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PUBLICATION

RAF ACES

WINTER
ISSUE

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AND STAMPS
FOR VICTORY!

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FEATURING
COMMANDO WINGS

An Exciting Action Novel
By **ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN**

YESTERDAY'S ACE

A Novelet of
Fighting Courage
By **STUART CAMPBELL**

*True Action Stories of
the Men With Wings*



"HAS GOD FAILED?"

I don't think so. I don't believe the American people know too much about God. Certainly they know little of the actual existing Power of the Great Spirit—God. If they did, they would most certainly be able to use the superlative invisible Power against such world-disturbing human parasites as Hitler and Tojo—would they not?

We have all heard a lot about what terrible sinners we are. And we probably are. We have been told that we all were born in sin and shapen in iniquity. We have heard much about the terrible punishments which lie ahead of all who do not believe "this" or "that" about God. These stories probably are all true. But there is one thing we have heard nothing about. We have heard nothing about the invisible superhuman, living Power of God.

We have not been told that the American people can, individually, and collectively, establish a definite and permanent contact with the Spirit of God, not "after" we die but **BEFORE WE DIE**. For it is now we need the Power of God.

We have not been told that every human being, regardless of race, creed, or religious affiliation, can, here and now, draw upon an invisible Power so dynamic in its operations that its use by the individual can bring into every

life, every right thing that can be desired. Not only that, the invisible, heretofore undiscovered Power of God, can be used to throw out of the life everything in it which should not be there. And we mean materially, as well as spiritually.

No, God has not failed the American people—they just simply have never been told of the staggering, scintillating Power there is in the realm of God. They have not been told that this superhuman Power can be found and used by all—here and now. If the American people will allow us to—we can show them how to find and use the actual literal Power of God—not "above the sky" but right here on earth. And let us tell you that this war can be stopped, and will be stopped, when the American people discover, for the first time in their lives, the actual and literal Power of God.

We shall be glad to help all loyal Americans find this Power. Full and free information will be sent you if you write to "Psychiana," Inc., Dept. 122, Moscow, Idaho.

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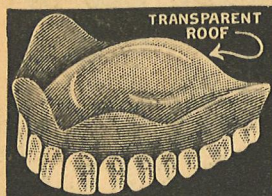
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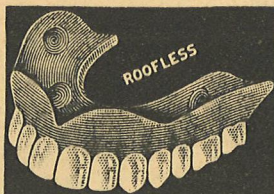
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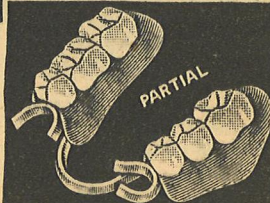
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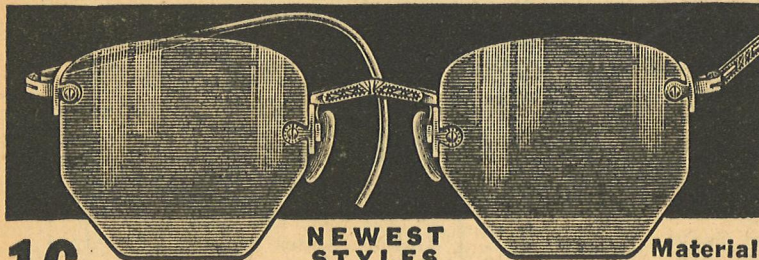
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VOL. 3, NO. 1 WINTER, 1943

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*A Personal Message
to the
Readers of
RAF ACES
from
Wing Commander
J. G. BARNES, R. A. F.*



IT IS a tradition of the R.A.F. not only to do what is expected of it, but whenever possible a great deal more besides.

This can be attributed to the skill and initiative of her pilots and air crews, and their ability to adapt themselves to all conditions and circumstances.

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Because the home front is solidly behind it, the R.A.F. will continue to play an outstanding part in the war, and will, with the United States and Allied Air Forces pulverize not only the German Luftwaffe, but Germany itself.

—Wing Commander Barnes.

(See Editor's Note, Page 113, for a biographical sketch of Wing Commander Barnes.)

RAF ACES published quarterly and copyright 1942, by Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th St., New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Single copies, 10 cents. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. February, 1943, Issue

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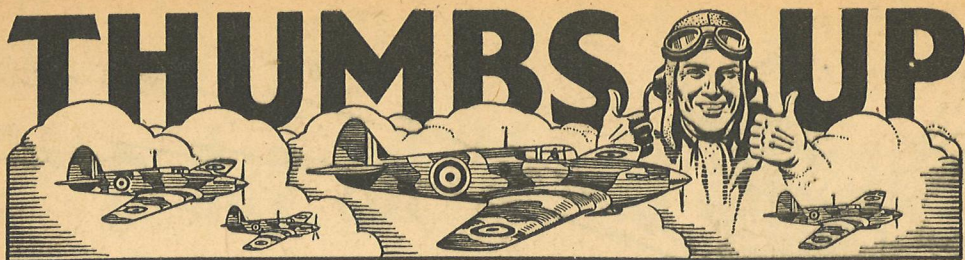
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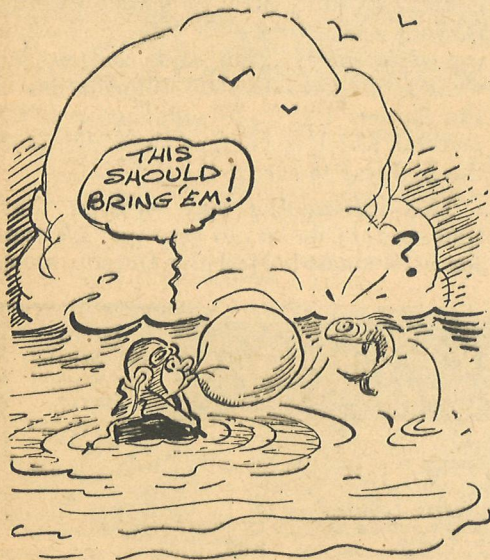




A Department for Readers Conducted by THE SERGEANT PILOT

IT'S A BIT crowded here, old chaps, but the Operations room on the station is being used by the higher brackets to-night. The Naafi hut will have to do and when you finish taking the mail out of the two big sacks, Corporal Mootty, save them for they came over on the same Yank plane that brought Eleanor Roosevelt. Don't any of you bloomin' beggars swipe any of the stamps.

We stopped in at the hospital on the west end to see Pilot Officer Hadbetter and he is none the worse for his jolly old dip



in the channel save for a small nip in the empennage by a blinking halibut.

Leftenant Hadbetter asks us to trace the address of the American heiress who sent him the bubble gum. It saved his life, no doubt about it. You haven't heard of the story, all of you? Well, the pilot officer was forced to go out of the window after a Focke-Wulf 190 had had a bit of luck with a burst. Leftenant Hadbetter dropped into the channel and floated about for hours and just about gave up until he thought of the bubble gum.

Hadbetter masticated nine pennies worth of the gum and then blew himself a big bubble which was a perfectly horrible yellow color. In less than a half hour, the pilot officer was picked up.

Tubby Goering Is Worried

Heard that Tubby Goering is tightening his belt and not the one he wears around his big fat paunch. We mean the searchlight belt that stretches from the Ruhr to Hamburg.

The Lancasters and Sterlings and Wellingtons and all the other big bombers are beginning to worry Tubby and he has not had the nerve to decorate himself with another medal for at least three months.

The big batteries of searchlights necessitate a small army of men to operate them and Adolf is hunting all over Germany for a scientist who can concoct human beings in a test tube.

We bumped into Alfred Nettlebottom in Melton-Mowbray a fortnight ago. We were getting the Bentley looked over on our way through and Alf was gnawing on a beef and mutton pie in front of the inn. "I got a Messup today, old custard," Alf said. Alf and your sergeant Pilot got medals over Cambrai and Laon in the last guerre. Today Alf would have to cut down on his fats to be able to get into a Wellington without it showing a bulge.

"You're pulling our leg, Alf," we said. It seemed that Alf got it down out of a tree, Alf belongs to the R.A.F. Maintenance Group now and got his chance to serve the King again after trying everything.

"This crate is a new Messup 109-G," Alf said. "We are goin' to have the autopsy when the Intelligent ofisers git here, Sarge. When I leave here, I'm goin' up to Scotland to help get a Dornier off an island. An' there's a Whitley we got to haul out of the sea off Bridlington Quay."

We congratulated Alf. Maybe he is only a glorified junkman but crashed aircraft must be gathered up to supply other craft in the process of construction with repairable components. The R.A.F. Maintenance

(Continued on page 10)



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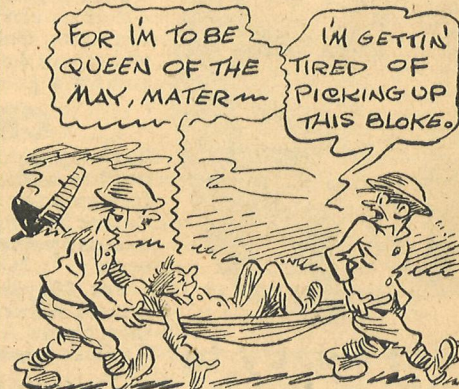
THUMBS UP

(Continued from page 8)

Group has made salvage an art in the British Isles. One Whitley bomber that crashed on the British coast was hauled ashore and put into active service again in 18 days!

You Have to Keep a Good Man Up!

His name is A. C. Deere and he is a squadron leader with the R.A.F. He chased a Heinkel over the channel toward Calais and after shooting it down, was swarmed over by a group of Messups. He fought his way back, and over Ashford, his plane fell apart around him. He bailed out and



dropped down into a hop field in Kent. Two days later he had his oil tank shot up. His rudder was shot away and the Merlin caught fire. Squadron Leader Deere bailed out again and landed in a plum tree.

A little more than twenty-four hours later, Deere was up teaching battle tactics to a student pilot. The pupil collided with his teacher and cut the Spitfire in half.

Deere was caught in the wreckage of his plane and could not get clear, half of his 'chute harness had been torn away and his rip-cord was dangling far beyond his reach. He folded his arms and waited.

Then there was a sudden tug at his shoulders and he was lifted out of the coffin when the 'chute decided to open on its own. Squadron Leader Deere went to a hospital for the third time.

That's your R.A.F.!

A Hurricane pilot had his arm amputated after a crash. He's flying again with a mechanical arm and on the side of his plane is a picture of the arm he lost. It is more accurate to say of a missing R.A.F. pilot that, "He could not return," rather than, "He did not return."

The Birth of the R.A.F.

In 1908, A. Verdon Roe made the first aeroplane flight in England. An air battalion was formed there in 1911 but it was not until 1912 that the issue of a Royal Warrant launched the R.F.C. with two wings, one Naval and the other Military.

(Continued on page 13)

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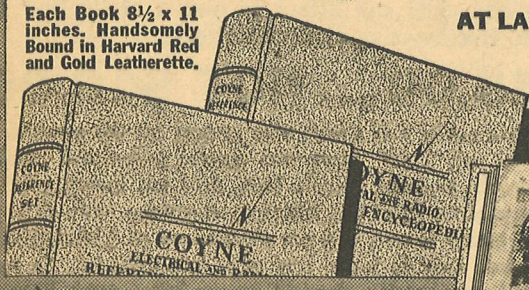
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At the start of the first World War, British aircraft numbered 179 planes. Less than a hundred were fit for service on the front.

In August of 1914, Squadrons 2, 3, 4, and 5 went into action against superior German machines. The R.F.C. pilots used Falmans, Avros and Bleriot.

A week later, British Air Reconnaissance discovered Von Kluck's Second Corps north of Mons. It saved part of the British army, for an almost inevitable encirclement was avoided. The pilots of a hundred patched up planes carried on from there until Britain could bring out her Camels, S. E. 5s, Sopwith Pups and Handley-Page bombers. The Zeppelins and Gothas were mastered.

The first aircraft carrier was the *Furious* and it took part in the operations against Heligoland Bight. Planes from the carrier destroyed two Zeps in the hangar at Tondern.

The Mailbag

Corporal Dilby Mooty is handling the mail at this meeting. He has a stirrup pump and two buckets of sand ready as last time we found a Molotov cocktail in a tin marked, "Huntley & Palmer Ltd.," a jolly old firm that makes biscuits.

What have we here, Mooty? A despatch from 94-14-117th St., Richmond Hill, L. I. From E. McAuliffe. Mac takes issue with a customer named Roselle who just abominates Yorkshire pudding and Bath buns. Let Mac matriculate here:

May I congratulate you on your swell magazine, R.A.F. ACES. The fiction is very good but I am a special devotee of your articles—R.A.F. In Action, Ferry Command, etc. That piece by Wing Com. Finucane really hit the spot and it will deserve a special place of recognition in my R.A.F. scrapbook. But, if it is not asking too much, how about something by Wing Com. Malan to follow up those wizard bits of literature on Cunningham and Truscott.

I heartily disagree with Mr. Dooley on keeping your column strictly stag. Hasn't he heard of the 19th Amendment? And of all the narrow-minded people Mr. Roselle really should take first prize. Wake up Georgy and don't be so bigoted.

Furthermore, I definitely agree with many of your advocates who say that R.A.F. ACES should be published more frequently.

(Continued on page 108)



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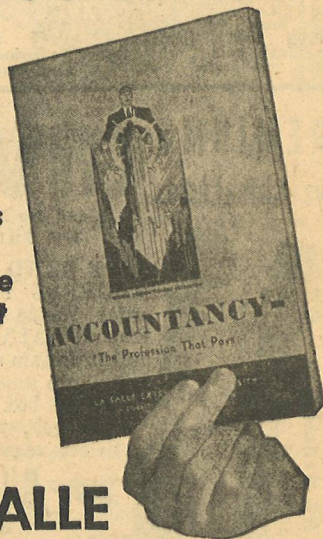
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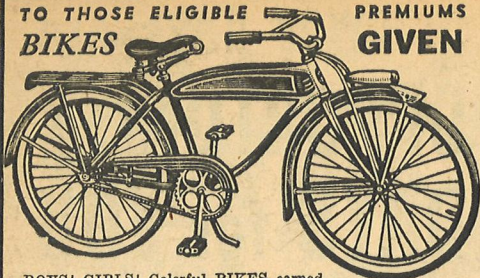
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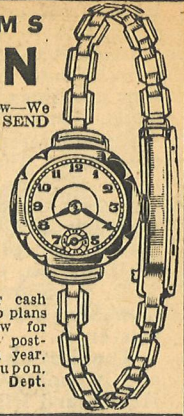
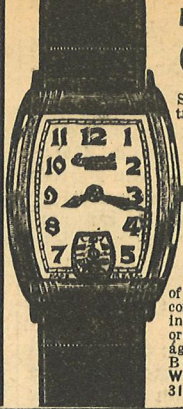


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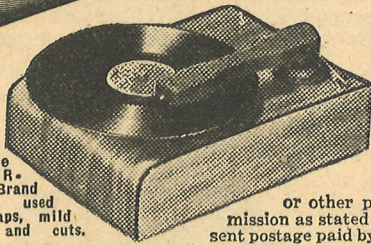
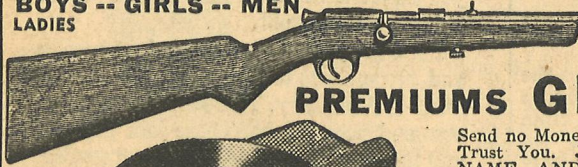


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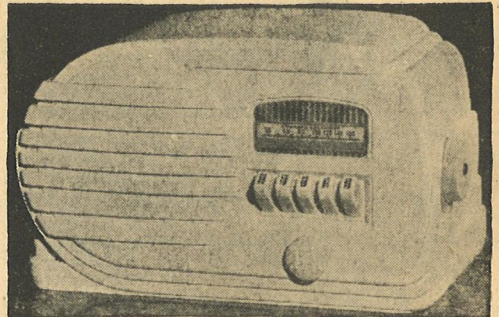
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"Don't move!" Regan said as he swung his gun from one to the other

COMMANDO WINGS

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

Pilot Officer Mike Regan Bites Off a Large Slice of Glory—and Trouble—When He Joins Major Tolley of the Commandos in a Daring, Dangerous Foray to Bag a High-Ranking Nazi Big-Wig!

CHAPTER I

Strange Orders

"COME on, you blighters, one of you spot a couple of Jerries for us, what?"

The voice of Flight Lieutenant Rockingham sounded in the ear-phones. Mike Regan flying Number Two in Green Flight grinned at the back of the helmeted head sticking up out of the lead Hurricane.

"No doubt, Yank," came the reply over the air. "What I want to know is," he called, "where the devil have they put the *Luftwaffe*?"

"Could it be," sang out young Briston in Number Three plane, "that the bloody thing is all over, and Adastral House has neglected to tell us?"

Rockingham groaned. "Let's toddle back and find out. The O. C. might know. He has friends in high places."

The four-plane patrol scooted away

A COMPLETE SKY ACTION NOVEL

from the coast of Occupied France. Some seven minutes later they sat down on the surface of the Advance Station of Ninety-seven Squadron. Mechanics ran up to them, hopefully, but hopes were dashed.

"We spotted nothing but a flock of sea-gulls," Regan grunted. "Ten to one that's what Spotters saw when they sent through the alert."

"Seems queer, don't it, sir?" his senior mechanic mumbled. "Twelve days without a sign of a Jerry kite."

Regan grunted and dumped his chute pack on the wing.

"Once over lightly, Spevins," he said. "That's all she'll need."

Regan wandered over to the Operations hut and made his report. Then he went over to the mess for a mug of coffee. He had not finished drinking it when the O. C.'s orderly came and informed him:

"Squadron Leader Leman wants to see you at once, sir."

IN his way to the Squadron Office Regan was puzzled, trying to figure what his senior officer could want with him. Squadron Leader Leman had an air record that couldn't be topped by any pilot in the Royal Air Force. He had been in France in Thirty-nine, he had been at Dunkirk, and he had done more than his share in the Battle of Britain.

But he had a granite face and a tongue that could crack and sting like an Australian bull-whip, and since his mother, father, wife, and only brother had been smashed to bits during one of the London raids, nothing but killing Nazis held any interest for him. And that interest was almost fanatical. He drove his squadron accordingly, so a man never knew just what was up when Leman sent for him. As Regan went in through the door, and clicked his heels, the O. C. growled:

"Sit down, Regan! So you're not satisfied with the Air Force, eh? But

what the devil makes you think you'd be a good Commando?"

Regan stared in dumbfounded amazement.

"Says *which*?" he finally blurted. "I mean, sir, what did you say?"

The O. C. stared coldly, then tapped an official-looking yellow paper on his desk.

"This," he said, "just came from Adastral House. It states that you are to report to Major Tolley, of the Commando Unit at Eastbourne, on the Channel coast. So you put in a request direct, eh? Think I'd keep any chap here, who doesn't want to stay? Why, I'd rather fly every patrol alone, than have—"

"Now hold on!" Regan shouted. "I didn't put in any transfer for anything. You're nu . . . Oops! I'm sorry, sir. But, honest, I don't know a thing about this, so help me!"

"News to you?" Leman echoed. "You didn't request Adastral House direct for a transfer?"

"No!" Regan shot back. "It must have been some other Regan, and Adastral House got it twisted."

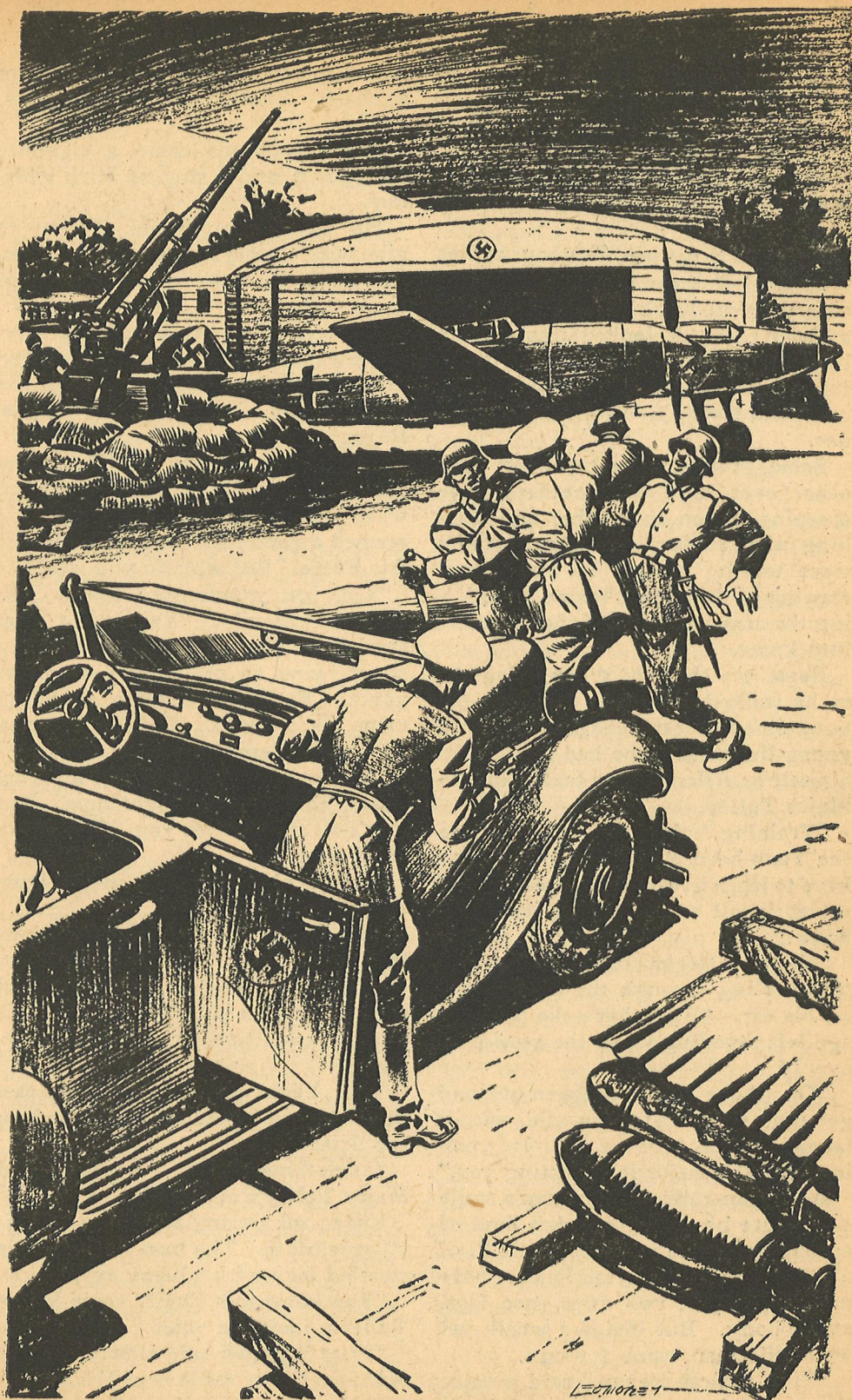
"We'll see," Leman said, and reached for the phone.

Regan listened while the O. C. talked with somebody at Adastral House in London, but could make no sense out of it. Eventually Squadron Leader Leman slapped the receiver back in its cradle and looked at him.

"You're the Pilot Officer Regan in this case," he said. "Seems this Major Tolley asked that you be sent down to Eastbourne at once. You know Major Tolley?"

"Not from Adam," Regan said, more puzzled than ever. "Did they say why he wants to see me?"

"They don't know. But it's some kind of urgent business. So get on with it. And, I say, Regan, sorry for making an ass of myself. You can't shoot for crumpets at times, but you're a good man to have about. Hurry down there, and hurry back. Luck."



Before they had time to steady themselves Tolley had vaulted from the still-skidding car

"Thanks, sir," Regan grinned and went out of the office.

Outside he paused and scowled at the sky.

"Now, what in blue blazes?" he muttered.

BEFORE the war Eastbourne was one of the most popular shore resorts in all England. When Regan arrived there, it looked like a huge institution for the coo-coo, with all the inmates escaped from their padded cells, and trying to do wholesale murder.

Some groups were throwing each other over high walls, others were creeping up on each other and stabbing with rubber knives, and others were tearing around in black face, clawing at each other's eyes, or twisting the arms and legs of their victims into knots.

Regan watched the dizzy goings-on as he walked to the O. C.'s office beyond lines of camouflaged tents. A young lieutenant who had introduced himself as Allerton was taking him to Major Tolley.

"Training," Allerton explained to the Yank-born R. A. F. pilot. "They have to learn how to take care of themselves in all sorts of situations, you know."

"Yeah." Regan saw one man go pinwheeling through the air, to land on his ear. "But what's the percentage left standing when the session is over?"

"Oh, those chaps toughen up and get used to it," Allerton said, with a laugh. "Well, here we are. Just pop in, sir. The major is expecting you."

As Regan returned the man's smile and salute he wondered what kind of an ape he was to meet. The O. C. of all those wild men certainly must have more than just two arms, two legs, and a body. But inside a small, yet well-built man, came forward.

"Pilot Officer Regan," said a voice that was about as tough and hard-

boiled as a moonlit June night. "Have a chair. Cigarette? An odd spot, eh?"

Regan took the chair, a cigarette and match, and a slug of Irish whiskey.

He waited for Major Tolley to give with the big mystery. The Commando O. C., however, seemed to be in no rush.

"Always like to meet a Yank serving with our side," he said pleasantly. "Decent of you chaps to pull an oar for us. Any of your friends with us, Regan?"

"None that I know of," Regan replied. "I was in England studying when Hitler pulled the whistle. It seemed a good idea to try to make the Air Force. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, just wondering," Major Tolley said casually. "Ran into a chap the other day. He said something about being an old school friend of yours. Rather a German sounding name, as I recall. Didn't have any pals with German names, did you?"

"Maybe," Regan said with a shrug. "Can't think of any right now. But if it's all the same to you, Major, why am I here?"

"Sorry, old man," the major muttered.

The Commando O. C. jabbed a button on his desk. The side door opened, and a thin-faced, hawk-nosed man in civilian clothes came in. He took up a position directly facing Regan.

The Yank glanced at him casually. Then suddenly he choked on the Irish.

"Something wrong, Regan," said Major Tolley's quiet voice.

Regan sat staring at the man in civilian clothes. The man returned his startled look with a blank expression.

"You know this chap?" came Major Tolley's insistent voice.

"Fritz!" Regan said slowly. "Fritz Meltcher! For the love of Mike, what are you doing over here?"

THE man suddenly grinned from ear to ear, and a sigh of relief spilled from his lips.

"Hi, Mike!" he cried. "Boy! Am I glad you remembered. Well, Major, does this satisfy you?"

Regan shot a glance at the Commando C. O. Major Tolley was smiling.

"Hey, what is this?" Regan cried. "You wanted me to spot Fritz, here? Oh, I get it! Friend of mine with a German sounding name. Say, what goes on around here, anyway?"

"The major had a hunch I was a German spy," said Meltcher. But, I guess you've saved me from the firing squad, Mike. Right, Major?"

The Commando O. C. gestured at Fritz Meltcher to take a chair. And when he spoke there was the sudden touch of steel in his voice.

"You can't take back mistakes in this war," he said evenly. "So they must not be made. Briefly, Regan, we made a raid on a wireless station on the French coast last night, smashed the place to bits, shot up the blighters, and brought back some of them as prisoners.

"One of the prisoners was this chap. When he came up before me this morning he swore he was an American, a newspaper man caught in France, and couldn't get out. Said he'd been hiding in a French peasant's house, waiting for the chance to steal a boat and get over here to England. Said he decided he'd have a better chance to get a boat if he wore a German's uniform. He stole one, and—and he was wearing it when my men grabbed him."

"And that's the truth!" Meltcher cried hotly. "And all the rest I told you is the truth, too. Why, Regan and I came over on the same boat! I left him in London to do a course at Oxford, and I went over to the Continent to take my job as a UP man at Brussels."

"That's truth, sir," Regan said to

Major Tolley. "I got a couple of letters from him when he was in Brussels, then the war came. But when Hitler went in to Belgium, Fritz, why didn't you get out with the others?"

"I started to," Meltcher said and touched his head. "We were all of us on the road heading for Paris, or some place where we could file our stories. Ten Stukas came down, and that's the last thing I knew for two months until I woke up in a Frenchman's house. My clothes, passport, and every paper I carried with me were gone."

"According to the Frenchman—his name was Massoit—I staggered into his house one day more or less stark naked, and did a fade-out in his front hall.

"He realized I was an American. Anyway, he didn't throw me out—he took care of me for a solid year, and I just have hazy flashes of things that happened during that time. A hunk of Stuka bomb had clipped me good on the head, and something else had almost broken my spine. I was in bad shape. Massoit certainly saved my life, God rest his soul!"

"HUH?" Regan gulped "You mean—"

"Yeah!" Meltcher said as his face hardened. "Nazi bullets. They got after me, too, but I got away. And that was seven months ago."

"And you've been trying to get back here for seven months?" Regan breathed. "Boy, what a story you can file, when they let you!"

"Oh, I fancy we'll let him send it in time," Major Tolley said. "Never really suspected you, Meltcher. Best, though, always to be sure. Toddle over to the mess, and have a drink. I'll be with you soon, and we'll see what we can do."

Meltcher grinned.

"I'm sure itching to get at the old typewriter," he said. "I've sure seen plenty, and then some!"

CHAPTER II

Eagle's Choice

AFTER Meltcher had gone Regan shot a quizzical glance at Major Tolley.

"You don't really think that Fritz Meltcher is a Hun, do you, sir?" he asked. "I've known him and his whole family ever since I can remember. Come from the same town. His father was an American infantry captain in the last war. Got decorated for bravery. Fritz is just a nickname. His real name is Charles Frederick."

"I wondered about him at the start," the Commando O. C. interrupted. "But I'm convinced, now."

"Well, I'm glad of that," Regan said. "But why did you ring me in for identification? Of course Fritz knew that I had joined the R. A. F. He wrote a piece about me for UP. But I could have been dead, by now. Why didn't you check with the American consul in London? Or the London office of UP?"

"Perhaps it's a Commando's nature to be suspicious and secretive," Major Tolley said, with a grin. "Matter of fact, though, I did check with the American consul, and with London UP. I found out there was such a person as Charles Frederick Meltcher. But I wanted personal identification, preferably by someone in our own forces. He named you as a friend of his. So I asked Air Ministry to send you down. And I warned Meltcher to let you make the identification."

"Well, I'm glad I was able to help," Regan said with a grin. "But . . . Well, I've a question, if you don't mind?"

"Let's have it," Major Tolley said, and looked at him steadily.

"There's more to this than just my identifying Meltcher, isn't there?"

"Now that you *have* identified him," Major Tolley said evenly, "there is more, Regan. I flatter myself that I can judge a man by his looks. I believe I have judged you correctly. Tell me, do you happen to know the area around Blangy in France?"

"Pretty well from the air," Regan said. "We made quite a few daylight runs over that place. And last month I did some bomber escorting at night. Add that to maps and photos of the area I've studied, and I'd say yes."

The Commando O. C. scowled, as though he were battling with his thoughts. Suddenly the Yank was startled by the tiny flashes of lightning he could see in the man's eyes.

"Without realizing it," the major said slowly, "Meltcher gave me a vital and highly important piece of information. In an account of his experiences during the last week at Blangy, he mentioned the fact that the Nazi Field Marshal von Khole has his headquarters in the little village of Lacume, just sixteen miles southeast of Blangy. You have heard of Field Marshal von Khole, haven't you?"

"Can't say that I have," Regan confessed. "But I take it he's one of the bigger big shots?"

"He is perhaps the only man in uniform whom Hitler really regards as a friend," Tolley replied gravely. "The one Nazi general in whom Hitler has complete faith and confidence. No doubt that is because von Khole out-Gestapos the Gestapo, a ruthless murdering blighter who would not even show any mercy to his own mother."

"He is the true Nazi, in all that the word implies. He is in supreme command of all the Occupied French coast. Every soldier, and every man, woman, and child civilian there lives or dies according to what he says. His . . . Well, his capture alive would be a pretty feather in our caps. I think it would hit Hitler more than

the loss of Rudolph Hess did."

"Ah!" Regan said softly and grinned. "And so?"

"And so I want to capture the blighter," Tolley said evenly. "D'you think you'd like to help?"

"Sure, but—" Regan waved toward the troops he could see through the window. "But what could I do that they couldn't do a darn sight better?"

"Fly me to Lacume," Tolley said. "Land in a certain field in the dark. Wait there for me, and fly me back to England with my prisoner. If all goes well, we should be back here by dawn tomorrow. And don't worry about Air Ministry, or your squadron. I'll arrange for this bit of leave, we'll call it. Well?"

RIGHT then and there Mike Regan's respect for the Commandos went up to a new high. No beating about the bush for them. They came right out with things, straight from the shoulder. An eerie sensation rippled through him as he stared at the Commando O. C.

"Anything that's a crack at Hitler suits me right down to the ground, Major," he said. "But . . . Well, it's sort of like hauling something out of a grab bag, isn't it? I'll land you in Berlin if you want. But I want you to be sure I'm the right man, that's all. Afraid to risk it? Listen! I'm thinking about the success of *your* venture, not about my hide!"

"I know all about you as a pilot," Tolley said. "I had this thought in mind when I asked Air Ministry to send you down. If one of my Commandos was a pilot I'd naturally choose him. But none is. Besides knowing that your flying record is of the best, I liked your looks the minute you stepped into this office. I've decided a lot of important things on a man's looks, Regan."

"Okay, count me in, right up to the hilt," Regan said with a grin. "I sup-



Regan set fire to the sticky oil on the half crumpled wing of the plane

pose you've got a plan of operation?"

"I have," Tolley said, and spread out a map on the desk. "But first let me give you the complete picture. We have been wanting to capture von Khole for some time. He is a master at organization, so to nip off with him would disrupt things quite a bit, but up to now we haven't been able to find out just where he was located. Now that I know through Meltcher I could try a capture raid with some of my men, but von Khole is a bit too far inland for us. We couldn't possibly reach there on foot during darkness and get back to our boats. Besides when we finally fought our way through we'd no doubt find von Khole gone. The job must be done by air, and with the greatest amount of surprise possible."

Tolley paused and stared steadily at Regan.

"I have to get this off my chest, Regan," he said. "Our chances of pulling it off are one in fifty. That's one reason I wouldn't think of detailing the job to any of my officers. You're not a Commando, Regan. You're R.A.F. I haven't even the right to ask you to risk your neck with mine. But, I am. I'm convinced you're the lad I want to go along with me."

"But think for yourself, Regan. If we're caught we will be dead men, because we won't wear British uniforms. We may crash, we may not find the field. We may become lost and be forced down. We may be shot down. We . . . Well, there's a chance, too, that we may not even lay eyes on von Khole, and still lose our lives. I have to make all this clear to you, Regan, before it's too late for you to turn back."

"Get to that part about your plans, Major," Regan said with a grin. "Skip the introduction."

Major Tolley sighed softly, then grinned. "That beggar, von Khole," he said softly, "will hate it no end in a British prison camp . . ."

BLACK night covered the Continent of Europe. Night made darker by the man-made blackout on land, and night made darker by the film of cloud scud that the gods of good fortune had stretched across the face of the stars and the crescent moon.

On the little field just south of the Commando training camp at Eastbourne, it was darker than the inside of your hat. But there were a dozen men there, most of them fussing over a Bristol-powered Westland "Lysander" of the type that had performed yeoman service in France in the spring of '40.

Standing to one side of the plane were Mike Regan and Major Tolley. In the dark they were just black blurs, but should a light suddenly have sprung into being it would have been seen that both wore the uniform of Nazi Occupation Army Divisions, complete with tabs, trick cap, and short dagger at the belt.

