Cross.

The Cobras dived onto their quarry like bullets from a gun. Picking their marks, they shot down four of them and probably a fifth, while the rear gunner of a sixth was killed. It was over in a flash. In it, the two Zeros were shot to pieces. And so only two out of nine Japanese bandits got home, and one of these had his tail badly singed.

The Cobra pilots did not know what infamous mission the Japs had been on, but even if they had, vengeance could not have been quicker.

NEW AUSTRALIAN D.S.O. ALREADY HAD D.F.C.

SQUADRON LEADER ROBERT HENRY GIBBES, D.F.C., whose additional award of the D.S.O. was announced on Monday, is the Commander of the famous No. 3 Australian fighter squadron in North Africa and one of the best-known airmen in that theatre of war.

Gibbes has been with the squadron for more than 18 months and has taken part in more than 200 operational sorties, in which he shot down nine enemy aircraft and probably destroyed many more. His total hours in air operations number over 400.

In December, Gibbes led his squadron in a strafing attack on one of the enemy landing grounds in Tripolitania and destroyed a number of aircraft on the ground.

During the strafe, one of Gibbes' pilots forced-landed near the enemy landing ground. Gibbes descended and waited for about 30 minutes until this pilot reached him. They both squeezed themselves into the tiny cockpit and took off. In the take-off, one of the fighter's wheels was smashed.

Gibbes flew the fighter back to his own aerodrome and contrived to make a successful landing on one wheel.

Gibbes, an Empire Air Training Scheme pilot, who is 26 years of age, comes from Ballowlah (N.S.W.). He gained his D.F.C. for leading the attack against bombers and ignoring the protecting fighter escort in a flight over the Western Desert in July last year. In the engagement, Gibbes' fighter was shot down and he baled out, later reaching his own aerodrome on foot.

More Stories of THE RAF IN ACTION Next Issue!

"THAT'S FOR ME FOR ENERGY"

BETTER TASTE.

BIGGER DRINK
Lieutenant Curt Elston prayed for Lady Luck to be on his side as he dropped through the overcast. Although lighted by slicing flame, scores of shifting, silver searchlights, and the dull glow of countless towers of fire, this overcast was a smoky murk over the wide river.

Elston pulled hard on the stick as the great harbor of the Elbe rushed toward the heavily laden scout plane, threatening to engulf it. The tail of the main R.A.F. and American flight of high altitude bombers had passed. The Hamburg lights still combed the sky, and the anti-aircraft guns, studded along the curving promenades of the Elbe, still stuttered wildly.

The silver fingers of lights were practically useless against the overcast made up of cordite and wood smoke and river fog at little more than three hundred feet.

Such hits as had tumbled half a dozen Stirlings and Fortresses from the high sky had been made by chance—lucky
flak for the Nazis and unlucky for the invading Allies.

In the cockpit behind Elston, glued to his .50 calibre gun, Banty Coburn chanted into the earphones.

"Not so good, Curt. It might have looked like a good idea, but it'll take more than a glove and a prayer to pull us out of this one! We'll have the dickens batted out of us any minute now!"

Leveling the scout plane at barely more than a hundred feet above the shimmering Elbe, Elston inwardly agreed with his gunner. Coming down here in the wake of the bombers had been his own idea.

Thurston, of American Intelligence, had agreed with his suggestion, but he had been given no definite order for it. The ex-Giant pitcher was on his own.

"The old glove and a prayer have been good enough for many a tough one," he growled in reply to Banty. "You've got a gun, and I've got a bomb. Hang onto the seat of your pants, and look out for any Mess-up crazy enough to think we're crazy enough to be down here."

There might be a stray Messerschmitt
or some other Heinie fighter prowling at this low altitude above the tricky Elbe, but Elston doubted it. The sprawling city of Hamburg still rocked and thundered to the tune of delayed block busters the invading echelon had dropped down suddenly in the night from the North Sea coast.

But all Elston could see were the hundreds of large and small craft in the Hamburg harbor, many blazing from some of the thousands of incendiaries mixed with the rain of death. It was simple enough to hold the scout plane to cruising speed, and apparently easy to evade both sky searching lights and flak.

The city of Hamburg was having its third raid in force within a week. Old fires of the first raid had not died out. Elston remembered the position of some of these.

"Keep an eye out for an egg-shaped black spot, a mile long and half as wide," he said to Banty in the earphone.

"That'll be it. There will be neither lights nor anti-guns in it. And I'm bettin' a sawbuck to a dime I know why it's dark."

"Yeah, I've heard that one," grunted Banty from the rear cockpit. "As for us, Mister, one gets you ten this old box-kite never kisses the clouds again."

HOLDING steadily toward the main section of the city, Elston grinned wryly to himself. The observation plane was a special. It was comparatively slow. It was equipped with the huge telescope camera and other equipment responsible for Lieutenant Curt Elston descending upon the burning city of Hamburg, practically on his own initiative.

Thurston, of Intelligence, had not said yes, and he had not said no. Clear photographs from two previous raids had revealed that blind spot in the lights and flaming defenses of Hamburg.

"That's why, sir, there seems to be no great damage done to the real nest of sub snakes," had been Elston's interpretation of the black spot to Thurston. "Now, if I could get close down, say on the tail of a big raid, I might come back with something."

"You mean, Elston, you might come back," had been Thurston's ironic reply. "Let me see. Didn't they call you 'nothing but a glove and a prayer' your last year with the Giants?"

Elston thought of that now. He felt a faint nostalgia. The Giants would be in their spring training camp. He was here by choice, first with the R.A.F., then switched over to the American Air Force.

"Yes sir," he had said. "About all I had was a glove and a prayer. But I won sixteen and lost seven."

Colonel Thurston had grinned then.

"If you do find the black spot and come back, Elston, report directly to me before the brass hats get a crack at you," he had said. "In this game, all I can give you is a bomb and a prayer, and an overloaded freak of an amphibian scout ship. Luck."

Recalling these words, Elston skimmed as low over the Elbe as he dared. For the first few moments it appeared miraculously safe and wide open down here.

Thundering explosions, thick smoke, crackling fires and the destruction of whole blocks of buildings and defenses seemed to have cleared the way for Elston's ship.

Banty Coburn apparently had the same idea as Elston now.

"We can fly right in and turn around, but can we fly right back again?" he chanted into the phone. "Would that be your screwy blind spot over there?"

Elston pulled stick, climbing as closely as he dared to the overcast. Silver light suddenly blinded him through the transparent greenhouse. The spotter had pulled the beam to almost pointblank range.

Although Elston sent the plane in a roaring dive toward the river, tracer streams raked the ship with a hard metallic clamor. A hollow, empty feeling assailed him and he wondered about the location of those guns. The anti-aircraft batteries could hardly have swung their guns down to such a low level so quickly.

Metal ripped with a rending, crashing sound under that hail of pounding lead. The left wing tip flapped loosely. There was the jolt of a pontoon loosening and racking the fuselage with quivering jolts.

"Bear down on 'em!" grated Elston.

Banty's twin .50s disgorged a stream of livid crimson flame. Then Elston
hauled the plane out of its screaming dive, sent it zooming above the sweeping arcs of powerful searchlights into the concealing murk.

"Good hunting!" he said to Banty. "We're fingered now, but they'll think we went up to grab sky. We'll stay in pitching. I'm trying for the heart of the fires along the canals."

Banty Coburn should have had his usual snappy come-back. There was none. Elston rammed back his shattered greenhouse. He raised up and looked back. Banty lay like a sack across the breech block of the swivel guns.

"A bomb and a prayer!"

Elston got the words out through his teeth. The plane, laden with its photographic equipment, carried but the one bomb in its rack. It had labored at first with this 500-pound lethal cargo. The long flight had lightened the gas load, which made it easier now.

"Banty? Banty?"

Elston called twice, although he knew Banty could not reply. Cursing softly, his eyes bright and hard, he dropped again out of the overcast. Here the fire draught started the ship dancing in sudden air pockets.

EELSTON was able to locate the heart of the city by the twin lakes. The spring thaw had passed. The Binner-Alsten and the Aussen-Alsten showed, gleaming like long platters of silver under the reflection of the fires. Summer resorts and rathskellers on one side of the Binner-Alsten were a mass of flames.

Stretching from the twin lakes toward the wide Elbe, which made Hamburg the second German city and its greatest inland harbor, the high turrets and gabled warehouses lining scores of lake-fed canals thrust their dark shapes through the pall of smoke and flames.

Again the low-flying ship did not for the moment attract attention. Elston judged thousands were fleeing from destroyed areas. Other thousands were fighting the fires. The presence of a daredevil Yankee, now flying alone, was the last thing the citizens and the city's armed forces would expect.

Lights that had been lacing the sky began to blink out.

"Banty, we have to find that blind spot now," muttered Elston, as he per-

mitted the plane to skim low over the Aussen-Alsten, the smaller of the two lakes. "Those blasted U-boats are spawned right here somewhere. Yet, all the blockbusters the British have showered down apparently haven't succeeded in destroying one submarine yard. That's because—"

His soliloquy on the secret of the subs, and his hard grief at the death of Banty Coburn were abruptly terminated. A long, black boat on the lake suddenly erupted with blazing .50-calibres and at least one armor piercing cannon.

Elston rolled his ship just before the elevators went dead. His attempt to hustle out of the fire became the side-long flight of a wounded duck. Even so, with tracers ripping along the ship's belly, Elston was able to gain altitude, lifting the plane practically upon the pull of the prop by working his ailerons.

He managed to side-slip away from the angle of the boat's gunfire. Then the radial motor coughed hoarsely. The engine died as Elston sighted the now distant Elbe, its docks and quays lighted by incendiary fires along the wide promenade.

Once that promenade of the Elbe had been heavily fortified. The port of Hamburg had been the most secure of all German cities. This new world war had changed all that. Air power had ended its security.

"And still," reasoned Elston, "by some secret means the Nazis are building their subs here, and they keep coming out as thick as little snakes from a big rattler's belly. The answer has to be somewhere in the canals."

He had enough aileron control to put the mortally wounded ship into a long glide. But he didn't have nearly enough altitude to lift him beyond the canals criss-crossing the city between the lakes and the Elbe.

Black smoke wreathed upward, blotting out what had appeared to be an open public square. Losing his view of that, Elston could only hold his course, free his legs and set himself for the inevitable crash.

"Guess you had the long end of it at that, Banty," he whispered hoarsely. "Last man up and too dark to see the ball, with two strikes over—"
For a brief moment the smoke lifted and Elston saw an old, high-gabled warehouse rushing toward the nose of the scout plane. On both sides other buildings were luridly ablaze, but this one seemed to have been kept intact for the sole purpose of smashing one Lieutenant Curt Elston and his stubborn idea he might find the secret of the German U-boats and why thousands of tons of bombs had failed to check their output.

Braced for the shock of collision, Elston was numbed by the smash that carried the nose of the ship into and through the ancient board wall of the warehouse.

A cold hand of fear stirred around in Elston's insides and he wondered if the 500-pound demolition bomb be carried would go off. But nothing happened. There was no deafening explosion. But by the time he realized he was safe he was absorbed with something he had seen.

Just before the moment of impact Elston could have sworn that he had glimpsed what had appeared on two photographs of recent bombings as a blind and undefended area of the city.

Ramming on into the old building, the scout ship's wings crumpled. Half-stunned, Elston felt the fuselage hit and bounce back, the tail dropping. The cockpit twisted over and he spilled out.

CHAPTER II

_Fight for Life_

ICY water closed over Elston as his plummeting body struck the river. His Mae West packet kept the cold current from his body, but his hands and face were chilled.

He bounced to the surface, blowing and gasping for air. The scout ship was lying half in the deep canal and half inside the wall of the old warehouse.

Fortunately the rear cockpit was not submerged so Elston pulled himself up. Through the warehouse districts delayed bombs were still creating thunderous concussions. Like a vaulted ceiling, hanging clouds of choking smoke obscured the gables of the warehouse.

Elston was thankful that the precautions he had taken with the bomb had saved him from being blown to pieces. Since he was flying a scout plane, not equipped for bombing, he had rigged a cradle for the bomb under the tail, the safest place for it in the event of a crash landing.

Because of the risk of his mission and the fact he probably would be flying beyond the range of his fuel supply, he had half expected he'd be forced down—if not by enemy flak, then by lack of gasoline. And in striking the warehouse, the tail assembly had escaped the brunt of the impact of collision.

Although the area seemed to be deserted, Elston cursed all Nazis when he observed the ragged hole in Banty Coburn's temple.

He saw that the wharves along the warehouse were only narrow, wooden affairs. For generations ships and barges had been unloaded directly into the hundreds of warehouses in Germany's greatest port. He was considering what to do about Banty's body when he saw a Nazi trooper armed with a rifle running toward the crashed plane.

The German was alone. He had appeared from around the warehouse corner, beyond which a big fire was raging. The blaze illuminated the wide reach of the deep canal.

At the same moment that he spotted the Nazi trooper, the American observer glimpsed briefly where the canal vanished into a black tunnel. A wide archway extended from one shore to the other. It had its foundation in the ruins of warehouses.

"That's the meaning of the blind spot," said Elston grimly, letting go his hold on the plane and slipping back into the water.

Neither he nor Banty had been carrying sidearms. It was impossible to counter the Nazi guard's rifle with the swivel gun across which Banty's body was lying. Elston waited tensely, hoping that he had escaped the German's notice. But his hopes were shattered by a guttural command to surrender.

This time the buoyancy of Elston's Mae West jacket and his waterproofed clothes were a handicap.

He floundered helplessly as the rifle spat red fire, cracking above the terrific din of other explosions. The bullet skidding along the river's surface, spraying
A BOMB AND A PRAYER

a geyser of water into his face. He put up his hands as best he could, kicking himself toward the narrow ledge of the loading wharf.

The Nazi’s rifle was poked down a few inches from his face as he caught the slippery wharf planking. Elston permitted his hand to slide off once, and he cried out helplessly.

“Dumkopf! Englisher!” grunted the German, and extended the barrel of his rifle.

The Nazi felt secure enough, keeping the round bore of the gun staring into Elston’s face. Sudden death was in position to split his brain as Elston grasped the gun barrel.

He exhibited apparent weakness, but held on until the German had used one hand to get a grip on the front of his jacket.

Elston jerked his head to one side. He shifted steel fingers to the Nazi’s wrist and bore down with all of his weight upon the extended rifle. With a howled oath, the trooper somersaulted over him into the canal. The exploding rifle scorched Elston’s ear.

“That’s for Banty,” Elston said as the German let go of his gun and slapped at the water with clumsy hands.

Elston kicked backward, swung the rifle butt once. When it crunches on bone, he dove forward.

HOLDING the unconscious German, Elston sighted along the canal and could see no other person moving. He crawled out, dragging the unconscious Nazi and his rifle with him.

The German pulled in a moaning breath. His body stiffened, then as suddenly relaxed.

“It was all the way for Banty, too,” muttered Elston. “I must have hit this guy too hard.”

The Nazi’s split forehead was proof enough of that. Once again Elston had a view along the canal. This warehouse and the canal all the way to the gaping archway of the strange tunnel appeared to be surrounded by fires that blocked out all but this one guard.

“There might still be a way out, or a way in,” said Elston musingly. “This is one time in a thousand that a plane could crash and remained undiscovered.”

Elston made his plan. In the dark shadow of the warehouse and the wrecked plane he removed the German’s uniform. He did not waste time with the body. He thought of the children he had seen in a bombed school in London and pushed the corpse into the canal where it immediately sank.

Five minutes later Elston was in the German’s uniform. He debated his next move. His best way out appeared to be through the warehouse into which the ship had crashed. Once more he went to Banty, but judged, for his purpose, he must leave his body in the cockpit.

His own Mae West jacket had fallen into the wide canal. Watching it float toward the center of the channel, Elston swore under his breath. He had made a mistake, even in disposing of the German’s body.

The canal flowed with a slow but strong current toward that black archway. His jacket and perhaps the corpse would soon be inside the tunnel. Even as he thought of this, he saw lights spring up back inside the arch, apparently on the surface of the canal.

These lights had been dimmed during the raid. Elston peered toward the tunnel, hesitant and unsure of himself. He could see for perhaps two hundred yards before a bend in the canal ended his view. There was no mistaking the smooth backs of twin subs moored a short distance beyond the opening.

With the delayed bomb explosions fading out, Elston could hear the clanking and grinding of machinery.

“The blind spot!” he exclaimed. “That archway is the beginning of an impregnable roof of concrete and steel. And there may be a dozen canals inside the blind spot where no archies or spotlights showed on the photos.”

He had the Nazi’s loaded rifle and his Luger pistol. He lifted one hand in a salute to Banty Coburn and turned toward the warehouse. Unable to find a door on the side of the plane where it blocked off the narrow wharf, Elston smashed a window with the rifle butt.

Removing the window sash, he climbed inside the musty smelling room. Water gurgled about piling underneath.

“Best way out will be to find a street and get to the Elbe,” he said, “Then find a boat.”

Right here his optimism failed. He realized he might as well be naked in the heart of Berlin as to be wearing a Nazi
uniform in Hamburg with the scanty German he could speak. He could get by until he had to talk.

"Anyway, you can only be shot for trying," he murmured. "Thurston had sense. Saying all he could do was let me go with a bomb and a prayer."

Elston straightened suddenly. His long lips flattened out.

"I'm exactly what that Heinie called me, a dumbhead!" he exclaimed. "A bomb and a prayer? And the bomb's still in the ship!"

He turned back toward the smashed window frame. A board creaked in the darkness. A hard point jabbed into his spine. A voice rapped out a command in German.

Elston understood enough of it to drop the Nazi rifle and lift his hands. He felt the Luger being taken from its holster. The point in his back pushed harder and he was ordered to move ahead.

His captor's face was vague in the darkness. But the pistol in his back was hard reality. Then another voice spoke. There was an exchange in German. One man then spoke in the best of English.

"Don't waste ammunition, Fritz! Crack his head and push him into the canal! He shot a Yank who was thrown from the plane!"

AGAIN Elston realized he was playing dumb. He was facing death as a Nazi trooper, nothing less. It brought a bitter laugh to his lips.

"Take it easy, pals!" he snapped in hard Americanese.

He had the satisfaction of inciting an expressive English oath. A rough hand gripped his arm, turning him. He saw an old man holding a pistol to his body. The old man had a leathery, wrinkled face with sunken eyes.

The man holding his arm was lightly bearded and young, with the smack of a seaman about his clothes and salt-cured features. He gave Elston a once-over with boring eyes that gleamed in the light of the shifting fires.

"Howlin' sons!" the younger man exclaimed. "A Yankee!"

"American?" mumbled the older man through toothless gums, a sudden grim smile changing his leathery cartoon of a face.