Regan, who wore the uniform of a captain, was not at all sure that this wasn't all just a cockeyed dream. He had heard much about the Commandos, but this was the first time he had come in close contact with that organization, and the violent swiftness with which bits of military "magic" were performed sort of set him back on his heels.

Ever since noon Major Tolley had seemed to just snap his fingers and various items appeared out of thin air. Presto! And they both were fitted out with uniforms, exact in every detail to the kind worn by the officers of the Nazi regiments stationed in the Blangy area.

Presto! And maps and photos were produced that revealed practically every bade of grass in that area. Presto! And a hundred and one other items they needed for reference, or to take along, were dug up for their use. The most important one was the Westland Lysander. Tolley hadn't

even so much as mentioned what kind of a plane they would use. But when they had finished talking of their plans the Commando O. C. had taken him out to the small field and shown him the Lysander. Regan had felt good all over, because a Lysander job was exactly the type he would have selected.

As a matter of fact, everything had been so carefully planned and worked out that the Yank almost had the feeling that the whole business was over, that they had just returned, rather than starting out.

"This will be a cinch," he muttered. "Like taking candy from kids. Boy! Do you Commandos see that all the corners are tucked in! I can almost see von Khole's red face right now."

"We haven't got him yet," Tolley said quietly. "In our work we try to plan for any and all eventualities, but we know a job isn't done until it's done, no matter how easy it seems. Just watch your step every bit of the way. And don't do a single thing other than what I've told you to do. Timing means everything on this job. A few seconds either way might well cost us our bloody necks."

"I've got my part learned by heart," Regan said grimly. "But I'd sure like it better if you took me along to where you expect to find von Khole. You may run into more trouble than you're bargaining on. I might help in a case like that."

"It can't be like that, unfortunately," Major Tolley replied firmly. "For one thing I know every bit of that land, every shack, and house, like the palm of my hand. For another, your German is not of the best. For still another, two are more conspicuous than one, and I'm trained and seasoned in killing a man without a sound. There's hundreds of reasons, Regan. But don't get the idea your job is any less important than mine. I fancy yours is more important.

You'll get us there, and you'll get us back after I've picked up von Khole. Silencing the blighter, and lugging him away on my back, will be child's play compared with getting this plane in, and out of that field I've selected."

"Says you!" Regan snorted. "But skip it. I'm tickled silly just to be going along for the ride. By the way, did you let Meltcher go up to London to contact his UP office?"

"Yes, I did," Tolley replied. "He told me to tell you to look him up in London as soon as you could. The drinks would be on him. Well, I guess it's time to buzz along. Just in case I don't get the chance to say it later, Regan, I appreciate your help no end. Luck to us."

"Check, and double check on that last," Regan murmured as they moved over to the plane.

CHAPTER III

Midnight Madness

MIKE REGAN took Lysander off the flashlight-marked runway, and nosed it gently up toward the pitch-dark sky. He climbed the plane in a series of wide circles until he was a good twenty-one thousand feet over the field, and forced to draw on the oxygen tube every now and then.

When he reached that altitude he leveled off, banked around and put the nose on a crow flight course for the coast of Occupied France and the village of Lacume several miles inland.

Relaxing slightly in the pit he kept one eye on the instrument panel, the other on the black sky ahead, and once more checked over in his mind the details of the part he was to play in this wild and daring adventure. In Major Tolley's office the whole thing had looked as easy as falling off a log. The Commando O.C. certainly knew his

onions when it came to raiding enemy-held territory.

The maps and photographs he had produced for Regan were so complete that the Yank almost felt that he was returning to some spot he had known for years. True, he would be making a night landing, and the field that Tolley had chosen wasn't any too big. Yet, the possibility that they might miss it in the dark, or even make a bad landing and crack up, hardly entered Regan's mind.

Dark as the night might be he would be able to find the field by the hair-pin bend in the river that served as its western border. All he had to do was to come in low over the bend. He would make a landing with a dead engine, wish Tolley luck, then wait until the Commando O.C. returned with the captured Nazi.

That was the part Regan didn't like. Waiting. He would far rather go with Tolley and take a hand in the actual capture. Tolley had ruled that out, however, and with good reason, too. The Commando was trained to the nth degree for his part of the job. He could mingle with the Germans just as easily as he could freeze motionless in a shadow and not be noticed by a man passing five feet away.

No, Regan's job was to wait. Tolley's job was to grab Field Marshal von Khole.

Anyway, everything was set. And yet—

For some unknown reason a violent shiver surged through Regan. He cursed softly and took a tighter grip on the controls as though to steady himself. An icy chill came with the shiver but when he put a hand to his face he found it wet with beads of hot sweat.

"Snap out of it, dope!" he mentally ranted. "What's biting you, anyway? Afraid of a little dark?"

Major Tolley's hand dropped down on his shoulder, and he heard the Commando's voice in his ears.

"Veer a bit southward, Regan. I just saw some exhaust plumes ahead and to north. We don't want to bump into any Nazi bombers heading for England."

The quietly spoken words did a world of good for Regan's jangling nerves. They steadied him, made it possible for him to pay more attention to his flying and less to his thoughts.

He strained his eyes ahead and to the north. Presently he spotted the exhaust plumes himself, and his face grew hot. Just a big help, he was! Letting Tolley do all the work. He touched right rudder a little and eased the Lysander more to the south. The exhaust plumes, like a swarm of giant fireflies in the black air, passed high above him and well to the north.

BY THEN he was across the English Channel and directly over the coastline of Nazi Occupied France. He eased up a couple of thousand feet more, just to be more on the safe side, hauled back the throttle, and cut his ignition. The sudden silence was "deafening" for a moment or so. Then, little by little, he heard the whisper of the wings in the wind, and the faint swishing click of the propeller turning free in the wind. Holding the plane steady with the nose just a couple of degrees below the "true horizon" he hunched well forward on the seat and glued his eyes to the vast expanse of murky, ever-changing shadows ahead.

The Somme River below was like a curving ribbon of washed-out silver. Every now and then he spotted a sprinkling of lights down on the ground. Pin-pricks of light from his altitude, but they could well be the flash of anti-aircraft guns in action. And each time he spotted them he waited for the crash of exploding shells in the dark air about him.

However, no anti-aircraft shells came screaming up, and as the ground

came up closer and closer, an odd sense of contentment settled over him. Now that the real danger was at hand his heart beat firmly, instead of in skips and jumps. The beads of sweat dried, and his hand on the controls was as steady as a rock.

Suddenly he picked up another cluster of lights, and he instinctively knew they came from the small village of Lacume. He stared harder than ever at the shadows below, spotted the hair-pin bend in the river and felt a glow of satisfaction. His navigation had been perfect. He couldn't have hit his objective any truer if he had come in on the beam.

Now to lose more altitude, slip across the hair-pin bend and sit down on that black spot framed by the curving river. Down a couple of thousand feet, then a gentle bank around toward the north. And then—

And then, suddenly, he was completely blinded by dazzling light. The white beam of a searchlight that seemed to spring into being on the Lysander's nose and slap him straight in the face!

Mike Regan went as stiff as a man turned to stone. Then every muscle in his body let go in savage action. He slammed the stick way over to the right, hauled it back into his belly, and jumped on right rudder bar.

The dead-engined Lysander answered the controls as best it could. It corkscrewed up and over to the right, and went cutting out of the

dazzling white beam. Regan dropped the nose a little more for added speed, quickly reversed the first maneuver, and he slipped past the white beam as it groped madly about for him.

However, he was safe only for a second or two. Three other beams of light joined the first one, and Regan knew that he and Tolley were cooked unless he switched on the engine and hauled them up and away from the beams.

Yet even as his hand flew to the ignition switch and starter button a tongue of orange-red flame stabbed upward from the ground and the night sky seemed to crash against the left side of Regan's head. For one fleeting instant he got flash glimpse of the Lysander's twisted engine. Then invisible hands seemed to reach up and grab hold of the plane and pull it earthward in a spin. Regan could hardly breathe. There was a continuous thunderous roar in his head, and there seemed to be steel bands about his chest that pressed tighter and tighter. And from a long way off he heard his own voice calling out to Tolley: "Don't jump! Too low! Bury your head in your arms! I'll get us down somehow!"

SPLIT seconds? Or were they minutes, or possibly years? Regan couldn't tell, and besides, it didn't matter much.

There was the ground right under
[Turn page]



his spinning plane. Yeah! The exact patch of ground he had been shooting for in the first place. Nice navigation, Regan! The old homing pigeon. But you're spinning in, pal, not landing. Do something about it! Want to make it curtains before you've hardly got started? The whole Nazi army knows you're here, and have no business to be here. Do something about it!

Thoughts whipped and slashed through Regan's brain. But instinct was doing its part, too. Instinct that had made him a natural born pilot.

His whirling brain had no idea what his hands and feet were doing. But somehow he killed the Lysander's spin. He got it righted and nosed down in a glide.

Dead ahead something blacker than the other shadows loomed up. They were trees, and he was overshooting the field. Anti-aircraft shrapnel made his engine useless. He couldn't start it up and swing around for another run at the field. It was now, or never—and it looked as if it were going to be never.

"Come on, old girl!" he cried hoarsely. "Up on wing and cut down. Cut down, and get us close!"

As the words spilled from his lips he sideslipped the plane down the last hundred feet, hauled it out with the nose up slightly, and "fish-tailed" viciously to cut down his forward speed. The dark shadows that were the bordering trees seemed to hurtle toward him at express train speed. He tried to cry out in alarm but all sound jammed in his throat. The only thing he could do was sit there and wait. Wait for Lady Luck to push the plane down onto the ground, or for the gods of war to slam it straight into those looming trees.

Lady Luck won. The Lysander was suddenly on the ground and jouncing forward. Regan applied as much pressure as he dared to the wheel brakes. The right wheel crabbed,

however, and the Lysander spun to the right, seemed to trip and bury the prop in the ground.

At that moment all motion ceased. The Lysander stood balanced on its nose, right wheel, and wingtip with its tail pointed toward the black sky.

"Very nice, Regan! Now, out we get, and run for those woods. A bloody fine mess, but we'll try and make the most of it!"

Regan had already slammed open his hatch cover. He half-fell, half-jumped to the ground, gave Tolley a hand down, and a push toward the woods.

"Get going!" he barked. "Be with you in a second. Got to take care of this baby. May give us a break."

Tolley started to speak, but Regan gave him another push and turned back to the plane. He felt along the half crumpled wing until his hands touched sticky oil. He whipped out a box of matches, lighted one and with it touched off the entire box.

He tossed the blazing mass on the gas-splashed wing, then raced after the running Tolley. The instant the Commando O.C. reached shelter of the woods he turned and waited for Regan. The plane was now a flaming torch that threw an orange-yellow glow high into the sky and to all sides. Tolley dragged Regan back under the trees.

"Stupid, Regan!" he snapped. "Think they could make use of that plane, or were you trying to light the way for us?"

"Neither!" Regan snapped back, as anger mounted in him. "Use your head, Major. It will take a while for that thing to cool, and the Nazis to find out if we were burned up in it! We need all the head start we can get, don't we?"

MAJOR TOLLEY pressed Regan's arm.

"Sorry, old man!" he whispered. "You're quite right. Blast that bloody

search-light! Ten to one they were just trying it out, and happened to catch us square. I'm certain we couldn't be heard from the ground."

"Me, too!" Regan grated bitterly. "Just one of those rotten breaks you can't guard against. Well, it looks now as if we've got to swim home with von Khole. But I wonder if this sweet mess will make him head for the tall timbers? What's your plan of action, now, Major? I—"

The roar of planes taking off far off to his left came through the night. Regan stared in the direction of the sound. A few seconds later he saw the exhaust plumes of three planes climbing up into the night sky. They were too far away to be caught in the glow of the burning plane, but from the throbbing beat of their engines he guessed they were Messerschmitts.

"A plane's a plane." He heard himself speak the sudden thought aloud. "Who cares who owns it? Major, are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Perhaps," the Commando grunted softly. "Right now, though, we'd do well to get distance. That burning plane is going to draw them like flies. Keep close behind me, Regan, and don't talk. Here, give me your hand. When I squeeze it stop dead, and don't even breathe, if you can help it. Right-o! Here we go. This bloody show isn't over by a long shot!"

CHAPTER IV

Dark Terror

DURING the next half hour Regan wasn't quite sure whether he was awake, or just experiencing a nightmare. With his left hand clasp- ing Tolley's right he let the Com- mando lead him through the night like a mother guiding a frightened child. And during that half hour Re-

gan obtained even a better picture of British Commando technique.

Tolley was not a man; he was more like a ghost. The man didn't make a sound. He missed every tree, bush, boulder, and ditch. And by hand squeezing he guided Regan practical- ly in his footsteps. A dozen times Tolley stopped cold, and a dozen times Regan wondered, "What now?" only to see a group of German troops pass them by a moment or two later.

Not one single sound or movement escaped Tolley. Every time he put a foot forward he knew exactly where he was going to step.

For a while Regan tried to keep track of their general direction, but he had to give it up. It seemed to him that Tolley simply traveled in a continuous circle, yet the shadowy objects that loomed up on all sides were always different. Trees, houses, barns, and whatnot.

If Tolley should suddenly let go of his hand and melt away into the darkness Regan would be complete- ly lost. He wouldn't know if he was close to Lacume, or Paris. And at the end of the half hour he was absently wondering if by any chance Tolley had called off their little kidnaping idea and was actually winding his way back to the French coast.

He was almost on the point of ask- ing the Commando when Tolley stopped short in the shadow of an unlighted house, and pulled Regan down to a squatting position on the ground. Regan saw they had come to a halt beside one of a row of houses that flanked a dirt road. And then he suddenly saw the crack of light that seeped past a blackout curtain of a window in the house directly across the street.

That there were houses here startled him not a little. He had been sure that they were in the middle of wild country. That this was actually a village . . .

He put his lips close to Tolley's ear.

"What now?" he breathed softly. "What's this place?"

"Lacume, of course!" came the whispered reply. "And see that crack of light? If I'm lucky, I'll find von Khole in that room. And I could certainly do with a bit of luck about now!"

Regan could scarcely believe it. This place was Lacume? And Tolley believed that von Khole was in that lighted room in the house across the dirt road?

He tried to see Tolley's face. Could that crack on the head during the crash landing have knocked the Commando just a bit haywire?

"You're sure this is Lacume?" he blurted. "That field was only a mile from it in the first place, and since we left the crash it seems like we've walked half-way across France."

"A straight line is sometimes not the best route to take," was the grim reply. "This is Lacume, right enough. And that's where von Khole makes his headquarters. See his Staff car parked on the right side of the house? And see that armed guard at the door? That's a Nazi headquarters right enough. I only hope it's von Khole's. I think . . . Ah, visitors! I'm certain I'm right, now. Don't move, Regan! Don't move a muscle!"

A car had come rolling along the dirt road. Its slitted headlights didn't throw light any more than fifteen feet ahead of the front wheels. It came to a stop in front of the house directly opposite.

REGAN was able to make out that two figures climbed from the car and went up the front steps of the house. There was the sound of the guard springing to attention. Then as the front door was opened the two figures stood silhouetted against the faint glow of light from inside.

Regan could see that they wore German uniforms, but that was all.

Then suddenly Tolley's fingers that were gripping his arm clamped down so tightly that it was all Regan could do to stifle a groan.

"What perfect luck!" he heard Tolley's excited whisper. "None other than His Nibs. The beggar with him is a captain. Important bloke from all the trimmings on his uniform, I fancy. Well, I'll be with you shortly, Regan. Stick here, and keep out of sight."

The Commando started to get slowly to his feet, but Regan grabbed him and pulled him back down.

"Hold on!" he hissed. "What are you going to do? Everything's changed, now. Our plane's junk. Are we going to lug him back to the coast, and hope we find a boat?"

"I'm afraid not," came the reply. "Yes, everything has changed. Wanted the beggar back in England alive, but . . . Well, that's life for you. But if we can't have him, neither can the Nazis. Nasty job at times being a Commando. Not very sporting to do him in in cold blood. But it's just giving him a bit of his own medicine. Stay here, Regan. I'll be back shortly. Then we'll try to get back to England somehow."

Before Regan could speak, the man glided away. For one brief instant the Yank saw the Commando jerk his gun from its holster, and take his deadly Commando knife from its belt sheath. Then he was gone. Without a sound. Completely swallowed up in the darkness.

A cold shiver ran through Regan. Then anger started to simmer slowly within him. This was a fine dish, like the devil it was! Here he was ordered to stay put while Tolley went sliding off to cut down the life of perhaps the most hated Nazi in all Occupied France.

Of course war was war, and a dead Nazi was one Nazi less for Hitler to hurl against the civilized world. Yet there was something just a little hor-

rible about sliding up on a man in the dead of night, clamping one hand over his mouth as you rammed the knife into his back. Much better a clean fight on the field of battle, or up in the sky where it was man to man. Or—

What had seemed certain to be a cinch had turned into a beautiful flop. And all because of a single searchlight beam that had accidentally nailed the Lysander. That single beam of light had knocked the well-laid plans into a cocked hat. The single beam that had made him a perfect target for that nearby anti-aircraft battery.

It was luck that they hadn't been killed as they had twisted around in the night sky. While a man still had his life he could still hope. But the whole picture was now completely changed. The usefulness on this venture of one Mike Regan was now definitely reduced to zero-minus.

In fact he had become a liability to Tolley. The Commando knew his way around in this kind of country. Alone he would make out all right, and perhaps get back to England without any trouble. But with a planeless R.A.F. pilot on his neck? Well . . .

"Nuts!" Regan grated softly, and strained his eyes at the house across the street. "For two cents I'd go join him whether he liked it, or not. I don't need anybody to wet nurse me in any man's war!"

DURING the next several minutes Regan built up a beautiful case for himself. But that was as far as he got. Each time that he was on the point of sliding across the street the very silence of the dark night checked him. He strained his ears for any telltale sound that might let him know how Tolley was making out. But he heard nothing. It was as though he was suddenly the only man alive in a strange world.

Wild, crazy thoughts started whipping his brain into a lather. He experienced the almost overwhelming desire to let out a bellow, or to shoot off his service gun. Anything to break the nerve-stretching monotony of this blasted silence!

And then suddenly he reached the breaking point. Tolley's orders be blowed! The Commando had been gone for forty-five long minutes. The radium dial of his wrist-watch told him that.

Where was Tolley? What was he doing? Maybe he wasn't doing anything. Maybe he was dead. Perhaps with all his training, and natural cunning, he had walked straight into a trap—and his own death.

Regan straightened up and swayed forward on the balls of his feet, as though in so doing he might see more, and hear more. But he saw nothing but the same shadows, and he heard not a sound.

He cursed under his breath, and started slowly across the street. He circled slightly and came up on the car from the left rear. The car was empty. He sneaked around it and glided toward some bushes to the right of the steps. When his foot suddenly struck something soft and yielding he came within an ace of letting out a startled yelp.

He clamped his lips shut in time and reached down with his free hand. He touched the death-chilled body of what had been a Nazi guard. He thought of the Commando knife Tolley had slid from its belt sheath, and shuddered slightly.

Then suddenly there seemed to be a damp chill all about him, yet there was a strange burning in his chest, and he could feel sweat trickling down his face. Curse Tolley, curse the Commandos, and curse Fritz Meltcher for getting Mike Regan into a mess like this. Why couldn't Tolley have put his dizzy proposition up to some other R.A.F. pilot? Why—

He clenched both fists and savagely shook his head to drive away the taunting thoughts. Then he took a good look at the crack of light that escaped past the blackout curtain drawn down over the window. He stared at it hard, hoping to catch a moving shadow that would tell him the room was occupied. He saw no moving shadow, though, and the window was too high from the ground to permit him to look into the room.

He sighed bitterly and clenched his fists again in a helpless gesture. He was playing in a different league now, and he didn't know what to do about it. Should he try to get into the house through a cellar window, if the place did have a cellar? Or should he raise a small riot out here, then hide and take a look at who and what came tearing out that front door?

He wondered what Tolley would do in a situation such as this. Nuts to Tolley! The big bum had left him sitting way out on a limb with nothing under him. Besides . . . maybe the poor devil was dead as a doornail right now. But for cat's sake, where was everybody? Nazi, or otherwise!

IT WAS as though the gods had been waiting for that question. At any rate no sooner had the thought slipped through Regan's brain than he heard the purr of a car turning the corner up the street, and when he snapped his head around he saw the slitted headlights of the car bearing down on him.

One look at those slitted headlights and instinct took charge. He grabbed the dead Nazi guard and dragged the body with him deep into the bushes. And there he crouched in the pitch darkness, hardly daring to breathe.

The second car rolled to a stop behind the first. Regan heard the car door opening, and the thump of booted feet stepping down to the ground. Then he heard a harsh voice speak in German.

"You will wait for me, *Herr Lieutenant*," the voice said. "I do not know how long I will be. But you will wait and take me back to the flying field. Perhaps we will have a passenger. A swine, *Herr Field Marshal* informs me, that he has captured. If I need you, I'll send out for you. Put out those headlights. There may be other British planes in the sky tonight."

"At your orders, *Herr Colonel*," grunted another voice.

Regan heard footsteps that passed so close that he impulsively shrank back. They went up the steps, paused, then were blotted out by the sound of a door opening and closing. Then nothing more but the quivering silence.

So the worst had happened! Tolley had stuck out his neck and somebody had come down on it like ten ton of brick!

CHAPTER V

Nazi Vultures

REGAN crouched motionless, battling with the whirlpool of thoughts in his head. So Tolley was caught! So what? So that seemed to leave it strictly up to a guy who was pretty good in the pit of a Spitfire, but that was about all.

Or was it? Maybe this was just the place where R.A.F. should step into the picture. Maybe not all was lost. Maybe something could be salvaged. He had learned one mighty important item. There was an airfield somewhere about. Maybe a new one that didn't appear on Tolley's maps and photographs. The driver of that car there was waiting now to drive some Nazi big shot back to a flying field. Perhaps there was just a faint chance that . . .

Regan killed the thought, not dar-

ing to finish it. Instead his inner self raged at him for being all kinds of a fool as he slowly inched his way out from under the bushes. Of all the dopes in the world he was being Number One, and he knew it.

Somehow, though, he didn't care. He was not playing war according to regulations now. He was simply striving to do what any other red-blooded guy would strive to do—get a pal out of a bad jam.

He might miss by a mile, he might get snuffed out like a candle flame between the thumb and forefinger of a giant's hand. Well, maybe he might. But that could not deter him now.

Hugging the ground he inched to the rear of the second car. Then he got up noiselessly and strained his eyes in the darkness. The corners of his mouth tugged down in a grin as he saw the head of the car driver almost within arm's length.

He stole forward two more steps, then jerked up his service automatic and brought it crashing down on the Nazi's head. Just in case the man's cap had softened the blow, Regan hit him a second one in back of the ear. Then he was in the car stuffing his handkerchief into the man's mouth, lashing the wrists and ankles with the man's belt.

When he had finished that he brushed a hand across his sweating face and looked at the house. Reckless decision was his in that moment. The only sensible way to go into a house was through the front door. And he knew this one was neither locked nor guarded. So the thing to do was go in with his gun ready, and pray that Lady Luck would walk in step with him.

When he reached the door, he hesitated a brief instant to clamp down harder on his jangled nerves, then grasped the doorknob with his left hand, twisted it silently and pushed the door inward. It opened onto a short hall that was empty and lighted

by a single small bulb fitted to the ceiling socket.

Four doors led off the hallway, two on each side. Three were closed but the one on the right was open a couple of inches. Voices came through the opening.

They were speaking in German but too muffled for him to make out what they said. Regan's blood seemed to turn to water, and his knees became dangerously watery. But he forced himself to slide along the wall to the partly opened door and flatten himself against the wall.

He could hear the voices clearly now. The voice of the man who was speaking sounded like a file being rasped across the edge of a piece of tin. And it was obvious that he was speaking to Major Tolley, of the Commandos.

"IT IS useless for you to lie to me!" the guttural voice said. "I have been expecting an attempt on my life for weeks. I knew that one of you Commando dogs, or one of the French swine of the underground would attempt to reach me sooner or later. That is why I made such perfect preparations to greet you. That is why I made it *seem* so easy to get close to me. *Gott!* You are such fools when it comes to playing war. The British Commandos? Bah! I spit in their faces. So! You deny you are a Commando, eh? I have seen this kind of a knife before. It is the kind that only a Commando carries. But you would steal over here in a German uniform. *That* is different. For you, my Commando friend, there will be more than just a bullet in the head."

The speaker paused and snorted loudly.

"So you would inspire the chained French, as you call them over your radio!" he went on then. "The brave Commandos will rescue France, and drive the hated Nazis away! Well,

we shall let the French see what a Commando looks like when we Nazis have finished with him. Perhaps then they will not be so inspired. Yes, I will show them what we will do to every Commando we catch. And we will catch all of them, in time. So! Something like this, only more of it!"

There came the sickening thud of something hard meeting flesh, then the thump of a body falling to the floor. The rasping voice spoke again, but to one of the other Germans in the room.

"That crash, *Herr Colonel!* You inspected it closely? You say no one died in it? Perhaps this stupid fool did not come alone. Perhaps he had a pilot fly him over. Your men are still searching?"

"Yes, *Herr Marshal,*" came the reply. "If there is another we will catch him. But I do not believe there were two. I feel sure they would both have come straight here. However, all roads are being watched. If he had a pilot the man will be caught. These Commandos—they often work alone. Do you not agree, *Herr Captain?*"

"I do," spoke up a different voice. "But if there *is* another he will walk into the same trap as this one did. We will find him in the cellar for the front door guard is on the alert, and—"

"Front door guard?" cried the captain's voice. "There was no guard when I came in. I meant to mention it, but seeing this swine, I—"

"What is that?" thundered the marshal's voice. "No guard?"

Mike Regan knew then that he had reached the cross-road in his life. It was do or die now! And as he went leaping into that room he felt in his bones that it meant—*die!*

Stunning surprise gave Regan the breath of time he needed, just time enough to slug his gun against the head of a blurred figure that was right in front of him as he went through

the door. The figure folded silently to the floor, and three other figures froze motionless.

Two of them stared with eyes filled with terror and hatred. The third, the figure of Tolley slumped on his side on the floor, stared in disbelieving bewilderment.

But Regan had eyes only for the pair in German uniform. One was a Gestapo captain, and the other wore all the trimmings and shooting gallery medals of a Nazi Field Marshal.

"Don't move!" Regan bit off as he swung his gun from one to the other. "None of us stands a chance, but you two stand the least chance of all. You able to get on your feet, Major?"

REGAN switched to English for the last sentence, but he didn't so much as glance at the Commando.

"Quite," he heard Tolley murmur. "Hands tied, but I can make it. Nice of you to pop in. No end of help. They were about to get messy."

"Skip it!" Regan choked him off and took a quick step forward that brought him closer to the Gestapo captain. "Got tired of waiting, and wanted to go home. I think maybe we can do it. I—"

Suddenly Regan moved like a streak of greased lightning. It is doubtful whether the Gestapo captain so much as saw the flash of Regan's gun. Maybe he didn't even feel it as it nearly caved in the side of his head. He went down in a heap and lay still. Field Marshal von Khole's body twitched and the flames of berserk madness leaped up in his eyes.

"You will both die, horribly!" he got out between lips that didn't seem to move. "You have been lucky, but that is all finished!"

Regan stared at him, flint-eyed, and moved over close to Tolley. The Commando was on his feet and swaying slightly as he tried to free his wrists that were bound behind his back.

With his free hand, Regan turned him around, and tackled the ropes himself. But his eyes remained clamped to von Khole's rage-flaming face. It took a full minute to free Tolley, and during every second of the time Regan expected to hear something explode, or the pounding of running feet through the front door. Neither he nor Tolley stood a chance in the world but he was going to follow through with his wild, crazy plan—as long as he could.

"Okay, Major," he said when Tolley's hands were free. "That slob is your baby. Hurry up and slug him silly. I've got a car waiting. Complete with chauffeur."

The Commando fairly sailed through the air.

"All my pleasure," he said. "But we're quite mad, of course."

Tolley crashed a fist to von Khole's jaw in a blow that made even Regan wince. The Nazi, in the last split second, seemed suddenly to realize that Regan didn't dare risk a shot. But he realized it too late. His big mouth was not quite wide open to yell when Tolley's hammer-head fist belted him.

"Okay, we move fast!" Regan barked and leaped forward. "Take his feet. I'll take the head and shoulders. Then out the front door and into the back of a car out there. Our only play—if we hope to get this slob back to England."

Tolley grinned slightly.

"Quite, Yank," he said. "Only decided to do in the rotter because I thought I was forced to. He was responsible for my . . . But never mind that. Up with him, and out we go. But I hope you have dug up some kind of a plan."

"That makes two of us!" Regan breathed fiercely, and hooked his arms under the Nazi's armpits. "Let's go!"

For the next couple of moments Regan had the spinning sensation that he was walking barefooted on a hot stove with a gun at the back of

his head. Going along the hall was not so bad, but when he passed the front door into the darkness every nerve and muscle seemed to be twisted into knots, leaving him with no strength to take another step. But somehow he managed to carry his share of the load over to the car and help dump it face down in the back.

HE MOTIONED for Tolley to get in, and followed. At that moment he heard a faint groan from the trussed-up man at the wheel. The sound was like music in his ears for he had feared that the Nazi driver had been knocked a little bit too cold. And though the man didn't know it, he held the lives of a Commando and an R.A.F. pilot in the palms of his two driving hands.

Bending over the seat Regan whipped out the gag, and jerked the belt free. Then he shook the driver vigorously.

"What happened?" he demanded in gruff German. "You fool, *Leutnant*, what happened to you? Never mind! Later! Get the car started and drive us back to the air field at once. Hurry, you stupid fool, or I promise you it won't go well with you!"

Unfailing obedience that had probably been beaten into him from birth, plus the fact that he more or less hadn't just came out of a fog, brought no protest or questions from the groggy driver. He shook his head a little to clear it, switched on the car lights, and started the engine.

Regan released the clamped air in his lungs only when the car started moving down the street. But even then he did not sit back. He stood half upright and close to the back of the front seat to block off all view of the rear seat in case the driver did turn his head.

The driver, however, was obedience, plus. And he was a skilled driver, too. Despite the meager slits of light that threw but a faint glow

on the road ahead, the Nazi drove at high speed and put the village of Laccume behind him in no time. Holding on fast Regan stared upward in the hope of seeing some stars and learning the direction they were taking, but cloud scud still covered the heavens like a shroud.

He believed that they were traveling in an eastward direction because the distant horizon seemed to be a shade lighter. The glow, however, might come from some distant fire. But if the truth must be known, direction didn't matter. It was destination that counted — and what luck they would have when they got there.

CHAPTER VI

V for Valor

UNEXPECTEDLY the German spun off onto a road leading to the right. The crazy turn tore Regan's hands from the back of the seat, and for a horrible instant he felt himself sort of hanging in mid-air with the car rushing by underneath him.

Tolley's quick-wittedness saved a minor catastrophe; perhaps a major one. The Commando shot up both hands, hooked them in Regan's belt and hauled him onto his feet.

In the nick of time the Yank choked off the English-spoken words of thanks on his lips. He took a fresh grip on the seat back and stared ahead over the driver's head. The road they had taken led through a short patch of woods.

Beyond it was open space, and the small cluster of lights that suddenly came into Regan's vision started his heart to pounding against his ribs, and the blood to surging through his veins like so much liquid fire. Too often had he seen shaded hangar lights and tiny runway oil-spot flares

not to recognize those lights ahead instantly.

Straining forward he stared hard at the lights, striving with every ounce of his entire being to obtain a good advance picture of the place before they would be on top of it, and it might be too late. After a long heart-chilling moment his fervent prayer was answered. His eyes saw what they had been straining to see. Rather, what he had been hoping with all his heart they would see.

Ahead, and considerably to the left, were two Messerschmitt One-tens. The other planes were all of huge night bomber type, but the two set apart on the left were Messerschmitts.

But there was one unhappy thing about that bit of the picture. Three bull-necked German mechanics were lounging on the ground near the two planes. Just the same Regan took one flash look, slapped his hand down on the driver's shoulder and snarled an order in German.

"Over there, to the left! Those two planes. Never mind those lazy fools. Run them down!"

The car suddenly slackened speed, the driver turned his head, and opened his mouth to say something. He didn't say a thing. Speed and hair-trigger action were Regan's wings of hope, now. He didn't even hesitate. He slugged the driver cold, and half-hurled, half-kicked the man out of the seat as he slid down behind the wheel himself.

In nothing flat he had the car thundering across the hundred yards of open ground to the two Messerschmitts. He drove it straight for the mechanics lounging on the ground, and barked words back at Tolley over his shoulder.

"Be ready, Major! I'm going to stop fast. That slob with you has a Luger in his holster. Grab it, and when I brake to a stop come out of there fast and shooting! That will take care of those guys on the ground.

I'll dump your boy friend in the nearest pit, and get the engines kicking over. Then you dive for the rear pit!"

"Just as you say, Yank!" he heard the faint reply. "Really been all your show for hours, you know."

Regan grinned and hunched forward a little more over the wheel. He was less than twenty yards from the mechanics lounging on the ground before they realized that things were not just quite right. As a matter of fact they almost realized it too late.

As Regan slammed on the brake and screwed the wheel around to help the skidding stop the three mechanics fairly flew out of the way. Before they had time to steady themselves Tolley had vaulted from the still skidding car and wading into them like a madman. He didn't once fire the gun.

TRUTH to tell, Regan didn't see what exactly the tough Commando did. He didn't have time, for he was too busy with his own little job. He only heard gun metal thud against solid bone, heard a few grunts and groans, and some thuds, then he was spilling over into the back seat and scooping up the limp but heavy body of Field Marshal von Khole.

He half-fell and half-stumbled down out of the car and staggered the few yards to the nearest Messerschmitt. In one mighty heave that seemed to make his blood vessels split he hoisted the Nazi big shot up into the radioman's pit. Then he leaped up onto the wing stub, and scrambled along it to the forward pit.

It seemed that he was no sooner inside the pit than the ungodly wail of an alarm siren hit the night air, and lights began springing up all over the place.

Then there was violent movement in back of him, and he heard Tolley's panting voice.

"Get this blasted thing going, Yank!" the Commando cried. "That's

the field alarm. Those blighters back at Lacume must have revived and spread the alarm to all fields! Look! They've seen the blasted car. Get this thing into the air if you can! They'll—"

Tolley choked off as a machine-gun started yammering over by the hangars. Regan heard the metal messengers of death whine close to the Messerschmitt, but he didn't bother to look. He was too busy snapping up ignition switches and jabbing starter buttons.

Maybe it took all of one whole second, or maybe it took five heart-crushing years before the two Benz-Daimler engines caught and thundered out their dual song of power. By that time the machine-gunners seemed to be right on top of them.

Through the chattering din Regan heard Tolley's Luger replying like a pop-gun. Then he had released the wheel brakes, rammed both throttles open wide, and the One-ten was charging forward as though hidden coiled springs had suddenly been released.

The forward lunge snapped Regan's head back, and as white pains shot through the back of his neck he almost let the Messerschmitt fly right from under the seat of his pants. By the grace of Lady Luck he was able to check a violent swerve that would have crabbed the right wing and put everybody up on his ear. But check it he did, and held the plane in a straight line take-off.

Before the wheels had even left the ground he could feel the slight tremor caused by machine-gun bullets hammering into it. Then the plane was off and he had it prop-screaming upward through showers of hissing death. A sudden numbness in his right arm told him that he had been nicked by a lucky one. But there was no pain, and he could still use the arm.

For a crazy moment the fighter in him pleaded to turn back down and

give those ground rats some of their own medicine. Common sense, though, forced him to beat back the urge. His only hope was to get all the altitude he could under his wings, to get up into that cloud scud and lose himself before pursuing planes could catch up with him.

And so he continued to virtually hang the German plane on its props and go tearing up through a sky now crisscrossed by frantically swinging searchlight beams, and bursting globs of red and orange flame that seemed to get closer and closer with each passing split second.

Then, without warning, he was in the middle of blessed darkness. Not quite pitch-darkness, for there was a pale glow beneath him, the tips of the searchlight beams stabbing at the belly of the cloud scud.

HOWEVER, it was darkness enough. He leveled off, picked his direction from the compass, and let both engines get the bits in their teeth. As he sent the Messerschmitt hurtling westward toward the channel he twisted around in the seat and peered backward. He saw the shadowy hulk that was von Khole, but his heart seemed to stand still when he couldn't see any figure in the rear gunner's pit. He reached out impulsively and eased back the throttles to kill the engine roar.

"You aboard, Tolley?" he bellowed.

"Oh, quite, and fit as a fiddle!" came the faint but heart-gladdening cry. "Talk with you later, old thing. Best to get out of here in a hurry, don't you think? Mind our Channel guns, though! This is a bloody Nazi plane, you know."

Regan laughed, opened up both throttles wide again. He flew straight ahead in the scud for some ten minutes, then figuring it was just about right he stuck the nose down and pounded down through the stuff into clear air. Directly below, he

made out the rolling cold swells of the Channel. He went straight on down until he was only a couple of hundred feet above the water.

He heard the wild cry of alarm from Tolley in the rear pit, but paid no attention, and certainly didn't bother to take time to explain that the lower they came in over the Channel, the less chance there was that unsuspecting British gunners would smack them down. He just pulled out of the screaming dive and sent the Messerschmitt virtually skipping the wave tops the rest of the way to the English coast.

The instant he was over the coastline he zoomed up and released a couple of landing flares. If any British fingers were on gun triggers those flares bursting into being stayed their pressure. An enemy plane most certainly would not reveal itself in its own flare light.

In the glow the flares threw down onto the ground Regan picked a strip of fairly smooth ground. One minute later he was on the ground. One minute after that it seemed half of the British army was shoulder to shoulder about the Messerschmitt.

And an hour after that Tolley and he had satisfactorily identified themselves, had turned over to the proper authorities one Nazi who would certainly make all of tomorrow's front pages, and the two of them were partaking of cigarettes and whiskey in the local officers' mess, waiting for a car to arrive and take them to Eastbourne.

It was the first minute they had been left alone since their landing, and as they looked at each other each flushed with embarrassment.

"Hope you're not too sore I took charge of the parade, Major," Regan said with an effort. "I . . . Well, I guess I went a little haywire. And I got scared stiff at the thought of being left there alone in Nazi territory. By the way—how did they

happen to nail you? You . . . Well, it struck me that you knew the whole set-up, if you get what I mean?"

The Commando flushed deeper, but there was no malice in the look he gave Regan. Just heart-deep thanks.

"Frankly, I learned a big lesson tonight, Yank," he said. "And thanks to your courage I didn't pay for it with my life. I mean, I thought I could be so much more clever than any of the blasted Nazis. I wasn't. You heard von Khole say how he was expecting just such a thing, and had made it *seem* an easy thing to get close to him?"

"Well, it was true. That escaping bit of light was a plant. To let bloody fools like me know it must be his H.Q. because no other house would dare let light show.

"He had a guard posted at the front door knowing that a very *clever* chap like me wouldn't go in the front door, but by some other way—like the cellar. I killed that guard just to make sure he'd stay put, then made my entrance through the cellar. And . . .

"Well, I came in contact with live wires he had cleverly arranged and was knocked cold. When I came to I was a prisoner. If only I'd gone through that front door like a—a—"

"Like a fool, like me?" Regan said, with a chuckle. "Go ahead and say it. That's okay by me, Major. By all the laws I should have been killed the instant I opened the door. Von Khole planned for a smart lad to come. He didn't plan for a dope. Between the two of us we just crossed him up, that's all. It was blind luck on my part, Major, and we both know it! One thing more, though. Just as we were leaving that house you started to say that von Khole was responsible for something. What did you mean?"

Tolley was silent for a moment, a cold hard gleam in his eyes.

"I think you were a little shocked by my being so casual about killing von Khole in cold blood when I thought we stood no chance of getting him alive," the man said slowly. "It wasn't quite like that. I wanted him alive because of the feather it would be in our cap, and the disorganization it would create over there. But if I couldn't capture him alive, I would certainly have killed him.

"You see, Regan, the killing part would have been something a bit personal with me. Von Khole once captured another Commando. Six months ago it was. It was a horrible end for the poor chap. When I heard about it I swore that some day I'd capture von Khole, or kill him, to sort of even it up. That Commando he caught was my younger brother."

TOLLEY gave his head a vigorous shake as though to drive away unpleasant memories.

"About you, Regan." He suddenly spoke again. "After this little adventure tonight, what say? I could get you transferred to the Commandos in a jiffy. Make you a major, easy. You're just the kind of man we need, Regan. In fact, you are *the* man, according to the way I see things."

Regan laughed, but shook his head. "Then take another look, Major," he said. "I wouldn't have missed tonight for anything, but I don't want any repeats. Nix, and double nix. My heart and my nerve wouldn't be able to take it. No. For you the thrill of the Commandos, the dark nights, and certain death around every corner. For me, though, the safety of a nice Spitfire's pit, and no danger except getting shot down in flames. Nope! Commandos don't need wings—but *I do!* I'm drinking to that. Join me?"

Major Tolley smiled sadly, then lifted his glass and drank.

"NONE OF OUR AIRCRAFT IS MISSING"

By A CZECHO-SLOVAK PILOT OFFICER

BECAUSE it is necessary for the pilots and other officers of the fighting forces of the Occupied European countries to remain incognito so that reprisals against their families in the homelands may be avoided, many stories of heroism involving these men are never told to the American reading public.

We have obtained the following account of a flight by two Czechoslovak pilots over Occupied France. We are glad to be able to bring this story to our readers, as an evidence of the courage and intrepidity of the aerial fighters of the United Nations.

MANY of the most heroic activities of our flying men are concealed behind brief official announcements demanded by the restrictions of censorship and the desire to prevent the Axis Powers from gaining any information about objectives or successes. Therefore, after a pilot officer has done his tour of duty, he has learned that it may be summarized just as the description of our trip was presented over the British Broadcasting Company's news period. The announcer read a number

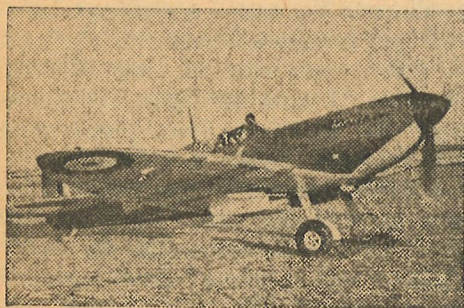
As a matter of routine, we invariably listened to these broadcasts of the official communiques, partly to determine just how much of our activities could be given to the general public; and partly to discover what other squadrons in the service had been doing. This simple description of what had been a hectic few hours for my comrade and myself was enough to make us chuckle.

Proud and Pleased

I looked at Franta and I grinned at him. It had been his show. And it had been more fun than you would have guessed from the radio bulletin.

He and I had been picked the day before for an attack on an enemy-held aerodrome. We were pretty pleased. There were not many Czech pilots at this British fighter station, and here we were, two Czechs picked for a job out of the ordinary. This was to be no mere convoy patrol. We were really going to get down and give the Nazis a dose of their own medicine. But we were aiming for combat troops and not for helpless women and children such as those the Germans were accustomed to machine-gunning in the streets of English East Coast villages.

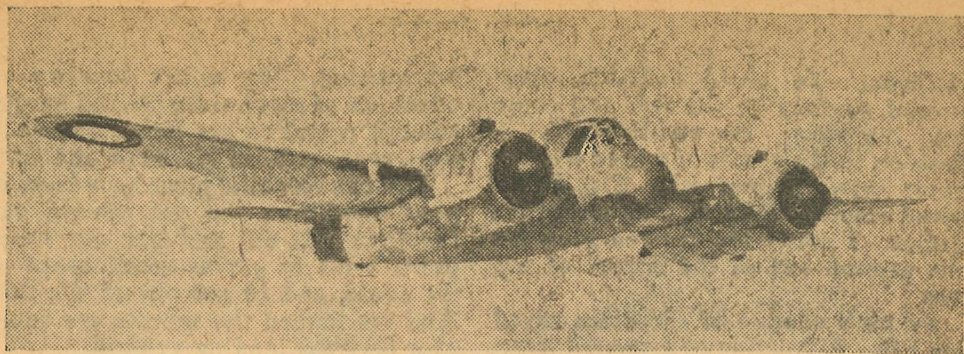
Flying over German heads, and only a few feet over them, seemed venturesome. But Franta's an old hand and he didn't say much.



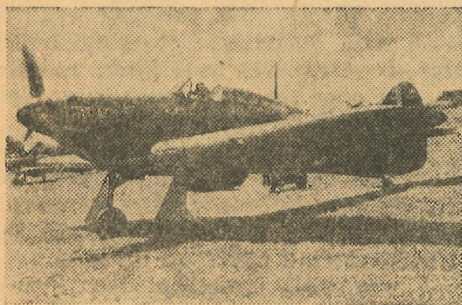
SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE

of items, then came to our little episode. He said:

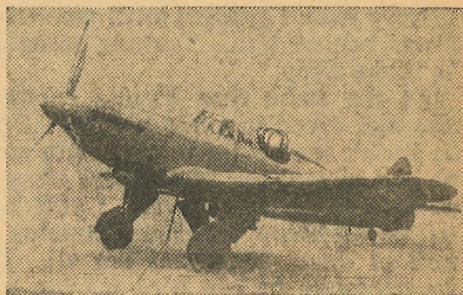
"Yesterday, Fighter Command aircraft carried out offensive patrols over northern France. One enemy aircraft was shot down. None of our aircraft is missing from this operation."



TWIN-ENGINE BRISTOL "BEAUFIGHTER" MONOPLANE



THE HAWKER HURRICANE



THE BOULTON PAUL DEFIANT

Franta set a course and climbed above the clouds. They were unbroken but only just opaque. When we reckoned that we were just about over our target, Franta made signs that he was about to go down through the clouds. We dived down into a sea of milk-white cloud, so thick that I could scarcely see Franta's wing-tip.

We didn't take long to break through. In a few seconds I was looking about the countryside for a fix. Now we were flying low, and we found ourselves slightly to the south of our target. Just in front of us was a big transformer station.

Franta dived gently and fired a short burst of cannon-fire into it as he swept by. I was on his tail, following his example. We climbed again through the cloud, setting a new course for our target, and we didn't dive through again until we were sure of our position.

Surprise for the Messerschmitts

I was slightly to the rear of Franta so as to get a clear view. If I had

been too close, I should have had to concentrate on him rather than on the target. That was why I came out of the cloud a fraction of a second later than he did.

And when I did come through, I caught my breath.

Not fifty feet behind him were two Messerschmitt 109s. In fact, he and they looked as though they were flying in formation. The Messerschmitts seemed stunned and incapable of action—perhaps because Franta had appeared so suddenly. But a third one was just behind them, and I sensed that he was getting ready to attack.

"Three behind you!" I shouted through my phones, and I made to attack the one nearest to me.

But I couldn't fire because I was afraid of hitting Franta. We were all three in line astern.

Jerry Dives—and Crashes

When Franta heard me, he cut his engine sharply and sawed on his rudder to lose speed. The two nearest overshot him, unable to spot his ruse

in time. To avoid collision, they turned slightly to the left and came into his view. He ruddered like a flash on to their tails and fired a short burst into the nearest. The Jerry dived steeply, crashed, and burst into flames. I could see the red glow on the ground out of the corner of my eye.

Franta's change of direction saved his life. A fraction of a second later, the third German fired and missed. Franta was now out of my line of fire and I blazed away with everything I had.

Jerry hadn't guessed until then that I was behind him. Turning steeply, he broke away.

At the same time Franta spotted him and dived to avoid his fire. But he hadn't the height to play with and he had to pull out of the dive almost as soon as he had begun. I saw his tail wheel bump the ground, raising a puff of dust. That was not all. In front of him he saw high-tension cables, too late to avoid them.

Forked Lightning

His aircraft ran into them head-on and I saw a flash of forked lightning. I closed my eyes. He would frizzle. I opened them, letting out my breath in a hiccuping sigh.

I gasped again. There was Franta, still flying, still ahead. And now there was our target, lying open, waiting to be attacked. Franta, still cool apparently, went in to attack. I followed.

There was not much flak, for we were overhead before they knew it. The men on the ground ran about like ants. Franta fired off all the ammunition he had left at the aircraft on the ground, and I gave them all I had, too.

The job done, Franta climbed up again through the cloud, set for home. I felt relieved now. We were through. But over the coast the cloud was broken and the flak was thick and

frightening. We didn't dare try to climb out of reach since we had hardly enough petrol to get home, let alone maneuver with, if we were attacked.

Franta's machine must have been in poor condition, but we opened our throttles full out and put our noses down a bit to get as much speed as we could, and to get out of the flak. And we landed the minute we could at a forward landing-ground.

Battered Plane

Franta's machine might well have come to pieces. The fuselage was riddled with bullet and shrapnel holes, the air-screw was bent back, and the engine cowlings and wings were festooned with bits of broken cable.

Franta told me that when he crashed into the cables his engine stopped. He thought he would have to make a crash landing and give himself up. But it started again on its own.

I was still sweating, but Franta looked as cool as a cucumber. He had been the hero, I had been the looker-on. Perhaps that was why. But he put it on a bit when he made his report to the Intelligence office. That was why I grinned at him when we heard the radio version. No trimmings there. . . .

The Last Story

That is the story of our unknown Czecho-Slovak flying officer. A few days after writing the fascinating story of his sweep over Occupied France with Flying Officer Franta, this famous airman was reported missing from an operational flight over France.

So you can see that there is real meaning when R.A.F. officers hear the simple statement: "None of our aircraft is missing!" It means that heroic men are back home with jobs well done and a determination to continue their fight for Victory.

*Coming Next Issue: MADAGASCAR INCIDENT, a Zooming
Action Novelet by FRANK JOHNSON—Plus Many Other
Exciting Stories and Features!*



It was nice remembering the havoc wreaked on the Nazi rail-head

ACTION OVER ST. OMER

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Captain George Alyard, Bombardier, Crashes at the Feet of a Hun Lieutenant—and Springs a Surprise!

CAPTAIN GEORGE ALYARD was alone in the battered B25A. It was badly smashed and he knew he could never reach the Channel.

The bombardier had been singing in the meatbox when the heavy stuff had hit the greenhouse. Pompoms make a hole a man can crawl through.

A burst of flak had fractured the B25A from tail to gun turret and there was no protection behind Alyard. The gunner was dead.

Alyard was alone with the screech of battle all around him, with a Cyclone engine trying to tear itself loose from the hangnails of metal that held it to the wing. He felt like an insect

smothered in aspic, his senses were not entirely clear, and the bite of high-explosive stuff was in his nose and throat. It came boiling in through the jagged holes in the B25A's flanks, along with the stench of burning castrol.

So this was the end, Alyard thought. The ground was coming up to smash him to bits as he fought the controls. He wondered if he would burn up—the minister back at Sudbury, Massachusetts, did not countenance cremation.

Not much time in which to think. You timed this new war in seconds; the old one was timed by minutes.

Flashes of his boyhood, mental pictures of those dear to him paraded through his head. No regrets. He had done his part. Long before the Yanks had come over, he had flown with the R.A.F. There had been a day over Brest when he had nearly taken the prize packet in a Boulton-Paul, but he had brought the kite in, crashed it near the station, and had just managed to crawl away from the flames that began chewing it up.

It was nice remembering the havoc he had wreaked today on the Nazi rail-head. He had had some help, of course, for he had not been alone then. Two other B25As had been along. They were gone now, but while the three of them had been going the bombs had straddled a line of flat cars carrying essential Nazi fuel, had left them smothered in a pall of smoke and flame. Joe Torry had been a good bomb-aimer.

HIS side felt atrophied and he explored it with his fingers. They came back red with clotted blood. The B25A kept dropping and for a few horrible moments Alyard thought it had burst into flame. But it was only a searchlight's beam knifing through the crippled plane.

Dying was a man's job. Every time you went up you had to be prepared

to die. But Alyard did not want to burn.

The port engine was trying to tear itself loose and Alyard, gripped with nausea, fought to compensate for its actions. The ground was reaching for him. Two great trees were its arms and there were two ponds down there not far apart and they were its eyes.

He did not hear the crunch of metal or see the wing snap off. He was wrapped in blessed fog when the B25A ploughed through shrubbery and piled up against the side of a hill.

Alyard opened his eyes, closed them again, for the involuntary action drove a terrible ache through his head. For a long time he lay there, not quite sure that he was alive, until the sounds coming out of the night had meaning. The dull *crump-crump* of shells over the Channel, the faint buzz of planes in the sky. The music of tiny night life was all around him, and somewhere a dog barked.

Alyard tried to move, found one of his legs free. The other? He smiled grimly. His arms were all right because he could move his fingers and his skull was intact, for he could think. He thought of a prison camp in Poland just as a man spoke to him. He spoke in German and Alyard guessed he was through with the war. He opened his eyes and looked up at the square face so close to his own.

"You are alive, yes?"

"Trying to make up my mind, Fritz," Alyard choked out.

"Your leg it is crushed, *mein Freund*," the German said. He reached down and groped with his fingers, suddenly cried out. "Ach, the bone is splintered, Englishman. You don't cry out, but you must have pain."

"All Englishmen, according to the *Feuhrer*," Alyard bit out, "are cowards, sure. What do they say about Americans, Fritz? I'm an Amer—"

Alyard felt cold. A sound throbbed and drowned out all other noises. A

steady, measured *thump-thump-thump*. Like water dripping off the eaves of a house and hitting flagstone. Fuel dripping against stressed metal. He could smell it.

"A cigarette, *Amerikanischer*?" the German said icily. "Always when a man is in pain he likes the cigarette."

"Petrol—gasoline, Fritz. No cigarette!"

"Of course, *mein Herr*. How is the pain?"

"Won't let me forget it, will you?" Alyard ground out, beads of moisture shining around his lips. "Where am I?"

"Near St. Omer," the German said. "I am *Leutnant* Paul Hanstedt of the *Luftwaffe*. I had a brother killed only a week ago. I promised him—"

"So the Nazis have me," Alyard said in a tight voice. "Always wondered what I'd do and say to them when they caught up with me. Call them Huns of course, what, Fritz? Tell them to go to the devil—yeah. But there are no brass hats about to listen to the melodrama. How did you happen to be here to meet me?"

"I am to meet a girl here." The German grinned. "Her name is Marcette. It is a nice trysting place, *mein Herr*. Near the ruins of the Abbey Thierry d'Alsace close to the Pont Haut marshes. Despite what you have heard to the contrary, the French are quite cooperative. Their women have been nice to us, yes."

LEUTNANT HANSTEDT took his cigarette case out again. The moonlight striking against his face accentuated his ghoulish smile.

"The fuel drops steadily," Hanstedt said. "One little spark and you are finished with the war, aren't you? Wouldn't want to hobble about on one leg the rest of your life, would you?"

Alyard did not speak. He was reading a devilish sentence in Hanstedt's eyes. The beat of little liquid drops seemed to be inside his head. *Thump-*

thump-thump. Keeping time with the pound of his heart.

"Of course you wouldn't," Hanstedt said. "Even if I should be fool enough to go to St. Omer and get a surgeon, I doubt if you would survive amputation, *mein Freund*. Ah, I see you have pain. In a little while, you will start screaming for your life. I heard Eric scream when they pulled him out of the Messerschmitt, *ja*. The flames had finished what the bullets had started!"

Hanstedt slowly slid a cigarette between his thin lips.

"An English cigarette, *mein Herr*. A Gold Flake."

Captain George Alyard knew that one of the most fanatic followers of Hitler was prolonging a grim execution. Hanstedt—Hanstedt. Yes, he remembered Major Eric Hanstedt, the Nazi who boasted of ninety-one victories, the Messup butcher who shot men dangling from parachutes.

The petrol kept dripping. In Alyard's brain it sent out thunderous echoes. He had to think. Suddenly he ground his teeth and groaned, covered his face with his hands.

"*Ach*, you feel pain and you are afraid, *Amerikanischer*. Like the English dogs, you are a decadent race. Up to this moment, your wound was numbed." Hanstedt drew a little silver lighter from his tunic. "I wish to hear you scream—like my brother Eric. Not too loud, for you might scare the French girl away."

George Alyard smiled under the cover of his hands. These Nazis did not think for themselves. Their leaders did the thinking for them. Every Nazi who had began his hellish apprenticeship in a *Jungvolk* camp and had graduated from Gatow was a psychological guinea pig for a non-totalitarian to study well.

"The pain—it is terrible," Alyard forced out. "Get help, Fritz. I'm a prisoner of war and I'm entitled to—"

Alyard swore and twisted his body in the cramped space of the wrecked

B25A's office. He cried out and Hanstedt laughed. The Nazi flamed the lighter and shielded the flickering fire with one hand. He got the cigarette going and drew sweet smoke into his lungs. He quickly snapped the lighter off and blew smoke into Alyard's face.

"No!" Alyard called out huskily. "A spark from that cigarette . . . Listen, you Nazis aren't that devilish. You—"

"I can hear Eric screaming," Hanstedt said. "Every night since, I have heard his scream. That is why they sent me here—to rest my nerves, *Amerikanischer*. There is only one way to stop his screaming. No, I will not go to St. Omer for a surgeon, *mein Freund*. They have enough to do as it is. We have our own wounded, and one Nazi life is worth a million of the enemy. It won't last long."

"One thing I ask," Alyard pleaded. "Just a puff from the cigarette, Hanstedt. It is little enough to give me—to ask even of a Nazi."

"Of course," Hanstedt smiled and leaned forward. "To show you we are not heartless beasts."

ALYARD groaned and closed his eyes for a moment, and he looked terribly weak.

Hanstedt cupped the cigarette with one hand and slid the moist end between Alyard's lips.

Captain George Alyard, pilot of the B25A seized at the one little avenue of escape. Quickly he drew the lighted cigarette into his mouth and his hands reached up as quickly as striking snake-heads and closed on Hanstedt's throat. He spat the wet cigarette into the Nazi's face as he summoned every last ounce of strength in his body.

Hanstedt struggled, but the hands that were on his throat were those of a man fighting for his life. Fingers like as many lengths of steel dug deeper into his flesh. His eyes strained at their sockets and all light had gone out of them.

In the Nazi's numbing brain was a feeling of stark wonderment, a compote of voices, his leaders' voices telling him that he was of the master race, that all Americans and Englishmen were miserable Royston crows, decadent Hoodie crows. All the voices, one of them the bombastic, irrational delivery of Adolf Hitler, began to die.

George Alyard clung to the Nazi's throat a long time after the man was dead. Then he let the Nazi's body slump down against him and waited for the strength to come so that he could pull him off. The petrol kept dripping, but it was fainter now than the hammering of Alyard's heart.

He was sure he heard a voice. Overhead a squadron of planes filled the night sky with a plethora of sound. Alyard smiled thinly. He knew the voices of the English bombers.

The voice came again. It was a woman's voice.

"Here," Alyard said. "In here."

The woman's face was near his own.

"*Merci, bon Dieu*," she said. "You have killed him."

"You are Marcette," Alyard forced out, then told her what she could do to help him get clear of the wreck of the B25A.

"It was not so bad as I made him think, Marcette," Alyard said. "Here, in my pocket is a knife. I'll try and twist my body so—"

The French girl worked swiftly. She managed to pull the dead German clear of Alyard, then she worked with the knife, close to the heavy engine that pinned the pilot to the wreckage. Alyard was crawling away from the bomber a few minutes later. Fifty feet away from it, he caved in.

A voice called Alyard back again. He felt the girl's hands under his shoulders and she was dragging him along the ground. The whole area seemed ablaze with light and there was a roaring, crackling sound. Alyard turned his head and saw the burning attack bomber.

"He is in there," the woman said. "I set it afire. Please, *M'sieu*, try an' help. We mus' get to the forest of Clairmarais. In the ruins of the abbey we can hide until—"

CAPTAIN ALYARD threw an arm around the girl of France and hobbled along with her. Later, in the depths of the woods, she got water, tore strips of cloth from her skirt, and washed and dressed the wound in his side. While she worked, the sounds of English bombs shook the stillness of the woods.

They were falling toward the coast, tons of them.

"It won't be long," Marcette said fiercely. "My France will be free again. Now I must leave you here. I will go to get my friends . . ."

Twenty-four hours later, George Alyard, clad in a peasant's clothes, lay on the bottom of a small boat crawling slowly along a canal in the direction of St. Omer. Marcette crouched at his side. When they landed not far from the city, German soldiers examined them.

"*Heil Hitler*," Marcette said. "My brother and I—"

Alyard leaned on his cane and produced his identification. A card that belonged to another man.

"*Heil Hitler*," Alyard said, his words sour in his mouth, his spine filled with little stinging needles.

"Jacques was in the factory when the English bombs hit it," Marcette said. "The dirty butchers—the Churchill pigs!"

They were allowed to go on, and together they continued toward the Channel. All the next day and the next night they were in the cellar of a ruined farmstead two miles out of St. Omer. In the French underground with six others who wanted to reach England. Three aviators, a stranded commando and a man whose life was forfeit because he had slit a Nazi officer's throat.

The commando, a grim-looking figure in his black uniform, his face smeared with grime, said:

"The chaps should be here by dark. It is scheduled for tonight. I got a message from Henri Duchard, who talks with the English in his cellar—a short-wave set, inside an old music box. Beauforts and Fighters and the boats. Duchard sets off the power station in an hour. Everything timed."

Transportation arrived. It was a German armored car with a Rheinmettal-Borsig gun on the hood. There were traces of blood inside the car when Alyard was loaded aboard. The three French fliers went with him. Marcette's good luck kiss was on Alyard's cheek when the car roared toward the Channel.

At Gravesend, on the coast, the armored car went into action. It arrived at the same time as the boats filled with deadly butcher and bolts, with the Beauforts and Spitfires. The German gun on the hood blazed a path through the Nazi beach patrol. Beauforts screeched overhead and the Spitfires added their whine to the growl of Taurus engines.

The black-clad raiders poured across the dunes, carrying deadly instruments of war, and Alyard hobbled through them, the light of battle in his bloodshot eyes. He threw his cane away when the water was up to his waist and let the salt brine's buoyancy and coolness gather him in.

He swam toward the nearest boat and climbed in. The bullets and cannon shells from Nazi Messups raked it as he fell into it. His strength spent, Alyard let himself go and the fury of battle was lost on him. . . .

THE survivors of the raid were going back across the Channel.

Searchlights stabbed at the sky from both sides of the narrow strip, and British night fighters were overhead, driving off the last of the Nazi inter-

ceptors. Their tracers made weird patterns in the sky.

Alyard was on his back, looking up at them. A face blotted out the view of the pyrotechnics, a face blackened by soot.

"Leg's gone what, old chap?" the raider said. "Have a drink of something, m'lud."

Alyard let some rum get deep inside of him and warm him up.

"American flying bloke," the commando said. "I say, what—" He yelled for a comrade.

"Doesn't hurt a bit," Alyard grinned. "A Nazi wouldn't believe me at first, either. Had to make him think it was pretty awful, that I was too far gone to put up a fight. Funny guys, the Nazis—can't think for themselves."

"Well, sky my old auntie's calico

cat," a commando suddenly gasped....

In the hospital, Alyard grinned at a nurse who was not too pretty. American and British flying officers were grouped near his bed. The nurse took the wrappings off something she had brought in and laid it beside Alyard. An American magazine correspondent grinned and made some notes.

"What they can't do nowadays," Alyard said. "My new leg, gentlemen. Aluminum and as light as a feather. Great improvement over that clumsy wooden one I left in the B Twenty-five A. The Cyclone did a complete job of smashing it. Yes, I'll have a cigarette, Major. But, Nurse—do something for me, will you? Have them fix that leaky faucet over the basin there. It leaks and goes thump-thump-thump-thump. Gets on my nerves."

An American Prize-Fighter Battles Under R.A.F. Command in FLYING GUNNER, Tracy Mason's Thrill-Packed Novel Next Issue!

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MEN BEHIND THE PLANES

AMAZING STORIES OF BRITISH GENIUS

FOR every man in a plane there are many men on the ground, in the factories, in the scientific laboratories, doing the ticklish mechanical ... work and the vital experimental study so necessary to the success of aviation—especially in wartime.

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AIR MARSHAL BISHOP AND CLAYTON KNIGHT—A GREAT TEAM!

BACK in the early day of World War II, a distinguished American artist who flew side by side with Canadian Air Marshal Billy Bishop when von Richthofen's circus was battling the old Allies, headed the call of the British Ace of Aces and thereby gave an invaluable boost to the then newly-inaugurated Commonwealth Air Training Scheme.

All plane fans are familiar with the flying pictures that stem from the facile brush and pencil of Clayton Knight. Not so many, however, are aware of the fact that he was one of that fabulous group of "War Birds" who made the French sky miserable for the Kaiser's aviators back in 1918 and compiled a notable record in action.

When Air Marshal Bishop was placed in charge of the Air Training Scheme, he had at his disposal a few primitive Canadian airfields, a flock of callow youths who knew nothing about flying and a scant number of obsolete Fairey Battles and decrepit Ansons, long since discarded by the Coastal Command.

The plane situation was desperate, but even direr was the new program's need of competent instructors for future RAF flyers and bombardiers. At that time, the United States was full of able flyers sitting around on the seats of their pants.

So Bishop sent an S. O. S. to his old friend Clayton Knight. Too old to fly in this war and not sufficiently up-to-date to teach the fledglings himself, Knight, in collaboration with an ex-wing commander, Homer Smith of the RCAF, did something that proved a lot more valuable.

The two of them primed the pump for a project that is today turning out trained pilots at a rate of 25,000 a year. Opening a recruiting station in New York and passing the word around among their flying

friends in America, they enlisted 500 seasoned flyers as instructors for civilian flying schools in Canada.

A triumph of improvisation at its inception, the Commonwealth Air Training



Air Marshal Bishop

Scheme operates today from 93 up-to-the-minute flying fields in Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and the United States. It is the feeder for the entire RAF, without which that great organization could never have kept going.

"Its results may be big enough to win the war," Marshal Bishop said recently.

BLIND BRITISH EX-SERVICE MEN WORK IN WAR PLANT TO BEAT HITLER

BRITISH servicemen, blinded in action against the enemy, are now engaged in the production of war weapons, which they hope will exact full revenge for their disabilities and be a factor in the eventual victory of the United Nations.

This factory, the location of which is a closely guarded secret, has twelve blind employees, of whom four are former members of the British services who have survived their first bitter round with fate. Being forced to work in perpetual darkness has not dimmed their zeal to continue the fight against the Axis powers, but has rather fired their determination to furnish those who can see with a sure means of retribution.

For instance, when ex-Private Patrick Francis Campbell first began assembling blind-flying panels at the factory, fourteen assemblies were considered an ample morning's work. He increased the output to eighteen. Now he's been raised to deburring, which is tooling the roughness off the complicated castings which compose modern airplanes.

"Paddy" Campbell, 20-year-old former Royal Irish Fusilier, with a rich brogue, was fighting a rearguard action near Brussels to cover the withdrawal to Dunkirk when German artillery put down a barrage which cost him his sight.

Oldest of the four is ex-Bosun's Mate William Norman Stephenson, 44, late of the Royal Navy, and a veteran of the last war. His training made him familiar with engines and engine parts, and he now handles with sensitive, perceptive fingers such equipment as baffles, air intakes and generators.

"I seem to see them," he says, "and I never make a mistake among the smallest parts, no matter how much alike they are." One eye was lost when he was blown by a bomb into the sea from the deck of an anti-aircraft cruiser, and, six hours later, as he floated on a raft, a machine-gun bullet from a German plane destroyed the other. When

surgeons attended him later, they found 19 bullets in his body.

"So you see, I have something to pay back," Stephenson said.

The "baby" of this grim quartette was singing as he worked. He is just concluding his first fortnight at the factory. He was also the "baby" at Saint Dunstan's famous institution for equipping blind men to face life anew, where all four were trained. He was, in addition, the "baby" of the Woolwich Home Guard.

But William Cowing, at 18, is a vigorous six-footer. When fire bombs rained on the headquarters roof in March, 1941, he raced upstairs four steps at a time. A high explosive bomb made a direct hit when he was halfway up. With gashed throat, wounded chest and both eyes blown out, he was dug out from the ruins.

"I reckon," he said, "I got my packet of bad luck all at once. You see, I'm the thirteenth child of the family."

Philip Todd, 29, veteran of the now mechanized Royal Horse Artillery, who has been five months at the factory, is Cowing's bench mate and also shares his lodgings. A Newcastle man, he was eight years in the Artillery, passed unscathed through the retreat at Dunkirk and the ordeal of its beaches until a shell exploded in a gun breech and blinded him.

"Maybe I'm not so quick-like with my hands as the other blind blokes, but when I was young I used heavy tools in the mines, and it made my hands tough," he says. His bosses are fully satisfied with his proficiency.

Here in the factory, these blind heroes of the war find life, if not what it was, at least very worthwhile. Their workmates are considerate, and kindly, and give them their greatest treat of the week when they take them to the movies—for though they can't see the action on the screen, they can follow the dialogue like a radio show. That's their favorite entertainment.



FLYING DOCTORS OF THE R. A. F.

IUT in the western desert of Africa an R.A.F. pilot lay in the wreckage of his shattered plane. His skull was fractured, one arm was broken. Beside him lay the observer with both arms broken.

A British aircraft spotted them, reported their position to the base, and immediately a doctor was flown to the scene of the crash. He administered anaesthetics and dealt with the fractures. At dawn, an ambulance plane took the doctor and his patients back to the base hospital.

This is a typical example of the calls the medical officers of the R.A.F. have to make. No matter where the R.A.F. may be, the unswerving rule is that if the patient can-

not be brought to the doctor, the doctor must be taken to the patient.

One R.A.F. doctor had to perform a blood transfusion in a tent surrounded by whirling sand. The patient, a South African rear-gunner, had been badly wounded when he baled out of a shot-up plane. The doctor called for volunteer blood donors, worked swiftly under difficult conditions, and saved the gunner's life.

But treating wounded R.A.F. men is only part of the work done by the flying doctors. Much of their time is spent in research on the physiological requirements of flying. They make special flights to discover the reactions on their own bodies, brains and

vision of the stresses inseparable from modern high-speed and long-range flying. As far as possible, they fly under the same conditions as those encountered on fighter sweeps and high-ceiling, long-range operations.

A fighter aircraft with a doctor aboard will be dived at speed, pulled out, zoomed, rolled and thrown all over the sky, exactly as it would be in a fight with the enemy. And while it is performing these acrobatics, the doctor notes his own physical and mental reactions. From this data adequate treatment can be devised for operational personnel.