"Verdammt!" The German oath came from the smashed window of the old warehouse. It was followed by a terse, guttural command, emphasized by a pointed rifle. The gun weaved back and forth.

A second Nazi soldier was holding a tiny girl, his arm locked about her neck. Elston saw braided hair the color of honey piled high on her head. Her face and her dainty figure were something right out of old-time fairy tales.

She was helpless in the Nazi's grasp, but her eyes were alive and glowing.

Elston understood the command for guns to be dropped. The old man, looking at the girl, cried out, "Elise!"

His pistol thumped to the planks. The younger let go of a short, sawed-off gun he had been holding under one arm. One of the Nazis gave a nasty laugh. What he said in German was unfit for the ears of the girl. But he added the name "Krueger," looking at Elston.

Elston kept his face down, muttering low words in what German he knew. When the old man raised his hands, Elston reached out and plucked the Luger taken from him out of the old man's waistband.

He had been mistaken for the Nazi whose uniform he wore.

The one Heinie permitted his rifle point to drop. The other relaxed his choking grip on the girl's neck. She cried out hoarsely. It was in German, but Elston got enough to know she was spilling the works, probably having seen his encounter with the first Nazi.

When in a pinch, groove the ball, had always been Elston's principle. The Luger placed its first bullet accurately between the eyes of the Nazi holding the girl. Surprised, the other man whipped up his gun, shooting.

But Elston dropped flat as the rifle came up. The second Luger bullet took the Nazi just above his belt. He staggered, groaned, and Elston stepped aside to permit him to dive into the canal.

"Now we'll get together," said Elston calmly. "You are—"

"Of the Underground, and in a tight spot," cut in the man in the seaman's clothes. "I'm Carl Loger, American, off a torpedoed tanker, of German parents. Old Rannemann here, and his rebels, saved me. Elise is his grandchild. That's all, Yank. We must weigh
anchor before the fires die down."
Elston, as Loger named himself, was busy. He rushed up to the warehouse and helped the girl through the shattered window. She was exhausted and trembling and he placed an arm about her to steady her. He turned to the seaman, flashed a hard grin.
"Glad to meet up with you, Loger!" he said. "Before we start running though, what do you know about this canal and that lighted tunnel down past those fires?"
"That?" Loger's voice hardened. "It's one Nazi trick that has caused the wasting of tons of bombs. A German pigboat repair base, with a refueling and torpedo ammunition dump half a mile or so under that concrete. Can't do anything about it. Old Rannemann has been smart enough to get in there as a workman. But we haven't time—"
"We've all the time there is!" interjected Elston. "Time for a bomb and a prayer! If you'll take the girl to safety, Rannemann, I'll give Loger an idea of what I mean!"
Loger stared at him. Old Rannemann shook his head, his lips working. But he was taking the dainty girl from Elston's arms as he murmured:
"Americans! All are crazy like the Marine Devil Dogs in the last war."

CHAPTER III
Hot Steel for Nazis

ELSTON judged the old man's mind had been twisted by hardships, perhaps the closeness of Hitler murders among his friends or kin. Yet, it might have been the Nazis' smug belief in his senile childishness that had won him a chance to work inside the canal sub base.
"A bomb and a prayer, Yank?" repeated Loger. "Look! You got bumped hard when you crashed. We've a camouflaged motorboat under the warehouse, and we can take you to an underground hideout where you'll have a chance. Maybe you're a bit out of your mind."
"Name's Elston," said the observer shortly. "In a few minutes a second wave of bombers will be coming over. I need a little help. Then I'll play out the rest of the game alone. There's a five-hundred-pound demolition bomb in that plane, Loger. All I want is to find some way to get it inside that Nazi submarine den, and I'll make sure it explodes."
"You're crazy! There's no way to do it. If you could get it into the pigboat tunnel, how about concussion to set it off?"
Elston faced Loger, his voice steady and slow. There was implacable determination in the observer's manner.
"If the nose is slammed with a heavy wrench, or a few slugs are pumped into it from a Luger close up, that ought to do it," he said. "My gunner, Banty Coburn, is lying dead in the rear cockpit. The bomb and the prayer is for Banty if the plane will float on that canal current, and I think it will."
"Good grief, man! Do you know what you're saying?" exclaimed Loger. "That would mean suicide!"
"But quick!" said Elston harshly. "Leaving you, Loger, to get out with the old man and the girl, perhaps, and the job of delivering a message any way you can to Colonel Thurston, American Intelligence, across the ditch."
Loger's eyes suddenly were alive. His hands were tightly clenched. He moved closer, peering into Elston's face.
"A bomb and a prayer, you said?" he intoned softly, tipping the Nazi cap back from Elston's head. "Holy smoke! Old glove and a prayer Curt Elston! Say, I saw that last game with the Dodgers—"
Above all the noise of blazing fires and occasional detonating bombs the cutting wail of a new alert screamed across the night. Almost immediately the first explosions came.
The Yanks and the R.A.F. were back again, giving Hitler's killers a second helping of lethal lightning from thirty thousand feet.
The bombs appeared to be falling in another section of the city. But the submarine canal tunnel blacked out instantly. And now the warehouse fires about them were dying down.
"It's our chance!" snapped Elston. "Some leverage will put the old ship back into the canal. It will float, half sunken. I hate to do it, but Banty Coburn's body across the swivel gun will convince the Heines the plane's a dead duck that just happened to crash in the canal. It can be floated right into their
munition and torpedo dump, among the pigboats, if old Rannemann can give me a line on the distance."

Old Rannemann's brain was not half so softened as his trick of mumbling speech indicated. He touched Elston's arm, and spoke to Loger. His English was but slightly accented.

"I know what has been said by the American. He is as crazy as the Devil Dogs. But, Loger, there is another way. I have seen a demolition bomb exploded. There are the two clocked bombs, the little ones, with which I planned to set off the munitions dump when I go to my job again. One little bomb and—"

A closer thunder of a block buster drowned old Rannemann's speech. But Elston had it. As the echoes died down, Elston was already in action.

He moved quickly to the lower end of the old warehouse nearly fifty yards away, toward the submarine tunnel. The ancient wall there was dry and highly inflammable.

"The time bombs?" he said, returning, "They are where we can get them?"

"In the boat under the warehouse," said Loger. "Old Rannemann's three sons died in Russia. He's as crazy as you are, Elston, and probably as smart. His gibbering fools the Heinies, that's all. Now what do we do?"

"Bring the bombs," directed Elston.

The second wave of bombing was just about finished. Elston was in the plane bomb bay. He unfastened the safety of the demolition egg. Keeping his eyes averted from Banty Coburn's body, he opened a valve and soaked some motor waste with gasoline.

He was coming out of the greenhouse again. Disheartened rage turned him cold. For, picking their way along the narrow shelf past the ruins of the warehouse near the archway, half a dozen Nazis were moving in single file.

Their lack of haste proved they had not noticed the plane. Elston thought they might be a change of the outside guard. Within a few minutes they would be seeking three Heinies they would fail to find.

The bend of the canal placed them in the light of a dying fire a little more than a hundred yards away. Elston rolled into the rear cockpit of the tilted ship. Without moving Banty's body, he gave the twin .50s a testing swing. Their muzzles lowered.

At almost the same instant, the girl Elise, darted from the warehouse directly into the light ahead of the Nazi patrol. Elston could not hear shouts in the bedlam of the fires left by the second bombing, but the Heinies started running, waving their arms.

Old Rannemann appeared, apparently seeking to halt the girl. He was holding two small flat objects under his arms. Elston chilled, his hands reaching over Banty's body, and lowering the guns.

The girl spun about and raced toward the plane in a direct line between the guns and the Germans. Cursing, gripping the Luger pistol, Elston started from the cockpit. Then two Nazis raised their rifles.

The explosions were almost lost in the din that blanketed the city. Rannemann staggered, cut through by the Nazi fire. Elston saw one flat object, he judged to be a time bomb, fall into the canal. His heart contacted queerly. Then savage determination took hold of him.

That demolition bomb must be put across as he had planned, even if he had to stick in the floating plane and smash its nose with a wrench, as he had suggested.

The Nazis came on at a fast run. Elston had made the mad choice of probable suicide in an effort to blast the submarine canal base. His life, or a dozen lives could not be as important as the destruction, the effect upon German morale.

For seconds he even considered the girl, Elise, in the sights of the twin .50s. But shooting her to wipe out the Nazis was beyond the power of his will. Then he saw Loger start from the warehouse. The loyal American seaman, of German origin, went to his knees, then to his face, as rifles made queer red streaks again.

The oncoming Heinies reserved their fire when they saw the girl with the honey-colored hair. They were within fifty yards of her when she flung herself to her knees beside her grandfather sprawled limply in the shadow of the plane.

Elston lined his twin guns on the advancing Nazis and tripped the triggers. But not before his movement had been seen and rifles had blasted. He felt no
shock, but a warm liquid on his cheek was accompanied by dizziness.

"Swing on this one!" yelled Elston fiercely as the twin guns vibrated under his hands.

It was over so quickly that he was still hammering tracer streams into the wall of the warehouse when the last Nazi had fallen and rolled into the canal.

Elston was out. He wasted only a moment comforting the girl. Her grandfather, who had recalled the Devil Dogs, had met another Devil Dog of the air which might have accounted for the little smile on his dead face.

Detonating bombs, the screaming burst of incendiaries and the roaring of new fires had effectively muffled the sounds of the shooting. Beside Loger, Elston applied quick first aid to a neck wound.

Loger raised himself slowly, half stunned.

"Old Rannemann?" he said. Then, "Elise! You must get back to the boat quickly!"

Loger looked expectantly at Elston.

"That's mopping up, but what's the program now, Elston? Rannemann had two flat time bombs set for twenty minutes. I saw one go into the canal. The other one is here somewhere."

"Find it," directed Elston. "We have to create smoke, a screen between the plane and the tunnel. Look for the time bomb. I must fire this warehouse. If it threatens the boat, move it. Anyway, I must go with the plane."

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CHAPTER IV

A Sub Nest Destroyed

SMALL hands suddenly caught Elston's shoulders. He looked into brown eyes under the honey-colored hair.

"No! I have heard what you say you must do! It cannot be so! All of the Nazis in the world could not be worth so much!"

The girl, Elise, was clinging to him. Loger looked at her with a quizzical frown. He glanced at Elston, and Elston nodded. Before she could resist, Elise was pushed into Loger's hands.

"Keep her with you!" ordered Elston. "I have the time bomb," said Loger.

"This one was under his body. It has but twenty minutes after you pull the steel lever on the outside. It should kick the biggest block buster into action."

"Take the girl and make for the boat," said Elston. "No matter what happens, get the boat out. In ten minutes this old warehouse will be an inferno."

The girl cried out again in apprehension. Elston could not believe it was real. But Loger supplied some information quietly.

"You look a great deal like Elise's oldest brother who was killed," he said. "She has never recovered from losing her brothers, and her father and mother in a concentration camp."

Elston had the gas-soaked waste when he ran to the end of the warehouse nearest the tunnel. Two minutes later tongues of flame licked upward along the ancient wall. That wall had probably been built right after the great fire of 1842 had destroyed the city of Hamburg.

Loger shouted something Elston could not understand as he climbed back into the plane. While it still was balanced across the narrow wharf, Elston got into the improvised bomb bay and attached the Rannemann time bomb to the nose of the 500-pound demolition egg.

He clicked the little lever. An ominous ticking started inside the flat box. Old Rannemann had conceived the wild hope of hiding one of these close to his body, entering the submarine base, and probably blowing himself to bits near the munitions dump.

The scout plane still teetered precariously. Moving hastily, Elston shifted pieces of heavy apparatus from the front to the rear cockpit, until the plane began to inch off the wharf.

The warehouse blaze now roared across the wide canal, obscuring the tunnel mouth. The Nazis had no means of knowing it had not been set by one of the R.A.F. incendiaries.

Elston climbed past the rear cockpit, throwing his weight onto the plane's tail. He had recalled the bend in the canal, the possibility that the plane might drift into a backwater eddy and be delayed reaching the tunnel.

"Banty, my boy, I guess it's up to me to see you off," he said grimly. "This isn't exactly what I would call a burial service. But if you could know what
may happen, you would be happy. When the Nazis in the tunnel see you lying across the gun, the plane half submerged and no signs of life, it’s ten to one they’ll rope it right into the wrong place.”

Elston went under when the scout plane slid into the canal. But he climbed aboard and made sure the one good pontoon and the other, wrecked by gunfire, together with the fuselage would sustain the weight.

Half under water, the ship moved slowly, turning in the slow current. Elston estimated that ten minutes had passed since he had set the time bomb. Ten minutes more remained.

He was swimming now, using what weight he had to keep the ship in the middle of the canal. Flame and smoke beat down upon him as the wrecked plane floated through the spreading warehouse fire. It occurred to Elston that this was probably a one-way ride. But there was no fear in him, only a wild and reckless anticipation.

*O*NLY a miracle could save him if he drifted into the tunnel. The thick smoke clung to the canal, being drawn into the sub tunnel by a draught. Elston stuck with the plane another four minutes, allowing himself six minutes before the time bomb would let go.

“That about plays out my luck,” he muttered as he left the plane and started to swim. “I’m inside the tunnel. This narrowed current is speeding up.”

He was fighting an eight-mile flow of the water and couldn’t make much headway. His spine chilled when he found he was not getting far from the plane. Over everything hung that dark pall of smoke.

Light switched on ahead but failed to reach him. He angled for the side of the tunnel. It was smooth, without a runway or even a handhold and his groping fingers slid off it. He could not tell now whether he had three minutes or one to go.

Suddenly he heard the clamor of guttural voices as the plane was seen by Germans. He knew then he could not be far from the two subs he had seen moored. The Nazis jabbered and water splashed.

The twenty minutes must have passed, Elston told himself. He found his nerves tightening up, waiting for the explosion.

The blunt prow of a boat shoved through the smoke and almost ran him down. Elston thought he must have gone off the beam. He looked up and was amazed when he saw the pretty face of Elise.

Then he was climbing the side of the low craft and Elise was spinning the pilot wheel. Elston saw Loger getting up from the small afterdeck, rubbing his head. The boat turned, headed back out of the tunnel, picking up speed.

“You fools!” Elston raged at Loger and the girl. “If we’re not blown to kingdom come any second now, I’ll be surprised!”

Loger rubbed his head ruefully. Elston saw he had an egg over his ear.

“Don’t call me either a fool or a hero, Elston,” he said. “I didn’t have what it takes to follow you. I was battered over the head from behind. I awoke just now as you were climbing on board. How far—?”

Loger’s question was answered by a tremendous rush of air and water that heeled the small boat far over. A giant hand seemed to lift it high. Elston caught the girl’s knees and pulled her down just as the top of the cabin smashed into the curved roof of the tunnel.

The great wave receded, but the blast swept them out into the open canal. The warehouse smoke still obscured the surface. Behind them came the roaring blast of the first explosion, that of the demolition bomb.

Old Rannemann had timed the smaller bomb well, or rather, the time consumed had caused Elston to play in luck. Another explosion followed. The boat moved into the smoke. Loger was at the wheel, steering the craft directly out of the canal into an opening under the still unburned end of the old warehouse.

The final blast pounded their ears, flattened them to the deck. It seemed to Elston as if all of Hamburg had been blown up. That was the submarine munitions dump and torpedoes letting go. Elston could picture one sub and another being riven and sunk.

“Two-block busters,” he grunted to himself. “That secret sub base will look like a world buster hit it.”

Loger had learned from old Rannemann the maze of the canals and waterways that passed under some of the historic warehouses. Elston discovered the girl beside him, her hand on his shoulder
as the broad expanse of the Elbe spread before them.

"The Undergrounders have a plane ready in an old barge that will carry two persons," said Loger. "Elston, it's your turn to play chaperon to Elise. One bump on the head is enough."

Looking back at the city, Elston saw a mighty pillar of flame that dimmed all other fires that night. The sub base explosion had been of earthquake proportions. If he got out, he would have a great deal to report to Thurston, of the A.I.

Still in a ragged, soggy Nazi uniform, Elston put one arm about the orphaned girl. She looked up at him trustingly. He straightened in a stiff salute.

The girl did not quite understand the meaning of what he said.

It was:

"Many a game's been won with nothing but a glove and a prayer. Here's to a bomb, and a prayer for Banta!"

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**AS THE PROP WHIRLS**

**THE** White Cliffs of Dover may not be as innocent as they seem. Many of the chalk mines and quarries of England have been transformed into airplane factories building ships for the R.A.F. This is an important part of England's campaign of dispersement which makes it difficult for the Luftwaffe to repeat the damaging air raids of 1940.

**THE** British Air Transport Auxiliary, headed by Commander Pauline Gower, is one of the little known activities of the Royal Air Force. Because of the initials A.T.A., the women in this group are known as the "Atagirls." There are more than a hundred women in the Auxiliary, and they can fly any one of more than 140 types of planes.

**MANY** soldiers making their first trip to Murmansk or Africa are surprised to find their convoys accompanied by a balloon barrage even while hundreds of miles at sea. Balloon barrage boats were one of the first innovations of the R.A.F. Coastal Command, after the success of the balloons, as a menace to enemy aircraft, was demonstrated around London and other cities.

**NUMEROUS** pilots in the Indian Air Force unit of the R.A.F. are native Bengalis. Some of them prefer their turbans while flying, instead of the regular helmets and warming pads. They make excellent fliers, and are a worthwhile addition to the world-wide air force of Great Britain.

**WHEN** an American speaks of a Lizzie, he's usually talking about a Model T Ford that escaped the last salvage drive. But Lizzie means something quite different to the members of the Eighth Army Corps in Africa. It is the familiar name of the Lysander planes of the Army Cooperation Command of the R.A.F. Many a Lizzie dropped food and water to the Eighth Army boys in the great chase of Rommel across North Africa.

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**NEW SUCCESS OVER ATHLETE'S FOOT**

**NEW SCIENTIFIC 2-WAY TREATMENT WITH QUINSANA POWDER - ON FEET AND IN SHOES - IS PRODUCING AMAZING RESULTS. IN TESTS ON THOUSANDS OF PERSONS, PRACTICALLY ALL CASES OF ATHLETE'S FOOT CLEARED UP IN A SHORT TIME.**
MARSHAL JOUBERT'S PLANES PATROLLED 5,500,000 SQUARE MILES OF CONVOY ROUTES

LAST November 28, when promotions were issued to picked members of the high command of the Royal Air Force, it was announced that Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Bennet Joubert de la Ferté, K.C.B., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O (1917) had been appointed Inspector General of the entire R.A.F.

Marshal Joubert, as he is called, is not one of the best-known and most highly publicized members of Britain's flying family. Yet, for rine wolfpacks, to protect convoys between Saint Helena and Murmansk from Focke Wulf Kuriers and submarines alike and to carry out bombing missions against enemy shipping.

His almost invariably scant squadrons have had to patrol and fight, usually against terrific odds, some 5,500,000 square miles of ocean territory, an area almost twice as large as the continental United States and not nearly as compactly grouped.

It was his command that ran down the Nazi battleship Bismarck after she had sunk the mighty Hood and threatened to annihilate North Atlantic shipping. It was his command that, operating far from their bases, gave enough protection to the Murmansk convoys so that the bulk of the sorely needed supply and materiel they carried got through to the Russians. It was his command that has kept the big ships of the German Navy skulking in Norwegian fjords.

Joubert is truly one of the great men behind the planes in this war. But in the last war, he was up where the action was thickest on all fronts, flying the wood, wire and fabric horrors they then called planes by the seat of his pants. He is not willingly an armchair air marshal today.

Joubert was educated for the British Army at Elstree, Harrow and Woolwich, the great English artillery school. From Woolwich, he entered the Royal Field Artillery as a second lieutenant in 1907, was seconded (transferred) to the old Royal Flying Corps in 1913, about the time our Hap Arnold was winning his wings.

He flew in France in 1914, when air fighting was just beginning, served in Egypt in 1916 and 1917, where he won the D.S.O. for gallantry in action, finished out the war in Italy, where he picked up two Italian decorations and was mentioned in despatches six times for bravery.

Remaining in the R.A.F. after the Armistice, he was appointed R.A.F. instructor at the Imperial Defence College in 1927, became commander of the 23d Group of the Inland Area two years later. In 1930, he was made commander of the R.A.F. Staff College, there served four years.

In 1934, he became Air Officer Commanding the Fighting Area, was appointed Commander in Chief of the Coastal Command in 1936. Two years later, he was put in command of
the entire R.A.F. in India, returned shortly after the outbreak of war to serve as Assistant Chief of the Air Staff and then as Commander in Chief of the Coastal Command. Now, as Inspector General, it is his job to see that the bombers and fighters of the R.A.F. are in shape to carry on. And, judging from the anguished wails arising from the bombed areas of Axis held Europe, it is a safe bet that he’s doing a job.

MEDHURST TELLS THEM WHERE TO LAY THEIR EGGS

"THE Encyclopedia Britannica," says Air Vice Marshal Charles E. H. Medhurst, "defines intelligence as either animal, human or military. The thrust is probably less deserved than people think. Military—or for that matter air—intelligence, which sounds so mysterious when called ‘M.I.5’ or ‘A.I.6,’ is nothing more nor less than applied common sense."

And surely Air Vice Marshal Medhurst, C.B., O.B.E., M.C., should know. At present Assistant Chief of the Air Staff for Policy, he’s been Intelligence boss of the R.A.F. since 1941. He’s the man who sees that bombs aren’t dropped on empty warehouses or dummy U-boat pens, sees that they are dropped where they will do the enemy the most harm.

"Beautiful spies do not steal the plans of secret submarines from infatuated young at-taches," he says. "Nor do devoted agents stagger across frontiers with the specifications of a new stratosphere bomber imbedded in their hollow teeth."

"In real life, it is only the torn scraps which come to the Intelligence officer’s hands. They are rarely even scraps of paper. It is not stolen documents which fill the files, but brief reports of glimpses into banned areas, small oddnesses noted, careless words overheard."

"From such things is built up the huge shadowy jigsaw which is our picture of enemy territory. It is rarely that any one agent gets the whole story, but when fragments from a hundred different sources are pieced together, it is surprising how near the truth, if only in small areas, the jigsaw comes."

In other words, Intelligence is the most tedious kind of assembly work, of cooperation and sifting multitudes of material to get the small core of truth. Yet on this office labor, as much as on any single factor, the success of the entire operations of the R.A.F. depends. Medhurst comes from a long line of clerics, but he was always hell bent for military service. Born in 1896, he was educated first at Rossall School, then at St. Peter’s, Yorkshire, and finally at Sandhurst, England’s West Point. He became a subaltern in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in 1915, but did not remain long in the infantry, being seconded that same year for the R.F.C.

From 1915 till the end of the war, he flew first in France, then over Allenby’s victorious armies in Palestine, winning the temporary rank of major. He remained in the newly formed R.A.F. after the war, serving at home and in Iraq until 1931, when he was appointed an instructor at the R.A.F. Staff College.

After serving as Deputy Director for Air Intelligence between 1934 and 1937, he was successively Air Attache in Rome, Berne and Athens, attaining his Directorship in Air Intelligence shortly before the outbreak of World War Two.

"It is hard, grinding work at the desk," he says of his current job, "with endless disappointments and continual uncertainty. But always, to drive you on, the chance of some secret, but none the less tremendous victory."

A fellow like Medhurst just doesn’t lose.

KEEPING R.A.F. PERSONNEL FIT TO FIGHT IS WHITTINGHAM’S JOB

IT IS somehow fitting that an Honorary Physician to King George VI should be the medical chief of the R.A.F. But the attainments of Air Marshal Sir Harold Edward Whittingham, K.B.E., cover fields a lot broader than the mere superintendence of the placing of mustard poultices on the royal bottom.

He is one of the greatest specialists alive in the matters of tropical diseases, cancer and pathology. He has won just about every medical honor there is to win in the United King-
their planes' weight in Luftwaffe flyers, the pride of the Nazi super-being tradition, back in 1940.

"Not much has been heard of the medical men's work," he says. "It is not often front page news. But the single fact that the R.A.F. Medical Service has today over a hundred flying doctors, men who have taken their wings as pilots in order to test medical theory and fact under actual flying conditions, gives an idea of the size of the problem and the way it has been handled."

Marshal Whittingham was born in 1887, received his final training in the celebrated medical school of Glasgow University in Scotland. He passed the last three years of World War One in India and Mesopotamia as an officer in the Royal Army Medical Corps, was transferred in 1918 to the R.A.F. (Medical Branch), where his real career began.

In 1925, he was appointed Director of Pathology, R.A.F., served there for five years, when he took over consultative duties while developing his research into cancer and sandfly fever and malaria. In 1934, he became Office Commanding the Central Medical Establishment of the R.A.F. with the rank of Group Captain, equivalent to a Colonel's rating.

Five years later, with the rank of Commodore and the acting rank of Air Vice Marshal, he was appointed Director of Hygiene for the Air Ministry, serving simultaneously as Chief Executive Officer for Flying Personnel Research. He became an Air Vice Marshal on the outbreak of war, was made Air Marshal in 1941.

He's the man who developed the diet best suited for night fighters, who standardized tests for nervous resiliency and that unknown quality called inherent flying ability. In short, he's one of the men who keeps them flying.

**PRODUCTION IS BUCHANAN'S PITCH**

Back in 1940, when the Nazis swept through western Europe like a swarm of armored locusts, it didn't look as if England had long to live as a free nation. Air power was in the ascendancy, and England didn't have it. Her Lysanders and Fairey Battles were no match for the German Messerschmitts and Heinkels in quality. And their quantity was pitiful.

But two short months later, when the Luftwaffe turned from its completed conquest of France to the supposedly simple chore of knocking the R.A.F. out of the skies, swarms of improved Hurricanes and brand new Spitfires rose from the flying fields of Britain to deal Goering's proud air force a series of wallops from which it has never recovered.

These planes were faster in some cases than the fastest of the Nazis. Where they lacked speed, they were more maneuverable, and in all cases, they packed the savage striking power of eight machine-guns. It was the surprise victory of the war up to that time.

Where, people wanted to know, had the British been hiding these great planes?

It was said with some bitterness by many that they'd been held back while the French were taking their pasting so that England would be certain of defending her own shores.

This statement was acclaimed as a typical example of British self interest and ruthlessness.

Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. Had France held out a little longer, Britain would have had those planes over there to make those Stukas' lives miserable. But France didn't, and it was touch and go to get them in the air in time to stop the Nazi drive on England.

The man who won that crucial battle of production is John S. Buchanan, C.B.E., Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society, Fellow of the Institute of the Aeronautical Sciences (U.S.A.) and, incidentally, Director General of Aircraft Production for the R.A.F.

(Concluded on page 93)
PRIVATE PURKEY SPEAKS

By

H. I. PHILLIPS

Famous Humorist—Author of "Private Purkey in Love and War"

You wouldn't wait to chip in for a new hose if the one being used to fight the fire in your own house blew out, would you?

If you were going over Niagara Falls on a tightwire and you heard it snap, you wouldn't say "See me later" if somebody suggested a contribution to help buy a net?

Would you say "I'm too busy just now" if you saw a neighbor drowning and the only rope nearby was in a window under a sign marked "Make me an offer?"

Then as Private Oscar Purkey would put it, "Don't do no more stalling. This war of the hemispheres is a war for survival and if you wanna survive don't quibble over the survival rates. Kick in with your dough! Plenty of boys are kicking in with their lives."

Buy Bonds!

A WAR BOND MESSAGE FOR ALL AMERICANS!

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THE WINGED BOOT

By NORMA A. DANIELS

With Yankee Valor, Jimmy Craig Stages His Own Single-Handed Blitzkreig Against Ambushed Italians in the Libyan Desert!

They never had a chance. If the odds had been fairly even, say four or five Italian ships to the two-seated, chunky and unglamorous Lysander army cooperation plane, Jimmy Craig might have put up something of a fight.

There were eight Italian crates, flying like humming birds around the Lysander. Guns spat death and steel tore into fuselage, motor and cowling.

Jimmy Craig went into a dive while his motor still functioned. If he could knock one or two of them down—particularly the squadron leader whose ship was identified with black streamers and a dagger painted on the side of the craft—he would feel better about dying.

Below, the uneven terrain of Libya stretched for miles. There were no trees, hardly any shrubbery, just sand and rocks. Craig's partner in this reconnaissance flight was in the pit behind him. Qualen, a Limey with a language all his own, was probably the best friend Jimmy Craig had made since he had been assigned to this outpost of civilization.

One of those Italian ships was swooping down for the kill, its pilot secure in the belief that Craig's dive
had been impelled by motor failure. Craig looked up, saw the belly of that Italian plane and sent his own craft into a sweep that brought its guns directly in line with the enemy ship. He squeezed the buttons and that Italian plane kept right on going down.

It was followed by a long streamer of black smoke. Craig saw it crash and explode.

Then he was busy again. The others, intent on revenging the loss of one plane, dived on Craig with all guns flaming. The Lysander shook and trembled.

Nothing Jimmy Craig could do would throw his pursuers off, nor did he get the slightest chance to take another whack at them.

A stream of slugs smashed into the motor. It gave a despairing cough and then hot oil splashed out to cover Craig's face and goggles. He hastily wiped them clean and one look told him it was all over.

He jerked around in his pit, signaled Qualen with a jerk of his thumb that he was to hit the silk. Qualen nodded, pushed back the cowl and one hand grasped his parachute ring. He climbed out and jumped. Craig saw the chute blossom out. Qualen was safe at any rate.

Now all Craig had to do was try and land this crate in some isolated spot, pray that the Italians wouldn't bother to come down also for the kill, then hope some more that he might be able to fix that motor. It still sputtered, but there was no power behind it.

The squadron leader's plane came swooping past, guns barking, but the range wasn't close enough to be effective. Craig's heart stood stock-still for a moment. That burst of fire had been just something to worry him. The squadron leader was intent on getting Qualen who drifted, via his silk, toward the ground.

Craig pointed the nose of his plane groundward and dived after the leader. But the Italian plane was in a power dive. It leveled off, circled and came back toward Qualen. Its guns let go.

Craig saw the tiny object on the chute harness spin like a top as fifty or sixty heavy slugs smashed the life out of him.

Jimmy Craig roared a blistering curse! "That murderer! I'll get that heel some day, if I live only for that!"

But there was no time to speculate on the future now. Craig's own time seemed to be mighty short.

He tried to level off a bit. As luck would have it, the only tree for miles loomed directly in front of him. The landing gear tangled with the upper branches and sheared off the whole top section of that tree.

That was the final blow so far as the tough little Lysander was concerned. She wobbled, then her left wing struck the ground. Craig's world turned topsy-turvy. Automatically he shut off the switch and grabbed for anything that might give him some measure of support.

A vast cloud of dust covered the scene. Craig knew he was in some extremely odd position, then realized that the plane was upside down and that he hung from his safety belt. Miraculously he had escaped injury.

That would not be for long though. Once the dust settled, those Italian airmen would dive and strafe the ship, making certain no living thing could still exist on it.

Jimmy Craig unbuckled his belt, dropped heavily to the ground, and crawled out from under the wrecked plane. The dust still concealed his movements, but he could hear the enemy planes diving and zooming. Bent low, he scurried across the rough ground and flung himself behind a huge rock.

His uniform blended well with the surroundings and he was comparatively safe here.

Led by the squadron commander,
the planes dived and their guns punctured the Lysander in a thousand places. Some of the heavy slugs ricocheted off the rock behind which Craig was hidden. Others created geysers of sand and dirt all around him.

He did not move for fully half an hour, until his cramped muscles and limbs cried out for relief. The Italian planes had vanished, but Craig was taking no chances. This was Italian territory. There would be patrols out—probably one of them sent to inspect the ruins of the Lysander. Jimmy Craig was not exactly safe yet.

Deep in his heart rankled a black hatred for that squadron leader who had shot Qualen to death. Not that such things were not done in this war. The chivalry of 1917 was utterly missing, but just the same the thing struck Craig as a particularly murderous piece of work.

Yankee stubbornness rebelled at the idea of going away without taking a crack at this man. But how could it be done?

Craig gave up the thought and struck out toward the British lines. They were miles away, over hot, dusty terrain. If he got through, he would be plenty lucky. Without water or food, with nothing but a Webley holstered at his side, his chances were not too rosy.

A FULL day later his feet burned from the hot ground, but he kept going. There were a few stunted bushes about and he sprinted from one to another, just in case enemy planes spotted him, or a patrol suddenly rose up out of the horizon. Sometimes he hoped a patrol would materialize. They would have water and food—something Craig craved terribly.

A clanking sound brought him down behind one of those bushes. He held his breath as one man appeared—an Italian private. Two more followed, but that was all. Craig reached for his Webley and waited. His eyes were glued on the canteens these men carried.

What they contained was more precious to him than a lorry load of gold nuggets.

As Jimmy Craig leaped to his feet, one of the Italians raised a rifle and fired point-blank. Leaping swiftly to the right, Craig let his Webley go twice. The Italian who had fired curled up in a ball and didn’t move again. The other two promptly raised their arms high.

Craig indicated by a crude sign language that they were to turn around. Then he examined the man he had shot. The Italian private was dead. Quickly grabbing the dead man’s canteen and food supply, Craig satisfied a parched throat and felt better.

By dint of frequent consultations with his dictionary, Jimmy discovered he had captured an advanced outpost and that the British lines were not too far away. With the prisoners marching ahead of him, he covered ground fast. It was night and cool—no more of that hundred-and-twenty-degree heat of the daylight.

Just before dawn, he ran into a British patrol and a Bren carrier whisked him and his prisoners back to his own quarters. Colonel Catlin, with Squadron Leader Goodwin and Lieutenant Brent, listened to Craig’s story, and he flushed slightly at their compliments.

Lieutenant Brent drew a friendly arm around Craig’s shoulder as they walked out of the colonel’s quarters.

“Yank, old boy,” Brent said, “you came through nicely. We were a bit afraid of you for awhile. Blasted few Americans are fighting in Libya and we didn’t know your talents. I’m satisfied now and... By the way, you haven’t heard the last of this. Honor, decorations, and all that. Certain to follow, so stand by to receive them. Now, good night—get a bath and some sleep.”

Craig needed no second invitation
to follow those orders. . .

He awoke late in the morning, dressed leisurely, then strolled into the scorching heat of the field. To his surprise, at once half the squadron was drawn up in tight ranks. Sergeant Daly, a red-faced leather-hided Irishman, wheeled with precision and saluted.

Jimmy Craig gaped, then realization dawned. They were going to honor him for his exploits! His chest swelled, his head puffed a little and he snapped back the salute. Eight men became a guard of honor and they marched into the largest hangar where the rest of the squadron, its mechanics, and even the staff clerks were drawn up.

When the entire personnel, except officers, were assembled, Sergeant Daly made a speech—one well garnished with blarney, but Craig just stood there, sad because Qualen couldn’t receive such an honor, too.

Jimmy Craig made a speech after the sergeant finished. He put his whole heart into the thing.

“What I’ve done isn’t much,” he said modestly. “A man shouldn’t be honored for losing a battle and a plane too. Qualen is the man who should receive this medal, not me. I had a chance, he didn’t. Of course I managed to get back all right and bring a couple of the enemy along for company, but they were almost willing to surrender. I wish you hadn’t gone to all this trouble, men. I don’t deserve it.”

EVEN then Craig did not detect the tight lips, the quivering stomachs, and the red faces of the men. They were doing their best to keep from laughing out loud.

Sergeant Daly motioned and two men stepped up. They held a plush box, about a foot square, between them.

The three advanced on Craig. He raised his head slightly and prayed that Qualen could see this. He had determined that this medal was being accepted for Qualen—for the dead and not the living.

Sergeant Daly opened the box, stepped up to Craig and pinned something on his chest. Jimmy Craig looked down to see the glittering bit of medal and its bright ribbons. He turned pale, then red. That was the signal for the company to let go. Their howls rocked the hangar.

Jimmy Craig fingered the oddest decoration he had ever seen.

It was a miniature rubber boot with small brass wings attached to the heel.

“The Order of the Winged Boot,” Daly boomed through the laughter. “Granted only to those heroes who have to walk back instead of flying. A great and considerable honor if I say so meself. And now—”

“It’s a dirty trick,” Craig’s temper boiled over. “Not for me—I don’t care a hoot about medals—but I was accepting this for Qualen. He’s dead. Dead, did you hear me? And you’re making a joke about it! Well, I don’t like this sort of business.”

He ripped the winged boot away and part of his shirt with it. He thrust the squadron’s idea of a huge joke into his pocket and stalked out. The laughter died away then.

Jimmy Craig thought he had floored them, but later on he recognized the fact that he was practically ostracized. A man who couldn’t take a joke was not acceptable.

Craig went to work on a report and hoped he would get a chance to do something that would show these nitwits he was not a complete fool. He did chide himself for losing his temper. He should have laughed it off. Maybe would have, except that he had been remembering Qualen.

For the next day nobody spoke to him. He was not sent up on patrol, but confined to helping service a bomber.

Sergeant Daly glared at him every time they passed each other. Then Colonel Catlin emerged from his quar-
ters shortly after dawn the next day. Every man was present and at attention.