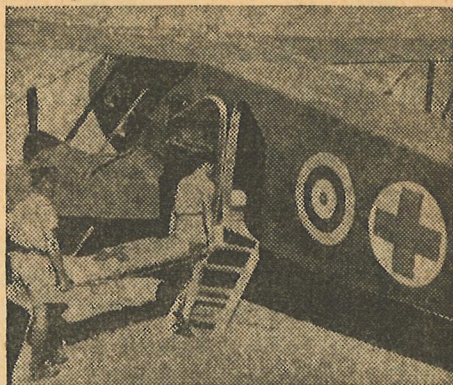
Doctors also make long-range cross-country flights at the ceiling reached over enemy country. They study their reactions and those of the crew. It was through such first-hand experience that the use of oxygen at high altitudes was perfected.

Some air doctors are first-class pilots and take aircraft up themselves to judge a pilot's reactions. One physician had a ciné camera fitted in the cockpit to film his facial changes as he deliberately "blacked-out"—that is, dived at such speed that when he pulled out he momentarily lost consciousness.

The first warning signal of blacking-out is a feeling that the tissues of the face and eyes are being sucked inwards and downwards. Then there is a downward displacement of the contents of the abdomen, followed by a gradually increasing dimness

of the whole visual field. The climax is sudden blindness and a tingling sensation in the calves of the legs.

The great danger of blacking-out is the momentary loss of control over the machine during a critical maneuver. Medical researchers have found that the possibility



An R. A. F. ambulance plane in Egypt

of blacking-out is decreased if the pilot is in a crouched sitting position, with legs raised, during high acceleration.

One other duty performed in the Middle East by medical officers in the R.A.F. is flying to the aid of stricken tribesmen. Such service has built up a strong spirit of good will for Britain among the African tribes.



THE WACK FROM DOWN UNDER

FORTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD Lawrence James Wackett is not only the kind of chap who has to take a watch apart to see what makes it tick—he is also a member of that much rarer species that can reassemble it so that it will run much better than before. Incidentally, he is also the first figure in Australian aviation today as he was one of the first Australians to fly and build planes just before World War One.

Lean and lanky, he has always been known as "the Wack," which indicates a slight deviation from the normal down under as it does here. He acquired it not because of any erratic behavior, but for his incorrigible habit of tinkering with whatever machinery was at hand while his fellows were out indulging themselves in the usual male pleasures.

This habit first evidenced itself back in 1913 when, as a first-year student at the Royal Military College at Duntroon, Wackett proceeded to invent an automatic fuse setter for artillery shells, in which he was well ahead of all other inventors in the world.

The War cut short his scholastic training, flung him into Palestine and France as a pilot, later a flight commander in the Royal Australian Flying Corps. He became

a terror aloft thanks to a self-made machine-gun mount which was well ahead of its time in mobility and deadliness, previewed parachute warfare by once dropping 100,000 rounds of ammunition to a beleaguered infantry unit via the umbrella route.

He wound up a major of 21 with the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Force Cross, re-earned his nickname of "Wack" by staying on in England to study plane manufacture after the war instead of heading for home, later got through a three-year course at Melbourne University in twelve months.

During the interim between wars, Wackett, in and out of the Army, argued, fought, built and pleaded for an Australian air industry to add to the island's self sufficiency and protect it from the attack that he, like all other intelligent men, saw was coming.

He built midget land planes and bigger amphibians, built them out of native materials and without proper machine tools—yet they flew as well as any planes of their period. He became a genius at improvisation, and in the course of making a substitute do as well often came up with something better than the original.

Finally, in 1936, with the Japs already making menacing gestures, Australian in-

(Concluded on Page 99)

YESTERDAY'S ACE

By STUART CAMPBELL

Squadron Leader Colliston Goes All Out for the Son of His World War One Buddy—to Pay a Twenty-Three-Year-Old Debt!

CHAPTER I

Son of His Father

RALSTON forgot about his tail, sir," Flight Lieutenant Barber said through stiff lips. "He was after a Heinkel, and didn't see the flock of Messerschmitts that dropped down on him. I gave him a scream over the flap-mike but I



guess he didn't hear. The rest of us couldn't get across the sky to him in time. He didn't have a chance. A flamer. He didn't bail out. I guess he was dead before his bus caught fire. I hope so."

"Please God, he did!" murmured Colliston, Squadron Leader of the Forty-fifth Fighters, R.A.F. "All right, Barber. Congratulations on your Flight getting three of the beggars. Make out your patrol report, and then knock off for a bit. Green Flight will take over stand-to."

The flight lieutenant nodded, turned, and walked out of the squadron office. Colliston compressed his lips to a thin line, clenched his two fists, and stared at the closed door, bleak-eyed. His face seemed to age ten years in as many seconds.

Group Captain Spendle, sitting at his elbow, stared at him for a moment, then reached out a hand and touched him on the arm.

"Steady, Colliston," he said gently. "You should be able to stand up under this sort of thing. You saw enough of it in the last war. Don't let it get you down, man. It's bound to happen. It's war, you know."

Colliston didn't say anything for a few moments. Not if he lived to be a hundred could he get used to "this sort of thing." Get used to a mess of enemy planes dropping down out of the blue and riddling some poor devil with certain death? He could not, because of what had happened one day in that other war. It had not been Messerschmitts then. It had been Fokkers. And they had piled down on two Royal Flying Corps Camels far behind the German lines on a suicide observation patrol.

He had been in one of those Camels. In the other had been an American named Pat Hogan, his hutment mate, and closest friend in the squadron. Hogan had saved his life. Barged straight into a withering blast of Spandaus bullets meant for him. And Hogan had paid with his life. Gone down in flames. They had not had parachutes in those days.

Colliston had eventually managed to get safely back to the English lines with the valuable information that he and Hogan had gone after. But the war, and life, had not been the same after that. And the memory of that day 'way back in 1917 had lived in Colliston's mind like a live coal ever since.

"I'm all right, sir," he finally said gruffly to the group captain. "Just hate to have them go. Especially fledglings, like Ralston. Just a kid. Well, anything else I can show you on this visit, sir?"

"No—seen everything," the group captain grunted. "Just popped down as routine, you know. Adastral House insists on that. I'll be buzzing along now. Keep a stiff upper lip, Colliston. Bloody war to be won, and all that rot.

A NOVELET OF FIGHTING COURAGE



A Messerschmitt was streaking down at him, its nose jetting flame

I'll try and jack up Central Training to send you the replacements you need. See you anon, old chap. Thumbs up!"

EITHER Fate, or Group Captain Spendle, worked fast. At any rate, late that afternoon the squadron office door was pushed open and two flushed-faced, eager-eyed pilot officers stepped inside and saluted smartly.

One was tall, dark, and built a little on the broomstick side. The other was medium, fair, and had an air about him that seemed to say he could give a good account of himself in any man's war.

Colliston looked up from some paper work, smiled, returned the salute, and waved at a couple of chairs.

"Make yourselves comfortable, lads," he said. "Fresh up from Central Training, eh? Good! Glad to have you with us. Welcome to the bloody war, and all that sort of thing. Got your papers, of course?"

"Right here, sir," the tall one said, and Colliston instantly saw in his mind the venerable halls of Oxford. "Jolly glad to get posted to this station, sir."

"And mine, sir," the other fledgling said, and handed over his papers. "Hope I can start pitching, and soon!"

Colliston stiffened slightly and looked at him.

"Yank?" he murmured.

"Yes sir," the youth replied with a grin. "My mother was British before she married Dad, but I was born in the States. New York. So of course that makes me Yank. But there's nothing that can top the R.A.F. in my book. So I signed up, instead of waiting for Pearl Harbor, if you get what I mean."

Colliston didn't answer. As a matter of fact he hardly heard the chatter that spilled off the youth's lips. He was staring down at the Central Training papers, and the type seemed to be swimming around before his eyes.

One set stated that the tall fledgling was one R.V.C. Fenton, English-born, schooled, and the rest of it. The other set of papers stated that the fair-haired youth was one Paul Hogan, American, enlisted for duration and six months afterward, and so forth. In case of death the next of kin to be notified was his mother, Mary Louise Hogan, at such and such an address in New York.

"Hey! You sick, sir? Want me to get you a glass of water, or something?"

Young Hogan's voice seemed to come from a long way off. Colliston got a tight grip on himself, swallowed quickly, and looked up.

"No, no thanks," he said. "I'm all right. Quite. Well, welcome, Fenton, and you Hogan. Go hunt up Adjutant Traxton. You'll find him in the mess, I fancy. He'll show you around, and assign you quarters, and what not. I'll see you again, later. No, never mind the saluting, chaps. We don't go in much for that around here—unless Brass Hats are about. See you later."

The two fledglings grinned and shot out of the squadron office door like a couple of school kids released for recess. Colliston stared at the closed

door for a long minute, then shook himself, took a deep breath, and looked again at Hogan's Central Training papers. They contained only the usual stuff, however, for the squadron files. There was no family history or anything like that. Such information was filed at Personnel at Adastral House.

Colliston read them through, however, but learned little apart from Hogan's flight training record. Yet, when he finally stopped reading and put them to one side on his desk, he knew for certain in his heart that Fate, or whatever you want to call it, had played him the dirtiest of tricks.

"Pat Hogan's son, come to my squadron!" he breathed softly. "Can it be, or am I just losing my mind? Pat married an English girl during that last leave of his. And her name was . . . Louise? I'm sure of it! Or am I?"

HE placed his elbows on the desk, rested his head on his two clenched fists, and closed his eyes tight, as though that would help him to bring back the half-forgotten details of the past. But twenty-three years was a long time to go back. Much had happened since, and only one item was definitely burned into his memory. That suicide observation patrol he had made with Hogan. The many other little items were all jumbled up.

But Pat Hogan *had* got married during that last leave of his. Colliston had been scheduled for leave at the same time. Matter of fact, he was to stand up with Pat and meet the lovely lady for the first time. But his leave had been canceled, and Pat had gone to England alone.

Ten days later he had come back to the squadron. And three days after that he had gone down in flames. Colliston never had met Pat's wife. He had not gone back to England until after the war. The transfer of the

entire squadron to the Middle East Front had taken care of that.

When he had returned to England it had been to learn that Pat's wife had gone to America to live with his family. He had never even written her. What could he have said? What good would it have done? Pat was dead. Why refresh her memories and agonies?

"But her name was Louise!" he murmured. "Yes, Mary Louise. I'd swear to it. So this young chap is—"

He stopped short, raised his head, and shook it savagely.

"It can't be!" he groaned. "Just my blasted imagination. That doesn't happen. The world isn't that small. Pull up your socks, Colliston! Stop making up fairy stories. You'll be a blithering, raving idiot before you know it! Come off it, my lad!"

That was easier said than done. In the evening, at mess, it was all he could do to stop from just sitting at the table and staring at the Yank fledgling. A hundred thousand times he was almost overcome by the desperate urge to question the youth. To find out for sure. But each time he checked himself. He didn't want to find out the truth, for fear that he would learn that a miracle *had* come to pass, that the son of his best friend in one war was now under his command in another.

He didn't want that to be, for he had always considered himself responsible for Pat Hogan's death. It had been he who had suggested that mad patrol to Hogan, and induced the American-born Royal Flying Corps ace to come along. That he had brought back valuable information did not compensate for Pat's death in his mind. And it never would. So to have Pat's son placed under his orders . . . The Fates just couldn't be that cruel!

And so he refused to find out the truth. He concentrated on forcing himself to believe that it was just his

own imagination going haywire. And his most convincing argument was that young Paul Hogan possessed none of the physical appearances of Pat Hogan.

Just the same, that did not stop Colliston from joining the patrol next day when young Hogan and young Fenton were taken out for their first look at the war on the Occupied France side of the Channel. Nor did that stop him from practically resting the belly of his Spitfire on young Hogan's tail when a flock of Messerschmitts dropped down out of nowhere and gave battle.

CHAPTER II

Suicide Patrol

AS a matter of fact, that patrol simply added to the agony in the squadron leader's mind. It did, for the simple reason that it was as though he were seeing Pat Hogan again at the stick of a plane. When the Messerschmitts dropped down and things began to happen, young Hogan made a lot of the usual fledgling mistakes, but a certain wild daring that made Colliston's heart bleed, carried him through before the Messerschmitts could pick him off.

When the patrol was over, young Paul Hogan had a whole Messerschmitt to his credit, and a share in the destruction of a second one. And Colliston had a refreshed memory of what a hard-flying, fast-shooting pilot Pat Hogan had been.

And so it went for the next ten days.

Paul Hogan more than earned himself a regular place in Forty-five. And Colliston realized more and more that all of his arguments to the contrary were simply a waste of effort. Pat Hogan lived again in young Paul. The ten-day-old fledgling, actually a

veteran now, was Pat's son.

Yet Colliston still couldn't bring himself to confirm the truth. And he was honest enough to admit to himself that the thing that stopped him was the fact that the lad would naturally want to know about his father's last flight. And he couldn't tell him that. Couldn't, because he would have to tell the youngster that he had been responsible for Pat Hogan's death.

Whether that were true or not, Collister believed so in his own heart. And that was reason enough to keep silent.

On the eleventh day after young Hogan's arrival at the squadron, Group Captain Spendle suddenly showed up on one of his surprise visits. It wasn't routine this time, though. It was strictly business. Important business, and at his request all the pilots were assembled in the briefing room of the Operations hut. He waited until they had stopped shuffling their feet, and were comfortably seated, then cleared his voice.

"A bit of an unusual request from Adastral House, gentlemen," he began. "A job that's got to be done at once, and in a hurry. Adastral House got me on the phone not half an hour ago, and I buzzed right down here, rather than to any of the other units in my command."

The group captain paused long enough for the pilots to grasp the fact that a fine compliment had been paid to their squadron. Then he continued, turning to the huge map on the ready room wall behind him.

"It's a one-man show," he said. "At least, I pray it will come out just that way. Briefly, the job is this. We've received the report that the Nazi's *Scheer* and *Tirpitz* are holed-up in the Bukken Fjord at the southern end of Norway. It is simply a report, and not confirmed at all. Adastral House wants proof. Definite proof. Yesterday scouting bombers were sent up there to take pictures. They couldn't

even get close. Nazi planes and ground fire kept them at a distance.

"Two of our planes that did break through, were lost. The long-range pictures taken show nothing that can be accepted as definite proof. I mean, they show two Nazi warcraft there, but they may or may not be the real thing. They may be perfect bits of camouflage. It wouldn't be the first time the Nazis stuck up dummy ships to fool us."

The senior officer paused again to clear his throat.

"Frankly, we don't know where the *Scheer* and the *Tirpitz* are," he went on. "It is imperative that we find out. If they are at Bukken Fjord, then well and good. A strong unit of our North Sea Fleet now standing well off shore will continue its watch to see that they stay there. If those are dummies there, though, the Admiralty wants to know, because it has other jobs for that guarding unit now patrolling off shore at that point.

"A regular photo patrol, regardless of strength, has been proved definitely useless, to say nothing of costly. The job must be done by a single man in a type of plane the Nazis wouldn't be looking for in that area. In short, complete surprise. One of you chaps in a Spitfire must do the trick. Streak up there low, get a good look at things before the Nazis have a chance to get after you, then clear out in a hurry."

A PUZZLED frown appeared on every face as the group captain stopped talking. Every pilot there knew that even with extra tanks, and a much reduced ammo load, a Spitfire wouldn't be able to make it to Bukken Fjord and back, unless it had a tail wind both ways. The senior officer saw the frowns and made a little gesture with one hand.

"Naturally your fuel wouldn't let you get back here," he said. "Probably wouldn't be able to make even a point on the coast of Scotland. I

don't expect you to. *If* the chap gets away after taking his look, he is to fly due west until he picks up the Fleet unit on patrol. There's no carrier with it, so he'll have to land in the water and be picked up. Perhaps, though, rather than risk a water crash injury he had better bail out and go down by parachute.

"The point is, though, he must obtain definite proof of just what *is* in the Fjord. He's got to go in low enough down so that his own eyes will tell him whether it's the real thing, or just blasted camouflage. No mistakes, mind you. No wild guessing. Make certain! I need not tell you what a bloody mess it might turn into if the Admiralty sent the Fleet unit to other waters, and the *Scheer* and *Tirpitz* actually are in the Fjord.

"And so, make certain! If you are not certain in your own mind after you get back and are picked up, be sure to report so. Another chap will try it. In other words, if one chap fails, whether it's from being shot down or uncertainty, the next chap will be sent out to have a go at it. And so on, until we find out for sure.

"Of course, in a certain sense, this is a suicide assignment I've brought you. The first chap may not succeed, nor the next, nor the next. But, you've got to keep trying until you do find out for sure. We must know one way or the other, and as soon as possible. Therefore, it can't be anything but a volunteer job."

The group captain stopped talking and turned to Colliston.

"Or perhaps I'm wrong about that?" he grunted. "Perhaps there's some particular pilot you want to have a go at it first?"

"Yes," the squadron leader replied promptly. "Myself!"

Group Captain Spendle smiled, but shook his head.

"Definitely, no," he said. "A squadron leader is barred from this kind of a show. It will have to be one of

your pilots."

Colliston opened his mouth to protest hotly, but checked himself when he realized the futility of it all. That was one of the rotten things about being a squadron leader. Your job was to give orders and direct others. Yours was one of squadron responsibility. You couldn't go batting off on some solo show. A bird in a gilded cage had more personal freedom than a squadron leader!

"Very well, sir," he murmured instead. "But, I've no special chap in mind. They're all good. As you say, it'll be a volunteer job, and—"

Colliston stopped and grinned. Every pilot of Forty-five had sprung to his feet and was clamoring for attention. He shook his head and lifted his hands for silence.

"Just as I expected," he said. "So, as I was about to say, you'll draw lots for it. Numbered slips in a hat. Number One goes first, then Two, and so on. But, I hope there won't be any Number Two chap taking off. Right-o. Half a minute, chaps, while I fix up the slips."

MINUTES later, Colliston had made out the slips and dumped them into a helmet somebody handed him. He stirred them up and motioned for the pilots to come by in line. Young Hogan was the tenth pilot to draw a slip. He looked at it and let out a joyous whoop.

"Hot dog, I catch!" he yelled, and waved the Number One slip in the air. "My lucky day. Anybody got Number Two, yet?"

It was Flight Lieutenant Barber who answered.

"Right here, my lad!" he called out. "Why?"

Young Hogan grinned and made motions with his hands.

"Might as well tear it up, sir," he said with a chuckle. "I got a hunch I'll be lucky."

Barber didn't say anything. He

just smiled and stuck his numbered slip in his pocket. Barber had been around a long time. He'd had experience trying to crash through concentrated Nazi defenses alone. The smile he gave Hogan said that it was his sincerest wish that the Yank's hunch *would* come true.

As for Colliston, Hogan's joyous announcement seemed to cake his heart with ice, and make it start to slide down into his belly. He hardly noticed the remainder of the pilots drawing their slips. He stared at the happy, flushed-faced Yank and felt worse and worse by the minute.

It was on the tip of his tongue to call the drawing off. Or at least to exert his authority to do so, and to order Hogan and Barber to change places. There was good reason to do so, too. Barber was a veteran. He knew what it was all about. Hogan was still only a ten-day-old fledgling, or veteran, if you wish. It might be suicide to let a pilot that green tackle such a dangerous mission.

Yet even as Colliston thought of all the good and sound arguments against letting Hogan undertake the mission, he knew that he had to let things stand. The drawing had been fair and square. Luck had touched Hogan on the shoulder. And, after all, the Yank had certainly proved himself a pilot with courage and ability. It would cast a slur upon Hogan's service to the squadron to refuse to let him go. And it might, also, give rise to the possibility of favoritism in his command. There was only one thing for him to do—let things stand. Yet . . .

CHAPTER III

Guardian in the Air

COLLISTON cursed under his breath, realized that he was still standing there holding an empty hel-

met. He tossed it on the table and went over to where Spendle was talking with young Hogan. The group captain was giving the young Yank detailed instructions about the flight to be made just as soon as mechanics could check his Spitfire and make sure it was set to go.

Colliston listened to the instructions, and cursed himself some more for being such a fool. Young Hogan was R.A.F. This was all a part of his job. What if he were Pat Hogan's son? So what? Actually, perhaps he wasn't. It was silly to think as he did.

After all, *he* hadn't ordered Hogan to make this dangerous flight. Matter of fact, he wasn't in the least responsible for Hogan undertaking it. Or was he? He *could* call it off, and order Barber to go in Hogan's place.

Hardly realizing that he was doing so, Colliston went out of the Operations hut and over to the line. He gave orders for the mechanics to go over Hogan's plane with a fine-toothed comb. He watched them for a spell, then abruptly turned on his heel and went over to the squadron office. He, of course, would talk with Hogan later, wish him luck, and all that sort of thing.

Right now, though, he didn't want to see the lad. Something was building up inside of him. He was afraid that he might still refuse to let the lad go. What a fine squadron leader he was being! What an all-around fool he was, anyway! If only he were sure that young Hogan wasn't Pat's son, he would feel different.

Of course, one chap's life was just as dear as the next. Yet, hang it, he knew he *would* feel better about it all if he knew that it was not Pat Hogan's son he was letting go out on this one-in-a-thousand-of-coming-back-alive show.

For a long while he brooded, and cursed, and chewed his finger-nails in the squadron office. Then he shoved up violently out of his chair, shoul-

dered out through the squadron office door and over toward the line of planes.

He didn't see Hogan in the group of pilots there. Then he realized that the youngster was probably in his hutment leaving the usual note of instructions on what to do with his things, just in case he didn't make the grade.

For a moment Colliston was tempted to wait, to do Hogan the courtesy of letting him have these few minutes alone. But his feet started walking and he soon found himself before Hogan's hutment door. It was open a couple of inches. He pushed it open all the way, and stepped inside.

The room was empty, and a quick glance about told him that Hogan had skipped the "just in case" preparations. There was no letter, or anything like that on the pilot's bunk. As a matter of fact, the room looked like a cyclone had gone through it in high gear.

Colliston had started to turn and leave when suddenly a small leather double picture frame on a little table caught his eye. He could not see clearly from where he stood by the door, but the picture in the right-hand frame appeared to be of a man in uniform. It pulled him across the room as a powerful magnet pulls a nail. He bent over, stared at the picture, and felt his whole body go cold, and his heart to race madly in his chest.

It was a picture of a pilot in Royal Flying Corps uniform. It was a picture of Pat Hogan twenty-three years ago!

Colliston was just barely conscious of the picture of a smiling middle-aged woman in the other frame. His eyes were riveted on the 1917 picture of Pat Hogan. He suddenly remembered that he had taken that picture himself. He and Pat were having a weekend in Paris, and—

Every drop of blood seemed to flow out of Colliston's veins. He gripped

the edge of the table hard until his fingers ached. There was fire in his heart, and thunder in his head.

"Pat! I can't do it! I can't let your boy go on this show. I can stop him, Pat. I owe that much to you, lad. I—I will stop him!"

It seemed to take all of his strength to let go of the table and straighten up. And even then his legs refused to move. He just stood there staring down at the picture of his dead friend of another war. One side of him screamed to go out and stop young Hogan from taking off. The other side demanded that he remain right where he was.

And then suddenly he heard the roar of a Spitfire's Merlin hitting top revs. Something seemed to snap in his brain. Without another thought he spun around on one heel and dashed outside.

The roar of the Merlin was slamming the echo against the surrounding hillsides. And as Colliston raced toward the tarmac line he saw a Spitfire lift clear and go prop-clawing up into the English sky. In another few seconds he reached the group on the tarmac.

GROUP CAPTAIN SPENDLE saw him and frowned sharply.

"I say, where've you been, Colliston?" the senior officer demanded. "The chap was expecting you to see him off, you know. There he goes now. I say, there! Where're you going?"

"Just to keep him company for a spell!" Colliston shouted, and vaulted into his Spitfire.

The group captain opened his mouth and shouted something else, but Colliston did not hear. He was not listening. Besides, his own Merlin was roaring up into life.

No sooner did it catch than he kicked off the wheel brakes, and sent it rolling forward. As soon as he was clear of the other planes he opened

the gate and gave the Merlin everything it could take. That was plenty. The Spitfire virtually shot up into the air from a standing start.

When he had some five hundred feet of air under his wing, the squadron leader leveled off, gave the plane its head toward the northeast, and wiggled into his chute harness and safety belts. He grabbed the radio jack and was in the act of plugging it in but on second thought he dropped it and let it dangle down from the helmet he had jammed on his head.

He didn't know whether or not Hogan had his radio plugged in or not. And somehow he didn't want to make sure. He knew that if he contacted the kid over the air he would order him back to the field. He knew it was the one thing he had no right to do, but he knew that he *would* do it if he plugged in and radio contacted the Yank fledgling.

"Curse your emotions!" he ranted at himself savagely. "If you had any sense you'd turn back, and stop making a ruddy fool of yourself! But you're not turning back. You're going to tag along after the boy and do your blamest to see that he gets through. You're mad, insane, and completely balmy! But this is one way your can repay Pat a little. And so you're going to do it, aren't you?"

He let the question hang in the air and be blown away by the prop-wash. Then he savagely shut his mind to all questions and thoughts, and concentrated only on his flying. Hogan was a good six or seven miles ahead. A blob of black against the sky ahead and not over a thousand feet above the rolling slate-gray swells of the North Sea.

Shifting to a more comfortable position in his pit, Colliston kept one eye on the other Spitfire, and let the other rove about for signs of any other aircraft aloft. There were none that he could see. As a matter of fact there was not even the black smudge

of funnel smoke from a surface ship. And in less than no time Hogan and he were the only two moving things between a cloudless sky and an empty sea.

A year-long half hour finally became a full hour. Although he knew full well that he had gas for another thirty or thirty-five minutes in his over-sized tanks Colliston kept glancing anxiously at his fuel gauges as the horizon continued to be bare of nothing but sky and water.

Of course he was way down close to the water. Should he zoom for altitude he would no doubt make landfall in nothing flat. Still, it filled him with an eerie desolation to keep pouring high test to his Merlin and still see no sign of land. He wondered what young Hogan was thinking about.

His heart seemed suddenly to freeze up when he realized that he had been following the fledgling blindly, instead of checking his own compass course as he tore along. Suppose Hogan had gone haywire with his dead reckoning navigation? Suppose the pair of them were way off course, and actually prop-clawing right up the heart of the North Sea toward the emptiness of the Arctic Ocean?

HE realized instantly, of course, that such could not possibly be the case. If they were that far off their course they would be spotting the patrolling unit of the British Fleet. They would—

He let the rest go by the board and sat up stiff and straight in the seat. The air in front of Hogan's plane had suddenly become spotted by gobs of black, and red, and orange, and yellow. His heart turned to solid ice, and beads of sweat broke out on his body. He viciously cursed Group Captain Spendle, the Brass Hats of Adastral House, and anybody else who had had a part in thinking up

this kind of suicide show. For suicide it was, and no doubt about it! Those gobs of color right in front of Hogan's plane were the results of furious concentrated gunfire.

He knew in a flash that Hogan's plane had been spotted coming in low down, because the Nazis had been on the alert or just that sort of a trick! And even as he saw the anti-aircraft bursts he saw the dark shadow farther ahead that marked land, the southern coast of Norway.

In fact, it was as though a curtain had suddenly been pulled aside. Shoreline and jagged peaked mountains, tipped by snow, seemed virtually to pop up out of the water.

The Nazis had been waiting! They had spotted Hogan's plane streaking in low at close to four hundred an hour, and they were throwing everything they had at him. Colliston rammed his free fist hard against the already wide-open throttle and crouched like a man in a trance, like a man made of stone.

With every split second that flashed by into the history of time he expected to see a direct hit turn Hogan's twisting, turning, zigzagging plane into a shower of blazing embers. But nothing happened to Hogan's Spitfire, and then suddenly Colliston himself was darting through a world of blazing light and roaring sound.

Instinctively he pushed the nose down until the Spitfire's belly was almost kissing the crests of the rolling swells. The shoreline of Norway was close now. Less than a couple of miles away, and the jagged slopes that formed the sides of the Bukken Fjord rose up before him like black and gray walls of doom waiting to catch his Spitfire and pound and grind it into powdered metal.

But he did not give that looming-up doom so much as a parting glance. He snapped his gaze down at the fjord. For a couple of seconds he

saw nothing but an ever-changing conglomeration of shadows. Then a wild cry burst from his lips as he spotted them. The pocket battle ship *von Scheer*! And the mighty battle wagon, *von Tirpitz*!

They were hugged close to a point where the side of the fjord rose up straight like a brick wall. They were partly covered by a flurry of snow, and the torpedo net booms rested on the surface of the water like huge pencils of ice. But at that close range there was no mistaking the two war craft.

They were the real thing. They were the *von Scheer*, and the *von Tirpitz*. Not cleverly camouflaged dummies by any stretch of the imagination.

CHAPTER IV

Back from the Dead

IF he wanted proof he got it a split second later. Gun crews spilled out on deck, and red flashes of anti-aircraft fire dotted the two vessels from stem to stern. Together with shore guns that were continuously blazing away, the world above, below, and on all sides of him became alive with thundering, roaring doom.

He knew that his Spitfire was being smacked in a dozen different places because he could feel it sort of jump right out from under him. His head was full of sound, and seemed to be swelling up to twice its size.

Through a sea of swimming red he saw Hogan's plane rip right across the fighting tops of the two ships, zoom up to clear the solid rock side of the fjord. Then it sliced over and around on wing and went tearing westward out to sea.

How Hogan's plane survived in that hail of blasting destruction that poured upward was beyond Col-

liston's powers of imagination. And how his own Spitfire continued to remain in the air was equally impossible to imagine. There didn't seem to be a cubic foot of air on any side that was not exploding with red and yellow flame.

But perhaps Lady Luck actually did ride the wings of those two mad-flying Spitfires. Or maybe it was just one of those things. At any rate, Colliston had suddenly cleared the ships and the fjord wall himself, and was banging his plane westward out to sea.

The enemy fire was still like a curtain of red doom that drew closer and closer about him. But little by little it slackened off, and presently only the low-angle, long-range stuff was still pegging away.

He gulped air into his lungs, sobbed with joy, and jammed in his radio jack. Even as he did so, he saw that a chunk of shrapnel had turned the set into junk. And even as he realized that, he became conscious of something that was even more heart-chilling. Death had given them both a break. But it had been short-lived. Death was after them again, and in earnest this time.

Colliston spotted the swarm of Messerschmitts that suddenly came ripping down from the north. He did not bother to count them. What good would that do? There were enough, and they were tearing straight for a point in front of Hogan's ship to block the way and then slap Hogan and himself out of the sky like a couple of helpless clay pigeons.

"Veer south!" Colliston bellowed into his dead flap-mike. "Veer south, Hogan, and make it a tail chase. Its our only chance. They—"

He cut off the rest with a choking sob. In that instant he seemed to streak right up on Hogan's tail, which meant that the revs of the Yank's Merlin had fallen off and cut his

speed in two. In another instant Colliston was practically alongside the other Spitfire.

He saw Hogan banging away with his hands at things in the pit. It seemed to do some good, because the Spitfire picked up speed again and shot forward. Colliston fired his guns to attract Hogan's attention, and pointed wildly toward the south. He saw Hogan jerk up his head and stare across the air space at him in dumb-founded amazement. It was obvious that up to that moment the young Yank had thought he was alone.

But he snapped out of his trance, nodded sharply, and banked his plane around and to the south. Colliston shot a fearful glance to the north, then headed south himself.

He flew with his breath clamped in his lungs, and his whole body swimming in sweat. The Messerschmitts were close. They had altitude and they were diving down and getting closer by the second. The small of Colliston's back tingled and itched as he waited for hot nickel-jacketed lead to bite into it. A moment or two later he heard the savage yammer of the Messerschmitts' guns. He knew it was now time to act, and he did not even hesitate.

"I'll do my best, Pat, old fellow!" he choked out. "I'll do my best to hold them off your boy, and let him get away."

The first word had not left his lips before he had wheeled his Spitfire around and up, and had his thumb jammed down on the electric trigger release button. It was plain suicide, that maneuver. But the very reckless daring of it was a margin of safety in itself.

The Messerschmitt pilots piling down for a couple of cold meat kills were instantly thrown off whack by the completely unexpected. As a matter of fact, the two planes in the lead were completely "thrown" out of the war and the world for keeps.

The others seemed to stagger about in mid-air. Before they could pull up their socks they had lost complete formation, and a wild-flying madman was whizzing and bullet-slammng around in their midst.

ALL sense of direction, and even action, became lost to Colliston. Time ceased to exist. Everything ceased to exist, save the violent maneuvering of his plane, and the continuous chattering yammer of his guns. Everything that flashed across his gun-sights was a target, and he fired at it blindly. He lost all track of how many exploding balls of flame appeared before his eyes and fell away out of sight.

Then, suddenly, it was not fire in front of him. It was fire all about him. He seemed to be sitting in the

flame was licking up at his Mae West. He impulsively beat it out with his bare hand and stared dumbly at the charred marks on his palm.

The chatter of gunfire, and the agonizing scream of over-revving engines came to his ears. He forced his head back and looked up. A Messerschmitt was streaking down at him. Its nose was spitting out four streams of jetting flame. Little things silverish and smoking zipped past the top of his parachute envelop. Two of them cut right down through it and missed his face by inches.

Then suddenly a second plane appeared out of nowhere. It seemed a thousand years before his pounding brain grasped the fact that it was a Forty-five Spitfire. Young Hogan was in the pit! Young Hogan had not gone skipping south. He had

Ted Stanton Shows His Foes the Meaning of a Sky Bommerang in MADA-GASCAR INCIDENT—Next Issue's Smashing Novelet by Frank Johnson!

middle of it. Pain lashed at his body from his head to his feet. His mouth was full of stinging dust, and his lungs were full of fire. His brain told him that he had been hit, that his Spitfire was a seething mass of flame. And his brain screamed to his aching muscles to get him out of there in a hurry.

Instinct, and nothing else, came to his rescue. He flopped his burning plane over on its back, ripped the safety buckles loose, slammed open the bullet-shattered greenhouse and let gravity haul his body downward. He slapped his right hand across his chest, grabbed the rip cord ring, and jerked hard. Invisible fists thumped him, and tossed him about.

Then suddenly he was a human pendulum swaying back and forth at the ends of his parachute shroud lines. The right pocket of his tunic was smoldering, and a tiny finger of

turned back. Of course it would be like that. Like father, like son. They—

The Messerschmitt suddenly stopped spitting jetting flame at him. It went zooming up off to the right. It exploded in a billion pieces that showered out in all directions. Hogan's Spitfire rocketed past, but it left behind a long trail of oily black smoke.

Colliston saw it nose up, and turn over. The nose was so much solid flame. He saw Hogan dive out of it. He saw the young Yank's parachute open and check his fall. He did not see anything else. Vision suddenly left his eyes, and all became dark, and silent . . .

When Colliston could see again, he found himself aboard ship. Violent bouncing movement made even his slow-spinning brain grasp the fact that he was aboard a destroyer. A

slightly blurred figure in Royal Navy medical white told him it was a British destroyer. He turned his head and found himself staring into the grinning face of young Hogan in the adjoining sick-bay bunk. The kid wore a lot of bandages, but he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Thanks to you, sir," he heard the Yank say, "we made it. They'd have nailed me cold if you hadn't turned back. Couldn't get my guns to work at first. Got them fixed, though, and tried to help you out. Talk about luck! Do you know, the two of us darn near landed on this destroyer that was tearing to meet us?"

"Guess we owe her skipper something, at that. Her guns drove the rest of the Jerries away while she picked us up. You . . . you were out cold, so I reported that the *Sheer* and *Tirpitz* were there, right enough. The skipper wanted to know in a hurry. But, gee, sir! How come you tagged along with me?"