Catlin rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Gentlemen," he said seriously, "the enemy is retreating. Our tanks and Bren carriers have raised merry Ned with them and they've had enough. During the night they withdrew and our forward positions have lost contact with them. We've got to know over which route they are retreating and where they intend to make a stand. There's a chance we might send fast tanks to cut them off, and yet they mustn't realize we're up to something of that nature. I want a volunteer to take up a plane and make photographs of their retreat. It's a risky, unprotected job, and I'm asking for volunteers instead of making an assignment. Anyone who wishes to accept will step forward two paces."

The whole squadron moved forward the assigned distance. Catlin smiled in vast pride. His eyes swept the ranks and came to a stop on Jimmy Craig.

"Craig—fall out and come here."

Jimmy Craig's heart thumped like mad. This was his chance to prove himself, show these grinning apes he could actually make himself worthy of a real decoration. Then Lieutenant Brent and Sergeant Daly stepped close to the colonel and spoke in low voices.

Catlin's eyes became grave. "I've changed my mind, Craig," the colonel said shortly. "Bellows—fall out. Come with me to my quarters for instructions. Sergeant, dismiss the squadron."

Craig fell out with the rest of them, glared at Daly, and walked alone to the barracks. He felt low and bitter. They could have given him that chance to make good. After all, he was a complete stranger in their midst, a man from a nation not required to fight.

He had liked all of them until that fiasco in the hangar and, he had been sure they liked him. Now, everything was changed. He was more of a stranger than ever. He had been in the wrong, and knew it. They had expected him to accept that decoration in the spirit in which it had been presented.

He thought of apologizing, but that same streak of stubbornness prevented him from doing that. He gave up the whole idea finally and concentrated on his tasks.

There were no patrols for the time being. Another squadron at Tmimi was taking care of routine work. The day passed, and the night. Bellows, in the reconnaissance plane, failed to return, and there was worry and speculation as to his fate.

Then, an hour before dawn, they heard a plane coming in fast. Craig was among those who rushed out. It was Bellows' ship, but if he was at the controls he was wounded. The plane came down in a spiraling dive, hit the ground with its nose and stayed there, sticking up like an ungainly giant flower.

They hauled Bellows out. He was dead—a bullet wound through his head. Others located the camera equipment and Sergeant Daly brought out a stout box in which negatives were carried.

He hurried with this to the colonel's quarters.

The news began to circulate soon. Bellows had shot his pictures before he had been shot. Somehow he had managed to set his course accurately and bring the ship back. Jimmy Craig wondered just how that could have been done by a man with a bullet through his brain.

In company with other pilots he responded to a call and listened to Colonel Catlin's explanation and orders.

"Bellows died a hero," the colonel said gravely. "He got what he went after and brought it back. The photographs he took show the Italians re-
treated toward the pass near Gialo. By now they must be well through it. We can follow, divide forces and trap them in a pincers movement. We have Bren carriers and tanks enough—men too. Our job is to cooperate with the army corps, scout ahead, and bomb and strafe. The pictures are here on this table. You may all have a look at them. In an hour C Squadron will take off for scouting flight. That’s all.”

Craig mingled with the others and approached the table. Several men drew away from him as if he poisoned the atmosphere, but he had a good chance to view those photographs. They had been taken at just about the spot where he had crashed. The ravine, or pass, was close by. Yes—there was the tree he had struck.

Then Craig’s eyes grew wide and round. He had sheared off the top of that tree and yet, in this photograph taken after the crash, the top of the tree was intact!

Craig studied a map, studied the pictures again to make sure there was no mistake.

He saw Lieutenant Brent and walked toward him. Brent turned away. Craig stopped and felt the blood rush to his face. They were pushing him around just a little too much. Maybe he had made a heel of himself, but that was past. There was a war to fight, no time for personal squabbles. Stubbornly he checked his advance, wheeled and stalked out to the field. He crossed it and approached Bellows’ plane, still stuck nose down in the sand.

JIMMY CRAIG climbed into the plane, as best he could. There something decidedly fishy about this whole affair.

By practically climbing hand over hand, he managed to reach the tail assembly, a favorite target for fighter planes. It was all but blasted away. He examined control wires, and whistled softly. They had been cut by bullets and roughly repaired. Bellows could not have done that behind enemy lines. It took a skilled mechanic and a workshop to handle such a job.

But who had repaired the plane then—and why?

The Italians! They had shot Bellows down, made a prisoner of him, and fixed his plane so it would fly back. An Italian pilot could easily have killed Bellows, baled out, and made his way back to the Italian lines, leaving a dead pilot to crash at the airfield.

“Hey, you!” a harsh voice called. “Come down out of there and take your place. We’re going up.”

Sergeant Daly did not wait for Craig’s reply. He stalked off impatiently. Jimmy Craig raced to his quarters, piled into flying togs and reached his plane, a single-seater. Fifteen minutes later he was in the air, following in the wake of those other ships.

They streaked toward the ravine, but Craig had plans. They did not include the rest of the squadron. They might have helped, but when they refused to listen, to have anything to do with him, he decided to handle the job alone.

Gradually he dropped back and began to make the ship slip-slide all around the sky to indicate that something was wrong. Apparently he fought for control, but could not master the ship. He fixed the throttle for a poor mixture and the engine began to hammer like mad. Black smoke streaked out behind him and he lost altitude.

Then, any observer would have believed that Craig had gained control once more, but did not dark risk finishing the flight. He turned the craft back and disappeared.

As soon as the squadron was out of sight, he swept about again and zoomed for altitude. He streaked south so he would not contact the squadron again.
He had to kill a few minutes and he spent these at a dangerous height for this plane. His motors could not be heard on the ground and of course he was invisible. Then, after he was sure the squadron must have made its scouting detail, he gradually lost altitude, pierced a cloud-bank and looked down at the five-mile-long ravine. It looked like a tiny crack in the earth from this distance.

A bomber could never have flown between those cliffs, but this small ship could do it easily, with a steady hand on her controls. Craig meant for his hands to be that steady. He calmly shut off his motor and went into a noiseless glide.

The ravine loomed up closer and closer. He flew straight toward the north end of it, planning to give her the gun as soon as he was between the high, dangerous walls.

He flipped the switch and his motor roared into life, echoing and reechoing like a gigantic thunderstorm between the cliffs. Flying as low as he dared, he swept through the ravine, eyes busy maneuvering the craft and watching the loose rock, the deep caverns and the huge boulders that formed the walls.

He caught a glint of steel, then more and more.

The Italians had rigged some pretty good camouflage, but had not expected a plane to fly below their gun emplacements.

This ravine had been turned into a death-trap of the first order. It bristled with all manner of guns, well hidden and ready to deal out quick and certain death once the British forces were well inside. They would not have a chance—no opportunity even to fight back, because those guns would cut them to pieces in two or three minutes.

Jimmy Craig learned what he wanted to know. Now his problem was to get back. Without question, Italian radios already were spitting code messages, warning that their trap had been uncovered, but only by a lone flyer.

Every available Italian plane would try to cut off his escape now. Speed was the one essential.

When he reached the farther end of the pass, he nosed up and circled fast, heading for home. His fuel supply was nothing to brag about, but if he could spot the British formations advancing toward the ravine, he would be satisfied. One thing about this hot, dusty, sandy country—landing fields were made to order on every side.

Craig had to contact them at once. His radio! Of course—the quickest and easiest way. Now that he was flying clear, without gigantic walls to threaten him on two sides, he could give the plane her head. He plugged in his receiving connection, snapped the switch—and only a monotonous silence greeted him. The radio was out of order.

Cursing himself for neglecting to examine the apparatus, he concentrated on getting back now. That was the only thing left. He gave her a full gun, saw cloud-banks ahead and streaked for their protecting cover. Then he saw four Italian pursuit ships descend from that cloud-bank, and groaned aloud.

They had probably been on patrol, had received the warning by radio, and knew he would head back this way, so they had laid in wait for him, ready to pounce. They were pouncing right now, set on blasting him out of the sky as fast as possible. If they were successful, thousands of troops and incalculable amounts of motorized equipment would be destroyed. The Italian forces were no doubt well concealed somewhere in the hills, prepared to swoop down after their artillery shattered the British ranks.

These thoughts hit Jimmy Craig’s brain like a stinging slap in the face. And he was alone—to fight these four planes, each manner by a man intent
on his destruction. He had been a fool not to forget that unholy pride, forget the fiasco in the hangar, forget the winged boot.

At full throttle, he veered away from the diving Italians. They flashed down, traveling fast, then came up to get under him. Craig singled out the foremost ship and concentrated on it. As she came up, Craig's plane went down. For a moment it seemed that the two craft would meet head on. Then Craig's guns cut loose with a short, sparring blast. He had to conserve ammunition now.

The Italian plane flopped its wings drunkenly and screamed for the earth. Craig's grin that showed his teeth, was more of a snarl. Now the odds were a little better.

Two of them came at him now, the third seemed to hang back. Then Craig saw that it was striving for altitude while its two mates kept him busy.

From that third ship would come the gravest peril.

Craig zoomed away from the pair on his heels. That Spitfire he handled was faster, much more maneuverable than the Italian crates.

In twenty seconds he was pouring steel into the cockpit of one fighter. He could almost hear the bullets slap into the pilot's body. It was enough. He looked for more prey and found it—too fast for his own health. The third Italian had a bead on him and before Craig could start playing cat and mouse, bullets were singing all around him.

He felt the rudder go, knew the controls had been severed. It was all over now! His best bet was to try and land. That meant a dive with the plane out of control—but there was no other way.

Gritting his teeth, he roared through the Italian's stream of death, felt for his parachute ring to see that everything was right there, then he shrugged. If he baled out now, they would just dive, circle him and let him have it. He would be twenty pounds heavier when he collapsed on the ground—with Italian steel.

The ravine was in the distance. Craig had no idea what he might do even if he reached it again, but the ground was level there, in the pass leading to it. He might be able to land, hide and then warn the advancing columns if he was lucky. Anyhow, it seemed the only logical thing to do, so he shot in that direction. Without a rudder he could not change his course anyway, but it was possible to land sooner.

The two Italians were right after him. If they caught up, he would be doomed, because he no longer had fire power unless he could turn his plane around—which was impossible. He had to set her down, get out, and race for safety. That was the one and only way.

He felt the gear hit ground, bounce, then roll along the sand. At that moment the two Italians dived with guns blazing.

Craig crouched as low as possible in his ship and hoped the belt would hold when the crash came.

As had happened the first time, a wing scraped the ground and the plane went over on its side, beneath the crumpled wing. Craig hauled out his Webley, crawled from the pit, and saw both Italian planes coming in for a fast landing. Evidently they believed he was trapped in the wreck and were going to make sure of his death.

He dropped flat, wriggling behind the broken wing. The first plane to land was the one which had sent him down. Its pilot hopped out, gun in hand, and carelessly ran straight up to the wrecked Spitfire. Craig raised the Webley and at that moment the Italian spotted him.

Jimmy Craig felt a sharp pain high in his left shoulder. His Webley roared. The Italian running fast, kept going under his own momentum until a knee buckled, and he skidded across
the sand on his nose.

The second plane had landed. Craig's muscles tightened as he saw the black streamers of the squadron leader and the dagger painted on the side of the craft. The man who advanced was the killed who had murdered Qualen!

The pain in Jimmy Craig's shoulder disappeared. He steadied the Webley against a section of the shattered wing and waited.

The squadron leader saw his fellow flyer sprawled on the ground, realized what had happened, and ran back to his ship. Craig wondered if he were going to risk taking off and hunting him down from the sky.

Such an act would be mad, because Craig could be in the brush and well hidden by then.

The squadron leader fussed around the motor for a moment or two, rushed over to his companion's plane, and fired a flare pistol into it. The fuel supply caught and there was a crimson beacon where the plane had been.

Craig knew then what had happened. The squadron leader had crippled his own plane, thrown an essential part somewhere, and he alone knew its location. If he were killed, Craig would not be able to snatch one of those ships and reach his own lines.

A certain amount of admiration for this killer came over Craig, admiration and the sense that he would have to use all degrees of caution. This man had brains.

The Italian slowly advanced, a gun ready. The range was too great. Jimmy Craig simply waited. Then, suddenly, the Italian began running. Possibly he thought that Craig was wounded or that the erratic course he pursued would make a difficult target of himself.

Craig sighted his gun and fired twice. He missed both times, but the Italian dropped flat and began pumping lead himself. The bullets smashed into the wing and Craig buried his head in the sand for a moment. He counted five bullets.

Then the Italian was on his feet again, but crouched and prepared for quick action. Craig held his fire. Slowly the man advanced. Beneath his flying helmet he presented a dark, cruel face and lips parted in a ghastly grin.

Jimmy Craig let go with three fast ones. The Italian threw up both hands. His gun flew out of his grasp and he slowly collapsed to the sand. Craig waited. If this were a ruse, he didn't want to fall for it.

Ten minutes went by. Time was growing important. Craig slithered from behind the wing, but still the Italian remained motionless.

He'd fallen with one hand under his body.

Craig advanced, Webley pointed, and finger tense against its trigger. Within a yard of the man he decided it was all over. He reached out with one foot to prod the body. Like a flash the Italian's hand shot out, grabbed Craig's ankle and gave it a terrific wrench. His Webley went off, but the bullet sang harmlessly through the air and as he came down with a crash, the gun was hurled twenty feet away.

The Italian was wounded, but not badly. He had been resting and was not quite prepared to kill. Furthermore, that hand on which he had been lying, gripped a dagger. He raised it, gave a triumphant shout and leaped.

Jimmy Craig raised both feet quickly, and the Italian ran straight into them, to be hurled back with all the strength of the Yankee's legs muscles. He sat down, but bounced up again, but now Craig was on his feet too. They circled one another for a moment, the Italian snarling curses and Craig silent as a Sphinx.

The Italian charged in, knife raised. Craig did not try to avoid the rush. He faced it, but he did duck under the weapon's onslaught, bobbed up
once more, and rapped a hard right under the Italian's chin. The man went down and Craig leaped on top of him.

He seized the knife wrist, gave it a savage twist, and the blade fell into the sand. But the Italian's free hand managed to wriggle up until the outspread fingers approached Craig's eyes. The other hand reached for his throat.

Craig adopted some of the same tactics. Both hands fastened around the Italian's throat and squeezed. He kept raising his own head until he thought his spine would break. They remained that way for a minute, then the Italian's hands began to weaken and falter. Craig held his grip, for he could still see Qualen dangling from the chute while this murderous Italian circled him and tripped his guns.

It was soon over. Jimmy Craig regained his feet and staggered over to where his Webley had fallen. He searched the dead squadron leader to make sure he had not secreted the engine part on him. It was not there. Craig raced over to the plane, but soon found that unless he had that part, the plane was no more good to him than a kiddie car.

For ten minutes he searched vainly, then gave up. There was not any more time to waste.

He must warn those approaching British troops.

He noticed that the bomb racks of the dead squadron leader's plane were full—hundred pounders too.

Craig was at the base of the mountain which rose up to become one side of the ravine. He recalled that the two sides of the pass were covered with loose stones, great rocks hung precariously on the ledges. An explosion here would start a landslide, and also serve to warn the advancing British that there was trouble ahead.

Wriggling beneath the plane, Craig dislodged one of those bombs. He dragged it out, bent and lifted the heavy, ungainly thing to his right shoulder. Under the strain of lifting it, his wounded left shoulder began to spurt blood. He paid no attention. According to his calculations he had about forty-five minutes to act before the British got so close they would suffer losses no matter whether they reached the ravine or not. Those hidden guns had a long range.

Craig scrambled up the side of the mountain for the first fifty or sixty yards, then fell flat on his face, with the bomb pinning him down. He rolled it off his back, arose, and tried to steady muscles and nerves that were twitching with exhaustion. Once more he got that bomb slung on his back and began to stagger up.

Sharp stones cut into his flesh, barbed branches ripped his face and bare arms. The wound ached horribly, and sweat seeped out of every pore. Still he went on. Dimly he could hear the first rattles and clanks of the light spearhead tanks. Then the rumble of the heavier ones and the roar of Bren gun carriers. The British were coming up fast.

He reached a point within a hundred feet of the top. A stone, dislodged by one foot, rolled down, picked up others and a miniature slide started. Knowing that the slightest warning to the Italians would cause them to begin shooting at once he held his breath until lungs ached and there were spots before his eyes. The avalanche petered out before it gained momentum enough to cause much noise.

He started crawling then, clutching the bomb to his side as though it were something precious. Foot by foot he advanced. Then he had to rest.

He could not go another inch. There was a sparse bush to his left and he wriggled over behind it.

None too soon, either, because an Italian infantryman appeared suddenly from the top of the ravine. His
bayonet gun was slanted down and his eyes roved the hillside.

Craig peeled off his shirt as fast as he could, wrapped it around the Webley, and hoped it would muffle the sound of the shot. He waited until the Italian was no more than thirty feet away, and shot him through the head.

The body fell and started to roll. Craig pounced on the corpse as it gathered speed, and pinned it to the ground. He made sure it wouldn’t be dislodged, returned to the bomb, and summoned all of his remaining strength.

The sound of the advancing columns was clear now, and planes were roaring overhead. Before they discovered the trap, it would be too late. Armies on the other side of the ravine would be ready for action and come out of their holes to give battle against a foe blasted and shattered by the artillery.

THEN Jimmy Craig reached the top. He crawled on all fours, dragging the bomb along until he reached a ledge that overlooked a sheer drop straight down to the bottom of that abyss.

From this point he could see the careful preparations made for the ambush. Everything was set and waiting. He pushed the bomb over to the edge, pulled the fuse, and let her go!

For perhaps a full minute there was no sound beyond that made by the British columns. Then the air was filled with noise and dust and debris and death. A hundred landslides started. Italians popped out of their hiding places, screaming in terror. Big guns went down to smash on the rocks below.

The squadron of British planes circled fast, came back, and made a diving attack.

Craig let himself roll down the side of the mountain until he lodged against a big rock. He stayed there for hours...

Two days later Jimmy Craig’s squadron was lined up in the hangar, just as they had been when they had bestowed upon him the questionable Order of the Winged Boot. But now the decoration was one of the highest Britain could award.

Colonel Catlin shook hands, smiled and stepped back. The flyers remained stilly at attention.

“You earned that decoration, Jimmy Craig,” Catlin said plainly. “You knew those pictures we thought Bellows had taken were fakes, probably made by the Italians weeks ago. The tree top which you sheared off was intact, proving the point. I believe the Italians photographed—with Bellows’ camera—certain enlargements they had made themselves. That’s why they sent Bellows back—so we would get the pictures and fall into their trap. You alone saved us from that. The Empire is grateful.”

Craig gulped, his eyes filmed a bit, then he reached into his pocket. A moment later the Winged Boot hung precisely to the right of his newly acquired medal.

The cheer that went up made the rafters quiver. The flyers broke ranks and surged toward Craig. He was one of them now!

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MITSUBISHIS OVER MANILA, an Exciting Action Novelet by TRACY MASON—HOODOO CARRIER, a Novelet of Sabotage by NATHANIEL NITKIN—and Many Other Zooming Stories and Features in the Summer issue of AIR WAR, Only 10c at All Stands!
LET'S imagine we are in the dispersal hut, waiting to be briefed for a cross-Channel sweep. As soon as the Wing Commander Flying—he's the fellow who leads our Wing—enters the hut, all chatter ceases. We are getting accustomed to seeing him each day sit on one of the tables and say with a smile: “An easy one today, chaps; just a ‘quickie,’ over St. Omer and back via Calais,” or something like that.

But today it isn’t quite such a “quickie,” as we are flying somewhat farther; the target for the bombers is Lille.

The Wing Commander is now reading out to us the particulars of the sweep. We are to take off at 3:02 p.m., climb up and rendezvous with the rest of the party at 3:17 over Blank-on-Sea, then fly with the bombers to Lille and stick to them. Good enough. We discuss the order of take-off, and the order and position in which we should fly; that’s the most important detail, for otherwise every one of us might start milling round and the sky would be full of Spitfires looking for each other.

Then on with My Mae West

IT’S exactly 2:45 when I leave the dispersal hut, just ample time to finish a cigarette, put on my scarf and “Mae West,” and then saunter out to my aircraft where one of the crew is holding my parachute ready. It’s a lovely day, sunny, with a few cumulus clouds a couple of thousand feet up. I note that the wind is blowing gently from the south and that visibility’s good. As always, my aircraft looks as clean as a new pin.

The fitter who’s standing on the wing helps me into the cockpit, and hands me my helmet and gauntlets and a map. Long ago I learned that it is essential to be comfortable in an airplane; and, you know, a Spitfire is small enough to sit in, even without all the impediments which a fighter pilot has to carry with him on these occasions.

As I look around the airdrome, I can see other pilots climbing into their aircraft and settling themselves comfortably. Over on the far side of the field one of the other squadrons in our Wing is also getting ready to take off; I can see airmen running about. This squadron is due to leave shortly after us and to form up on us as soon as we are airborne.

Hello! the Wing Commander’s aircraft has burst into life; that’s the signal for all of us to start up. I unscrew the doping cock and give a few pumps to richen the mixture in the cylinders. As I press the self-starter button and turn on the magneto switches my aircrew begins to revolve, and some sheets of flame belch out from the exhaust ports; I can feel the heat of them on my face. Suddenly, with a deep roar, the engine picks up and I throttle back until it ticks over regularly.

Next I wave the airmen away from my wing-tips and follow the Wing Commander as he taxis round the side of the field. We jolt over the ground, and just before turning into wind and getting into position for taking off, I press the switch on my R/T set; a few seconds later I hear that familiar wave and faint crackle in my headphones. Then a few bumps and we are airborne.

Slowly we climb up along the coast. At twelve thousand feet I turn on my oxygen but, apart from noticing the flicker of the needles registering the flow, I can’t detect any other sign. Oxygen as oxygen isn’t noticeable so long as the feed is all right and there’s plenty of it; it’s when there’s a lack of it one feels uncomfortable. And it doesn’t give you any warning either.

On one occasion, I remember, I was caught with an oxygen failure at 22,000 feet; at one moment I was flying along merrily, but at the next, or when I came to, I found myself spinning down to earth with my altimeter marking five thousand feet.

*The identity of the author of this true article, who is serving in the R. A. F., cannot be revealed because of military reasons, but the authenticity of this account has been fully established.

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Well, here we are at 18,000 feet and approaching Blank-on-Sea. I close the radiator flap, and although I'm only wearing a sweater over my shirt and trousers, I feel quite warm with the hood shut.

My clock shows that according to schedule we should be sighting the bombers, with their escort of Spitfires provided by a neighboring wing, within the next minute or so. There they are, approaching from inland; they are quite easily recognizable by their shape, and by the close formation in which they fly. We allow them to pass us, and then we climb up above, always keeping them in full view.

Rendezvous in the Skies

HALF-WAY over the Channel we take up our battle positions by increasing the distance between aircraft; that's so that each individual pilot may watch over his friend's tail. At the same time, we keep the bombers in view, and watch the sky all round them. Slowly, slowly, and very, very close to the aircraft on my right. I hear the faint "crump," and can see the vivid orange center as it explodes. The airplane next to mine rocks slightly. I look round quickly; all's well—the pilot has put his thumbs up.

Now the silence has been broken by the controller back at our base. He tells us that there are enemy aircraft climbing up towards us from the southeast, a message acknowledged by the Wing Leader by a call "O.K." Hearing voices is always a comfort; and these are crystal clear in my headphones. Suddenly there is the warning voice of the Wing Leader.

"There they are—right—three o'clock."

As I look in that direction, I can just see them as flies in the distance against the white cloud. I try to count them, but at present the specks are still too far away. Anyhow, as they are still below us, they won't attack.

We are passing over St. Omer and approaching Lille. Although I haven't yet had time to examine the ground, I can already recognize certain landmarks, for I'm daily becoming more and more familiar with them. I spot the airfields near St. Omer. It is just visible as a small square. Two narrow strips cutting across it are the runways.

Just behind me is a large green patch. That would be the Forest de Nieppe, and immediately below us is the canal which runs from Dunkirk to Bethune. We are almost on top of Lille now, and the bombers are flying in close formation in front of us. As I'm looking at them, their bombs leave in a shower and flash towards the ground.

The Ack-Ack Gets Thicker

If only I could follow them down, and watch them explode on their target! But I've been on too many of these shows to do that sort of thing, for I know that at any minute we are likely to be attacked by odd Huns who will dive down and try to break up our formation.

All the way from the coast there's been spasmodic ack-ack, but now that we are over Lille it's much thicker. Still, nobody's hit. The bombers have launched their second salvo of eggs and they fly through as if there were nothing to hamper them, and then start to turn through 180 degrees.

We turn with them—steeply in order to afford protection if they are attacked at this moment when they are more vulnerable. I squint up continually into the sun because I know that if an attack is made it will come from that direction. Then the warning voice: "Hello! Clinker Leader, Ratter Blue on here. Two 109s at nine o'clock above. Watch 'em."

I look up to the left. Yes, there they are—two black brutes with slightly longer fuselage and blunter wing-tips than ours. I wonder, will they dive on to us or on to the bombers? Neither.

Just then two Spitfires from another squadron above come tearing down; one of them is already firing, for I can see some red tracer coming from his cannon. Good show! One of the 109s reels kind of drunkenly on to his back with white and black smoke pouring out of him. The other one?

No, the other has done a flick half-roll, and dives down toward the ground; he seems to have got away all right. But the first 109 is now a blazing mass of wreckage and leaves behind a trail of thick, black, oily smoke.

I can't watch any longer because our own squadron's being threatened, and the Wing Leader has ordered us to turn to the right—into the attackers. I do a steep turn, holding the stick well back into my tummy until a kind of red mist begins to form in front of my eyes. Then I give the warning call. "If I turn any tighter, I shall just "black out."

So, gently, I ease the stick forward and look all round me. Two more black 109s flash by at terrific speed, and disappear before I get a chance to open fire on them. I let them go, a lesson I've learned since doing these sweeps; never follow a Hun down.

Shepherding the Bombers

YOU see, our job is to watch the bombers and prevent them from being attacked. It doesn't matter if we don't shoot down any enemy aircraft; other squadrons on our flanks and above us are there for that job. So long as the bombers get back safely to their base we shall have done our stuff.

We are straightening up again now. A further warning comes along that two more enemy aircraft are diving towards the bombers. But they don't get very far because a couple of Spitfires detach themselves from the section on my right, turn towards the Huns and head off their attack. As ours open fire I can see a piece of a 109's tail drop off whilst he turns away in a dive.

Now I can also see small formations of Huns above and on the flanks of our wing. (Concluded on page 96)
THE PILOT OF P FOR PAUL

By JOE ARCHIBALD

The Pilot Officer Was Always Practical—Even When It Was a Question of His Life or Another’s!

In the wardroom of the British destroyer, the rescued flyer lay more dead than alive. They had been working on him more than an hour, but he was slow to respond.

They had spotted him clinging to a bit of wreckage in the North sea. Not clinging exactly; he had tied himself to a big chunk of driftwood that had come from some hapless vessel. It was barely buoyant enough to support his weight. Identification showed him to be Sergeant Harry Grew, Gunner, R.A.F.

"Give him a little more stimulant," the doctor said. "Keep him warm. I think he can pull out of it, all right. Had a rough go of it, poor chap."

Sergeant Grew could talk a little when the destroyer nudged against her berth in Portsmouth. Not too much, but enough to piece a strange story together.

He had been on a Hampden and they had been bombing the Ruhr. Flug-Abwehr-Kanonen had plastered them with AA and snappers, night fighting Messups, had caught them on the way back and had riddled the bomber with cannon shells and Rheinmettal-Borsig slugs.

The crew had had to bet on their 'chutes and May Wests. They had gone out the window.

"We were flounderin’ about some, me and Pilot Officer Worthy," Sergeant Grew said weakly. "The water was blasted cold and the sea was heavy. A
blonde would die too long in it. Then we splashed toward a bit of wreckage, bigger than the one you peeled me off, gentlemen."

Sergeant Grew rested awhile to get his breath. "I found the pilot officer the most practical person I'd ever known, mates," A strange smile flickered over his face. "The wreckage was not quite heavy enough to keep us both free of the water. Worthy made it first. When I got aboard, it went under the water a bit and the pilot officer shoved me off."

"What's that?" a British officer said. "You hear that, Mr. Danforth?"

"Say that again, Sergeant," Danforth said and leaned closer to the gunner.

"Now we can't blame him too much, you know, Grew said. "He put it to me sensible. He said, "Sergeant, the Lord drew the lot. He dealt out the cards, not me. Why should I die? I'm worth more to the air force than you are. I have a wife at home. You are single, aren't you Grew?"

The officers of the destroyer glanced at each other, their mouths a little open.

"Some sense to that," Sergeant Grew said. "Why should one man think he should have a right to live and another die, gentlemen? Grew lay back and closed his eyes. Soon he talked again. "I couldn't answer the question. The pilot officer was there first. He had just as much right to live as me. Funny, I kept thinkin' for hours afterwards, half frozen, the ruddy blonde was right. Cold-blooded and practical, yes. But what would you have done?"

"I don't know," Mr. Danforth said. "I rather think I'd climbed aboard again and argued the point with him. Practical man, you said. Rather, Sergeant. I would like to meet Pilot Officer Worthy, this man who dared to play God."

"I have no hard feelin's toward the blonde," the gunner said. "Could I have another spot of hot tea, sir? Ah, that's good and warms the cockles of my heart. Perhaps the pilot officer fared worse than I."

"Yellow dog," the skipper of the British destroyer said.

"Please, sir. He was a brave lad. Up there in the Hampden he took it all like the rest of us. I was with him when he bailed out, sir, and he was smilin'."

"Up to a certain point, he was a brave man," Mr. Danforth said. "Then he showed his weakness. Practical? Cold-blooded, I call it, Sergeant. That's it, let me lift you up. We'll have you back with your squadron in a few days.

The second officer from the destroyer met a Boston pilot in London a week later. He had a few bracers and he loosened his tongue. The next afternoon a lot of R.A.F. men were talking about a pilot officer named Worthy.

Pilot Officer Robert Worthy was in a Yarmouth hospital at the time. Just ten days later the two members of an ill-fated Hampden's crew were at the station again. They were brought to the Operations Room and quizzed by a Vice Air Marshal and he C.O. of the station.

"I don't remember telling the Navy the story," the gunner said. "I was a bit off my beam you know and must have been raving."

"Thanks so much, Sergeant," Pilot Officer Worthy said. "But you needn't spare my feelings. It was the way you heard it, sir. I was not afraid to die; it all seemed logical to me, the way I handled it. Put yourself in my place, gentlemen. You are with a man who hasn't half as much to live for as you happen to have. There's no reason why you should give up your life for him. You can still save only one man for the service."

"Don't believe him, sir," the gunner said. "He's off his..."

The Vice Air Marshal held up his hand. He stared at Robert Worthy, a little glint of scorn in his eyes. "That's all, gentlemen. You may go," he said.

Pilot Officer Robert Worthy was transferred to a station farther north the next morning. It was a station where they kept some Bostons and a flight of Hurricanes. There was a huge white country house where the bomber crews and fighting pilots lived. The airfield was two miles away.

PILOT OFFICER WORTHY was in the mess having a Pimm's when Flight Lieutenant Agnew walked in. A Hurricane pilot nibbled at his slice of cucumber and said:

"Pilot Officer Worthy. Leftenant Agnew, bombardier."

"You can call it that," Worthy said. "Will you have something?"

"I don't feel quite up to it," Agnew said and went out.

Pilot Officer Worthy found himself in a sort of covery at the bomber station after he had been there a few hours. He accepted his lot in stride and confined himself to the grim business of fighting the Huns.

Fate put him into a Boston that had Mr. Agnew as its bombardier. He had a nice record with the Hampdens and Air Ministry is inclined to overlook the behavior of a pilot when he is thrown into the sea. Deep-sea business belongs to the Royal Navy.

Close to dusk, the crews of the Boston filed into the briefing room and got their instructions for the night from the station commander. On the wall was a great map of northwest Europe on which tape stretched showing the route to the target.

The plan of the objective was thrown on a large screen by the epidiascope. They listened to the meteorological officer's forecast of the weather. Navigation, signal and armament officers had their say.

The Bostons were only an infinitesimal part of the plans of Combined Operations that night. The Royal Navy and the Butchers and Bolts and American Flying Fortresses were included in the cast of the show. It was to be a powerful thrust, a "feeler" at a certain spot on the coast that was supposed to be vulnerable.

It was very dark when the crews of the three Bostons piled into cars and drove along a winding road fringed with laburnum and hedges that were beginning to grow wild. The air smelled clean and the scent of new-mown grass was washed out of the meadows by a gentle wind to delight the nostrils of men that were soon to get the smell of high explosives.

"I hope we do not have to drop into the channel," Worthy said, when he found he was not included in the banter. "Be quite awkward, wouldn't it, Mr. Agnew?"

"Rather. I'll see I get there first if there's something I need to hang onto."

"Smart of you," Worthy said. He smiled thinly. "Heard you were going to buzz off soon to train bombardiers for the King. Agnew. Valuable chap, I heard. Wife and two children, haven't you?"

"If it is any of your affair," Agnew snapped.

"I like to know everything about my men," Worthy said. "Important, Agnew."

The ground crews had everything ready when the Boston crews piled out. Oil and fuel bowser and bomb dollies rolled away and in a few minutes, the Bostons would be over occupied territory and smashing at Hitler's airfields.

The Bostons were tough babies, half bomber and half fighter and you could do almost anything in the air with them. Thirty-two hundred horses pulled each of them along.

Pilot Officer Worthy turned the Boston's head into the wind and looked along the closely shaded lights on either side of the concrete runway. He watched the signal light at the end of the flare path turn green and opened his Wasps wide. They grumbled at first, then let loose a mighty roar and P for Paul streaked away.

Over the channel, Worthy flew "wave high," as the R.A.F. call it, low enough so that the curvature of the earth would raise hob with Jerry's attempts to establish radio location.

SLIPPING out of the great belt of thin mists that shrouded the channel, Worthy could see great fires burning and searchlights were lancing the sky.

"It'll be a Donnybrook," Pilot Officer Worthy said. "Our bombers have been messing things up a bit."

There were flashes of gunfire on the waters below. AA was bursting in the sky and the long fingers of Nazi searchlights groped through the fiery blooms and one struck flat against P for Paul, held to it for a moment, then slipped away just as flak burst off the Boston's right wing.

"Watch it, Bevin," Worthy said into the intercom. "We're going in."

Agnew's job was to get those bombs
of his down on an airfield no more than three miles inland. Then he and Bevin would use their guns along with Worthy's to rake everything that looked like aircraft hugging the ground.

They had come in fast and had found things boiling. It would get hotter. Down there barges were sliding ashore and men piled out of them armed with Sten guns, knives and every kind of weapon that could butcher the enemy.

The Boston swept low over the action, shells and tracers screaming up at them. Down on the beach shells rained on the Nazis manning machine guns and mortars. Agnew checked with Worthy. The roaring flak almost drowned out his voice as he guided the pilot over the target. Above it all were Spitfires and Beaufighters and Flying Fortresses. Messerschmitts kept knitting down. Some got through and sprayed barges with cannon shell and hellish streams of lead.

Bevin, behind the bomb bays, was steadily firing. Bevin was the important guy now. Agnew and the pilot had to get those bombs down where they would do the most good. They were sweeping down toward the German drome at fifteen hundred feet.

A Boston was in and unloading. It's bombs smashed a hangar to bits and its machine guns drove tracers into Nazi fighters that were trying to take off. One burst into flame and skidded off along the ground like a cannon-cracker gone wild.

Pilot Officer Worthy got on the target and Agnew pressed the Mickey Mouse. The Boston swooped upward like a frightened hawk, lightened of its load. Great fiery flashes marked their hits as Worthy banked around, steadily climbing.

"Pretty," Worthy said. "A posh job, Agnew. I'd hate to have to drop you in the water after that one. Bevin, get that Messup?"

Bevin had more than one Messup to worry about. Focke-Wulf 190's were swarming around too. While the scramble raged, Worthy could hear the words of the general directing the action in his phones.

The big bloke was in a small room on a destroyer, Worthy guessed, down there off the coast. He was coordinating three services, the army, navy and air force. He could call Fighter Command for aircraft to cover for certain landing thrusts, order escort vessels to move in the right spot at the right time. He talked with bomber and fighter pilots and could hear them when they got one that hurt.

"Calling J for Jimmy," a voice hammered in Worthy's ears. "Bomb gun positions on east flank. Calling J for Jimmy."

P for Paul was trying to get out of there, Worthy pouring on the coal. There was a great fracture in its fuselage from Bevin's position to the tail. The left wing was scarred by Messup lead and flak bursts and a wasp was acting up a little.

A FOCKE-WULF 190 landed in and sent its tracers howling past Worthy's greenhouse. A cannon shell burst between his seat and Agnew's glass coop and blinded him for a few moments. Something stung his face and the arrows on the panel started dancing.

"These American beauties can take it," the bombadier yelled into his mike. "I think I got me a Mess that time. The whole nose is lighted up and it wasn't the Jerry lighting his pipe."

The pilot yelled: "How is it, Bevin?" and swung over hard to get out of the path of a flaming rocket.

"A piece of cake," the gunner said. "Hang on, Skipper, we'll make it home."

"Yes, and hang on together," Agnew said, and a smile came to Worthy's face, although one side of his face did not seem to want to help out in that smile.