COLLISTON waited for the roaring in his brain to subside a little. He waited for the sick-bay to stop going around so fast.

"I don't exactly know," he said slowly. "I—I guess to repay a little on a debt I'll always owe. I . . . Oh blast it, I guess you'd better know, after all. I knew your father, Hogan. He was in my squadron in the last war. He was my best friend."

The youth's drawn face suddenly lighted up with fiery eagerness.

"You knew my father? You were in his squadron?"

"He was my best friend," Colliston replied. Then suddenly he heard his lips blurt the words. "I saw him die, son. I was with him on his last patrol. It was my fault he died. He died saving my life."

"Died?" young Hogan exploded. "But that's not true! My father lived. He's alive today. But he can't remember. He can't remember anything

that happened before he woke up in a German hospital. You knew him? Then you can tell me what happened. Mother never could find out, and Dad can't remember even to this day."

Despite the pain it caused, Colliston forced himself up on elbow.

"Your father's alive?" he gasped. "Your father's *Pat Hogan*?"

"Sure, sure!" The youth nodded violently. "My mother's told me about it a thousand times, I guess. And Dad, too. One day he found himself in a hospital in Germany. The war had been over a year or more. He couldn't remember anything of what had happened. But, he knew that he was an American. He remembered where he lived in New York.

"It seems the hospital people got in touch with the American Embassy. They checked and found that he'd been in the Royal Flying Corps. They took charge of him, and when he was well enough sent him home. And—Well, Mother had thought him dead. She'd gone with me—I was only a year old—to live with his folks in New York. My grandparents.

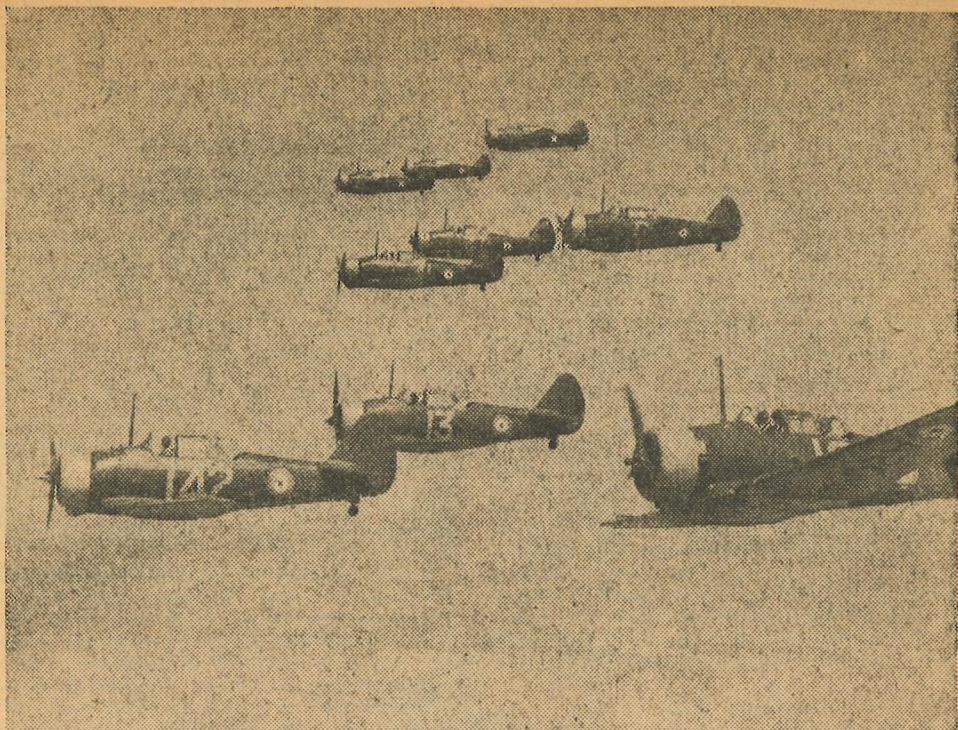
"Then one day Dad came home. Gee, that must have been one happy day. Funny thing, Dad remembered about Mother, but the rest was a blank. He was pretty sick, so Mother didn't talk much about it. She knew what squadron he'd been in, of course. And his C.O.'s name. But that didn't help Dad anyway.

"The war had become a blank, and Mother let it ride that way. Dad still has to take things easy, so Mother sort of runs everything. But the Doc swears Dad will live to a ripe old age. Just that part of his memory gone. But . . . But tell me, sir! Just what *did* happen?"

"A miracle!" Colliston heard his lips mumble.

"What did you say, sir?"

Colliston didn't answer. His throat was too choked up. And his eyes were smarting, and wet.



Australian News and Information Bureau photo

Wirraway planes in squadron echelon formation on operations in the Australian New Guinea area

MY LIFE IN THEIR HANDS

By **FLYING OFFICER W. L. WACKETT**

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

FLYING OFFICER W. L. WACKETT of the Royal Australian Air Force is the son of Wing Commander L. J. Wackett, General Manager of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in Australia. While a member of a squadron of Kittyhawks raiding and groundstrafing the Jap aerodrome at Lae, New Guinea, he was shot down, and was missing for one month and three days.

For three and one-half weeks of this time he was in Japanese occupied territory, and under the care of two New Guinea natives. His return trip from the native village to Port Moresby was made on foot, in canoe, by launch and motor lorry. The story of his journey with the two natives is one of the human interest dramas of the war in the Southwest Pacific.

WHEN we arrived over the target we could see our strafing aircraft go in to attack the aerodrome. No enemy aircraft could be seen in the air. We were in tight fighter formation at six thousand feet. Straight ahead and two thousand feet below us, I could see six Japanese

"Zero" fighters peeling off from formation and diving on our strafing aircraft. We dived to the attack and while in the dive I tested my guns and switched my reflector sight on.

I picked out a "Zero" and gave him a long burst, and saw my tracers enter his wing.

AN EXCITING EYE-WITNESS STORY

At about two hundred yards I pulled away, and the next thing I knew was that I was being fired on, for bullets were entering the cockpit and wings. One bullet struck my wristlet watch and I was covered with horse-hair, which was probably the padding of the head-rest. I could also hear bullets hitting the back of my armour plate.

I pushed the throttle open and dived down steeply. My engine was then hit, for it started to smoke badly from the exhaust. I looked behind but could not see the enemy, so I pulled out of my dive and half rolled. While on my back I noticed a large cloud below me and dived into it. Suddenly my engine packed up completely, and I crash-landed in the sea. I was slightly stunned and I had a cut forehead and shin, and numerous small cuts and scratches. While the aircraft was sinking I undid my belt, wireless and oxygen equipment and climbed out of the cockpit. I rose to the surface and undid the release box of my parachute, and as it floated I held onto it while I took off my flying boots and helmet.

Next I blew up my "Mae West" and as I looked up I could see a large shark breaking the surface about 50 yards away. My heart skipped a beat as I saw it and then looked at the land which seemed a good ten miles off.

Shark Bait

I started swimming for the nearest land. After a few strokes I stopped to unroll my sleeves and also pull my socks up over my knees, as I thought this would make me less noticeable to the sharks. Then I continued swimming, and wondered whether I should discard my revolver and water bottle as they were weighing me down. I decided to leave them on as I was swimming right into Japanese-held territory, and might need them.

I saw several more sharks. One came very close, so I just lay very still and watched him cruising around me. Finally he disappeared and I continued swimming.

The sun was very hot and I felt absolutely helpless. My mouth was sore from the salt and my eyes were stinging. Every now and again, I would turn over on my back and have a rest, only to find I had drifted far off my course, so I found resting was useless as the energy used to regain my former position was more than what was gained in the rest.

I was swimming for about eight or nine hours, and after this time my strokes were very weak. When about two hundred yards from the shore I could see two natives standing beside a canoe and pointing toward me. However, they did not seem disposed to help and walked back in the direction of the village.

Head Hunters Ahead

Not until I was about ten yards from the shore could I touch bottom and I staggered over the rocks and sat on the sand. After a drink from my water bottle I fired a shot from my .38 revolver to make sure it was in working order. The sun was very hot and the flies were attracted to my flesh cuts.

I walked into the outskirts of the village, still with my "Mae West" on, and several women screamed when they saw me and rushed into their houses.

"Does anyone here speak English?" I said. And one native replied: "Yes, Masta." I gathered that he had attended a mission as he had a small cross hung about his neck. I indicated to the natives that I wished to be taken to safety, and did not want to see any Japanese soldiers.

An argument then developed between the members of the tribe. Two natives seemed to be taking my part, but what the argument was about remained a mystery to me for several days.

The two natives who wished to help me led me down the beach about a hundred yards and told me to wait. When they emerged from a hut, each carried a small bag made of reeds, and one was armed with a bush knife and carried an umbrella. The other carried two army biscuits which he handed me saying: "He altogether plenty good fella *Kai-Kai*." By which he meant it was good food.

It was terribly hot and my cuts were getting stiff and sore. My socks wore out and I was compelled to walk with bare feet. The two natives cheered me up by saying that there were plenty of Japanese soldiers around where we were. However, whenever they saw or heard anything suspicious they would make sure I was well concealed.

We waded several rivers and soon I found out it was useless to ask them how far we had to go, for I always received the same reply:

"Ah! Masta—he altogether long way—too much!"

Trek Through the Jungle

We kept walking along a river bank, through thick tropical growth, and then commenced to climb slowly. The ground was wet and soggy and it was dark. After a good six hours' solid walking we reached a deserted native village, where we stayed the night. Sleep was impossible, so we just sat up and waited for the dawn. We had *Kai-Kai* of coconuts and paw-paw, and about five A.M. next day continued on our way, climbing up the mountain range. The ground was very wet and big roots and thick vines made progress slow. At noon we had a rest, and as we had nothing to eat we continued.

Then we entered the leech country. They would fasten onto one's toes and suck the blood, and it wasn't long before we were covered with them and had to stop and scrape them off with sticks. My feet were sore enough, without leeches biting my toes.

About six o'clock that evening I was practically done in. We had climbed all day and it had been hard going, but the natives said we couldn't stay in the jungle, we must go on to the next camp.

We entered the outskirts of a large native village, and as I was staggering along, still carrying my "Mae West" I was confronted by six powerfully built warriors with drawn bows and arrows aimed straight

at my chest. My guide, on seeing this, jumped forward and explained I was a friend and not a Japanese soldier. They lowered their weapons and escorted me to a hut, where the doctor boy made me comfortable.

It was bitterly cold and I later learned the elevation of this village was ten thousand feet. We had climbed to this height in about twelve walking hours. After finishing off a meal of yams and *Kow-Kow* we went into the hut and tried to get some sleep. It was bitterly cold, even with a fire, so we all cuddled up together.

A Narrow Escape

After the two natives had gathered up their few belongings next morning, we continued down the track and walked right into a Kanaka Sing-Sing. My feet were very sore. We crossed and recrossed a swiftly flowing stream numerous times, and climbed round steep gorges as the river wound its way through the rugged country. Swamps held up our progress and often we were wading up to our waists in foul-smell-

ing mud. That night was spent in such a swamp. The evil-smelling slush and the millions of mosquitoes made sleep impossible.

We stretched out on some banana leaves and the guide, seeing I was troubled with my legs, sat up all night and massaged them.

At dawn we had a breakfast of yams and continued to follow the river. Late in the afternoon we reached a settlement, and after a cleanup I was put to bed and my wounds dressed. My guide insisted on coming into my room to see me and it was here that I learned what the argument at the first village had been about.

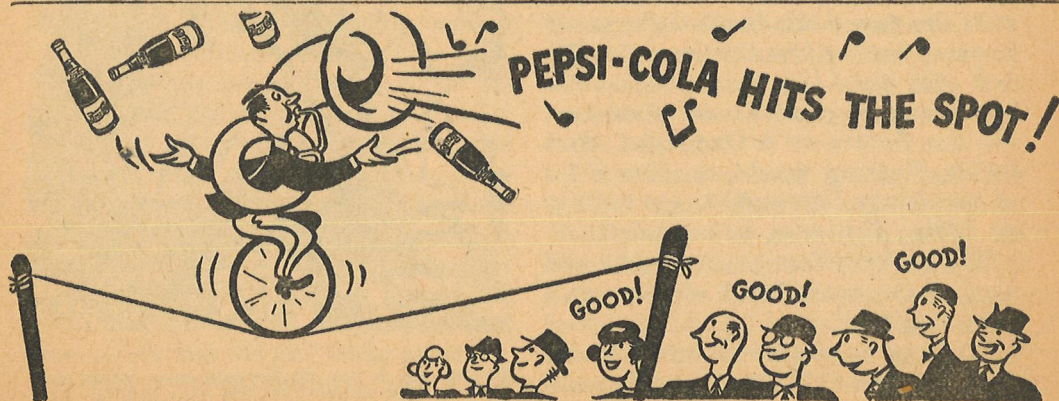
It appears that all members of the tribe had agreed that I should be handed over to the Japanese. The Japanese had shown the village what they would do if the tribe displeased them, so they were acting under the fear of Japanese soldiers.

The two natives who helped me were not from this particular village, and so were not obliged to fall in with the wishes of the chief. I was extremely lucky to meet these two Kanakas, and they were suitably rewarded.



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TARGET FOR TONIGHT

By
DOUGLAS DAWSON

*To Save a Secret of the Air,
Hasley Keeps a Rendezvous
with Destiny in the War-Torn
Skies Over Occupied France!*

GROUP CAPTAIN WENT-WORTH wiped his face with his handkerchief, stuffed it in his pocket, and stared silently for a moment at the Blenheim bomber crews grouped in front of him in the briefing room.

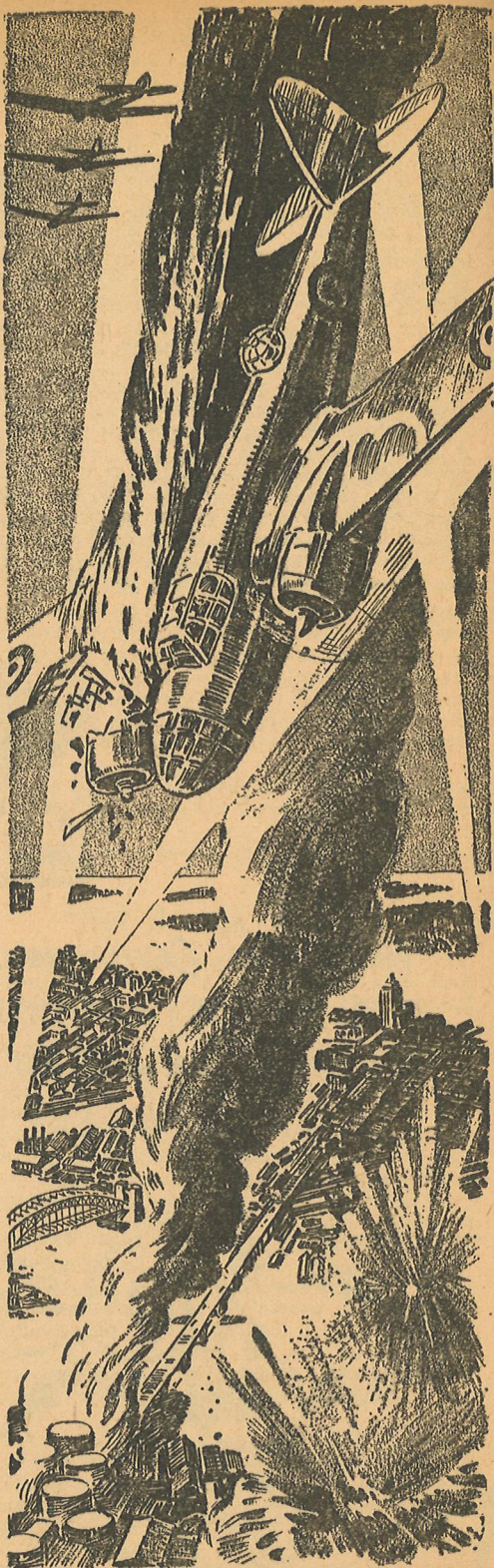
"So that's the target for tonight, gentlemen," he said finally. "The Nazi stores depot at St. Omer. And I hope you drop everything you have right on their blasted heads. Do the job as quickly as you can, and come on back home. Well, I fancy that's all for—"

The group captain cut himself off short, and shook his head.

"No, it isn't all!" he said, as though it were a mild reprimand for himself. "One more thing, and it happens to be the most important. It has to do with the new Aldis bomb-sight you'll be using for the first time tonight. We feel that the Aldis is as good as the best, even as good as the American Norden, Sperry or A One sight. Naturally, Goering would sacrifice a lot of his bloody *Luftwaffe* to get hold of an Aldis. However, he mustn't!"

The senior officer paused again and singled out every bomb aimer with a searching look.

"It is up to you bomb aimers to see that he doesn't!" he presently said



Hasley stuck the Blenheim's nose down and headed straight for the blazing area

tight-lipped. "Your sight is the most important thing in your charge. Not even death must stop you from seeing to it that the sight doesn't fall into enemy hands. You have all received detailed instructions regarding the sight. If your plane is hit, and your plane captain orders you to leave the aircraft, you are first to *destroy the sight!*

"You have been instructed as to how that is to be done. So remember! Do not let your aircraft crash with the sight still intact. A crash might only bend the sight, or throw it out a whack a little. So, destroy it, as ordered. See to it that the pieces are spread all over France. Well, I guess that is all this time. Good luck, gentlemen. But, I want to see you a moment, Squadron Leader Bakersmith."

With a certain amount of foot shuffling, and good-natured pushing and shoving, the bomber crews went out of the briefing room and some headed for the mess. Some went toward their hutments, to try to relax and wait for the take-off hour that would arrive on the stroke of midnight.

One of their number, however, headed neither toward the mess nor his hutment. He was Flight Lieutenant Hasley, pilot of Bomber H, and the leader of Green Flight. He was a tall, dark-haired man close to his thirties. Under his R.A.F. wings he wore the D.F.C. and Bar.

TO LOOK at him, it might be assumed that he went about with a perpetual, vicious sneer on his face. But when he took off his cap or his helmet the reason for that was plain. An ugly scar, which the hair could not cover, ran from the left ear diagonally up across the back of the head.

It was a good surgical job, considering what a sliver of shrapnel over Dunkirk had done. But it pulled the skin and muscles of his face so that the result was the perpetual sneer.

Hasley walked slowly toward the

line of Blenheims waiting like faithful steeds of the air, to be thundered aloft on their missions of Nazi destruction. He stared at them, but did not see them. His thoughts were on Group Captain Wentworth and Squadron Leader Bakersmith back in the briefing room. He swallowed hard, clenched one fist, and impulsively raised the other hand and touched the scar on his head.

"Discussing me!" he muttered. "Know well enough they are. That medical check-up last week. Blasted medicos looked as grave as tombstones. What if I do get a headache now and then? I can still fly as good as the next chap. I—"

He let his voice trail off, clenched his teeth hard, and closed his eyes for a moment. The sharp pain that cut across the back of his head seemed to cut deeper than it ever had before. He was getting the pain more often, too, these last few days. He steeled himself until it was gone, then took a deep breath.

"A spot of leave and a bit of rest, and I'll be as good as new," he murmured. "Blast it! I've got hundreds of more hours to fly against the Nazis. They can't put me on the shelf now. I couldn't stand it. Not even if they made me an Air Vice Marshal with a pretty bit of fluff to drive my car. No! It's flying I want. What I've got to have."

He suddenly stopped muttering to himself. And he also stopped dead in his tracks. He hadn't heard anything, but it was that certain thing science calls the sixth sense that told him somebody was hurrying toward him from behind.

He turned around slowly and saw that he was right. Squadron Leader Bakersmith was walking rapidly toward him. His heart skipped a beat as he saw the half worried, half angry look on the O.C.'s face. He waited, heart thumping while the senior officer came up to him.

"Had a bit of a talk about you with the group captain," the O.C. said, as though he were in a desperate hurry to get the words out of his mouth. "He hinted that you're due for promotion and a cushy job at Adastral House. Congratulations."

"Then my medical report has come through?" Hasley asked with an effort. "The brass hat blokes are kicking me upstairs to perch on the shelf."

"No, not quite that," the squadron leader said, with a forced smile. "Your report hasn't come through, yet. But . . . Well, I expect it before tonight's show. And . . . Well, to be perfectly frank, old man, I've detailed Foxx to stand by to take your bus out. You've really had your share of active service, you know. Mustn't be hoggish, and all that sort of thing. Envy you, as a matter of fact. Wouldn't mind a soft nook in Adastral House, myself. You've certainly earned one, though."

"That's a lie, sir!" Hasley said. "And you know it. Either of us would pine away in Adastral House. I want to go on this show tonight. More than any other show. The Aldis, you know. I had a little bit in doping that one out. You can't ground me now, sir. You've got to let me go out on this show."

"But it's out of my hands, old man," Bakersmith said. "If your medical report says—"

"But you don't know what it says!" Hasley cut in savagely. "It hasn't come through, yet. And . . . Well, I never felt better in my whole life. The medical report may say I'm A-One. I've done quite a bit of flying since I caught this over Dunkirk. Medicos are stuffy lads who don't know their business half the time, anyway."

"Perhaps," the O.C. said, with a shrug. "But there it is. Group Captain Wentworth seems to feel it will go against you. Hence my detailing Foxx to stand by. Sorry, and all that, but there isn't anything else I can do. If the report comes—"

BAKERSMITH stopped and made a little gesture with one hand. Hasley pressed his lips tightly together and swallowed hard.

"Yes, quite," he muttered. "Not blaming you, sir. But—but it's all such rot. Worrying about a medical report that hasn't even come through yet. May never arrive. The beggars may have decided I was quite fit—as they should—and didn't bother making out any report. Unless something turns up, I go, of course?"

Squadron Leader Bakersmith avoided the direct, intense stare. He chewed his lower lip hard, and started to shake his head. But he didn't quite do it. He finally looked up to meet Hasley's eyes, and sighed heavily.

"Right-o," he said finally. "Unless something turns up, you go in H. I'm a fool not to ground you now for your own good. But . . . Well, as you say, this is an important show for you tonight. Not quite fair for you to miss it, I suppose. That is, unless—"

The squadron leader did not go beyond that. He turned abruptly on his heel and walked away. Hasley stared after him for a moment or two, then slowly raised his eyes toward heaven.

"I asked for help over Dunkirk," he whispered softly. "I'm asking it again, now. Please don't let that report come through. Not ever!"

At a couple of minutes to midnight Flight Lieutenant Hasley sat at the controls of Plane H. His body was soaked by a cold nervous sweat. Yet inside of him he was on fire. For ten-year-long minutes he had been waiting for the Operations Officer to blink the red light that would send the six huge Blenheims rolling to the far end of the field for the take-off.

Parsons, his bomb aimer, was in the nose and ready to do his best with the Aldis once they made their run on the target for tonight. Aft of Hasley was Allen, his navigator. Then Wilcox, radio. And behind them his gunner, Sergeant Yates.

All set and ready to go, but every split second that dragged by was like another knife twisting in Hasley's heart. Like a knife twisting in his heart, plus the agony of little pointed slivers of wood being jammed up under his fingernails.

For the ten millionth time he tried to stop his gaze from wandering over toward the squadron office. He could just barely see the tiny light that hung from the ceiling inside. He thought he could see Squadron Leader Baker-smith seated at his desk, but of course he couldn't.

HOWEVER, his tortured brain visioned the O.C. sitting there staring at the telephone, waiting for it to ring. More than that, he visioned the O.C. picking up the instrument and putting through a check call on the medical report he was supposed to have received.

Hasley visioned all kinds of things, and each one seemed to make him die a little. Veteran though he was, and trained as well as the best of them, it was all he could do to stop himself from being the utter fool and taking off well ahead of the signal. Once in the air they could radio until they were blue in the face. Once in the air he became the sole commander of his little flying world, and every man aboard had to follow his orders, regardless. So, if he once got into the air, why—

"Stop it, man!" he grated at himself viciously. "Luck's only got to last you two more minutes. And what's two more minutes?"

What were two minutes? They were two years, two centuries, two eternities! Somehow, though, they managed to drag by into the history of time. The operations officer winked his red light, engines roared up in a louder note, and the first of the bomb-laden Blenheims started trundling forward to the lee end of the long runway.

AS THOUGH the Fates had previously arranged to add the last tiny bit to Hasley's agony, his was the end aircraft to trundle forward and swing around into the wind. As he sent it rolling forward he saw Bakersmith come dashing out of the squadron office. His heart stopped cold in his chest, and he almost let the Blenheim yaw around to port.

He caught it in time, though, and his heart started beating again when he saw the commanding officer pull up to a halt and simply wave a hand in a good luck gesture to the bombers as they trundled by. Hasley impulsively lifted a hand and waved back, though of course the C.O. couldn't see him in the darkened pilot's compartment. He waved just the same, and the backs of his eyeballs were hot and stinging for a moment. "Best O.C. ever!" he muttered. "Best O.C. in the whole RAF, by the eternal!"

A few moments later he had the Blenheim in the air and was climbing her straight as a taut-slanted string up to eighteen thousand. At that altitude he leveled off, took the instructions handed him by his navigator, and put the big craft right dead on course.

That done, he called into the intercom phone and checked with every member of his crew. As usual everybody was set, everybody was eager and ready to deal out a package or two that Adolf would hear about in darn short order.

As Plane H cut eastward through the night sky Hasley sat at his controls like a man in a trance. But there was a set smile on his scar-twisted lips, and every now and then he lifted his free hand and touched the upper left pocket of his tunic. Yet, each time he did it his smile faded, and there was a great aching emptiness in his chest. He would jerk his hand away, curse softly, and stare harder at his instrument panel, and the murky darkness ahead.

Eventually, they were over the coast of Occupied France and roaring on inland. The German archie gunners were waiting and ready. They hurled up all kinds of exploding death, but the Blenheims were high and the Nazi shooting wasn't of the best. The six British bombers thundered onward, with no more than a few fragment scratches on their wings.

Hardly had they passed beyond the fire range of the coastal batteries than they ran into the stuff screaming upward from the inland batteries. The Blenheims, though, ignored the stuff as though it didn't exist up there in the black sky.

THE leading pilot nosed down slightly and started his run on the target not so far ahead. The German gunners sensed what was happening, and every gun in the area joined in the furious blast of concentrated fire. Hasley felt hunks strike his Blenheim, but his grip on the controls was a grip of steel.

He held his course as though he were walking a tight rope, and switched on the inter-com that connected him directly with his bomb aimer in the nose not six feet away from him. By leaning forward and squinting his eyes he could just make out the shadowy form of Parsons, half-crouched like a poised spider over the Aldis bomb-sight.

A couple of moments later the shadowy ground far below started belching up great gobs of red, orange, and yellow flame. Huge mushrooms of brilliant color that rose part way up toward him, then seemed to splash out in all directions. A grunt of joy burst from his lips, and his heart-beat stepped up its tempo.

The Aldis sight was proving its merit. Those sticks had been dropped from the lead Blenheim, and they had gone right down the old chimney, as it were.

HE WANTED to take more time to look below, but he couldn't. He kept his eyes glued on his instrument panel, because Parsons' calm, matter-of-fact voice was in the ear-phone.

"A shade to port!" the aimer was directing him. "No! Too much. Bear back a little. Trim ship some more. Left wing down. There! There you are. Hold her. Ready for the run, sir!"

Body braced and set, Hasley eased the nose down to the required angle, held the huge craft steady as a rock, and sent her roaring downward. Both sky and earth, now, were a seething, boiling mass of exploding light and sound.

As he dropped the Blenheim down to the bomb-unloading altitude he thought he heard the cracking and pounding of Nazi night fighters in the air. But he couldn't tell for sure. And he didn't bother to take a look around. If there were night fighters coming up it would be up to Allen, Wilcox, and Sergeant Yates to take care of them.

His job was to fly; to fly just as Parsons directed him. That, and that only.

"Approaching target!" came the aimer's voice. "Ready for dumping. Port a hair. Right! Hold it! Stick one away, sir! Stick two away. Stick ... *three!* On target! Okay!"

In Hasley's imagination he felt the Blenheim grow lighter as each stick of concentrated doom for the Nazis left the racks and went slowly nosing downward with their finned tails rotating slightly like gyroscopes. The instant he heard Parsons' okay, meaning that all sticks had gone, he banked the Blenheim over and went curving up and around to the left.

Twisting his head he peered downward into the boiling sea of red and orange and yellow. He thought he caught the faint glitter of the last stick of bombs going down. He thought also that he saw several foun-

tains of red burst into being far below. He was not sure, but it gave him a wonderfully warm feeling in his chest to think that he had seen their bombs hit dead center on the target.

"Stout fellow, Parsons!" he called into his inter-com. "All the gin and bitters you can swallow when we get back. Mind those forward guns, now. They may have a go at us on the way back. Let's have an okay check, you other lads!"

One by one the crew members checked with him over the inter-com. No damage at all reported. Everybody was in good shape, and tickled pink with Parsons' work.

But hardly had Sergeant Yates, aft in the blister, given his check report than Hasley felt the Blenheim suddenly seem to fly right out of his hands. A great flash of blazing light, a thunderous sound, and the Blenheim heeled far over on left wing.

As Hasley, clenching his teeth against the pain that had sprung up at the back of his head, hauled the staggering craft back onto even keel there was a moment of pin-dropping silence. Then came a grinding sound as though the gods were tearing the roof off the top of the sky. Hasley realized the reason instantly, and at the same moment he heard Allen's voice in the inter-com.

"Starboard engine's dropped off! Wing on fire!"

Hasley looked out at the ribbons of flickering red that licked back over the torn and twisted surface of the wing. It was not a pretty sight, and his throat went bone-dry and his mouth became filled with sawdust. He throttled his port engine as much as he could, then exerted all his strength on the controls to keep the Blenheim on even keel.

MAYBE it was five seconds, or maybe five minutes, before he realized beyond all doubt that the direct archie shell hit on the plane had

put the bomber out of the war for keeps. The entire right wing was a blazing mass, and the flames were creeping closer and closer to the fuselage. But at least they had been able to dump their full bomb load before the archie shell struck!

"Get set to leave ship, chaps!" he yelled into the inter-com. "Wait a bit while I try to get us clear of that mess below. Then give me a check yell, and bail out. Happy landings. Buy you all a drink after the bloody war!"

As Hasley called out the words he coaxed and cursed the Blenheim around in a shallow turn that took it clear of the seething bedlam that was St. Omer stores. The instant he was clear of the area Sergeant Yates shouted his okay and stepped off into space. Then Wilcox, and then Allen. But no word came from Parsons in the nose. Hasley shielded his eyes to the glare cast by the flame and peered forward and down into the nose.

"Parsons!" he bellowed into the inter-com. "Bail out, man! It'll all be fire in a second, and . . ."

The last stuck in his throat and died. He had thought at first that Parsons was making sure he destroyed the Aldis before bailing out. But such was not the case. Parsons was stone dead, sprawled stiff and motionless in the nose, with one hand stretched toward the mounted sight as though in death he were trying to obey orders.

Hasley saw him clearly in the glare of the flames. Archie fragments had torn right up through the nose and finished Parsons instantly.

He sobbed out a curse, let go of the controls and started to slide down into the nose himself, to wrench the Aldis from its mounting. But it was then he saw what the archie shell had really done. It had severed supporting I-beam girders and bent them down crisscross over the opening. It was as though the dead Parsons and the Aldis bomb-sight were in a cage formed

by the nose, and that Hasley was on the outside.

He gripped the bent girders with his two hands, and summoned every ounce of his strength. But he might just as well have tried to lift the Blenheim straight up over his head. The only way to get past those girders would be with a blow torch. And where was he to find a blow torch at eighteen thousand feet over Occupied France?

Panting for breath, he struggled back up into his seat and took hold of the controls. The Blenheim was now lurching around in the air like a drunken eagle, and with every split second the blazing wing threatened to go sailing off on its own. Added to that, black shapes appeared out of nowhere and the yammer and pounding of Nazi aerial guns filled Hasley's ears.

"Want the Aldis, eh?" he roared at them. "Want me to abandon ship so she'll simply crash and burn, and you can collect all of the Aldis pieces? Maybe the whole blasted thing still intact! Well, a fat chance of that, my little Jerries! A fat chance, I must say!"

As the words spilled from his lips he stuck the Blenheim's nose down and headed straight for the fringe of the blazing area. In the light cast by the roaring flames of St. Omer he spotted the row of poorly camouflaged fuel

tanks that were still untouched.

He was so low by then that he could even see the antlike figures of Nazi fire-fighters doing everything in their power to keep the flames from the tanks. He saw them, and his stiff lips went back in a smile.

"Last flight anyway!" he muttered. "Much, much better this, than any job they could possibly give me at Adastral House. Recommend that Flight Lieutenant Hasley be relieved of all flying duties as of this date, eh? Right-o! Recommendation received, and put into effect at once. Yes! Very much so!"

HUNCHING forward slightly, Hasley ignored the Nazi night fighters streaking in from all sides like mad hornets, and kept his eyes fixed on the fuel tanks below. When he hit them there wouldn't be any Aldis bomb-sight any more. It and the Blenheim and everything else aboard would be so much powdered dust exploded all over the area.

"And this, too!" he muttered, and touched his upper left tunic pocket. "That report did come through, Bakersmith. You weren't about—luckily. And I saw it first. I snitched it, old man. Had to. Had to make this one show, at least. Top-hole, the Aldis. Don't ever let the killing Nazis get one, chaps!"

And then the Blenheim hit!

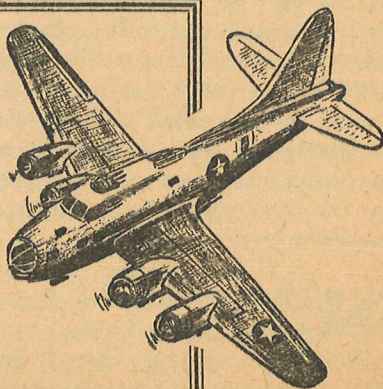
*When His Foes Seek to Make a
Fool Out of Flier Ted Stanton, He
Hurls the Laugh Right Back at
Them in*

MADAGASCAR INCIDENT

A Complete Novelet

By **FRANK JOHNSON**

COMING NEXT ISSUE



THE R.A.F. IN ACTION!

TRUE STORIES OF THE MEN WITH WINGS

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!

The publication of previous stories in this series as an exclusive feature of R.A.F. 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.

MALTA'S DEADLY "SKEWBALL"—GEORGE BEURLING

GEORGE FREDERICK BEURLING is a twenty-year-old Canadian now wintering on the sunny Mediterranean—the exact address is the island of Malta. George Frederick Beurling is also a hero—which is as much of a surprise to him as it was to his mates, who regarded him not long ago as a bit of an odd case—hence the nickname "skewball," which is a slightly garbled version of the good old American "screwball."

He is also called "Buzzy."

George Frederick Beurling was turned down by the Canadian R. A. F. because he was minus a diploma—that an early-developed passion for flying was responsible for his scholastic failure made no difference to the recruiting officer. Rules were rules, and all that.

So George Frederick Beurling hopped a cattle boat two years ago and got across to England, where harder-pressed recruiting officers weren't so particular. He got into the R. A. F. Volunteer Reserve, managed to work himself up to the grade of flight sergeant and was sent to Malta last June.

He was the kind of a fellow whose uniform never even scored a close miss as to tailoring. His mop of blond hair refused to stay combed. Worst of all, he cared so little for military regulations that he never even bothered to sew on his sergeant's stripes. He carried them around in his pocket instead.