He threw the ship in and out of a sea of flak, and then a terrific burst turned the Boston over and Worthy thought for a breathless moment they had taken it cold.

When he finally leveled the bucketing craft, it was sweeping low, over a flaming warehouse and the great fire lighted up the area for several square miles.

At fifteen hundred feet, a Focke-Wulf slipped past Bevin and poured it on. There was another blinding flash and the light bomber pitched and tossed like a tanker torpedoed in a heavy sea.

The gauntlet toward the coast was filled with flying chunks of steel every foot of the way.

"Come in, Bevin!" Worthy yelled.

The gunner answered, but his voice was hardly audible in the intercom.
Worthy tried to isolate the even singing of the Wasps from the other hellish sounds and found it difficult. He checked hurriedly and discovered that one was hot.

He looked at the left wing tip and saw that a great chunk had been bitten out of it. He tasted salt in his mouth and the right side of his face felt as if it had been pounded by a great wooden maul.

"Got to get out of here," Worthy babbled into his mike. "Got a valuable cargo, Agnew. Have to make a lot of bombardiers for the King."

"Thanks," Agnew countered. "Think of yourself, Leftenant."

Worthy knew the bomber would not make the station. It was terribly sluggish at his touch.

Back in England they talked of the practical man who had weighed his life against another's. The R.A.F. men, the majority of them, were young and impressionable. They'd read books like Beau Geste and worshipped at the altars of sacrifice.

A Wasp engine quit and sent out a pennon of reddish black smoke. It became a "sitter" and the Messups and Focke-Wulf's came down and hammered it.

"We're finished," Worthy roared hoarsely. "Out with you, old chaps!"

"We're staying, Skipper," Bevin said. "We haven't altitude enough to go out the window, anyhow. Happy landing, Mr. Worthy."

Pilot Officer Worthy took the crippled Boston down and swiftly broomed the terrain that was illuminated by the fires burning along the coast. He saw a road that came out of a little village, saw that it split into a fork near a woods. At the fork, there was room to put the Boston down.

"Hang on, men," Worthy said and gritted his teeth as the ground leaped up at them.

He dropped his wheels and one of them crumpled as if it had been made out of gingerbread and the Boston ground-looped to the accompaniment of a grinding and rending of Bethlehem steel. Worthy felt like a horse-fly caught in a corn hopper and he desperately hung on and wrestled with the Havoc as if it had been a wild beast until the control column snapped. The Boston slued to the edge of the woods and threw a Wasp away.

Pilot Officer Worthy found himself tangled up with the bombardier. There was a red slash across Agnew's bronzed cheek, but the blood trickled from it and was not very deep.

"Lucky, Worthy," the bombardier grinned, and they extricated themselves and got out of the wreck.

Then they lifted the hatch from the gunner's position and dragged Bevin out. Bevin was badly hurt. There was a bullet through his shoulder and one high up on his chest.

"Curtains," Agnew said, and swept his eyes over the surrounding topography for sign of Nazis.

"Come on, we can get to that village," Worthy said. "What's left of it. Looks deserted. Help me with Bevin, Leftenant."

"Right."

Overhead the battle raged. The guns boomed all along the coast and running through the inferno was the crackle of light guns. Smoke boiled in from the beaches and the smell of battle was everywhere.

It was about a quarter of a mile to the cluster of half-ruined houses, all uphill. Bevin was almost a dead weight between the pilot and bombardier.

"Go on alone," the gunner said.

"Nuts," Agnew ripped out. "You ever hear about the camps in Poland? Maybe we can make it through to the barges."

Worthy said hoarsely: "Down—quick!" They flattened and Bevin groaned. A Nazi armored car and three motorcycles mounting machine guns roared around a bend in the road and passed by the huddled Boston crew so close that a wheel nearly ran over Worthy's foot.

"In a hurry," Agnew said. "A bit of luck. Let's get on."

They reached the little village. The houses were deserted and had been bombed, one or two of them still belching smoke. Worthy and Agnew entered the nearest one and went down into a cellar. They put Bevin on a heap of old bedding and did what they could for him.

"Look for a way out, old chaps," Bevin said. "I'm staying on here."

An hour passed. There was a little
narrow window in the cellar just above ground level and Worthy kept looking out. He could see that the beach was very far away. It was marked by the flashes of the guns of the Royal Navy. No chance to run for it. The area would be crawling with Nazis who would be in a nasty mood. "Look, Agnew! Come here," Worthy yelled suddenly. The bombardier came over and peered out through the broken glass. He saw a man gathering in a great mass of billowing cloth not a hundred yards away. "Had to bail out," Worthy said. "Wonder if it's one of ours."

"Can't tell from here."

"Got to tell," the pilot officer said. "There's a Nazi airdrome not far from here. I've seen the Messups come up just over the top of a hill over that way. Not more than a mile, I'll wager, Agnew. Wait here, I'm going out."

The bombardier watched Worthy go up the cellar steps, heard his soft tread on the boards overhead. Above the roar of the action toward the coast, he heard the pilot officer call out.

He jumped to the cellar window and looked out and he saw the man that had come down out of the sky lift a hand and then start toward the house. Agnew turned toward Bevin and said:

"The practical chap is up to something."

A GNEW waited. There were faint sounds of a scuffle upstairs. Then Pilot Officer Worthy came down the cellar stairs, dragging the limp figure of a flyer for the Luftwaffe.

"Always wondered if the German I studied would do any good, old fellow," he grinned. "Get that flying gear off him, will you? Sorry I had to kill him."

Agnew went to work without delay. He looked quizzically up at Worthy and saw that the Boston pilot was removing his own R.A.F. outfit. When Worthy pulled on the Nazi's trousers, the bombardier's lips tightened.

"You're buzzing off, what?" Agnew said, and got to his feet. "I don't relish a Polish prison camp either, Worthy. Your chance to get to the beach in a Nazi uniform. Look, Worthy, remember Sergeant Grew? It was either you or that gunner in the channel. Now it's between the two of us. The best man walks out in that get-up, understand?"

"I'm in command," Worthy said, his eyes stormy. "You'll obey orders, Agnew!"

"I'd rather not, Worthy."

He came in at Worthy and a fist caught him flush and dropped him. He got up and was knocked down again and his head hit the floor. When he got up again, Pilot Officer Robert Worthy was all rigged out as a pilot of the Luftwaffe.

"Take care of Bevin, Agnew. Keep yourself hidden. There may be a chance for—"

"'Me First' Worthy," the bombardier sneered. "I hope you meet up with a thousand Jerries. I'm not such a valuable man now, what? Not when I stand in your way. Hah, the King needs bomb-aimers."

Agnew laughed, turned his back and knelt beside Bevin. Worthy turned and walked up the cellar steps.

When the pilot officer's footsteps had died out on the road leading out of the village, Agnew said: "You see they were right about him, Bevin. Brave up to a certain point. Then in a spot like this, he thinks of Pilot Officer Worthy."

"He—did a posh—job up there, sir. Odd bloke. He got us down...

"Thinking of his own skin. Practical man? A yellow dog, Bevin. You hear me, Sergeant?" He looked at Bevin very close, shook him gently. No use anymore. He knew the signs.

Bombardier Agnew sat down and waited. He got up suddenly an hour later when he heard the roar of aircraft overhead. He looked out of the cellar window and he saw three familiar silhouettes skim low over the woods, Beaufighters. The action was still on.

Searchlights stabbed up from somewhere beyond the woods and then flak began to burst. Messups appeared and steadily climbed. One burst into flame at about a thousand feet and then Agnew could hear the bombs breaking up. The pyrotechnics lasted for three or four minutes and the Beaufighters came roaring back again.

"So close, those planes," Agnew grunted. "And so far away."

He waited and the action all around him began to taper off. The chill of the hour before dawn seeped into the cellar and raked along his bones.

Then he heard the whine of a Nazi
engine and he hurried to the window
and looked out. Unable to get a view
of the plane from there, he hurried up-
stairs and peered out through the door-
way.

The plane dropped low over the vil-
lage and Agnew saw the great swastikas
on its wings. A Messerschmitt 109F.
It went down where the road forked and
landed.

Agnew ducked back into the doorway
and drew his service revolver. He rolled
his body along the wall until he came to
the window and there he made his stand.

THE pilot of the Messerschmitt got
out of the greenhouse, dropped to
the ground and seemed to reel around
for a moment. Then he came up the road,
a gun in his fist.

He was only fifty yards away from the
house when a Nazi car roared into view
and Agnew could see the gun on its
bonnet. The Messup pilot jumped clear of
the road just as the armored car put
on the brakes and squealed to a stop.
Two Nazi officers got out and yelled at
the pilot.

"Herr Leutnant Reizwig!? Comst du
—Himmel!"

The Messerschmitt pilot stepped into
the road and he fired twice. A big Nazi
clutched at his chest and went down.
The other spun half around and got a
third bullet before he could brace him-
self.

Bomb-aimer Agnew threw shock away
from him and bolted out of the house.
He was running full speed when the
Messup pilot lunged for the door of the
Nazi car.

"Agnew! Agnew!" a voice roared.

The bombardier was in there in a few
moments helping a bleeding pilot officer
pull a Jerry out of the driver’s seat.
Pilot Officer Worthy was choking the
life out of the man and talking with all
the strength that was left in him.

"Run and get into that Messup. It’s
turning over and ready to roll. Not very
hard getting it, old chap. Hid near the
airdrome and waited for a chance. The
Beaufighters came over and gave it to
me. Nazis—weren’t—looking for any-
thing—but pilots—to take the Messups
off. Didn’t bother—to—brief them—
long as they wore—My German. Agnew.
Had to be me, you see. You'd made no
end of a mess of it. King needs bom-
bardiers—valuable man, Agnew. Two
children—run, you fool!"

Agnew ran, after slapping a hand
against Worthy’s shoulder. His lungs
were bursting when he got to the Mes-
serschmitt and climbed into its pit.

There were spidery designs in the
plexiglass, made by English lead. The
Daimler-Benz was purring and Agnew
found the throttle and the brake release.
He whipped the Messerschmitt around
and poured on the coal as it sped along
a road, its squarish wingtips brushing
against the leaves of the high bushes.

He tuck’d in the Messup’s wheels
when he got buoyancy under the wings
and then roared up high into the sky that
was tinted by the first traces of dawn.

“A brave chap,” he said. “Practical
fellow, Bob Worthy.” There was a
lump in his throat.

Pilot Officer Robert Worthy leaned
against the Nazi car, remembering an-
other decision he had made. His life
against a gunner’s. He’d liked Sergeant
Grew. He hadn’t liked Agnew, knew
he never could have cottoned to the
man.

But England needed a man to train
bombardiers.

The Germans getting out of the other
car that had come up, wondered about
the strange smile on his face. They
looked at the dead Nazis and drew their
guns.

"Very foolish of you to waste your
bullets,” Pilot Officer Worthy said in
German as he started to sink toward the
ground. “You had better conserve them
in the Reich, my friends. Not practical
using them on a man already . . .”

He fell to the ground and rolled over
on his back and tried to see that Mes-
serschmitt high in the sky before the
curtains were drawn down over his eyes.

ACES WIN THE HARD WAY, an Exciting Air War Novel by ROBERT
SIDNEY BOWEN—featured in the July issue of SKY FIGHTERS, Only
10c Everywhere!
BRITAIN'S BOMBER STRENGTH

By WING COMMANDER L. V. FRASER

Bombing Germany by daylight may be dangerous, but bombing the Nazis by night has its own special perils—
which the R. A. F. is trained to meet and overcome!

BRITAIN, at the present time, is the only country in the world with a great force of heavy bombers whose main function is long-range attack at night.

It is not an over-specialized force, for it can be used for many other purposes. It can and does attack in the day. And it could and would play a great part in the defense of Britain if any invasion were attempted.

But it is a specialized force in the sense that there are few types of bombers outside the R.A.F. which could do what the Blenheims, Hampdens, Wellingtons, Whitleys, Manchesters, Halifaxes and Stirlings can do.

These, and especially the latest of these, are the types on which Britain relies for the strategic bombing of Germany—work that for some time to come must be done mainly in darkness. Only British bombers have so far been used by the R.A.F. to attack Germany or objectives in the occupied countries at night.

The American bombers have so far done all their work in the day.

The British bombers are the result of years of research. Plans were laid down in advance. Equipment, machine tools and factories were designed with the sole intention of producing a particular weapon for a particular operation. With all the complicated processes of modern industry, it may mean that aircraft planned as long as five years ago are only now coming into service.

Moreover, it may be very difficult to understand a particular campaign (such as the German bombing of British industries and ports in the winter of 1940-41) unless it were also realized that weapons devised for one purpose may have to be used for another.

It is certain that the Germans had no idea, until they were defeated by daylight in the Battle of Britain, that they would have to send out great forces of bombers in darkness. It is known that their bombers were not built and their air crews were not trained for this purpose; and that only the Nazis' inability after the Battle of Britain to bomb Brit-
ain in the day induced them to attempt night bombing.

Nazi Grief

They had great difficulties in pressing it home. Untrained crews in machines not really made for night flying involved enormous strain on the Luftwaffe’s resources.

Losses from crashed aircraft must have been far higher than those caused by British defenses. The proof is that, once German resources in the air were strained by the war in Russia and the Mediterranean, night bombing of Britain was the first thing to be abandoned.

How far was the R.A.F. prepared for night bombing before the war began? The main bomber force was designed so that it was entirely suitable for night attack. Though actual war experience has resulted in modifications, even the latest R.A.F. four-engined bombers were designed before the war began. The crews were fully trained for night work, which meant that methods of training were ready to cope with the vast expansion of the R.A.F.

On the first night of the war, the first force of heavy R.A.F. bombers was a good way into Germany at night. The bombers which made the first flight over Germany were Whitleys. Ten of them dropped 5,400,000 leaflets in an hour or two on a number of towns in northwest Germany and all ten came safely home.

The Whitleys were then the R.A.F.’s heaviest bombers and had the longest range. It is fitting that they should have been chosen to deliver, not the first blow, but the first grim warning of the R.A.F.’s long air offensive against Germany.

They Have What It Takes

On the first night of war, the Whitleys and their crews proved that they had the essential qualities needed for night attack, and although the place of the Whitleys has been taken by far more formidable types, they still fly at night over Germany. They are designed on the right principles, and their crews were trained in the right way.

There is nothing mysterious about the qualities needed in a night bomber. Where the mystery comes in is in contriving the best possible compromise be-

tween apparently incompatible qualities.

The cart-horse must have some of the qualities of the race horse. The battleship must share the maneuverability of the destroyer. The instrument of precision must be able to withstand the blows of the hammer.

If such apparently opposite qualities were not combined to the best efforts in a British bomber, the R.A.F. would not be able to hit at Germany with its current force in the darkness and so far from base.

You can get a better idea of the R.A.F.’s bombers’ ability from lighter attacks on nights of difficult weather than from obviously successful attacks in good weather. Take the night of April 1st as an example.

Navigator’s Story

One of the men who was out that night has just been telling his story. He was a navigator in a Wellington sent to attack a railway marshalling yard in northwest Germany. Just before they got to the Rhine, the weather went bad. Black thunderclouds were everywhere, and it got darker and darker. The front gunner was half covered in sleet as he sat in his turret. The crew saw nothing of the ground, so when they were due over the target, the pilot dived.

At last, he found the railway-line, but now the plane had come down into a valley, and black hills loomed above them on each side.

There was slush a quarter of an inch thick on the windscreen. They found the railway yard and began bombing it. They went round and round to make several bombing runs, and the navigator thought each time that they were going to run into the hills all about them.

The weather got worse, so the pilot decided the rest of the bombs must be dropped—and they were—in two sticks. The plane was so low that the crew heard the bombs burst and felt the blast.

On the way home, the weather was worse still. The whole countryside was darkened by the storm. They had had some icing before, but now they could hear the ice smashing through the side of the fuselage as it flew off the propellers.

The windscreen was coated inches

(Concluded on page 96)
RODNEY JUMPS THE GUN

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

When You're Down in Enemy Territory, You'll Be Glad to Use Any Old Transportation to Get Home!

MAINTAINING his position at the apex of Flight A, Fighter Squadron 64 of the R.A.F., Lieutenant Matthew Rodney glanced around at the rest of his flight, saw the heavy bombers just below which he was helping escort to dump loads of eggs on the city of Essen, and then stared straight ahead. There were bitter, unshed tears back of his usually merry blue eyes, and a terrible ache was in the back of his throat.

For this was to be his last flight. It was up to him to see that it was. And only next week he was to have been transferred from the R.A.F. to one of the U.S. combat units now stationed in England. But all that was impossible now. And just for one evening's innocent fun at the Blue Boar tavern.

Fun! He winced at thought of the word. Why had he, the only American in the whole Sixty-fourth Squadron been singled out by the wife of that British brass hat for attention? Colonel Gregory Waihe-Whitcombe of British Intelligence. What right had an intelligence officer to be insanely jealous, anyway? Well, he wouldn't be jealous any more, but that didn't help Lieutenant Rodney any.

Dawn was just breaking in the east. It seemed as though the entire flight was going to fly right into it when the voice of the squadron leader sounded in his headphones.

"Bombers coming on target. Flights A and B—interceptor planes over to left—altitude sixteen thousand. Attack. Repeat orders."
Rodney dutifully responded. He heard Craig of Flight B responding as he paused before speaking to the pilots in his A Flight. In the east, like specks of black dust against the first flush of dawn he counted twelve Messerschmitt 109s winging in to knock down these invaders of Nazi skies. That there would likely be scores and scores more he had no doubt, but these twelve constituted his flight’s particular job.

It was up to him and his eight comrades to see that these Jerries didn’t make dead ducks of the heavily laden bombers coming in sight of their goal. Nine Spitfires against twelve Messerschmitts. Good odds, and fair enough. Rodney grimaced as he called out orders over his throat mike, flicked his gun control switch to the on position and then fired a warming burst.

This was it. Singularly, the Nasties were a long time about attacking the bombing flight, but at last they were here. To knock most of them out of the sky to insure the success of the raid was the job now. And then—

Rodney’s mind went back to that awful mess in the Blue Boar tavern the night before. How the devil Vivian Whitcombe had managed to get him tight, and up to her suite of rooms, he still couldn’t puzzle out. Unless—his head still throbbed—the liquor had been doped.

But why would the wife of a British colonel dope an R.A.F. flier? It didn’t make sense. No, Matthew Rodney had simply made a fool of himself. Worse than that, he had set himself up for a first-class court martial and a military funeral—if an executed soldier rated an army funeral!

The details were still hazy in the American’s mind. He remembered sitting on the sofa with Vivian Whitcombe, and the woman was asking him questions about the Sixty-fourth Squadron when her husband came barging in. Before she had time to introduce him as Colonel Gregory Waite-Whitcombe the man was raging and raving all over the place. He reminded Rodney of a drunken motion picture director he had met once in an apartment on Park Avenue.

Mouthing a lot of hackneyed phrases about honor and integrity, good of the corps, lack of jolly old sportsmanship—and a lot of other rot like a ham actor—the colonel drew his pistol and attacked the bewildered Rodney. What his fellow British officers would have done under the circumstances Rodney didn’t know. But he had come from Oklahoma originally, and he knew what to do when a man pulled a gun on him. Promptly he had tackled the berserk colonel. . . .

He shuddered now as he lined a diving Messerschmitt in his sights and pressed the firing stud, to see the Nazi’s right wing crumple away and the German ship start spiraling downward under a plume of black smoke. These Spitfires were regular devils of destruction.

What kind of a show the woman had put on during that hand-to-hand struggle Rodney couldn’t remember. All he could recall was that, in the fight for the gun, they fell across the sofa and crashed to the floor. There was a dull report, and the colonel shut up his babbling with a terrible groan. He went limp, and the blood began spreading out like a pool on the carpet.

Shakily Rodney got to his feet, staring stupidly down at Waite-Whitcombe. The colonel had shot himself through the heart, but it had been Rodney’s fault. And then the woman screamed.

The sound keened in Rodney’s ears now as he put the Spitfire into a dive and a barrel-roll to get a diving Messerschmitt off his tail. Or maybe it was the whistling of the wind.

He came out of the roll and sideslipped hastily out of the path of a Spitfire pilot who had caught the Nazi ship cold and stitched a double row of bullet holes along the Jerry’s belly. That was that, and quick.

Rodney was amazed to note that the plexiglass shield before him was shattered and that his left ear was burning and tingling. Something wet was trickling down his cheek beneath his helmet. He’d better concentrate on his present job or he’d be shot down before it was done.

The attack had turned now into a dog fight. Two Spitfires had been knocked down and five of the Nazis had been blasted out of the sky. The bombing squadron had already disappeared southward and was churning the selected Essen targets into a fiery sea. Anti-aircraft guns had opened up, and the new day was an inferno of exploding hell.
So it was the wind whistling through his shattered greenhouse and not the scream of Vivian Whitcombe that shrieked in his ears now.

But, he recalled, that scream had torn it. Before he could think of the correct thing to do, Rodney had staggered to the window, kicked out the pane, hung from the sill and dropped the one story to the ground before the red-faced landlord and his staff could crowd into the dead colonel's suite.

There was no pursuit and Rodney got away easily. The lack of a chase didn't puzzle him. Everybody knew who he was and where he could be found. As soon as the military police took charge they'd be over to Sixty-fourth's drome to pick him up. That he knew.

He got back to his hutment twelve hours before his leave was up—just in time to participate in this bombing mission against Essen. It wasn't one of those all-out bombing raids this time, but Rodney insisted on making the trip. He had to! He'd left things in a terrible mess back there. Now it was either die heroically on this flight—or return to face a firing squad. Disgrace and imprisonment at the very least.

No, this was better. He simply couldn't go back. This way, his folks back home need never know what a mess he had made of things. They would be spared the shame of his ignominy.

A pair of Messerschmitts swooped down upon him, bracketing his plane. Rodney shook his head to clear it, and fed the soup to his engine. He zoomed out of that pocket with his wing guns stuttering. It was such a mad and reckless maneuver that it succeeded. The two Nazis crashed together in mid-air and went down in an exploding blaze of fiery coalescence.

Only one Messerschmitt seemed to be left in the sky, and that brave flier was winging it like a bat out of hell back into the broadening daylight from whence he had come.

Rodney leveled off and scanned the morning sky for sight of his own scattered band. Nothing was in sight save the glaring inferno off to the south that indicated the bombers had properly dropped their calling cards on Hitler's depots and had headed for home. Rodney barked out a call on his radio. Silence answered. To all intents and purposes he was alone over enemy territory.

"Well, isn't this just what I wanted?" he growled to himself. "I can land somewhere and give myself up as a prisoner of war."

He flew along in a wide circle, heading back toward the Channel as automatically as a homing pigeon.

"Like the devil, I will!" he gritted through his teeth. "That's no solution. I'll stir up another nest of Nasties and make them shoot me out of the air. I'm going to die a useful death. If I want to go to jail I can do that in England."

But making a decision and carrying it out were two different things. No enemy plane appeared in the sky to challenge him. Then he noticed that his compass was haywire—doubtlessly damaged by that fusillade of bullets which had cracked his hatch and nearly got him. He hadn't the slightest idea just where he was. In the strong daylight he scanned the terrain slipping along beneath him.

It was nearly an hour later that his engine coughed in the midst of its smooth roar, sputtered, caught and sputtered again. And finally conked out.

Evidently those slugs had done damage that was only showing up now. "Fine business!" he growled in chagrin. "What a way to end up!"

Far ahead of him he saw what appeared to be a patch of gigantic mushroom clouds. Huge round growths that swayed in the air at their moorings, towering above trees and buildings. The silvery sheen of a winding stream of water reflected in the sunlight.

And suddenly Lieutenant Rodney knew where he was. That was Abbeville before him, a big German air base. Those growths were captive and observation balloons—barrage balloons all around the field.

The Spitfire was losing altitude fast. It was senseless to try to keep it aloft only long enough to land right in the heart of that Nazi stronghold. So he began scanning the terrain below him desperately. The countryside was densely wooded, with here and there a cleared area showing like mange spots among the trees. The plane, silent now, felt like a big kite that had broken loose from its string.
Nosing it into a steeper glide, Rodney gained enough speed to make his controls respond with a certain amount of precision. He blessed the three months of glider training he had had, although this wasn’t exactly the same with a heavy motor in the nose of the thing.

Nevertheless, unobserved as far as he could tell, he guided the staunch ship down to the clearing he had selected and leveled off for a bit of hedge-hopping. The undercarriage caught in the branches of a stubby tree and flipped the plane forward onto its nose. There was a rending crash, and Rodney’s head banged against the instrument panel.

After the stars ceased exploding, he painfully extricated himself from the wreck and clambered to the ground. He surveyed the ruined Spitfire.

“Nice work,” he complimented himself grimly. “Now if I can just catch the seven-year itch, I’ll have had a perfect day.”

He looked around alertly. In the distance he thought he heard the baying of hounds and the occasional shout of a man.

“I forgot the bloodhound scene,” he added, drawing his match case from the pocket of his flying togs. “Well, this is one ship even the Nasties aren’t going to patch up and fly.”

He set fire to the plane in a couple of places and then ran into the woods. In a few minutes he lost himself thoroughly. Coming across a tiny stream of water, he scooped up a canteen full, dropped a chlorine tablet in it, and had his first good drink since the night before.

The sounds of men and dogs did not fade out, although they came no closer. As there was no gunfire, he figured he simply must be nearer to the town of Abbeville than he had supposed.

“Make it that much easier to get something to eat, come night,” he consoled himself.

He trudged along through the forest. Coming at last upon a deserted hut, obviously that of a charcoal burner, he hid himself inside and stretched out for the first moment of relaxation since Colonel Waite-Whitcombe had come through the hotel room door with a gun in his hand.

Which brought his personal miseries back to mind. What in heaven’s name was he going to do? Afoot in enemy territory, slightly wounded, without food, armed only with a pistol containing seven rounds—why did he have to think of a pistol at this moment? —and in a tragic mess if he ever managed to get back to England.

He groaned aloud in his despair. And then he started as his groan was answered outside the hut by another.

Whoever heard of echoes in a charcoal burner’s hut?

He lay tense, listening. Again came that seconding groan, accompanied by the sound of something dragging through the brush. Then a weak voice spoke—in English:

“I say there: Who’s in the shack? I surrender.”

That voice! Rodney wasn’t sure, but it sounded like Lieutenant Mayfair of the Sixty-fourth. But that was impossible! Mayfair hadn’t even been along on this morning’s raid.

Rodney crawled out of his straw in the corner and crept to the door of the hut, gun in hand. An R.A.F. officer lay half in and half out of the clearing. The entire left leg of his coveralls was dark with clotted blood.

“Mayfair!” exclaimed Rodney in amazement. “What the heck are you doing here?”

The wounded R.A.F. officer raised his head with a jerk. The pain and despair in his gray eyes washed out to be replaced by a gleam of hope rekindled.

“Matt Rodney!” he cried weakly. Then: “I’ve been shot.”

“And I am going to be,” muttered Rodney under his breath.

Reholstering his weapon, he sprang forward and gathered Lieutenant Sidney Mayfair in his arms, half-carrying, half-dragging him into the hut.

“Lie still, pal, while I have a look at your leg,” he ordered, and efficiently went to work slitting the coveralls and getting at the wound.

Mayfair had taken a couple of machine-gun slugs in the left thigh. Fortunately no blood vessels had been cut and the bone was okay. The wounds were clotting slowly. Rodney washed them as best he could, soosed them with iodine from his little emergency first-aid kit and then bandaged them up with handkerchiefs and strips of his shirt.
While he worked, Mayfair talked, and a number of things became clear to Rodney.

"I was on solo patrol," said Mayfair, "checking on details for a commando raid here in the Seine River area tonight. A couple of Nazis jumped me north of Abbeville. I turned tail, because I had orders not to fight but to return with my report. And I flew right into a swarm of MEs. I got clear, but not before they crippled me.

"Brought the plane down in a crash landing west of here in a thick copse. It seemed pretty well hidden, so I left it there and tried to get away on foot. Men and dogs have been out hunting for me. I was about done in when you popped up here."

"I was on my way home from a bombing raid," explained Rodney briefly, not daring to ask about conditions back at base. "Had to burn my Spitfire."

"Maybe that's what drew Jerry off my trail," speculated Mayfair. "They must have seen the smoke from your ship and thought it was mine—unless you were spotted, too. Either way, we've got to get out of here."

"Perhaps—after dark," said Rodney dubiously.

"We've got to get out now!"

"You talk like a crazy man, pal. With the woods full of prowling Nazi troopers and dogs, and you with one leg shot up—"

"But I have to go," interrupted Mayfair fiercely, grabbing the American's arm and shaking it. "I've got to get word back to base somehow. Those commandos—tonight—they'll walk into a trap. Don't you understand? I've got the details, and I have to let them know!"

Matt Rodney stared at his companion with slowly widening eyes. The seriousness of the situation was not lost on him. Here he was with a bad problem of his own to figure out, and Mayfair had to dump another tough one in his lap. For it was obvious that Mayfair couldn't do anything by himself. Rodney would have to take over. It was up to him to get Mayfair back in time to report, and to return to England meant the firing squad for Matt Rodney.

While Mayfair pleaded and demanded by turns, Rodney stared silently at him and fought out a bitter decision in his mind. He knew what he was going to do in the beginning, but he had to whip himself up to the sacrifice. His own honorable death in action was far less important than saving the lives of hundreds of commandos and rangers.

"Shut up, you lug," he said wearily. "I'll get you to a place where you can relay your information or die trying."

Lieutenant Mayfair quieted at once.

"What is your plan?" he asked quickly.

"You're going for a ride piggyback," said Rodney. "I'll tote you to the air base at Abbeville, and we'll find some way to get into the communications shack so you can send your message."

"Now you are crazy," said Mayfair. "I surveyed that field from the air. We can't even get close to it. I haven't got a gun, and all you have is a pistol."

"You said you left your Spitfire over west of here?" asked Rodney grimly.

"We are south of Abbeville right now. So we'll circle over and find your plane and demount a couple of machine-guns. Here, take my pistol and climb on my back and the heck with the pain and blood if your wounds start to flow again. And if we run into anybody, shoot first and ask questions later."

AN HOUR later Rodney staggered into the stand of trees where Mayfair directed him. Luck was with them so far; they had not encountered a single Nazi. Breathless, Rodney eased his companion to the ground and attacked the problem of demounting a pair of machine-guns from the cracked-up Spitfire.

It was nearly noon when the two men on one pair of legs reached a point near the German air base beyond which they could not advance without immediate discovery. Mayfair had been quite correct in his statement that they could not invade the field with impunity. Rodney lowered his comrade to the ground and surveyed the setup.

Soldiers were swarming all about the place. There were a number of Messerschmitts and bombers out on the field at which Rodney looked longingly. Within fifty yards of their spot of concealment a balloon with an observation basket tugged and swayed at its moorings. Only a couple of armed sentries were nearby.

"You see," groaned Mayfair. "We
can’t even approach the radio shack.”
Rodney eyed the balloon speculatively. “There’s a pretty stiff breeze,” he observed. “And it is blowing toward the Channel. If we could capture that balloon and cut loose, we might get away.”
Mayfair’s gray eyes popped, but he grinned. “Now I know you’re crazy,” he said. “It’s a million to one chance, but let’s have a try. How’ll we work it? Shall I cover you from here?”
“Nuts!” snorted Rodney recklessly. “You’ve got to go, and you can’t walk. Unlimber one of these machine-guns while I cradle the other in my arms. You’ll have to hold on like riding a camel, I guess. Ready? Let’s go.”
A strange apparition left the edge of the forest and headed at a lumbering trot for the captive balloon. Rodney had covered half of the distance before the astounded Nazi sentries realized what was happening. Belatedly they flung up their weapons and started firing.
Mayfair cut loose with a brief burst from his gun which mowed down the two guards like a scythe cutting grain and almost staggered Rodney at the same time. Then the two R.A.F. pilots reached the observation basket, and Rodney tumbled his companion over the side, and trained his own machine-gun on the mooring cables.
Shouts of alarm went up, and men began running and firing. For a moment it was nip and tuck, and then the cables parted, and the balloon ascended with a rush that almost left Rodney stranded. Hanging to the rim of the basket, he leveled himself up and sprawled inside with his gun as Mayfair caught his collar and hauled him in.
At once the Briton began tossing everything by way of ballast overboard, while Rodney set about mounting the two machine-guns so they could be put to good use. He loosed a couple of bursts at the rapidly shrinking field, catching a fighter plane that was just taking off in pursuit.
Then Mayfair dragged himself over to the other gun and joined the party. It was mad and merry for the next few minutes. The balloon drifted rapidly westward, but it was like a tortoise trying to escape the hare. A cloud of Messerschmitts roared after them.
“They are flying so fast they can’t pot us,” cried Mayfair as one plane after another overshot the mark and went past. “This is like duck-shooting. All we have to do is lead them with our machine-guns and let them have it.”
“Yeah,” grunted Rodney as he fired a burst into the belly of one ME-109 and watched the plane fairly burst apart in mid-air. “But wait till one of those incendiary bullets punches this gas bag.”

IN SPITE of everything, the two escaping R.A.F. pilots would have been doomed had not a squadron of Spitfires come roaring out of the west to investigate the queer air battle and promptly took part. Rodney waved madly from the balloon basket in signaling the British flyers.
Mayfair, weak and spent, lay back against the basket and let his machine-gun sag in his hands.
“Pretty fair show for a barrage balloon, a Spitfire pilot and a cripple, eh, what?” he said, grinning. “Isn’t that the Channel I see down below us?”
The Spitfires made short work of the pursuing Messerschmitts who gave up the chase as hardly worth the while for one barrage balloon. The R.A.F. squadron returned to escort the balloon safely across the Channel.
“What d’you suppose Intelligence wanted with you, Matt?” asked Mayfair.
“Huh? What do you mean?” demanded Rodney, instantly on guard.
“Before I took off for my special patrol this morning,” explained Mayfair, “somebody from Intelligence was at the drome looking for you. I heard the C.O. say that you were out on the Essen hop. Just what kind of stinko did you raise last night? They want to pin a medal or something on you for cleaning up a Nazi spy ring at the Blue Boar.”
“What?” gurgled Rodney in stark amazement. “What are you saying? Are you going delirious with that bum leg?”
“It hurts, but not my head. Give out, old bean. What did you do to help Intelligence?”
“I shot and killed Colonel Gregory Waiteh-Whitcombe,” said Rodney grimly.
“Oh, yes, that was it,” agreed Mayfair.
“He was a Nazi agent in disguise working with the hotel management and a

(Concluded on page 96)
Plume Dope on the Ventura

Twelve bombers were lost during the Eindhoven raid in 1942. British experts claim the large proportion of them were Lockheed Venturas. Three types of planes were engaged in the operations, Bostons, Mosquitos and Venturas. The Bostons and the Mosquitos were fast and were a match for the Kraut interceptors.

The Venturas had been developed from a spacious airliner and so were more suitable for long range reconnaissance in civilised parts of the world, where airmen do not have to spend their entire time in the air. In civilian life it is a homey place to live, even if it is not the most suitable thing for an airman. The Mosquitos were also suitable for long range reconnaissance, but the Mosquitos were not as fast as the Venturas.

Well, we have to have citizens like Tuttle and Dooley in the world as horrible examples for the rest of us. It is like the time we stayed overnight at a farmhouse while on a trip and we saw one picture of a real cow. The kid had cut it out of an air magazine and hung it up.

"I say, old top," we said to him. "That is no end flattering you know."

He said: "Yeah? My old lady made me put it up to show me what I'd look like when I was twenty-one if I kept sucking my thumb."

Comes a very short burst from Irving, Kass, Smithtown Branch, L. I., N. Y. Irv asks one question, then switches off.

Kiddly tell us if you know the type of plane which appeared on the R.A.F. Ace Spring issue. Several fellows have debated on it and have not decided which type of plane it is. The answer is:

They were Spitfires. Irving. The next time you write, tell us how you like R.A.F. ACES. Be frank about it, only do not forget we have a legal department that is a honey. We retain Wrigglesby, Wrigglesby, Chickory and Wrigglesby, barristers in Piccadilly and you will find it no circus if you get tangled up with those prodigious fellows.

Comes up to what Gracie Fields calls the *aspidestra*, another taciturn tadpole who calls himself Major Howard Loop. The citizen impersonating an officer lives in Wakita, Oklahoma, which is the Sooner State. It looks like Howard would sooner do anything but learn to improve his handwriting. Anyway here is his vignette:

I wish this is the only mag on the market. I wish you would have more about the R.A.F. In the Far East.