But aloft, George Frederick Beurling was another sort of fellow entirely. He didn't do any shambling around in a plane. The Germans and Italians did that—in fact, they became shambles in the face of his deadly airmanship and accurate gunfire.

Between June and October—a five month period—the Skewball shot down exactly twenty-nine planes to become the embattled island's ace of aces. What's more, his twenty-ninth victim was the one which lifted the island's tally since the war began over the 1,000 mark.

The day after this achievement, he was shot down, but managed to escape with nothing worse than a ducking. Scrambling ashore in dripping outfit, he was disturbed when superiors forced him to get into dry clothing

and stand up to receive a Distinguished Flying Cross.

He wanted to get right back upstairs and get even with Jerry for shooting him down. And medals were old stuff to him. He'd already received the Distinguished Flying Medal with bar. However, he was floored when they told him he was going to get a commission.

"But I'm not officer material," he

protested.

His protests were unavailing, so he's a flying officer today. And he's living up to the prediction of a flight commander who had charge of his training in England. The latter shook his head sadly but proudly, stated that Beurling would be the best fighter in the Allied Air Forces if he did not get killed. He's mighty close to both right now.



BRINGING THEM BACK ALIVE

RECONNAISSANCE reported that a large group of General Rommel's transport were gathered in a depression near Ras El Kanyis. Also, that damaged tanks were being towed there for repairs. Headquarters decided to spoil this little party during the night. Royal Australian Air Force bombers were assigned to the job.

Pilot Officer Thomas Edward White Howes was navigator on one of the bombers. Before the war, he worked in a freight office of Quantas Airways, Limited. He joined up before he was 20 and won his wings early in 1941. He was known as a cool and fearless youngster. And on this night he proved it.

They dropped their eggs in the target area despite heavy fire from the enemy anti-aircraft batteries. Everything was all right until they turned for home. Then

they ran into a mess of Messerschmitts. The enemy got a good one into the R.A.A.F. bomber. The inter-communication system went dead. Lights were out. The plane was filling with acrid smoke.

Improvising a torch from an illuminated compass, Howes went aft and found the second pilot and wireless operator grievously wounded. He assisted them to the cabin and administered first aid. He extinguished the flames by disconnecting the accumulators. Then he struggled to the burning rear turret and smothered flames which were spreading to the wounded gunner's uniform. He gave the gunner an injection of morphia to ease his pain, then made a tourniquet to staunch his bleeding.

Howes brought plane and crew back to the base. For his outstanding exploit he was awarded the Australian Distinguished Flying Cross.



RANKER LEADS RAF'S TOP-SCORING SQUADRON

SQUADRON-LEADER Royce Wilkinson is a living refutation of the German claim that if Marshal Rommel had been a Briton, he would still be a sergeant major. Three years ago, during the battle of France, Wilkinson, then a sergeant pilot, became, because of casualties, the only non-commissioned squadron leader in the RAF.

Leading 18 Hurricanes in a sweep over the advancing Nazi lines, he tangled with an overwhelming force

of Me 109s. Eighteen Hurricanes flew back to their base, leaving six Messers crashed behind them, several badly damaged and the remainder in full flight.

For this achievement, Wilkinson was immediately made a flight lieutenant, skipping the ranks of flight-sergeant, pilot officer and flying officer. He more than made good on his opportunity, winning the D. F. M. and bar and becoming a full-fledged squadron leader at 27 years of age.

Now Wilkinson has taken over the command of Britain's top-scoring fighter squadron—which has been personally responsible for the destruc-

tion of almost 240 Nazi planes. He has been awarded on merit and merit alone the most sought-after job in the entire RAF.



ROMMEL GAVE R.A.A.F. PERSONNEL WARM FAREWELL

R. A.A.F. personnel now in Australia will carry forever the memory of their last night in the Western Desert. They were bombed and strafed continuously by the enemy for nearly eleven hours, Sgt. Charles Blew, of Richmond, N. S. W., said.

"It was a great send-off. Rommel's air force commenced the blitz at 9 p.m. and kept it up until 7:45 next morning. I've never seen so many bombs and bullets wasted. Our aircraft were dispersed a long way away, and not one machine or man received as much as a scratch. It might have been intended for a farewell fireworks display.

"It was tough luck having to spend our last night under cover," he added.

During Rommel's recent air blitz in the Western Desert, members of the R.A.A.F. ground staff dug slit trenches alongside aircraft which they were overhauling so that delay caused by enemy air raids would be reduced to a minimum and no time would be lost in getting our planes back into the air, said Sergeant Fitter Desmond Carroll (Pat) O'Brien, of Sydney.

"The slit trenches gave us good protection, and our tin hats fended off stray bullets from low, flying strafers," he declared.

"We could see enemy planes against the stars and could hear their bombs coming

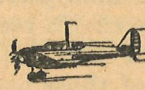
down. We knew where they were going to lob. Everyone went on with his work until the last minute and resumed it as soon as possible after a raid.

"Some of our chaps mounted their machine guns on home-made tripods in order to hit back at the Stukas.

"A lot of people sneer at ack-ack fire, but in the Middle East it was very effective against dive-bombers.

"One night a sheik in flowing robes, mounted on a camel, arrived at the squadron depot. It proved to be Flying Officer 'Nicky' Barr, who had been shot down behind the enemy lines. Friendly Arabs had loaned him clothing and a camel. Barr, who had shot down three Messerschmitts, was awarded the D.F.C.

"On another occasion, Barr and some comrades captured a Nazi 'people's car' in the desert. This type of motor car was one of Hitler's political advertisements, with which he gulled the German people. A large number of these cars were being used by the enemy, and the impression formed by the British was that they had been intended from the first for the German Army and not for the German people. Each car was fitted with radio, had seating space for four soldiers, and the independent springing on all four wheels made for quick transport in the desert."



SIX HOURS OF "WALTZING MATILDA"

A DRIFT in a rubber dinghy for six hours after he had been shot down into the Irish Sea in combat with a Junkers 88, Pilot Officer W. J. Lamerton, of Glenelg (S.A.) just "trailed round and sang."

Lamerton, who was a member of an Australian fighter squadron in Britain, and has recently returned to Australia, said that after a few hours in a rubber dinghy, there did not

seem to be much room to do anything more than sing.

He had been in a number of "scrambles," he added, and on the day of his misadventure, sighted the enemy air-Lamerton opened fire, but the range was too great. He closed in, gave another burst and saw strikes on the German machine. Closing again to 250 yards, he gave the Junkers another four-second burst and saw more

strikes. Apparently he killed the rear gunner, for the fire from that turret ceased.

"Then my engine began to give off flames, and I baled out at 12,000 feet,"

he said. "It was terribly cold in the sea, and when a number of aircraft flew over me without seeing me, I nearly gave up hope. However, I was eventually sighted and picked up."



SOUTH AFRICAN PILOTS ALLERGIC TO PRISON

FIGHTER pilots of the South African Air Force have a special tradition of their own.

When one of their comrades is shot down over enemy territory, they go in after him and get him out.

It started in the Ethiopian campaign when Lieutenant (they have Army, not R.A.F. ranks in the S.A.A.F.) R. H. Kershaw landed under heavy fire from the Italians, picked up his flight commander who had crashed and flew him to safety in the cockpit of a single-seater fighter.

For this rescue, Kershaw won the D.S.O.

Since then, young South African pilots have frequently snatched comrades from the hands of the enemy. It is a tight fit to squeeze two into a fighter's cockpit, but they manage it by throwing away their

parachutes. Many S.A.A.F. pilots have become members of the Caterpillar and Late Arrivals clubs.

"They dread being made prisoners, and if there is a way back, they find it," said a young South African pilot recently.

The commandant of the S.A.A.F. fighter wing in the desert is Lieut.-Colonel D.H. Loftus, D.F.C., who is only 25 years old. But like his men, for all his youth, he is thoroughly versed in air fighting. South Africans learn all modern techniques in their own training schools.

South African fighters like escorting South African bombers. It gives everybody, in their own words, a "homely feeling." But the prospect of internment in a military prison affects them in exactly the reverse.



"INTRUDER" ACE RETIRED TO TEACH

ONE of the pioneer "Intruder" pilots, Wing-Commander D. R. O'B. Hoare, carried out his eightieth and probably his final patrol over Occupied Europe airfields recently. An Intruder, in case you don't know it already, is one of those nasty (to the Nazis) lads who flies a night fighter over an Axis air base at night and swoops down on bombers returning from their missions with fuel and ammunition low.

Wing-Commander Hoare, who holds the D. F. C. and bar, began "intruding" in January, 1941, in a Blenheim armed with five machine-guns and carrying eight light bombs. On one occasion, the Wing-Commander pressed home an attack on an enemy bomber at such close range that the

two craft touched, and the Blenheim came home with a piece of the bomber imbedded in its wing.

On another occasion, he dropped his bombs from so low a level that fragments punctured a tire in his landing gear and punched a hole in one wing. He has a record number of Intruder flights to his credit and a score of at least six enemy aircraft destroyed. This record is deceptively low, for it is almost impossible to get confirmation of victories working at night over enemy territory.

From now on, Hoare will employ his vast experience in instructing young flyers who are preparing to add to the miseries of Goering's Luftwaffe this coming year. He should be able to tell them how.

"FROM DEFENSE TO ATTACK" RAF BOMBER SQUADRON'S MOTTO

A DOG, owned by Wing Commander R. J. Oxley, DFC, DSO, practically owns the Lancaster bomber squadron which Oxley commands. When Oxley—a short, bald, rather quiet man—is at leisure in mess, it sits beside him and divides his attention with his book.

But it is really on the alert when, in the interrogation room in the early morning, it eagerly awaits his return from a bombing raid—for, according to everyone on the station, it actually knows whenever he is flying.

The dog is always in attendance when the wing commander, not having been out that night, meets his crew as do all squadron commanders, to hear the story of their operations.

"They must not be afraid to say if things went wrong," says Oxley—not that things often do with such men, such a leader or such a mascot as Oxley's dog.

The squadron's motto is "from defense to attack," which originates from the fact that, having been formed in 1916 to defend London against Zeppelins and aeroplanes, the squadron was reorganized as a bomber squadron in 1939, and when the war broke out, was in readiness to attack.

To what purpose it has done this is attested by its being awarded five DFC's and two DFM's just before it set sail for Osnabruck on the night of October 6 to administer a further corrective to Germany. No squadron has shown more determination in carrying out its tradition to hit a target in every possible way.

The only monotony about the squadron's work is the regularity with which appears in its crews' reports: "bombed from 2000" which is low level flying for night time.

When the R.A.F. first attacked Berlin the night of August 25, 1940, the squadron had Hampdens, and Pilot Officer, now Squadron Leader, G. A. C. Potts was among the pilots. Despite the flak and barrage balloons, he dived to 2000 feet to drop bombs, and he was awarded the DFC. He won a bar to his DFC in October,

1941. When a thousand aircraft bombed Bremen last June, Flying Officer Southgate dropped bombs at a similar height.

Wing Commander Oxley won the DSO at Vaagao, December 27, 1941, when the squadron attacked gunposts and shore batteries at 3000 feet. Oxley attacked from 100 feet while his gunners shot up the ground defenses. Shellfire several times hit his aircraft and jammed the rudder, but Oxley, who afterwards won the DFC, flew home and landed with the entire crew unhurt.

When another aircraft of the squadron attacked the Renault works in Paris, it struck a power cable with a vivid blue flash, but survived. Many of its bombers came down to under 3000 feet in the Lubeck and Rostock raids. The squadron in three years of warfare has flown Hampdens, Manchesters, and Lancasters.

With the Hampdens, it has won many honors, among them its first DFC, awarded Squadron Leader J. J. Bennet in the raid on Sylt. He won a bar for the first daylight attack on the battleships at Brest in July, 1941. He secured direct hits at Sylt and, despite damage to aircraft at Brest, pressed home the attack and returned safely.

With Hampdens again, the squadron carried out defensive work on bomber German communications and during the battle of France, attacked invasion barges. As the command moved to attack, the squadron went from Hampdens to Manchesters, then to great four-engined Lancasters.

Bennet was born at Desbury, Manchester in 1913, educated at Hulme Grammar School, Manchester, and King William's College on the Isle of Man, was commissioned in 1936.

Potts, born in 1915, lives in Mold, Flintshire, joined the R.A.F. in 1932, became sergeant in 1939, and was commissioned in 1940. Oxley was born in Winchmorehill, London, in 1915, was educated at the Edmonton Latymer School and Enfield Grammar School and was commissioned in 1931. His wife lives in Doncaster.



FLYING OFFICER'S TRIBUTE TO GROUND STAFF

VITAL importance of the work performed by the ground staff of the R.A.A.F. squadrons in the Western Desert was emphasized by Flying Officer Alec Abicair, of Coburg, Victoria, who served for some time in that theatre of war.

"My experience has been that if the ground staff fails, the entire squadron fails," he said. "This is a technical war, and it is technicians who will play a big part in winning it."

"It was demonstrated in the Middle East that 100 aircraft in tip-top con-

dition were the equal of 200 badly equipped planes with inferior maintenance.

"Some aircraft required overhaul after 40 hours' actual flying but there were many instances in which the high efficiency of a ground staff lengthened the flying time by many hours in the aggregate.

"It takes ten men to keep one air crew flying, and if these men on the

ground fall down on their job, the squadron cannot possibly secure the results their country expects it to achieve. However, I am proud to say that ground staffs in the Western Desert did a whale of a job. It gives a pilot a lot of confidence when he goes into battle if he has complete trust in the efficiency and conscientiousness of the chaps who have prepared his aircraft."



SKY PARTY FOR R.A.A.F. FIGHTER PILOTS IN WESTERN DESERT

FIGHTER pilots of the R.A.A.F. had their best "party" in weeks in a dogfight over the Western Desert when they shot down three Axis aircraft for the loss of one plane, the pilot of which landed in one of our minefields, and later returned to his squadron.

The dogfight lasted for half an hour and was fought against a large formation of Messerschmitt 109's, Stukas and Macchi 202's. The fight took place well over the enemy lines southwest of Daba. At one moment the planes were mixing it thousands of feet above the ground, and the next they were skimming no more than 20 feet above the ground.

First man to see the enemy formation was Sergeant L. L. Boardman, of Kempsey (N. S. W.). There were about 18 Stukas in neat V formation, with half a dozen Messerschmitts protecting them. Boardman wagged his wings, and his formation dived to attack. One Stuka was destroyed. Our fighters climbed again to discover that many more Messerschmitts, which had apparently been hiding in the clouds, had joined the fight.

"It was one sweet mix-up," said Boardman. "One minute you would see the Me. on the tail of one of our boys, the next there would be one of ours on the tail of the Me. And so it went, with no time for anyone to see much or do anything

but attack, and keep one eye backward against a surprise."

The highest scorer in the whole battle was probably Sergeant G. Neill, a young pilot from Brisbane, who destroyed a Stuka and a Messerschmitt, and probably destroyed another. The Stuka came first.

"We all dived on them," he said "and I managed to get a bit ahead of them. The Stukas were going as hard as they could for home only about 20 feet from the ground. I turned and came head on at one of them. My fire entered the front of the Stuka. Perhaps I hit the pilot. I don't know. Anyway, it just dived into the ground.

"Then came the Me. After the attack on the Stukas, we climbed again, and the real fight started. We were all milling about and firing when we could, with flak bursting all over the place. I am not sure, but I think one Me. was hit by its own flak.

"I dived on an Me., and he dived away from me. I followed him down, firing until we were 20 feet from the ground and going fast. We got in among a lot of enemy tents in a camp, with the tent poles not far below our wing tips. I gave the Me. one more burst and it crashed on the ground right among the tents. Unfortunately, I think it missed the tents."

Neill then climbed away and rejoined the general fight which was still being waged.



TALLY HO!

ROYAL Australian Air Force Squadrons ran up some imposing records in the Middle East campaign. The best bag for a 24-hour period attributed to one squadron was

19. Another squadron brought down 15 enemy planes in one day.

The boys who accounted for the 19 thus increased their toll of planes shot down, and confirmed, to 182. That is

the highest total so far reported in that area. In Syria, this same squadron accounted for 29 enemy aircraft without losing a single plane of its own.

Individual acts of skill and bravery were many. One of the most unusual, according to Sergeant Benjamin Whittington, of Abbotsford, Victoria,

was that performed by Flight Lieutenant Perrin, who destroyed two Messerschmitts in an aerial duel while his own plane was in flames. Perrin crashed, leaped from the burning wreckage, then was strafed by the German fighters.

He finally got clear and returned to his base.



THIS MAN KEPT FLYING

THE epitome of what a pilot should be," according to his station commander, Flying Officer Leslie Thomas Manser, R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve, was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross after giving his life to save the crew of the bomber he piloted.

He was captain and first pilot of a Manchester bomber which took part in the raid on Cologne. As the aircraft approached its objective, it was caught by searchlights and subjected to intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire. Manser held it on the dangerous course and successfully bombed the target from 7,000 feet before turning back toward his base.

The already-damaged bomber was still under heavy fire. Manser took violent evasive action, turning and descending to less than 1,000 feet, but to no avail. Searchlights and flak followed him until the city's defenses were passed. Anti-aircraft shells struck him repeatedly, and the rear gunner was wounded. The port engine overheated badly and filled the cabin with smoke.

Pilot and crew could have parachuted to safety, but Manser disregarded the hazards and persisted in his effort to keep plane and crew from falling into enemy hands. He climbed to 2,000 feet, where the port engine caught fire. The blaze was extinguished in ten minutes, but the engine was out of action and part of the wing burnt away, lowering the airspeed dangerously.

Despite all efforts of pilot and crew, the Manchester lost altitude. At this critical moment, Manser again refused to bale out with his men, put the plane on a new course to the nearest base, accepting for himself the prospect of almost certain death in the

firm resolve to carry on to the end.

Soon the Manchester became almost impossible to handle. When a crash was inevitable, Manser ordered the crew to bale out. A sergeant handed him a parachute, but he waved it away, telling the non-com to jump at once as he could hold the plane steady but a few seconds longer. The crew, descending safely, saw the aircraft plunge to earth and burst into flames.

In pressing home the attack in the face of strong opposition, in striving against heavy odds to bring back both aircraft and crew and finally, when in extreme danger, thinking of only his comrades' safety, Manser displayed, according to the official citation, "determination and valour of the highest order."

Manser was born in New Delhi, India, in 1922, was bred in Radlett in Hertfordshire. He enlisted for pilot training in 1940, was commissioned in May, 1941, and was made a flying officer shortly before his death.

"To him, flying was not an adventure but a duty performable to the best of his abilities," said his station commander. "He disregarded all danger in achieving his aim, not from recklessness, but from a firm conviction that he must play his part in righting a wrong. He died with as little thought for himself as there had been in life."

Manser had made six squadron flights before the attack on Cologne, had already proved himself both in the patient endurance needed for long distance flights and in the most determined attack on the strongly defended town of Mannheim from a height of 3,500 feet.



TWIN ACE MAKES NIGHT FIGHTING SAFER

AD. F. C. night fighter ace, who now commands a night fighter station in the North-East, spends

nearly all his spare time devising ways and means to make his hazardous profession safer.

He is Group Captain David F. W. Atcherly, one of the RAF's famous Atcherly twins. His brother, Group Captain Richard L. R. Atcherly, is the former Schneider Trophy pilot and King's Cup winner.

It was Group Captain David Atcherly who perfected the scheme for airfield lighting now in current use by the RAF. Marshal of the RAF, Sir John Salmond, Director-general of Aircraft Safety, who controls, among other things, the RAF's Air-Sea Rescue Service, frequently consults Group Captain Atcherly before making decisions about lighting and other safety devices.

When Atcherly was awarded the D. F. C. just over a year ago, he and two other pilots who were also deco-

rated had, between them, destroyed eleven Nazi raiders and damaged at least six others.

He entered the RAF in 1927 from the East Lancashire Regiment in which he had served as a lieutenant. His brother has been in the RAF for 20 years.

The Atcherly twins are the 38-year-old sons of Major General Sir Llewellyn Atcherly, former Inspector-general of Constabulary.

Richard, nicknamed "Batchy" and "Grock of the Air" because of his dare-devil stunt flying at air displays, was shot down over the channel on a recent fighter sweep. He baled out and was rescued by a minesweeper and spent several weeks in the hospital.



AUSTRALIAN AIRMEN'S LONG TREK

AFTER a trek of 450 miles through enemy-occupied territory, and two encounters with Italian soldiers, four R.A.F. N.C.O.'s including two 29-year-old Australians, Flight Sergeant Charles Raymond Warwick, of Prospect (S. A.) and Sergeant Alexander Edward Owen Barras, of West Perth (W. A.) have returned to their base in Egypt.

They were forced down in a heavy bomber near Tobruk three weeks ago, after they had bombed shipping in the harbor. In addition to the Australians, the crew comprised a 22-year-old Scot, a 20-year-old sergeant from Herts (Eng.), and two officers from Canada. The officers became separated from the other members of the party towards the end of their "walk."

"After we had bombed shipping in Tobruk, one of the engines packed up, and we had to land in the darkness on the desert," a member of the party said when relating their adventures. "We took off our rations and a ten-gallon water tank which we strapped to the little aircraft ladder so that two of us could carry it easily. We walked all that night and, in the morning, finding a broken-down truck, we hid in it till night.

"As we were crossing a road two nights

later, we almost walked into some enemy trucks. We decided there and then that the risk of being seen was increasing with every mile we traveled toward the battle area.

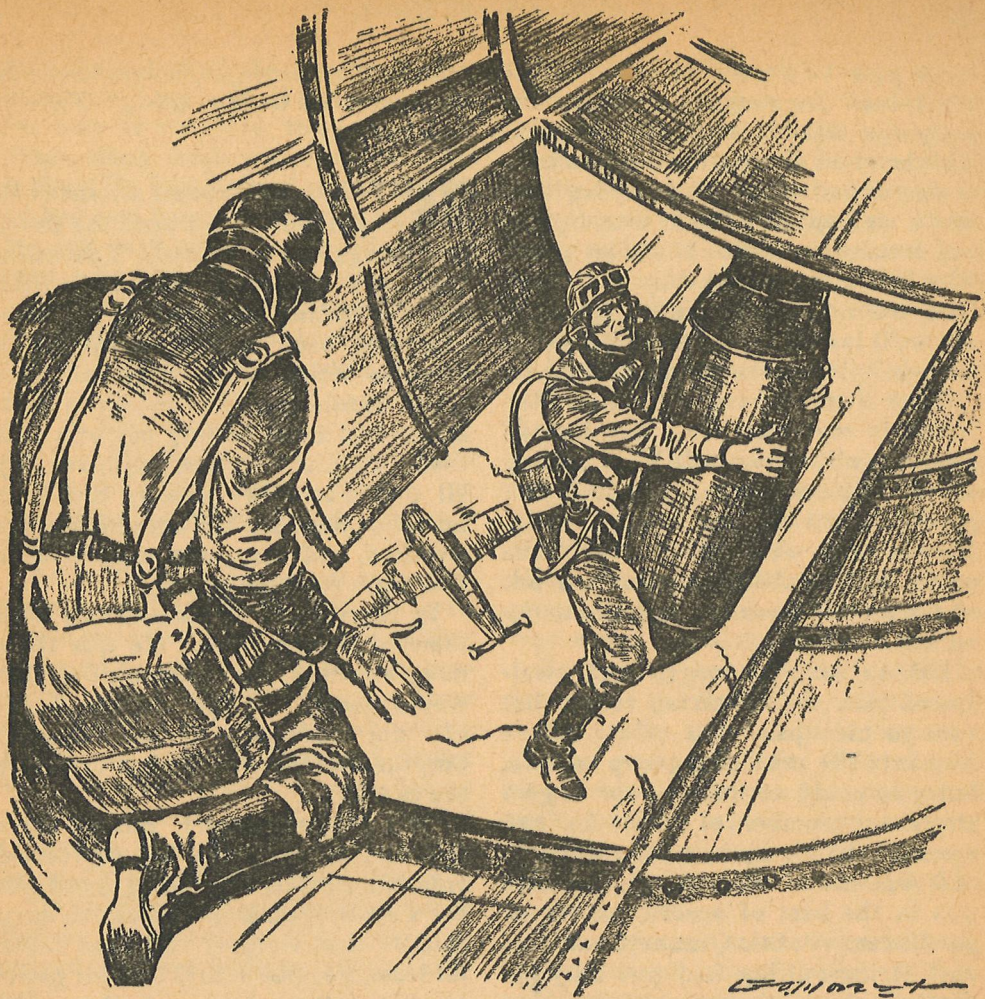
"We divided our rations, and the officers left, saying they would try to steal a lorry and drive themselves home. That night, we resumed our journey, but were challenged by an Italian soldier who jumped from a truck which we were about to search for food and water. We made off, and he did not follow.

"I think he was as scared as we were.

"Our real brush with the enemy occurred when we were looking for abandoned vehicles several nights later. Some Italians appeared and chased us. We were very tired. Our feet were bound with rags and we had cut away parts of our boots to ease our blisters. Because of this handicap, the soldiers gained on us and opened fire.

"One member of our party had a very old, rusty rifle which he had found two days earlier, and he returned the enemy's fire. This was too much for the Italians, who ran back the way they had come. We did not waste any time, either, and continued our journey with all possible haste."

More Stories of **The RAF in Action** Next Issue



Willerson threw himself at the bomb and clung to it like a monkey

FAREWELL TO WINGS

By FRANK JOHNSON

Pilot Willerson Is Headed for Court-Martial but Fate Gives Him a Chance to Prove the Worth of a "Wild Indian" in an Emergency!

BABSON fiddled with his tunic belt, chewed on his lower lip for a second or so, and cast a pleading look at the stern, granite-set face of Group Captain Smythe-Mather.

"I'm not saying Willerson should be white-washed of the charge, sir," he suddenly blurted. "He deserves a certain amount of punishment, of

course. He was a little wild, but . . . Well, sir, he's a good man. He's done a lot in this squadron, and . . . Well, frankly, I'm thinking more of his folks. They'll take it awful hard, sir, if you have him cashiered out of the service."

The group captain snorted softly, and curled down a corner of his mouth.

"A pity Willerson didn't think of his folks!" he snapped. "That's exactly the trouble with him, though. Thinks of no one but himself, and his brain-twisted ideas of enjoying life. Well, we happen to be at war, Squadron Leader Babson! If we let chaps like Willerson do as they jolly well like, and no respect for discipline at all, we'll lose the war before the year's out—in spite of the Yanks coming in.

"No! I won't have chaps like Willerson in my command. Too blasted dangerous for this squadron, or any other. It's not that beggar's fault that he didn't kill me, and the two other officers who were along. No! I'm going to have Willerson blasted out of the service as—as an example to the entire Air Force!"

Babson bit his tongue and swallowed back the blistering retort that rose to his lips. This officer before him held the rank of a group captain, but you could count on your fingers the exact number of hours he had spent in the air against the enemy.

It was one of those things that happen in the best of armies, navies, or air forces. Politics, money, and correct string-pulling had put Smythe-Mather where he was. And now that he was there he was proving to be just about as much help to the R.A.F. as a crack squadron of the *Luftwaffe*.

Discipline is discipline, Babson was thinking, but it has its place. And it should never be placed under the charge of lads like Smythe-Mather. True, old Willerson had acted the fool, no end. He had celebrated that pukka bomb show the other night much, much too much.

Babson wished with all his heart he had spiked Willerson's drinks, or something, so the chap would have passed out. Willerson didn't pass out, though, and the drinks in the mess, plus the strain of war, plus his wild Indian instincts, plus a lot of other things, had been too much for him. He had taken the squadron car for a

spin in the moonlight, before anybody realized what he was doing. Then it was too late.

BUT Fate had known all about it, or perhaps it had been the devil, and things had happened. Two miles from the squadron, Group Captain Smythe-Mather and two of his flunkies had been driving down for a surprise visit. When they had been about a mile from the squadron Willerson had come tearing out of a side road. He had hit them, and hard. By all that was lucky nobody had been hurt, but two cars had been hopelessly wrecked, and the group captain hit a new high for blazing anger.

In short order Willerson had been dumped in the klink. He was there now, awaiting the court-martial that would surely see him drummed out of the service. Group Captain Smythe-Mather would most certainly see to that!

"But his record, sir!" Babson made one last effort. "He has performed valuable service. Why not ground him for a spell, then ship him out to some Middle East station? Or even India. At least, sir, that would be a bit easier on his folks. I've met them, sir. They're wonderful people. He's all they have, sir."

The group captain snorted and curled his lips again.

"You're a bit soft, you know, Babson," he said. "You're talking rot. I shall do nothing of the kind. Sorry about his people, and all that, but this is a matter that can have a serious reflection on the entire Air Force. No, save your breath, Babson. That beggar, Willerson, is going to get exactly what he deserves. Let's drop it, shall we? Now, about that coming show on those Nazi troop concentrations south of Calais. That's what I want to talk to you about. Must make that a pukka show, of course."

Half an hour later Babson walked out of his own squadron office, took a

few steps toward the line of American-made Lockheed Hudsons on the far side of the field, then paused to draw clean fresh air deep into his lungs. He felt clogged up, as though he had just been through a gas attack. He felt as though he needed a good bath. He also felt desperate.

If there were only something he could do for Willerson! No, not just for Willerson. For his folks. Why, oh why, did the fool have to go kiting off in that squadron car the other night? He was sunk, now, with old Spit-and-Polish Smythe-Mather on his neck. Completely and definitely sunk.

And Babson knew just as completely and definitely that his own hands were tied. There was not a thing he could do about it. Willerson was going to be bounced in disgrace from the R.A.F., and in bomb-bleeding Bristol an aging mother and father would receive news that cuts deeper to the heart than one of those fateful telegrams from Air Ministry which begin, "We regret to inform you—"

"If only something would happen!" Babson breathed softly, and he prayed: "Please *make* something happen!"

At exactly one o'clock the next morning the pilots and crews of four Lockheed Hudson bombers waddled out of the briefing-room in their cumbersome flying gear and climbed into the tender that was there to carry them to the far end of the field where their loaded and warmed-up aircraft were waiting. Many, many times had they made the short trip in the tender, but this was the first time it had been made under such a blanket of silence.

Not a word was spoke, and not a single bit of the usual horse-play that helped so much to ease up taut nerves, and get everybody relaxed for the job in hand. Every man-jack of them sat hunched down in the tender as though he might be in a police van headed for the hangman's noose.

UP FRONT beside the driver, Babson sat that way himself. A great longing was in his eyes, and there was a dull ache in his heart. Old Willerson would not be with them on this show. Old Willerson, whose crazy talk, and idiotic songs, was just the right kind of tonic for you when you were flying through Nazi flack toward your target.

And on the way back? The chap made minutes seem like split seconds. And—

No, old Willerson wouldn't be along this dawn. He was over there in the klink waiting for removal to Group Command H.Q., and court-martial. His absence was like an invisible hand pressed upon the heart of everyone who was going along without him.

Eventually the tender arrived at the far end of the field. They all climbed down, split up in their separate groups, and headed for their respective bombers. Babson just nodded at each bomber captain, and silently stuck his thumb in the air. That was enough. None of the others felt like talking either.

The sudden almost overwhelming realization of exactly what Willerson's absence was doing to his men filled Babson with a sudden urge to hot-foot it to the phone and go right over Smythe-Mather's head, direct to Air Ministry. After all, morale is every bit as important as discipline. And morale tonight was bad, mighty bad.

Yet even as the urge surged through him he felt the utter futility of it. For one thing, he had no "friend" at Adastral House to whom he could appeal directly. For another, it was really too late to do anything. This show against Calais had to go off on time and like clockwork.

Five or ten minutes one way or the other could spoil the whole success of the venture. They were not carrying delayed action stuff tonight. Instead, they had full loads of fragmen-

tation bombs that would sweep the surface with blinding destruction, and doom. Gas, oil, and ammo dumps were not the targets tonight. No. Just troops. A great concentration of troops the Nazis thought they had slipped into the Calais sector in secret.

But they hadn't. British Intelligence had found out all about it. And tonight—tonight four Lockheed Hudson bombers were heading out to mow those troops down to mincemeat proportions with tons of fragmentation stuff.

They would go over high to give the coastal gun Jerries the idea they were heading toward an objective far inland—but that was the idea. The thousands of Nazi troops on the ground would give no more than a passing thought to their drone high, high up in the night sky. And then Babson, and the others, would let the blighters have it. But plenty!

"All checks made, sir. Everything okay. Give it to the beggars, sir!"

Babson turned his head to stare into the faintly flare-lighted face of the senior flight mechanic. He nodded and started fumbling with the strap of his helmet.

"Right you are," he grunted. "Do our best, of course. All right, chaps, in with you. A job to do."

He spoke the last to the three members of his crew and took a step toward the belly door of the plane. They seemed to hesitate a brief moment. Then Stafford, the bombardier, made sounds in his throat and slapped his hand against the bomb compartment.

"Checked those new releases?" he demanded sharply of the senior flight mechanic. "Last show that Number One stick release didn't act as well as it should. Don't want to be stuck with these eggs, you know."

The senior flight mechanic flushed slightly, but nodded.

"Everything was checked, sir," he said. "Everything's okay."

BABSON put out a hand and spoke softly to Stafford.

"In with you, old man," he said. "Tough, I know. Mustn't let our nerves go scraggy, though. The job, and all that sort of rot."

"Rot, is quite correct!" snapped Holder, the navigator, as he ducked down under the belly opening. "Give my right arm if Spit-and-Polish were along tonight. Know what I'd jolly well do?"

"Nothing," Babson said, and gave him a gentle push. "You wouldn't have the chance to push him over the side. One of us would probably beat you to it. Now, in with you, and shut up. We'll make this show doubly pukka. For old Willerson—blast his wild nature!"

Ten minutes later, Babson took the lead Lockheed off the field and up into the air. He checked with Operations on the ground, did the hundred and one other little jobs that have to be performed at the start of a show, and climbed the aircraft steadily upward toward the overcast at some twenty-two thousand feet. When he reached that height he made a single check with each of the three planes trailing along with him, then set his course for the objective.

He had just about reached the Channel coast when he heard a startled exclamation from Navigator Holder's lips just aft of him. It was just a sound, because of the drone of his engines, but it was startling enough to cause him to turn his head.

As he did, a startled exclamation flew off his lips. The tall figure of a Puck-faced flight lieutenant squeezed past Holder and dropped into the little canvas seat that was used by the co-pilot when long flights were made. On a comparatively short run like this, however, there was no need for a co-pilot. He served as a gunner in the aft blister instead.

"Great snakes!" Babson shouted as he took a second look. "It's you, Wil-

lerson! What the devil?"

"Surprise, surprise, as the Yanks say!" the pilot doomed to court-martial said with a chuckle. "Slipped out of the klink, and slipped aboard. Just like that. I say, though, don't turn back, and dump me off, will you?"

Babson had to choke a little and get his tongue untangled before he could speak again.

"You're mad, man!" he finally blurted. "Absolutely mad. You'll probably get shot for this!"

A shadow passed over Willerson's face, and he seemed to age ten years in as many seconds.

"Quite!" he murmured. "If Spit-and-Polish has anything to say about it. Fact is, though, I think I'd rather it would be that way. I've been a confounded fool, Babson, old thing. Deserve all that's coming to me. My nature, I guess, to be that way. Know it's wrong, but I can't seem to do anything to stop myself. But . . . Well, I sort of felt it wouldn't change anything—for the worse, anyway—to go out on this one last show. Do you mind, terribly? I can jump out, if you insist, old fellow."

"Of course, I mind!" Babson growled. "But don't be a blinking fool now. Stay right in that seat. How'd you manage it? The klink, I mean."

"Simple," the other pilot replied. "Used to klinks, as you well know. Always a loose board, or a brick, if you hunt hard enough. Ours has a poor window, old man. Practically able to swing it outward like a door. Must have used Nazi cement, I guess. Slipped out after the guard bloke had removed the remnants of my evening meal. Made my way to the end of the field. After they'd loaded the bombs I slipped aboard and holed up in the flare locker. What a spot if I'd touched one off by accident, eh?"

BABSON winced at the very mention of such a catastrophe. Old Willerson would have been fried to a

crisp, and in short order there would have been only the framework of the Hudson left.

He took a quick glance at the tall R.A.F. flight lieutenant out the corner of his eye.

"So one last show will be worth all that's bound to happen?" he murmured. "Bit of a fool, aren't you, Willerson? Something might possibly have happened, you know. Now, it can't."

"Smythe-Mather wouldn't have let anything happen!" the other man said grimly. "Been on my tail for quite sometime, you know. He knows full well what I think of his ilk. Fact is, I told him the other night. This is his chance. Yes, this one last fling is well worth all that Smythe-Mather can do. I . . . Good Lord! I swear it never occurred to me!"

"What?" Babson demanded.

"Why, you, and the others, of course!" Willerson said in a pained voice. "He'll go after your hides, for . . . But, no. He couldn't possibly prove that you knew I was aboard, could he?"

"Let him try it!" Babson said, tight-lipped. "It so happens that we didn't know you were aboard until it was too late. Don't worry about us. Only yourself. And I'm almighty sorry, Willerson. I want you to know that I did everything possible to—"

Babson cut the rest off short. His inner sense told him suddenly that he was close to the target.

And at that exact second Holder's voice behind him confirmed his dead certain hunch.

"Approaching target, sir," the navigator said. "Bombardier ready to operate."

Babson nodded and switched on the inter-com that connected him with Stafford in the nose. The man was lining up his target, and his flight instructions came through the inter-com in a steady drome. Babson forgot all about Willerson at his side. He con-

centrated everything he had on following Stafford's instructions to the letter.

He knew, though he could not see, that the three other Hudsons were strung out in line behind his craft. His bombs would go down first, then those from the next plane, and the next, and the next. As each aircraft let go with its load of bombs it would bank sharp to port and climb on full engines for altitude. That way it was hoped that they would escape the awful blast of anti-aircraft fire that would come up, once the reason for their presence was realized by those below.

A SURPRISE run on the target, and a surprise get-away. The success of both those items was absolutely necessary.

"First stick away!" Stafford's voice sang out in the inter-com. "First . . . Hey! What the blooming blazes?"

"What's up, Stafford!" Babson barked sharply, and tried to peer down into the bombardier's compartment. "What's the matter?"

"Every blasted thing!" came the man's agonized reply. "The release catch. It's stuck, and I never dreamed it would. The Number One bomb's caught by its fin, and swinging like a pendulum! I can just see it when I stick my head out this port. Hold us steady, for gosh sake, sir!"

Babson's hands went ice-cold on the controls, and his heart seemed to stop beating in his chest. Somewhere under the belly of the Hudson a five-hundred-pound bomb was dangling by its trapped fin. The nose end had gone down through the bomb opening, but the tail had caught and obviously jammed.

And there it hung in the prop-wash! Five hundred pounds of sudden death and destruction, with a war head on it set to detonate at the slightest contact because it was a surface fragmentation bomb.

BABSON knew that the light tap of a tack-hammer could detonate a bomb when it was set for a surface burst. If it should slap back against the Lockheed and the nose crack against the undercarriage housing in the belly, it would be curtains. It would be curtains also if he went back to the field and let down the wheels and landed.

As long as that bomb dangled there, unless Holder or somebody could reach down through the trap opening and force it loose, sudden death could come to them all at most any second!

As all that raced through Babson's head he felt Holder touch him on the shoulder, heard the navigator's panted words.

"Can't get down at the blasted thing!" the man gasped. "Out of reach of my arm, and even my foot. If there was only some way to get at it from the outside! Can't, though. Nothing to hang on to. I—"

"Just fly her steady, old man!" Babson suddenly heard Willerson's voice say. "Know just the thing to do. Must give Jerry his little surprise, you know. See you anon, old fellow."

Willerson squeezed Babson's arm, got up off his co-pilot's seat, and ducked aft.

"Here, where're you going?" Babson roared. "Come back here, you blasted fool! Come back here! You can't do anything!"

"But I can, old man," was the reply. "Had a hunch I might be useful on this show. Maybe that's why I was crazy enough to slip aboard. Lord! Won't old Spit-and-Polish be in a stew now! So sorry to disappoint the blighter. Fly us steady!"

Babson yelled again, but he knew he was only wasting his breath. Willerson could not hear him, and would not have paid any attention if he had. For the first torturing instant Babson was seized with the impulse to abandon the controls and go aft after the crazy man.

But he killed the urge and held the Hudson steady as sweat oozed from every pore on his body. The other bombers had already dropped their loads and great clouds of red and orange light were spreading over the ground far below. Their shimmering reflections were flung high up toward the Lockheed, and Babson was able to catch a flash glimpse of his three other Hudsons banking off and climbing on full engines toward the safety of the overcast.

Then, as he pressed his face hard against the cockpit window glass and peered down, he caught a flash glimpse of something that made his blood seem to turn to ice in his veins. He saw one of his own five-hundred-pound bombs go wobbling downward and to the side a little. He saw the dim figure of Willerson with both arms and legs wrapped about the bomb.

Then Willerson let go and Babson saw the man reaching for the ring of his chute ripcord as he went down out of sight. Babson stared hard at the blaze of color below until he was certain he saw the mushroom of flame-

tinted white that blossomed out and seemed to hang in the air. And from a long way off, it seemed, he heard Holder's half-sobbing voice in his ear.

"Chaps have got the V.C. for less! Climbed right down in the release trap. Threw himself at the bomb and clung to it like a blasted monkey. His weight pulled it free, and—and down he went. Lord, how I hope he gets an extra nice prison camp. And I hope that some day after the war I can meet him. Old Willerson. Never was a man like him. As he said, this will put old Spit-and-Polish in a stew, eh?"

"Amen!" Babson breathed fervently. "When we confirm this with our reports Smythe-Mather won't dare open his mouth. If I've got anything to say about it, old Willerson's folks are going to get a medal to keep for him—instead of something else. This blasted war can be a bit lovely at times. Close the bomb trap. Just to play safe we'll take our other eggs home and hatch them some other day."

"No," Holder chuckled, and turned aft. "Let's give them to Spit-and-Polish for souvenirs. What?"

*Slosher Gaines, Hero of the
Prize-Ring, Gets Into the
Biggest Fight of All*

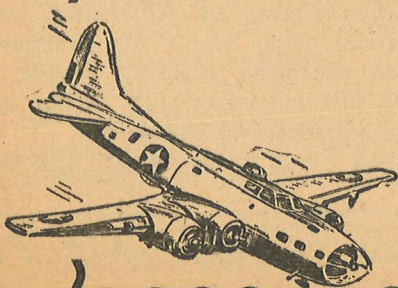
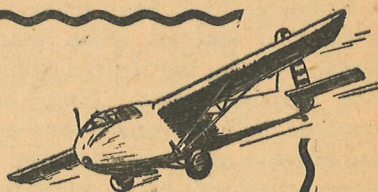
IN

FLYING GUNNER

*A Thrill-a-Minute
Air Novel*

By TRACY MASON

Coming Next Issue



TASKS WAITING TO BEAT THE AXIS

By **LIEUT. GEN. GEORGE H. BRETT**

Commander in Chief, Allied Air Forces in the South-West Pacific

IF THE United Nations are to win this war—and they must—there is one preeminent necessity, and that is overwhelming strength in the air.

To reach this stage, where they are ready to strike such blows as will paralyze the enemy's movements in the air, on land, and at sea, the United Nations must pour out, to the limit of their productive capacity and physical endurance, a huge armada of bombers and fighters, and streams of trained men to fly them in the air and to maintain them on the ground.

It is not enough that our numbers exceed those of the Axis Powers. The quality of our aircraft, their speed, their fire-power, their maneuverability, their capacity to take as well as give it, must exceed like qualities in the aircraft of our enemies.

Promises have been made for such a flood of aircraft from factories in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Huge as these armadas will eventually be—and they are already assuming massive proportions—they will be no contribution to victory unless there are men to fly them. No matter how inspired the planning and leadership of the United Nations, unless the best machines and the best men are available victory cannot be assured.

This is a mechanized war, but in the final analysis, victory rests in the hands of men.

So far, in the battles which have been fought in the air, our young men

have shown that, man for man, they can more than hold their own with the enemy. The exploits of young Australians and pilots of the other United Nations, in this and the northern hemi-



*Official Photo U. S. Army Air Forces
Lieut. Gen. George H. Brett*

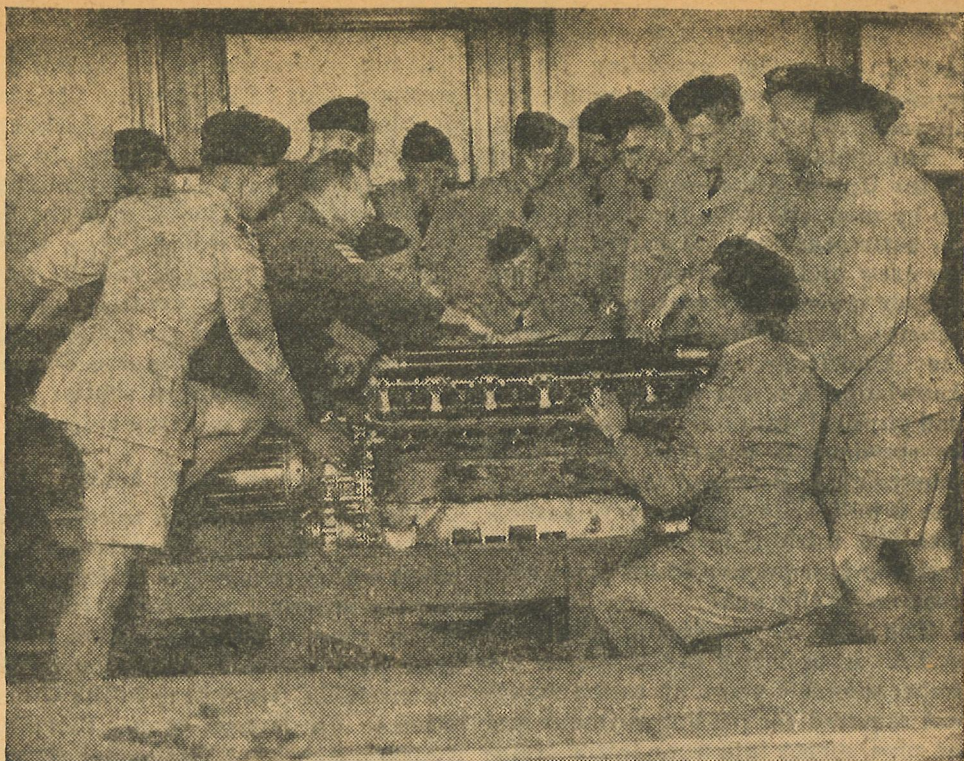
sphere will endure through history as epics of courage, fire, and determination. They should be an inspiration to young men who are to follow them, to fly and maintain the flood of aircraft soon available.

Importance of Thorough Training

One of the factors which had made for the success of Australian and American pilots under my command is the thorough training which, I would say unhesitatingly, is not excelled anywhere in the world.

When I was in England, I saw the

Overwhelming Strength in the Air Is



Australian News and Information Bureau

Australian Air Force Cadets

work being done there by the Air Training Corps and was deeply interested to know that there is an Air Training Corps operating in Australia, Canada, and Rhodesia—a girdle of youth which bodes ill for the Axis.

There is plenty of room in my command for young men in all the different categories which go to make up an efficient air fighting force. In all of them, specialized knowledge and the ability to apply it under service conditions are prime essentials. The men on the ground can win or lose battles as well as the men in the air.

Here then, is the niche of the A.T.C., which I see as an unfailing reservoir for recruits to the Royal Australian Air Force and other squadrons which fall within my command.

The United Nations started off badly. Their misplaced faith in human nature and their innate love of peace and culture lulled them into a trap of

military unpreparedness. So far we have been forced to fight defensively against an enemy armed to the teeth.

We Shall Take the Offensive

But the day is coming when we shall take the offensive, and it is against that day that our youth must get into war harness to beat back the powers that threaten our free existence.

The A.T.C. offers youth a tremendous opportunity to overtake some of the time lag which has been our worst enemy. Time is on our side only so long as we do not squander it. So I say to the youth of the United Nations who would preserve their country's freedom, join the A.T.C., and serve there your apprenticeship to the fighter and bomber squadrons of our Air Forces.

I understand that in Australia, where I now have my headquarters, the authorized establishment of the

the Keynote of United Nations Victory!

A.T.C. is 12,000, providing for 84 squadrons grouped in six wings, one in each State of the Commonwealth.

The syllabus—which we have sent to the United States—has been drawn up by men who have themselves been on active service, and caters to both air crew and ground staff. Training for air crew consists of mathematics, science, navigation, Morse code, service knowledge, general technical knowledge, aircraft recognition, drill and physical training. A slightly lower standard is accepted for ground musterings. Provided the youth has the intelligence necessary to assimilate the tuition, he is accepted for training irrespective of his prior educational background.

The aim of the training in the A.T.C. is to bring the youth in his impressionable years up to the standard required for passing, without loss of time, direct into your initial training schools and so into the battle line.

Building Pilots and Men

The A.T.C. is doing a fine job. In less than a year, sixty-one A.T.C. squadrons have been formed in Australia alone with an enrollment of 7,000 cadets. On reaching the age of eighteen and gaining the proficiency certificate, they are eligible for admission to the Royal Australian Air Force. Already some have been so accepted, and I will be glad to welcome them to assist me in my task of beating the enemy out of the skies.

This is the sort of youth movement which answers the challenge of Hitlerism. There is no compulsion as in Germany. It is free and voluntary. The United Nations want no militaristic youth movements such as are nurtured by the Nazis, but they welcome a patriotic rallying of youth to the defense of Democratic ideals.

Until recently, we in the United States have had nothing comparable with the A.T.C. We have, however,

had two movements which are not dissimilar. One of these is the Citizens' Military Training Corps. Although it imparts military training in the schools, it imposes no obligation at all on the student. The other is the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, which operates in the colleges, and the work the students do is credited toward their graduation. On graduation, they become officers in the reserve. But as I said, there has been no similar body to train boys for military aviation.

Guarantee of Peace

The nearest approach to this in the United States has been a private movement which encourages an interest in youths in model airplanes. Its popularity gives a clear indication of the vast pool of youth such a movement as the A.T.C. would tap in the United States. In Detroit alone, there are 22,000 members of this model aircraft movement.

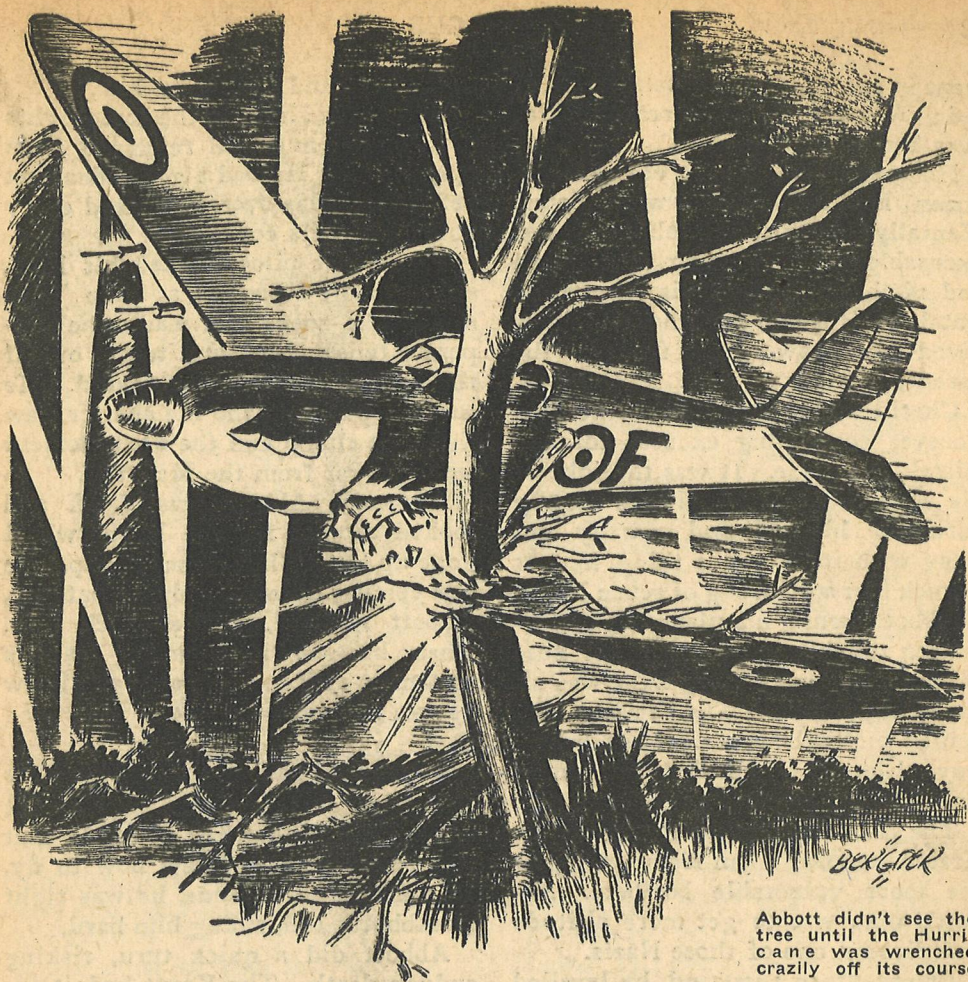
Practically every town and village has its squadron or wing.

Now, I am glad to say, cadets of the New York Military Academy at Cornwall-on-Hudson have formed the first unit of the Air Training Cadets of America.

I feel that if, in time of peace, there were similar movements in the Democratic countries, dealing not, perhaps with model airplanes, but approximating more closely to the A.T.C., the Democratic countries would offer in their organized youth a stern warning to aggressors, and a guarantee of peace that would by far outlive the scars which will be caused by the present conflict.

Today, civilization rests in the hands of our youth. Youth is straining with eagerness to rectify the errors which have been made. We need such eagerness, for the way ahead is grim and long. Only by the cooperation of lads like those in the A.T.C. can we hope to reach our goal.

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Abbott didn't see the tree until the Hurricane was wrenched crazily off its course

THE ORDER OF PRANG

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

Alibi Abbott Doesn't Need Any Excuses When He Sets His Ring Sights on the Flying Heinie He's Out to Get!

THERE were three big Handley-Page Hampdens flying at fifteen thousand, noses pointed toward England and egg crates empty. Far behind them were flaming furies where those bombs had landed.

Slightly above the bombers were four Hurricanes, lazing along to keep pace with the bombers. Pilots were stiff-necked from peering into the sky for signs of Messerschmitts. It was a

favorite habit of the Krauts to anticipate the direction of the return flight and lie in wait behind some cloud formation to pounce upon the bombers.

In the last Hurricane, his head constantly twisting and lips puckered in a shrill, unmusical whistle, sat Charlie Abbott. He was about twenty-four, red-headed and blue-eyed.

He'd trained as a transport pilot in the United States, until his enlist-

ment in the Eagle Squadron. Now his flying was done in battle-scarred skies over France and Britain.

He wasn't the first to see the half dozen Me 109's that swept down. Mentally he told himself that was excusable because being at the tail end of the formation, his job was to watch their rear, and those Heinies dived down toward the front of the parade.

Charlie Abbot was always like that. Forever concocting excuses for any mistake he made. It was the joke of his squadron, but he always stoutly defended himself and usually got away with it. For one thing, he was a crack flier with a bag of seven Nazis.

Abbott swung his plane out of formation quickly and shoved her nose toward the sky. A dog fight was already in progress. The bombers continued on their more or less sedate way, although a hail of death poured from every gun they possessed.

The Hurricanes were taking on the Krauts, keeping them from getting at the more vulnerable bombers. Abbott's plan was to get more altitude and dive on one of those Nazis.

At seventeen thousand, he levelled off, set his teeth and slowly shoved the stick forward.

The Hurricane's wings shrieked through the air. He singled out one Me darting about for a crack at a bomber. Abbott saw another Me go down on fire. That left five and the odds were now considerably upset because four Hurricanes against five Me's gave all the breaks to the British.

His finger touched the firing button and he kept on rushing headlong upon his victim. Out of the corner of his eye he saw another Me bank sharply, spot him and start rising to intercept his attack.

Abbott was traveling much too fast, however. Yet he knew that even if he did polish off the Me he'd picked out, the other one which was still climb-

ing, was bound to dive on him.

He got the Kraut in the cross sights of his guns and still refrained from opening up. He had a good idea that before this was over, he'd need every bullet his belts contained.

The Kraut pilot twisted his head, saw Abbott coming at him with meteorlike speed and made one desperate twisting attempt to get out of the way. Abbott's guns roared. He saw the panel on the Me shatter, saw the pilot slump and the next moment smoke burst from the Me's tail.

Instantly, Abbott leveled off and looked around for the Kraut who'd gone up to take him from the top. He was coming down already. That guy, Abbott realized, was a crack flier. Then he saw a squadron leader's streamers stiff in the breeze and knew he was up against an ace.

ABBOTT banked and avoided the dive of the Kraut, slipped out of the way of that hail of steel. But the German really knew how to fly. In a matter of seconds, he was right on Abbott's tail, riding him hard.

Abbott did a quick turn, risking sudden death. The Kraut hadn't expected a crazy stunt like that. Even Abbott held his breath for fear a wing would rip loose.

Bullets smacked into the Hurricane, but none found a vulnerable spot, and then Abbott was out of range again.

That sudden turn brought him on the tail of the Kraut for a change. Abbott set his jaws, leaned forward and gave her a full gun while his finger caressed the firing button.

The Kraut did a nose dive. The burst which Abbott sent out, missed by yards. He swore and headed down himself. The Nazi came out of his dive very fast, did a wild loop and on his way up, started to shoot.

Bullets smashed the Hurricane's belly. Abbott heard a loud popping sound even above the roar of his

motor. He knew what that was. A slug had smashed through a tire, drawn up by its retractors. That meant a dangerous landing, but he felt certain of how grateful he'd be if he ever got this chance.

Abbott had challenged many Nazi pilots, but this one seemed to hold all the cards for skill and fury. The man behind the stick of the Me must be a flying demon.

Abbott risked a quick look around. The bombers were merely specks in the distance and they were not being pursued. One British plane was going into a long, smoking glide, its pilot intent on reaching British soil so he could bail out. Two Nazis were left and these seemed to have had enough. They turned tail and fled back toward France.

But not the Limburger who had picked Abbott. That pilot was determined not to return without another Englishman in his bag. Abbott glanced at his fuel gauge and realized he didn't have so very many more minutes left to him. Ammunition was getting a bit low, too. His only consolation lay in the fact that the Kraut must be similarly worried.

That became very apparent, a second later, when the Nazi risked everything. He dived toward Abbott's tail, held his fire and leveled off. Abbott gave the Hurricane a full gun and there was a grim plan in his mind.

If it failed, he'd take an awful long drink of the British Channel, but if it worked, he'd chalk up another victory, the toughest one he ever had to fight for.

The Hurricane, roaring at top speed, was headed toward France again. They were both down to three thousand feet now. Abbott turned his head, saw the German maneuvering into position for a burst. Suddenly Abbott slowed up.

This was something a Hurricane could do well. From a top speed of three hundred and thirty-five miles

per hour, the plane was quickly brought to a speed slightly above one hundred.

The Krauts never seemed to remember this trick. Perhaps not enough of them had ever escaped when it was pulled, to circulate the information. The Kraut in the Me, ready to open fire, suddenly had to concentrate on flying.

THE distance between the two planes lessened as if by magic. The Me gave a crazy bank, missed the Hurricane by no more than several feet and as it streaked by, Abbott had a good look at the pilot.

He saw the narrow face, the bright, murderous eyes shining through the goggles. He had a good look at the streamers and knew he'd recognize them again.

The German had no opportunity to fire. Now he was the pursued instead of the pursuer, and he didn't like it. Instead of maneuvering to mix it again, he kept right on going at top speed. Abbott chased him for five or six miles and then gave up. Neither his ammunition nor fuel warranted this chase and a final battle.

He banked and turned back. The sky was clear of planes now. The battle was won and three bombers were safe to reload and begin another egg-laying journey.

It still rankled in Abbott's soul how that Kraut had got away, but he was morally certain that he'd met with one of Goering's top aces that time.

Then he forgot everything else except the fact that his landing gear was out of commission. He reached for his radio and found it dead. Cursing a little, Abbott set a straight course for his base and soon saw the field sprawled out below.

The other planes had landed safely, but he was going to crack up. Abbott knew it. He circled the field once and hoped they would realize something was wrong and get out the fire

wagon and ambulance.

Gritting his teeth, he started down. The ground came up at him with terrific speed. Sweat covered his begrimed face. His hands were locked on the stick. Landing gear was down. At least it might break the crash somewhat.

Then he contacted the ground. His left wing dipped crazily, collided with the earth and the plane spun around while metal shrieked. Abbott already had his motor off and the safety belt loose in case of fire. He shoved the sliding panel back, leaped out and fell flat on his face.

Breath whistled out of his lungs and he went into a blackout. Very dimly, he was aware of whining sirens, of men clustered about him and finally he was lifted onto a stretcher.

At six A.M. the next morning, Charlie Abbott was back in ranks. It was full dress parade. Wing Commander Bennett stalked forward, front and center. He wheeled, faced the line of flying fighters and called out one name.

"Flight Lieutenant Abbott—front."

Abbott obeyed, wondering what was going to happen now. He'd filed a full report, the moment they let him out of the first aid station. Perhaps he was due to get a medal. After all, he had helped to save those Hampdens.

WING COMMANDER BENNETT had an odd smile on his face. He returned Abbott's salute.

"Flight Lieutenant Abbott, before the assembled members of your squadron, I would like a detailed report on what happened yesterday."

"Yes, sir." Abbott flushed a bit. "We were flying at sixteen thousand, sir—"

"We know all about that," Bennett snapped. "I want an explanation of your sloppy landing."

"Oh, that," Abbott said. "It's easy

to explain, sir. You see, I—"

"Now just a moment," Bennett said sternly. "You have something of a reputation here, Abbott. They call you 'Alibi' Abbott, because no matter what happens, you invariably have an excuse."

"Yes, sir," Abbott gulped.

"Like the time you stunted and scared the devil out of two generals. You said your plane went out of control. Then you stole Colonel Jarvis' car and later on explained that it was a ghastly mistake. You thought the car was someone else's. Then there was that Channel fight two weeks ago. Radio orders were given that you break off the fight. You didn't and later on stated that you hadn't heard the orders. What is your alibi this time?"

"Well, sir—maybe I did stretch the truth a bit before, but this time, sir; it really happened. The Nazi I tangled with shot a hole in one of my tires. You can see for yourself if you look at the wreck."

"The wreck is so bad no evidence of that nature could be found. The tires were burned before we got the fire out, Abbott. I'm sorry—your excuses won't work this time. I think you made a sloppy landing, and we have methods by which we deal with pilots who destroy the King's property."

Abbott wet his lips and said nothing. Wing Commander Bennett shouted an order. A junior officer came forward, holding a large plush box. Bennett opened it, stepped up to Abbott and hung a large wooden cross in the shape of a German Iron Cross on his chest.

From a hip pocket he drew a scroll and handed this to Abbott.

"You have been decorated, Lieutenant Abbott, with the Order of Prang. It's an institution developed in the Eagle Squadron for careless pilots and you win the decoration. The scroll lists the damage you did to that plane."

"But, sir—" Abbott wondered if every blood vessel in his face would burst.

"No excuses," Bennett thundered. "No alibis. You have used up every one any man could possibly think of, and the one you just attempted was the weakest of them all."

"Yes, sir."

Abbott knew the futility of arguing. He knew also the big grins on the faces of his fellow pilots. It would take weeks to live this down.

"You will wear that decoration, Abbott, for one week. You will read the scroll twenty times a day and recite it to your squadron every evening when you are not flying."

"You mean," Abbott asked eagerly, "that I'm not grounded?"

"Certainly not. You did get one of those Germans, you fought well against the one who got away. I wouldn't dare ask you how that happened. Some monstrous lie would spout from your lips. That's all, Abbott."

A HOWL went up when the men were dismissed. Pilots clustered around red-faced Alibi Abbott and fingered the wooden cross while they clucked sympathetically or murmured questions as to what a man had to do in order to get himself decorated with such a valuable token.

Finally Abbott laughed. There was nothing else to do but take it gracefully, even if he boiled inside. The kidding kept up all day.

He was watched constantly so that he couldn't be without the wooden decoration for a single moment. He studied the scroll, too—in the middle of a group who jeered him and kidded the pants off him.

Abbott laid the scroll down. "All right, you bunch of vultures, that time I did tell the truth. If I could get the Kraut who peppered my machine, I'd prove it."

"Aw, don't get sore," Tex Blane

chided. "We're all of us apt to get one of those before we land the flying cross. It's just an idea to stop crazy Yank pilots from damaging equipment, that's all."

Abbott grinned. "Okay, boys. I can take it, but some day I'll get that Kraut and—"

The loud speaker broke in raucously. Orders were crisply relayed, and all pilots seized their flying clothes and chutes. Abbott had a new Hurricane poised on the field, and he rushed toward it. Mechanics had her warmed up and he was helped with his chute. A wizen-faced Britisher gave him a boost up into the cockpit.

"Good luck, sir," he yelled. "If you get into a jam, sir, just show them Heinies your decoration, and they'll get scared and fly away."

Abbott took a good-natured swing at him, but missed. He settled himself behind the controls and waited for orders.

"Blue Squadron will attack enemy field at position 3X. Your objective is to keep enemy planes from taking off from that field, while our bombers blast at a munitions dump. That is all."

Then Abbott was streaking across the field. He nosed up smoothly and headed for the Channel. There was little rest for airmen these days, with around-the-clock raids on the enemy.

Soon the squadron was soaring gracefully into the night, its objective clearly marked on every map the pilots had. Abbott knew the wild action that always resulted from an attack on a flying field. The Krauts had plenty of ack-ack there and planes ready to hop off on a second's notice.

Furthermore, that notice was bound to be flashed the moment the squadron reached French shores. The Krauts would be waiting for them, perhaps. It made little difference as long as the Messerschmitts were prevented from attacking the big formations of British bombers.

Searchlights cut the darkness. One flashed across Abbott's plane and he winced at the brightness of it as he banked to get away from the inevitable ack-ack.

The sky was filled with bursting shells. His plane rocked crazily, but held a steady course. None of the others were hit. At least he saw no flaming meteors racing toward the earth.

THE signal for attack came, and Abbott dived. He hurled destruction at a plane just racing along the field for a takeoff. It nosed over and burst into flame. Others were mercilessly machine-gunned by the rest of the squadron.

Abbott nosed up again. A score of searchlights were blazing around him. One caught a black Me in its ray. Abbott gave a grunt of surprise.

He was close enough to see the streamers. This was the same pilot who had shot off his tire and neatly arranged matters so he got that damned wooden cross pinned to his uniform under the flying coat.

Abbott ground out a curse. No matter what happened now, he was intent on bringing this man down. Two seconds later, the fight of that same morning was resumed over enemy territory.

Abbott's guns cut loose. The surprised Me gave a crazy turn and streaked into the night. Abbott was after him in a flash. He'd had plenty of night flying and possessed good eyes.

His Hurricane thundered along, got on the tail of the Me, and Abbott let go with a burst. He saw the Me wiggle madly, but keep on its course.

Abbott tried again. This time he shot off the tail. The Me started to spiral down and a bold plan entered Abbott's head. He might be able to land also and capture the Kraut, stuff him into the plane and parade him before the squadron the next morning.

Make him tell how he'd very probably punctured the tire.

Abbott started to go down after him. The Kraut was a master at this stuff. He knew just where to land. Through the darkness, Abbott saw a flat field, studded with a few dangerous trees, just below him. He saw the German hit the ground, bounce up and crash.

Abbott banked and came back eagerly. He wanted to sit down very close to the Me, and his heart almost stopped beating for fear that the wrecked plane would catch fire.

He was so intent on watching for this, that he didn't see the tree just to the right of him. He became aware of it only when he felt the Hurricane seized by an invisible hand and wrenched crazily off its course.

Coolly, Abbott cut the switch and braced himself. There was nothing else he could do. The wing was all but ripped off by that tree.

The ground rushed up. There was a hideous crash. The Hurricane scooped a deep hole in the ground, nosed over and stood there, almost vertical.

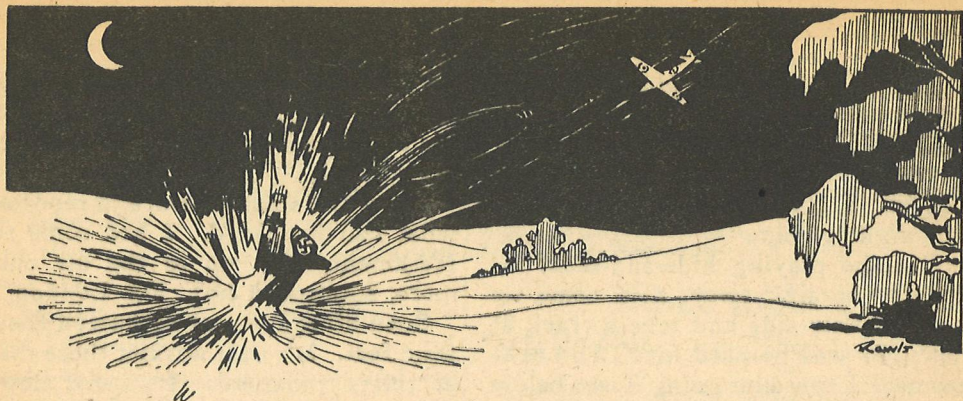
Abbott cleared his wits, loosened his belt and managed to slide out of the plane. He looked around for the Kraut. The Me was only about two hundred yards away.

He saw a dim figure start running away. Abbott reached for his service pistol and sent a slug whining above the pilot's head. The German stopped and raised both hands.

Abbott approached him cautiously. He didn't trust these Heinies any further than he could heave a Wellington bomber.

"Keep 'em up!" he warned. "You're my prisoner."

WHEN he got close enough, he saw that the German was about thirty, and there was a nasty smile on his face. Abbott got his gun away
(Continued on page 101)



WAR BY MOONLIGHT

By NIGHT-FIGHTER PILOT X*

OF THE R.A.F.

TRY to imagine the moonlight sky, with a white background of snow nearly six miles below. Somewhere near the center of a toy town a tiny flare is burning. Several enemy bombers have come over, but only one fire has gained a hold.

After all the excitement of my two combats, I can still see that amazing picture of London clearly in my mind.

It was indeed the kind of night that we fly-by-nights pray for. I had been up about three-quarters of an hour before I found an enemy aircraft. I had searched all around the sky when I suddenly saw him ahead of me.

I pulled the boost control to get the highest possible speed and catch him up. I felt my Hurricane vibrate all over as she responded and gave her maximum power. I maneuvered

into position where I could see the enemy clearly with the least chance of his seeing me.