Short, but certainly to the point. That correspondent Klaes asked for it, didn't he? Howard? So far R.A.F. ACES has not drawn a turkey, but we could brag too soon. The next next hails from 129 W. 142nd St., New York City, but omits his name or alias or number. Look who he says he is and what he has done! You would think he was running this department he pulls the truth so much out of joint—that is, he tries to make us believe he is a hero, too. Here is John Doe Anonymous:

While reading your column I came upon the letter of the very eminent "moron" Paul Bryant, who requests Flying Tiger stories in an R.A.F. mag. How about getting away from that European atmosphere and get down to Malta and Libya? There are a lot of those horrible German chaps there too you know. I agree with Walker about having World War I stories in each issue and by the way, couldn't you possibly put the magazine out more often?"
7th asst. to Vice Air Marshal, Sir Cliff Johnson, V.C., D.S.O., D.F.C., D.F.M., etc., and here is my record:

As I always say, "Nothing like a War to keep the kids interested in History." While your laughter recedes, the ready-noon speaker orders blue flight into the air (that's us) to intercept ninety million Focke-Wulf 195s equipped with 80 m.m. cannon, but undaunted, I hop into my latest edition of the somewhat obsolete "Spad" called "Spit-lone," and roar off to seek battle with the brazen Hun eagles.

In a space of nothing flat, the smoking remains of all but one Nazi plane littered the meadows of Gaberdine on the Tweed (my birthplace). The remaining one got in a lucky 69 second burst which merely shot off my top wing, tail assembly, and non-extendable landing gear, riddied the fuselage and instrument panel. The enemy turned it (no doubt recognizing its insignia of the Terrible Nazi Nemesio Johnson), my plane hurtled toward the Earth, emitted a greasy smoke. My struts were shrieking, all 2 of them.

Once on the ground Adastral House called me and advised my retirement as they had no more decorations to bestow upon my chest. But they didn't fool me. I knew the real reason was that I would win the war 3 years ahead of schedule if my magnificent flying continued.

Send us your name and we will see if we won't have that dope for you by the time we get your letter. You must have some good in you, old custard, to want stories of the old veterans like your Sergeant Pilot. But we do not believe a word of your alleged exploits in this war.

Eddie Weston, 12 Allen St., Buffalo, N.Y., sends this message:

Well here goes nothing. I'm going to praise and complain a little. I hope that you put R.A.F. Aces out more often as it's a swell mag. I think it best to keep R.A.F. Aces over Germany and not against Japs. In your latest issue Fred Walker said to print a story of the old R.F.C. Swell.

Your covers are O.K. How about every other cover of the 1st World War, eh? And some stories of the old days as those were the boys who were the real flyers in those flimsy crates. Maybe you could have a picture of a World War (1st) Ace and use it in this issue.

You know we hear enough of our own Yanks to make us proud, so how about a few Canuck stories.

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[Turn page]
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as they sure had some swell fighters like Bishop, Barker and Collishaw in W.W. I, Buerling in this war.

How about a story of a Bomber going over to Germany and getting shot down? The crew was an Ausele, pilot, Bombardier, a Yank, Navigator, a Canadian, and rest of crew English because you know yourself that the R.A.F. is a good thing.

If you have 4 cousins in the R.C.A.F. One of my cousins is in England, as pilot officer. There are a lot of Yanks over there too. I think a lot of fellows will recall some of your ideas (1) hope this story is true. Homer Rohr who pillaged about Liebys in R.A.F. Aces, what does he think the R.A.F. is made up of, Italian, German, French, and Yank?

We like you already, Eddie. Speaking of the veterans of the last war, we have to look back to the day in Chemin de Fer, France, when Air Nettletonbottom and your C.O. diverted a dangerous bombing attack on a British supply dump. There wasn’t a day went by without at least four pilots asking for transfers from our squadron as the Flies built a site factory three miles from the tarmac and they boiled down mules in it.

When the wind was right—anyway we caught a Jerry spy who was about to make a big cross on the roof of the supply shed with luminous paint and we took the paint can and brush away from him after executing him and went to the glue factory and put the cross there instead. The Gothas bombed the mule stewing plant and we were all satisfied with the operation.

Your suggestions are being turned over to some high bracketees with lots of braid up.

Watch R.A.F. ACES for results.

Paul Salisbury, 5 Brookside Avenue, Jamaica Plain, Boston, Mass., wants a pair of wings. Who doesn’t? Here is Paul’s epistle.

In reading your book R.A.F. ACES I’ve found it very exciting and thrilling. I am fourteen years old and I have been reading your book for the past two years. I think you book is the best seller around our neighborhood. Most of all I like your articles on the R.A.F. In action. When you print short stories of men who have performed certain brave deeds, which should be known around the world, you make a good story. The other good story is the one about “Death Writes the Orders” by Alfred H. Hlovdin.

If your Company would give me a free favor and send me a pair of R.A.F. wings I would be very happy to wear them on my coat.

Odd story very true, Old Boy. We will see the Vice Air Marshal when we see him at Lady Dimwitty’s Beveridge Plan Party at Sluffborough tomorrow night and ask how’s about the wings. We aren’t sure we can fill that order, Paul. But we’ll try anything once, even your gashly baked beans and brown bread.

We knew they’d moved the aquarium over there, but did not know the fish had been moved to 2112 Decatur Pl., N. W., Washington, D. C. Another burial place anyway, Gregory K. Stone, of that address, tells us the goldfish wish us luck. Says Greg:

I think R.A.F. ACES is the top mag on aviation fiction. Hats off to the story “Flying Gunner” by Trudy Mason in the Spring issue. You might tell the artist (blunderhead) a Flying Fortress has only 4 engines (not five). Otherwise it’s okay. “Flying Gunner” was the first one I read. Are there any Douglas Torpedo Planes? Those are poor facsimiles of P-40s and the tail markings are a pastime. Regards from the goldfish.

Gregory points out some mistakes. We would like the gormless kiwi that put 5 engines on a Yank Fortress to step up here and get the felt-lined 1914 model of the Crow de Guerre.
About those Douglas torpedo planes, Gregory, my lad. There's the Douglas TBD-1, a three seat torpedo bomber. Has a 1200 h.p. Wright Cyclone engine and has a top speed of 250 m.p.h. Carries several machine-guns. There's a Douglas Dauntless, a two-place dive bomber that could carry a torp if it had to. Any more questions, Greg? We'll see about the peacetime markings on our Yanks P-40s! There's going to be a shakeup around here.

Charles McComb, 417 Emerson St., N.W., Washington, D. C. Charlie's report is as short as your C. O. on the eve of St. Marks which is just before the lion roars. Pay day here, we mean. C. for Charlie drops this little squib out of his bomb bays.

I like your magazine very much. I have one suggestion for improvement. You have some long stories in your magazine. Why not make your magazine all short stories? I think this would be a good idea.

Judging from your letter, Charlie, you like everything short and to the point. We'll mark your letter for the immediate attention of the King's Committee on the Conservation of ink.

The next time you write, give us your unbiased opinion on R.A.F. ACES. We can't correct the menu unless somebody squawks about the diet.

Ralph Jones, Leavsville, N. C., U.S.A., is a big booster for THUMBS UP:

I have your column "Thumbs Up." What's wrong with those Puma talking that way about your column? I think if they haven't got brains enough to see the real fun in your column they shouldn't criticize it. Anybody with a few more brains than a moron can see, from a purely humorous standpoint, some real fun and good jokes in it.

Therapists aren't just a lot of hot air so, just keeping on the right side of things, you just keep on printing your column for the rest of the bunch that sure does enjoy reading it. And the rest of your mag is also tops.

It is very gratifying to us to have an in-

[Turn page]

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telligent reader like yourself take cognizance of our inimitable talents, Ralph. Look for bigger and better departments!

Donald Ream, 219 June St., Springfield, Ohio, comes in right on the beam and tells this to Escarole which is our code signal for tonight.

How about making up a set of the first ten or twelve Aces of this war? Of course I realize it wouldn't be right to date a girl after, but just the same please think about it.

I agree with the rest, make your mag at least a bi-monthly.

How about some stories on the old Royal Flying Corps?

In a little while, Don, we'll get up a set of the World War 2 Aces. We will send out the word when they are available. In behalf of all the Spad, Camel, S.E.5, Bristol, Sop with D. H. pilots of the last fives, we thank you for wanting stories of the old crates.

We still have the emergency tool kit we carried in 1916 and with which we once fixed a Camel that dropped us down behind Arras not far from Hindenberg and Ludendorff. It consisted of three sticks of spearmint gum, four hairpins, a penknife, a roll of stout twine, and a bottle of cognac. The cognac got us into the Camel and upstairs again but you are too young—here is a letter from G. E. Cook, 2715 45th Ave., S.W., Seattle, Wash.

I have been a collector of War Pilot Photos for some time and would like your set. You've really got a swell mag in R.A.F. Aces, keep it up. I'm all for more articles and less fiction.

We see you are a practical bloke, G. E. You could never enjoy yourself in a pub listening to Alf Nettlebottom tell of his flights in the Camels and Sops as he hates an audience that doubts him the least bit. But well continue to try and satisfy all tastes.

Fred Walker of 5217 Underwood, Detroit, Mich., is in high dudgeon over certain diagnoses of British bombers and hands out his opinion.

I know this is getting monotonous (my writing to you every issue), but was I burned up when on page 71 (Spring issue), quote: "The British have developed a new type of fighter, a heavy load of four engineered for night work. Their Avro Lancaster, Manchesters, and Short Stirlings are the most devastating loads, and BUT THEY LACK THE GUNS AND ARMOR and ability to bomb with precision from high altitudes that make the American ships unique.

The following information is from Aeronautics Aircraft Spotters Guide:

Avro Lancaster
It is armed with 10-303 guns.
Avro Manchester
It has 2-2-gun turrets, and 1-4-gun turret, making a total of 8 guns.

Short Stirling
It has 3 guns turrets mounted in 8 guns as a total. It is equipped with self-sealing gas tanks. It is HEAVILY ARMORED FOR CREW PROTECTION.

Back to my own figures:
Consolidated B-34
It has 2 turrets (most American turrets have 2 guns), making a total of 4 guns. (Half the Manchester's)
Boeing B-17
It has 2 guns in the tail, 2 guns under fuselage, 2 guns on top of fuselage, and 2 guns in nose. A total of 8 guns. (4/5 the Lancaster).

In regard to:
AVIATION QUIZ
No. 3. Name 5 different British planes.
Back to my answer you forgot to mention these as correct:
1. BLACKBURN-SKUA—dive bomber.
2. BLACKBURN-ROYAL—bomber and fighter.
3. BLACKBURN-ROTHA—reconnaisance bomber.
4. BLACKBURN-SHARK—torpedo-bomber.
5. BRISTOL-BEAUFIGHTER—night-fighter.
6. AVRO-MANCHESTER—heavy-bomber.
De Haviland-ALBATROSS—troop-carrier.
DEHAVILLAND-BERKSHIRE—troop-carrier.
FAIREY-SWORDFISH—torpedo-bomber.
FAIREY-SEAFOX—light-reconnaissance-bomber.
FAIREY-PULMAR—navy-fighter.
FAIREY-ALBACORE—torpedo-spatter—reconnaissance.
HANDLEY-PAGE-HALIFAX—bomber.
HANDLEY-PAGE-HEREFORD—bomber.
AVRO-ANSON—trainer (old bomber).
MILES-MAGISTER—trainer (advanced).
SHORT-SINGAPORE—reconnaissance-flying-boat.
SHORT-STIRLING—long-range-bomber.
SANUNDERS-ROE-SARO-LERWICK—reconnaissance-flying-boat.
SANUNDERS-ROE-SARO-LONDON—biplane-flying-boat.
WESTLAND-LYSANDER—now used as trainer.
WESTLAND-WHIRALAND—fighter.

But all in all, you have a good magazine in R.A.F. Ace!

We do not believe figures lie. We may be prejudiced, of course, but we were under the impression that British bombers had greater striking power than any in the world with the possible exception of the Fortresses and the new egg layer the Soviets have just put on the runways.

We like to hear a Yank stick up for R.A.F. air stock. Come in again, Freddy, and you'll always get the high sign from the control tower. If the flare path isn't ready, try our roof. Oh, bother! Here it is 2300 hours and we've got to get out to the bomber station in twenty minutes.

Your Sergeant Pilot is going to ride a Lancaster over to Bremen to get some pictures and true fact articles for R.A.F. ACES. We have got to get some aspirin, some calomel, and some pinch bottle Haig—spirits of ammonia, as we are not as young as we were in the last war!

We Bomb the Krauts

Well, the shuttle service between England and Nazi territory goes on without a break in schedule. Bremen and Hamm, Berlin, Cologne, Essen and Hamburg have housing problems and the Kraut civilian population know what a refugee feels like now.

Also they have a sneaky feeling under their [Turn page]

Wipe that sneer off his face!

Dr. Seuss

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tightened belts that Hitler and Goebbels have been taking them for a ride. Rommel is shown running backward in the Jerry flicker-platzes and Goebbels broadcasts to the audiences, "It ist der fault of der mooving picture machine. Der General ist just getting started and ist really chasing der bummers back to Cairo."

Herr Goebbels tells the populace that the Russians are really not human beings and haven't brains enough to realize they have been beaten. England's bomber crews are barbarians because they commit such horrible atrocities on the cities of the Reich.

Master minds could not possibly work in the fashion. Only brains with screws loose in them could concoct such utterly stupid counter-propaganda. By the way, WHERE is Virgino Gayda? In the first two years of the war, he was a big mouthpiece like Herr Garbles. Has Hitler had him liquidated?

Yes, the British and the Yanks joined forces in Libya and the British asked for beer. Eisenhower and Montgomery shook hands and then started chasing the Fox again. The whole CIVILIZED world is praying for a Dunkirk, Nazi style.

They know Hitler's beaten Herrenvolk won't show the moxy that immortalized the troops of the King on their withdrawal from the beaches on the far side of the channel. The Nazis are front-runners. When they're behind and taking the lumps, even Adolf can't pep them up with mullarkey from Munich.

In a few weeks, there won't be a free Nazi in North Africa. Then the big blow at Hitler's European fortress will come. And Adolf will need more than a manager to say to him, "Go in and fight, Kid. They ain't hurting us. They can't hurt us! You're the champ."

It won't be long before he'll be the chump, that Schicklgruber. We understand he walked along a street in Budapest the other day scanning employment agency signs. There won't be no paper hanging when it's over, Adolf. It will be Hitler hanging. So don't worry about the future. We've got it all planned for you.

Cheerio, old fellows. Wish us luck over Bremen, won't you?

—THE SERGEANT PILOT.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of RAF ACES packs a mighty wallop! A gala number from cover to cover!

The headlined novellet is "Malta Courage," by Don Tracy—a rip-roaring yarn packed with thrills! When Flight Lieutenant Michael Joseph Trade Leverington, DFC, better known as "Snoopy" and top night-fighting pilot of the RAF air group at Malta, heard that the much-bombed island was to be the base of a major assault on Sicily, he withdrew his application for a transfer to Libya.

What he didn't know was that the assault was the creation of his Squadron Leader, conjured out of thin air for the express purpose of keeping him from being transferred.

And what the Squadron Leader didn't know—but that's the point of the novelette, "Malta Courage,"—is that Don Tracy's best yarns of war in the air!

In another grand yarn, "Suicide Target," a hard-hitting novellet of a hard-hitting Can-
dian fighter pilot in the RAF, Robert Sidney Bowen is up to his best standard.

"Chuck" Romney was a flying fool and a top-flight Hurricane rider on all counts, but his squadron leader didn't think so. Whereas most such officers work for unity, Flight-Lieutenant Stanton, in temporary command, seemed intent on doing the reverse.

At first, Chuck thought he was the sole butt of Stanton's dislike—a dislike so keen that it held against him even when he found himself in possession of information upon which the entire matter of the Second Front might well hinge. Later Chuck learned differently—but how he found it out, you'll have to learn by reading a novel too good to give away here.

All of our usual features and a collection of top-flight short stories will be present when the next roll call comes around. So if you like air action and admire the courage of the RAF, look forward to the next issue. Meanwhile, keep sending in those letters and postcards giving your opinion of the magazine! Please address them to The Editor, RAF ACES, 10 East 40th St., New York, N. Y. Thanks!

—THE EDITOR.

MEN BEHIND THE PLANES
(Concluded from page 58)

And he didn't stop with the Battle of Britain won.

"While that great battle was still raging in the skies," he says, "the factory workers toiled at producing the new aircraft with which Britain was to strike back. With bombs falling on their homes and workshops, the men and women of Britain stuck it grimly and got on with the job of restoring and increasing the strength of the R.A.F. They were beyond praise."

But without an able and inspirational leader, how long could they have "stuck it" under such fearful pressure? There is no answer to that one, of course, because they did have such a leader in Buchanan.

Born in 1883 in Glasgow, he attended Allan Glen's School and the Royal Technical College in that city of Scotland. In 1908, after winning his spurs as a production engineer, he became His Majesty's Inspector of Factories, where he laid the foundations for his present position.

During the first World War, he served first as a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, later won his wings and attained the rank of Squadron Leader in the newly formed R.A.F. Leaving the service during the so-called peace, he was appointed Assistant Director of Research and Development of Aircraft, whence he graduated to his present vital post.

Almost every night, increasing numbers of huge four-engined bombers are smashing industrial Germany while low-flying fighters and mosquito bombers wreak havoc by day. When you read of these victories, which are becoming so frequent as to be almost commonplace, give a thought to the man who made and pilots the placeable—Scotsman John S. Buchanan of Aircraft Production.
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CHANNEL SWEEP
(Concluded from page 72)
They don’t attack, but now and again they make feints in the hope that some of the fighters will draw off to attack them, and become stragglers. We have had so many warnings of these tactics that nobody buys, and we just stick together.
We approach Dunkirk. Every moment the ack-ack becomes fiercer and fiercer. It seems quite inconceivable that the bombers can fly through all that dirt and get neither separated nor shot down. One of them is hit, and lags behind the rest of the formation.
Immediately six Spitfires leave our Wing and stay with him to ward off an attack by any of those enemy aircraft still flying along with us and waiting for such a victim. But as far as I can see, our bomber hasn’t been badly hit, and one engine’s working anyway. We are in gliding distance of Dover, from a height of 20,000 feet, so I’m sure he will reach base all right.
A few minutes later and we are crossing the balloon barrage at Dover. The bombers fly straight on towards their base whilst we turn to the right and make our own way home.

BRITAIN’S BOMBER STRENGTH
(Concluded from page 81)
thick with ice. The screaming wind blew at 65 miles per hour against them, and it took four and a quarter hours (much longer than usual) to get home. They had only enough gasoline to reach the first airfield over the English coast, but they landed safely there.
It was no great blitz like the attacks on Berlin or Cologne, but the sort of thing men and machines must be ready to endure any night of the week—or night after night.

RODNEY JUMPS THE GUN
(Concluded from page 87)
woman spy to blackmail or threaten information out of British officers. You’ll become famous in Sixty-four Squadron. How did you get on to the beggar?”
Rodney could scarcely credit his ears.
"I jumped the gun," he said weakly.
And then he turned to stare down at the glittering Channel and the white cliffs of England which were coming closer. So he was not going back to a court-martial after all. Those tears which would not come the night before now sprang forward to throw a golden mist before his thankful eyes.
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