As I caught him up I recognized him—a Dornier “flying pencil.” Before I spotted him I had been almost petrified with the cold. I was beginning to wonder if I should ever be able to feel my hands, feet and limbs again. But the excitement warmed me up.

A Flier's Big Moment

He was now nearly within range and was climbing to thirty thousand feet. I knew the big moment had come. I daredn't take my eyes off him, but just to make sure that everything was all right I took a frantic glance around the “office” and checked everything.

Then I began to close in on the Dornier and found I was traveling much too fast. I throttled back and slowed up—just in time. We were frighteningly close.

I swung up then, took aim, and fired my eight guns. Almost at once I saw little flashes of fire dancing along the fuselage and center section. My bullets had found their mark.

* **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Because of war-time restrictions, the identity of the author of this remarkably vivid account of air fighting cannot be revealed. Night-Fighter Pilot X took part in the action against enemy raiders described, during which 33 Axis planes were destroyed. The pilots of the R.A.F. took full advantage of the brilliant moonlight and were able to strike telling blows. We believe that this exciting true narrative, vouched for by the Air Ministry of Great Britain, is an important historical document.

A TRUE STORY OF AIR COMBAT

I closed in again, when suddenly the bomber reared up in front of me. It was all I could do to avoid crashing into him. I heaved at the controls to prevent a collision, and in so doing lost sight of him.

Was he playing hide-and-seek, intending to jink away, then come up on the other side and take a crack at me? Or was he hard hit? The next moment I saw him going down below me with a smoke trail pouring out.

I felt a bit disappointed, because it looked as if my first shots had not been as effective as they had appeared to be. Again I pulled the boost control and went down after him as fast as I knew how. I dived from thirty thousand to three thousand feet at such a speed that the bottom panel of the aircraft cracked. As my ears were not used to such sudden changes of pressure I nearly lost the use of one of the drums.

Dancing Lights on the Fuselage

But there was no time to think of these things. I had to get that bomber! As I came nearer I saw he was on fire. Little flames were licking around his fuselage and wings. Just as I closed in again he jinked away in a steep climbing turn.

When he got to the top of his climb I was almost on him. I took sight carefully and gave the button a quick squeeze. Once more I saw little dancing lights on his fuselage, but almost instantaneously they were swallowed in a burst of flames. I saw him twist gently earthward and there was a spurt of fire as he touched the earth. He blew up and set a copse blazing.

I circled down to see if any of the crew had got out. Then I suddenly remembered the London balloon barrage, so I climbed up and set course for home.

Making a Difficult Target

I had time now to think about the action. My windscreen was covered

with oil, which made flying uncomfortable, and I had an uncomfortable feeling that I might have lost bits of my aircraft.

Anyway I soon landed, and reported what had happened. I had some refreshment, then up in the air once more, southward ho! For London.

Soon after I was at seventeen thousand feet. It's a bit warmer there than at thirty thousand. I slowed down and searched the sky. The next thing I knew, a Heinkel was sitting right on my tail. I was certain he had seen me before, and wondered how long he had been trailing me.

Opening my throttle, I got around on his tail and crept up. When I was about four hundred yards away he opened fire—and missed me. I checked my gadgets, then I closed up and snaked about so as to give him as difficult a target as possible. I got into a firing position, gave a quick burst of my guns and broke away.

I came up again, and it looked as if my shot had had no effect. Before I could fire a second time, I saw his tracer bullets whizzing past me. I fired back and knew at once that I had struck home.

I saw a parachute open up on the port wing. One of the crew was bailing out. He was quickly followed by another. The round white domes of the parachutes looked lovely in the moonlight.

White Smoke Tells a Story

It was obvious now that the pilot would never get his aircraft home. For my part, I wanted this second machine to be a "certainty" and not a "probable." So I gave another quick burst of my guns. Then, to fool him, I attacked from different angles.

There was no doubt now that he was going down. White smoke was coming from one engine, but he was not yet on fire. I delivered seven more attacks, spending all my ammunition. Both his engines smoked as he got

lower and lower. I followed him down a long way, but as he flew over a dark patch of water I lost sight of him.

I knew he had come down though, and where he had come down—it was all confirmed later—and I returned to my base ready to tackle another one. But they told me all the Jerries had gone home.

"Not all," I said. "Two of them are here for keeps."

MEN BEHIND THE PLANES

(Concluded from page 49)

dustry became convinced of the need for an air industry. Naturally, the Wack was the man to run the show. With two RAAF officers, he toured the world, seeking a model which would fit the peculiar conditions Australia demanded.

In California, on the very last leg of their trip, they found it—a plane which North American Aviation called the NA 33. In January, 1937, the RAAF ordered 40 of them to be built in Australia, a tremendous order for the time and conditions—i. e., no aircraft industry at all.

It took the Wack two years to do it, but in March, 1939, the first NA 33, renamed the Wirraway, took the air. And once again it was found that the Wack had done some tinkering with the design and with his usual success.

It was full of handy gadgets, was so strengthened that it could be used for either level or dive bombing, was a fine all-around ship. And it was Australian built to the last rivet.

The Wirraway has proved invaluable as a patrol ship and trainer for the RAAF, but the Wack has long since lost interest in it. He's now at work on a twin-engine fighter-bomber that may turn out to be the "big" pursuit ship that America has been seeking vainly with such experiments as the Airacuda.

Wasp-powered, the CA4—which is generally known as "Wack's Job"—is, as might be expected, well ahead of the times. It has a great innovation in two power-operated turrets with fore and aft fire worked by a central fire-control system. This idea has not yet been developed by anyone else, so the Wack has a clear field.

The Wack is the man behind the planes in Australia—and he's a man we can all be thankful is on our side.

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL FLYING GUNNER

By TRACY MASON



N.I.A. Training Helps Sergeant "Make Good" in Writing Field

"That N.I.A. furnished me with enlightenment is easily seen by a flock of clippings. Many are straight stories published locally, but two are 'box' features gleaned from Army life, and syndicated by Associated Press. World War II keeps me busy. I am on the staff of our camp weekly and frequently do a publicity story for the Army."—Sgt. Howard Francis Elliott, U. S. Army.

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In fact, so stimulating is this association that student members often begin to sell their work before they finish the course. We do not mean to insinuate that they skyrocket into the "big money," or become prominent overnight. Most beginnings are made with earnings of \$25, \$50, \$100, or more, for material that takes little time to write—stories, articles on business, fads, travels, sports, recipes, civilian defense, war activities, etc.—things that can easily be turned out in leisure hours, and often on the impulse of the moment.

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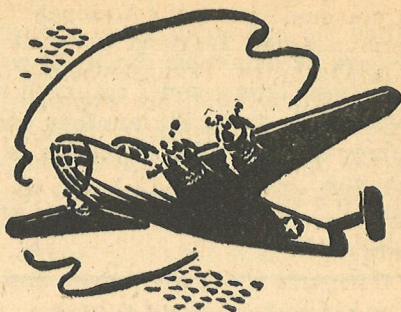
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AMERICA'S SUPREME TASK

A Message to the Home Front

By

LT. GEN. BREHON
SOMERVELL



THIS WAR is going to be won by fighting men—by men on blazing deserts, on northern wastes; by men fighting in the air and on scattered seas. Wherever the enemy is, our fighting men will attack and attack until victory is won.

The supreme task of all behind the battle lines is to provide the guns, the tanks, the planes, the ships, the equipment to make our fighting men strong and irresistible. They can fight and win, if we are certain that no second is lost in producing and sending them the weapons and the supplies so urgently needed now and until the final shot is fired that destroys the Axis.

A long, hard struggle faces us. Some few still talk despairingly of the need for greater sacrifices, of the little things that we must forego, of changes in the everyday habits of life of the civilian population.

Those at home, in factories, in fields, in the thousands of jobs the national effort requires, are demonstrat-

ing every day through selfless service their willingness and determination to concentrate all energies on winning the war.

The spirit of America is one of our greatest assets. It stems from an abiding faith in our way of life which we shall preserve and expand. This spirit is an asset which the whip-driven Axis powers do not possess, and never can. Only free men and women can own such a precious treasure.

You on the home front and we in the Army are a team. Our goal is victory. Let us not delude ourselves. We haven't had too much success so far. Let us not indulge in the luxury of wishful thinking. Our foe is strong and resourceful. This is no Saturday afternoon football game. It is a grim and deadly business.

Sweat, fortitude, unfailing devotion to daily tasks, no matter how trivial they may seem—these are the ingredients of victory.

Our fighting men are on the march in far-flung regions of the world, striking with unexampled courage at the enemy. They won't fail you.

Give 'em firepower!



A stylized, cursive signature of Brehon Somervell.

LT. GEN. BREHON SOMERVELL,
*Services of Supply,
Commanding.*

THE ORDER OF PRANG (Continued from page 96)

from him and shoved it into a pocket.

"Did you say I was your prisoner?" the German asked in good English. "This is Occupied France—German territory. Rather, you are my prisoner."

"Not as long as I hold this gun," Abbott snapped. "You and I met before—over the Channel this morning. Remember?"

The German's smile died away and a look of hate crossed his features.

"So? That is good. You are a splendid pilot and your capture weakens the British. Yet you do not talk like an Englishman."

"Yank," Abbott said. "There'll be an awful lot of us over here pretty soon. You'll find out when Berlin starts falling into ruins."

"Bah! The Japanese will keep you Americans so busy there will be no time to send men to fight us. You will soon be bombed. Your West Coast levelled. The Japs have enough carriers. They can bomb you, but you cannot bomb them."

"Oh, no?" Abbott laughed. "You ought to visit Tokio and Yokohama. They were plastered for the first time, months ago. Only you fellows never hear about anything except the good side—for you. Come on—we're heading for the shore."

"The shore? What kind of foolishness is this? Hand me your gun, surrender and I will see that you receive good treatment."

"No, thanks. You're going to visit England. That's what every Kraut has wanted to do for years, isn't it? Only you'll come as a prisoner. Man, this is the biggest batch of luck I've encountered since I started to fly."

"How do you expect to get through?" the German asked. "The coast is guarded, every inch. We are near a small submarine base. How do you expect to reach England—by swimming?"

"If necessary!" Abbott grinned.

[Turn page]

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"You see, this morning you shot one of my tires full of holes. Maybe you remember that?"

"It is possible," the German answered. "I did machine-gun the bottom of your plane. Yes, I did puncture a tire. I am sure of it because I saw pieces of rubber and metal fly."

"Ah, that's elegant. Now, all I want you to do is stand up before my squadron and tell them that. They said I made a sloppy landing this morning. I was decorated for it—with this."

The German stared at the wooden cross and then burst into a fit of laughter.

"The Order of Prang. We have heard of it. Heard how almost every pilot of the Eagle Squadron has one of those because of their foolish flying."

Abbott's gun came up and centered. "Cut that laugh, Heinie. I had to take it from my buddies, but I don't from you."

The German grew instantly sober. "Very well. Now how do you expect to get me to England?"

"I don't know yet," Abbott confessed, "but we Yanks usually create our chances of getting away. So there is a submarine base nearby, eh? Probably used for your torpedo boats, too."

"Why do you ask that?" the German demanded suspiciously.

Abbott shrugged. "Because torpedo boats may mean the failure of my getaway. Those babies can travel."

"There are torpedo boats—many of them. You cannot escape. Stop playing the fool and give me that gun."

"I'll give you part of it, right in the heart, if you keep talking loudly. Now get over against your plane. Turn your back toward me and stay that way."

ABBOTT quickly ripped loose several lengths of wire. He stepped up to the German, jammed the gun against his back and made him draw both hands behind him. Abbott lashed the wrists with wire. Then he

spun the German around, put his gun away and proceeded to fashion an effective gag."

"It's not that I don't like to hear you talk, pal," he said, "but I don't want anybody else to hear you. There—now let's hear you yell."

Abbott knew just where he was going. He'd flown over this territory often enough and studied maps of it, to be sure of his course. Forcing the German pilot ahead of him, he reached a dusty road and marched his prisoner along it.

Finally Abbott stopped him and removed the gag.

"What's ahead, pal? How many men are there near that small naval base?"

"I will not talk," the German snapped.

Abbott stepped back, slowly raised the gun and drew a bead on the Nazi's head. The German gulped and turned very pale.

"There are many men. Four or five hundred. Every inch of the beach is patrolled. For a hundred miles on either side of the base are larger encampments. Stupid dog—a flea could not get through those lines."

"Maybe," Abbott laughed. "A flea might not want to pass some ripe meat like you offer. I'm not a flea, so I'm going through."

They marched for more than three hours until Abbott finally saw lights flickering ahead and the breeze brought him the smell of the sea. He forced the German pilot to sit down. Abbott began thinking.

The only way to get at one of those torpedo boats was to create a diversion. A mighty big one, too. But how? He decided to look for a weak spot.

Using more of the wire, he tied his prisoner's ankles, calves and thighs. Abbott wound more around his prisoner's arms and fastened the gag very securely into place. Then he rolled the German over to a tree, well off the road, and lashed him to it.

Ten minutes later, Abbott crawled on all fours toward a small sentry box. It guarded a gate in the high steel

fence which hemmed in the limits of the base.

There was no village or town. The Germans had created the base away from any center of population, because French patriots had a habit of throwing explosives about rather indiscriminately.

Abbott saw the sentry, huddled in the box for warmth. He wriggled closer, coming at it from the blind side. Then he stood up, made sure no other patrols were about and edged his way toward the narrow entrance.

He gripped his heavy gun, surged into the box and swung it very effectively. There was one German less who'd have to Heil his satanic boss.

Abbott quickly drew the sentry's coat over his uniform, jammed on his coal bucket helmet and picked up his rifle. He made certain the weapon was ready for action and then he calmly opened the gate and made his way toward the waterfront.

Twice he passed patrols, but they paid no attention to him. So long as the sentry wasn't discovered, he was

[Turn page]

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safe. Change of guards might occur at any moment so he risked everything on this long shot.

H E SAW a long, low building, well camouflaged. Apparently, this was an ammunition dump because there were shells piled outside and many cases of ammunition stacked up.

Abbott grinned, but not in mirth. Even if they got him, he meant to do as much damage as possible. Grasping his rifle firmly, he moved toward the entrance.

A guard leaned sleepily against his rifle. It was after midnight, Abbott knew. This was the time to strike. The guard stirred at Abbott's approach, recognized the uniform and grunted a greeting.

Abbott stepped a little closer and said one word as he swung the rifle.

"Commando!"

The guard went down. He'd be out for ten or fifteen minutes at least. Abbott rushed into the building and looked around. It required five minutes to make up a package of high explosives and several lengths of fuse.

He made his way to the very center of the building, planted a charge of explosives and lit a fuse that would require fifteen minutes before it reached pay dirt. Then he slipped out of the building and planted more explosives.

He found the sentry, jammed into the box, still there and undiscovered. Abbott shifted a Tommy gun he'd taken from the arsenal, to his other arm and began running.

He reached the German pilot, untied him except for his arms and the gag.

"We're going around the Naval base," he said. "When we reach the water, we're going to swim for one of those torpedo boats. Nobody is aboard them. I had a chance to look."

The German shook his head violently, but Abbott just jabbed him with the end of the machine gun.

"You'll go into the water, because I'll push you. I'll keep your head up, but if you start anything, so help me,

I'll let you drown. Even though that would break my heart."

They were moving through the darkness just outside the high steel fence when the first cache of explosives let go. Then the others shattered the stillness. Finally the ammunition dump went up and it hurled both Abbott and his prisoner to the ground.

Men were rushing around wildly, searching for whoever had accomplished this. Pretty soon someone yelled "Commando." Abbott knew the guard he'd belted with the rifle butt had recovered and given the alarm.

Abbott shoved the muzzle of his Tommy-gun through the fence. He yelled Commando half a dozen times and started shooting. Then he forced the German along to another point and fired more bursts. He kept this up until the ammunition drum was empty. He flung the rifle away, drew his pistol and kept on going.

The water sparkled ahead of them. All guards on the waterfront had been withdrawn to search for the Commandos apparently raiding this base. There was indiscriminate shooting all around the place. The Heinies were certainly jittery about the Commando troops.

Abbott saw two men hurrying his way. The prisoner started running toward them. Abbott followed, swung the barrel of his gun against the German's head and sent him sprawling on the ground. His gun swerved quickly and he fired four shots. Both advancing men went down and stayed there.

Picking up the unconscious pilot Abbott threw him over one shoulder. Staggering under this weight, he reached the water's edge and flung the pilot off a dock.

S EARCHLIGHTS were playing all around. The confusion was supreme. Abbott saw four torpedo boats tied up. He slipped into the water himself, kept the pilot's head up and towed him toward the boats.

There were men on the dock, but

their attentions were focused toward land. Abbott turned the German on his back, let him silently float against the sleek hull of the boat, holding him by a length of wire while he climbed over the rail.

He reached down, pulled his prisoner aboard, too, and made certain he was still unconscious. Then Abbott slipped forward toward the engines. He knew how to run one of these boats. In fact, nothing with a motor was a stranger to Abbott.

He started the engines. They roared and he knew how quickly they'd bring men to try and stop him. He seized the wheel and backed the ship straight away from its dock.

He saw Germans heading for the other boats. He let go of the wheel, crouched behind one of the machine-guns and let go with a withering blast.

The Germans either fell or dived for cover.

Rifles started spanging away and slugs whined above his head and smacked into the craft. He returned to the wheel and gave the boat a sharp turn. It headed toward England. The powerful motors roared smoothly, and he began to put distance between himself and the now fiercely blazing base.

Searchlights fingered him out. Guns blasted, but he kept up a zigzag course
[Turn page]



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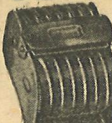
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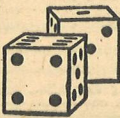
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and very soon he was out of range. He shut off all lights to prevent planes from spotting him and set a straight course for Britain.

The Heinie at his feet moaned and tossed a little. Abbott knelt beside him.

"That was a fool thing to do," he chided. "If I hadn't wanted you alive badly, I'd have shot you right between the shoulder blades."

The German pilot was only half-conscious and didn't realize he was on a speeding craft.

"You are the fool. You cannot get away."

"Want to bet?" Abbott chuckled.

"I have nothing to bet."

"You've got the greatest thing that I want. If we reach England, will you stand up and tell my mates you did shoot away one of my tires?"

"Yes, I will do that because it is impossible that it would ever happen. They will find you."

"Listen, pal," Abbott said. "We're halfway across the channel already. The base back there has been smashed. I parked enough T.N.T. around to do the job right. Now remember—you made a bargain. Let's see if you're man enough to keep it."

THE squadron was drawn up when Abbott advanced toward Wing Commander Bennett. He still wore the German coal bucket helmet and he held a gun against the German pilot's back. Abbott, if he had tried, couldn't have made a more timely entrance. He saw his friends gape, saw Bennett stare in awe.

"Face them," Abbott told the pilot. "Now keep your bargain."

The German did. His voice told how Abbott's tire had certainly been shot through, how it was impossible for him to make anything but a crash landing.

Abbott faced Wing Commander Bennett. "There you are, sir. And here, sir, is your Order of Prang. I don't like it as a decoration."

Bennett took the wooden cross, still a bit dazed. Then his eyes flashed.

"Abbott, you must be the man responsible for the destruction of the German base. We've had reports of it. That was a splendid piece of work."

"Thank you, sir."

"You have also proved that we were wrong in giving you this decoration."

"Yes, sir. You were quite wrong, sir."

"That's fine," Bennett's voice suddenly changed to a growl. "What happened to the Hurricane you took off in last night?"

Abbott turned red and gulped. "I—I cracked it up, sir."

"Ah, yes. Just how, Abbott?"

"Well, sir, I saw this Heinie go down and I wanted to bring him back. There was a swell landing field, so I just went after him, sir."

"Good. But why didn't you fly him back?"

"I—I cracked up, sir. You see, it was dark. My attention was on this German, sir. I—I—oh blast it, man, I was careless. I knew there were trees on the field, but I forgot all about 'em. One ripped my wing off. Sir, if you'll pardon me."

Abbott stepped up to Bennett, took back the wooden cross and pinned it on his breast again.

"I was getting fond of the darned thing, anyway," he said.

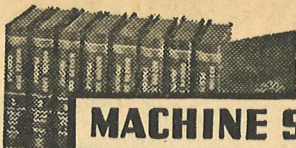
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THUMBS UP

(Continued from page 13)

We agree with you, old man. This is as much of a woman's war as it is a man's. Hasn't Mr. Dooley heard of the WAAFS of the ATAs? I wonder how he would make out ferrying British planes all over the British Isles? Some of those Atagirls have been popped at by Nazi flyers. We are proud of our fact stuff in R.A.F. ACES, and thanks for your unbiased opinion, Mac. If you ever get over to the station, drop in and we'll have a Pimm's. With cucumber no less.

Rollo Magden, 312 North 15th (that is all the address we have), can't see any air magazine but R.A.F. ACES. He is an inveterate collector of pictures of war aces and he should be an authority on the Boche bagging beggars when we finish this war.

Pancake Potts had a Nissen full of photos near Cambrai when we hived up with him in 1916. They were pictures of chorus girls from London, Paree, New York, etc. Pancake had a picture of Daphne Pollard in the office of his Camel. You remember seeing Daphne do her turn at the Palladium? Here is Rollo's report on his favorite journal of the trade.

I just bought the newest edition of R.A.F. ACES and it really is one of the best (if not the best) so far.

Since writing to you last I have gotten 150 more pictures of aces for a total of 250.

I also read the article by "Paddy" Finucane. Paddy was the 2nd leading British ace as W. C. A. G. Malan was on the top with 35 (this was a year and half ago.)

Please, for the sake of your readers, put R.A.F. ACES out oftener?

Nice visit, old fellow. Jack Kabcenell, 42-15 81st St., Elmhurst, L. I., is a hundred percent for our English cousins. Hark at the lad:

I would appreciate it if that screwball George "America First" Roselle was returned to the boobyhatch where he belongs. Don't get me wrong, I'm as patriotic to the good old U.S.A. as anyone but he ought to remember that the English took plenty during the German air-blitz and came out of it smiling. There are plenty of American Airplane mags. I think it's proper that the R.A.F. should have a mag of its own.

Why doesn't this mag come out every month? It's awful hard on us fellows having to wait three months for it.

We speak the same language, Jack. The R.A.F. took the Luftwaffe apart and no doubt saved a couple of U.S. coast towns from a bombing. We owe them some recognition and we brought out R.A.F. ACES to see that the world did not forget.

Any clients that resent R.A.F. ACES in our group should look in the mirror and ask themselves what is wrong. Wait until the Yank flyers come back from England. Ask them how they liked the Royal Air Force chaps! You'll be no end abashed.

Another R.A.F. fan threatens Mr. Dooley. L. B. Moore of Valdosta, Georgia, claims Dooley is hampering the war effort and that we at the controls should advise the Air Marshal to dictate a letter to the State Department. L. B. puts it this way:

This is the first letter I have ever written to an editor or a reasonable facsimile of one like you. I guess during a war they are glad to get any kind of a physical wreck to hold down a swiveling Sutton seat. But it is this guy Dooley I am sore at and not you, Sarge. I bet this gormless cove, Dooley, believes Dunkirk was a publicity stunt, a setting for a British Gaumont flicker production and that Winston Churchill made a deal with Hirohito to get Uncle Sam's coat off. Dooley has a one track mind that never comes to a switch and if you ask me, he has little Gremlins inside his thick skull that whisper anti-English propaganda to him. We are in this thing together, Mr. Dooley, and what would you think would have happened to us if Hitler had followed up Dunkirk with an invasion of the British Isles? How about our shipping in the Atlantic? German ships would have blockaded us to a fare-thee-well if England had collapsed like France.

We should cut out this bickering in a war. It is easy for loud mouths to criticize when they are beside a comfortable fire and listening to the war over the radio. We would join Mr. Dooley if somebody would only take him over to Norway or some place and watch the Nazis butcher the populace, burn up Bibles, and close up school houses. The R.A.F. spilled a lot of blood up to Pearl Harbor. A lot of youngsters died to save drips like Dooley. It's a good thing they did not see Dooley before they enlisted.

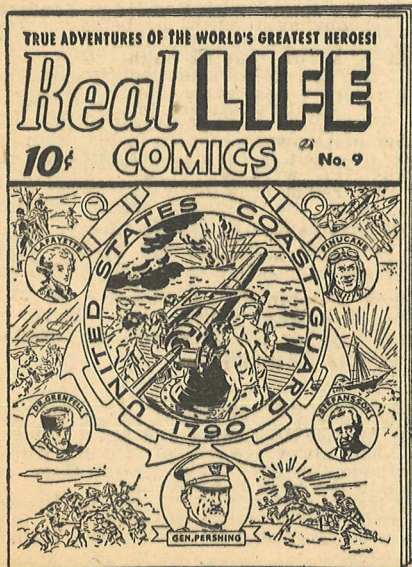
I am a hundred percent American and am backing the boys of this land with everything I have. But when I have a little left over, I intend to back the English fighter pilots too. Thank God for R.A.F. ACES. Nuts to Mr. Dooley.

That ten second squirt from your verbal guns should just about take the greenhouse from around Dooley, L. B. But we do not think Dooley really means all he says. Let us hear from him again.

We remember a day near La Brassiere, France, when Pancake plunked a Frenchman in the chin who did not stand up when they played "God Save the King."

[Turn page]

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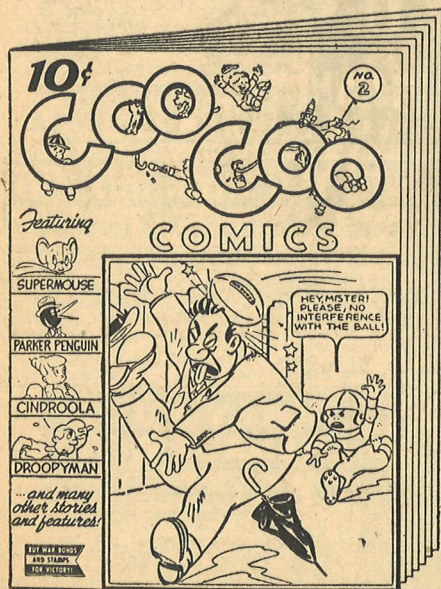
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The next day, the Frog saved Pancake from the river Styx at the cost of his left ear and a piece of shinbone. When we dragged Frenchy out of his Nieuport, he had a book of patriotic songs in his pocket. Comes up for briefing, Dick San Felipe of 1310 North 15th St., Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Dick dishes it right off the top to wit:

Your column, Thumbs Up, is one of the most interesting I have ever read. It really gives a flock of information on planes and fighters and I'm still pretty green on the subject so I devour your column like a cloud bank devours a "Spitfire." Thumbs Up to Robert Sidney Bowen and John Scott Douglas. Joseph Millard's WINGS ON THEIR FISTS was very funny but I doubt whether the C. O. would let his men get away with that much and as for that airport fugitive John Janostak I'll just say that I just finished my first R.A.F. ACES and I'm giving the gun to the editors to give us more magazine stories like those in the Summer issue of R.A.F. ACES.

I'm with the two girls, Joan Bryce and Marge Eddy, in wanting this super-mag more often because at the rate I can devour this mag I could read fifty or seventy-five mags a year. Well I'm not complaining so long as you keep up the good work you have been doing.

Fred Walker drops a memo in. Freddie wastes few words in going to bat for R.A.F. ACES. He lives at 5127 Underwood, Detroit, Mich. Says this Yank for the R.A.F.:

First of all I wish to tell all these dopes that say that R.A.F. ACES is a no good mag, to go jump in the sea. On the other hand, THE AMERICAN EAGLE is awful. I wish that you would put this mag out every month, as it is a fine one. I think. How about one World War I story each issue? Keep the stories in Europe please. I don't want any Japs in the stories. As to that guy George Roselle, he ought to remember that the British are our allies, and I hope you continue to print R.A.F. ACES. Well, that's all for this time.

We asked you your opinion of R.A.F. ACES, Freddie, and never mind about any of our other magazines. We will provide the Mae Wests for those citizens who intend to jump in the sea, Freddie. Send us a list as we know where we can acquire some defective life jackets very cheap. We will expect more from you, old thing.

Paul Bryant, Box 629, Delray Beach, Fla., is trying to get a guy named Fender-son in his sights. Paul is going to get the Chamber of Commerce down in his town in no end of a dither. He admits Florida is full of horseflies, sand rats, barracuda and octopi. And the blighter wants Flying Tiger stories in R.A.F. ACES. I say, Paul, aren't you just a bit off the beam? Did you address your letter to R.A.F. ACES or two other magazines? Straighten us out on that, old chap, won't you? Here is Paul's flimsy for the attention of Intelligence Officer Beamish.

I just got through looking in your department for my last letter. Well, let's ditch the redhead for the time being and get a blonde.

How about some true stories once in a while like Torpedo Squadron 8 and Ensign Gay. It would help the book a great deal.

I say less R.A.F. stories vs. the Luftwaffe and more Flying Tiger vs. the Japs.

Hey, what happened to those model planes in this issue?

I sure like THE WAR GOES ON, THEY NEVER DESERT, THE BOMBER SQUADRON

and TIGER'S LAST FLIGHT and the others were swell, too.

I hope that Tendersen guy comes to Delray. I'll sic all the horseflies, sandrats, mosquitos, borracuda, sharks, and octopi on him and, brother, they ain't hay.

We are not very impartial to redheads, old boy. And please be careful in the future as the good wife over at Ramsgate reads our stint you know.

A steady reader of our magazines puts your old retainer on a bit of a spot. David Lockyer, 33 Vermont Ave., Southington, Conn., turns the blarsted Naafi hut here into a schoolhouse and wants everybody to know we never went to Harrow. But we'll do our best, Dave.

I wish to congratulate you on putting out a swell magazine—R.A.F. ACES. Your article, The R.A.F. In Action was very interesting. Your other article, Anzac War Diary, certainly proved that Truth is Stranger than Fiction.

Now, if I may, I'd like to ask you some questions:

First: Is there a definite spot for a catapult on a Navy vessel, or doesn't it make any difference where they are located?

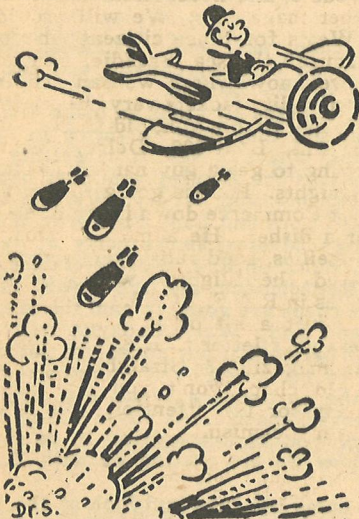
Second: Did or did not the Supermarine S-6-B, forerunner of the Spitfire set a record of 408/8 m.p.h. in 1931?

Third: Is it not true, that the Spitfire Mark V is one of the best, if not the best fighter in the World today? (From the information I have gathered it can run rings around the Fw-190.)

In your next issue of R.A.F. ACES try to put in some true stories of American pilots. Also try to get some stories of the U. S. Coast Guard, doing a swell job on all sides of our country.

The fifty-foot steel catapults on Navy vessels are secured high on gun turrets where they can be swung into the wind, Dave. We have no record regarding question number 2, but are inclined to believe that the 1931 Spit did not register that rate of speed. We'll look it up. You are right

[Turn page]



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on question three. British pilots will tell you the Spit Mark V is the best fighter in the world today and recent air battles over the channel and occupied Europe seem to prove their contention. Certainly they have as much firing power and as much speed as anything that ever had wings.

We just can't see to go through a briefing without taking some guff from an alleged comedian. Alphonse Tuttle, Greenland, N. H., doubts that we ever were in France. We are a bit confused about the chap's home address and are inclined to believe he meant the island of Greenland and he is a trained seal that can use a typewriter. Anyway, fish or human, here is Alphonse's attempt at humor.

Just because you print a lot of letters praising you is no sign that people who live in the country are believing they was really wrote. (Editor's Note: My, what grammar, Mr. Tuttle.) I know there are lots of fakes in the city and you are one. You never saw the R.F.C. except in the movies and I bet then you got dizzy and fell out of the mezzanine.

I read R.A.F. ACES and all your other books but I wouldn't read your column as I am no sucker. They are swell stories in R.A.F. ACES because you don't write none of them. I have looked at all the maps of France we have in the library and never could find a town named Blooeey. The only time you ever saw a camel was when you went to a circus and why don't you get wise to yourself like we are. My father says you would be too old now to be in an airplane as men over forty-five have no reflect action and too many air bubbles in their vanes.

Some day I am going to write to England and ask if you was in the last war. Please tell me who to write to there. Is it the Air Minister's rectory or Number Ten Drowning Street? You say you got medals, too. I don't believe it. But I like R.A.F. ACES like I said and would not cut off my nose to spite my face on account of a hoaks like you are.

How many in crew does a Wellington carry? Does a radio-man have to help shoot at the Nazis too? Please let me know as I want to be a radio-man on a bomber. The only thing is, I hate guns. I will sign off now as I got seven cows to milk. I still think you are a fake.

Odd chap, isn't he? Alphonse would write to an escaped convict and ask the address of the warden.

Well, it takes all kinds to make a world but why did they have to throw in Nazis and Japs, what? I say, it is getting late and see that the Bentley gets over here in about two minutes, Mooty. We just can't be late to Lord and Lady Fortescue Watts-Cookyng's Messerschmitt party at Inthsis Manor, Hammon-Rye, Worcestershire.

Alf Nettlebottom and the R.A.F. Maintenance chaps are going to haul the Messup there and Lady Watts-Cookyng will auction off parts of it for souvenirs and they expect to get enough out of the wreck to build the air force a brand new Spitfire.

However, cheerio, old boys. Let us have more of you blokes writing in to let us know how we are getting on with R.A.F. ACES.

Just come out here and look at the Lancasters and Wellingtons going over, will you? It's Musso's Turin to get bombed, we'd say. And beyond the alps LIES Italy's Virginia Gayda. The Neapolitan yellow journalist will no doubt report that the R.A.F. bombers weaved in and out of Turin and Milan traffic singling out orphan

asylums, hospitals and schools for the blind. Drop us a few lines in the pillar box, won't you?

—THE SERGEANT PILOT.

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WING COMMANDER BARNES

(See personal message on contents page)

WING COMMANDER J. G. BARNES of the R.A.F., whose personal message appears in this issue, is at present on special duty in the United States. While the nature of his work must necessarily remain a military secret, after meeting the man, we know that it must be highly important.

Wing Commander Barnes was attached to the Fighter Command of the R.A.F. during the first year and a half of the war, and was one of the pioneers in the successful night interceptor work which protected the British Isles from Nazi air and sea invasion, climaxed in the historic September, 1940, Battle of Britain.

When General Wavell's first operations in the Middle East became an important part in Allied strategy, Barnes was one of the men assigned to build up the R.A.F. in that area, and engaged with other experienced and talented instructors in giving the boys from the far-flung borders of the Empire their final intensive training in Great Britain. Many of his former students were in the spearhead of the successful drive against Rommel in Egypt and Libya.

What does a fighting man like Wing Commander Barnes do in his spare time? Well, the Wing Commander writes songs, and successful ones, too. He is the composer of "R.A.F. Patrol," "My A.C.W. 2" (referring to the Women's Auxiliary Workers in Britain), and "I'm So Proud of You."

—The Editor.

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS

FLYING GUNNER

An Air Action Novel

By TRACY MASON

Madagascar Incident

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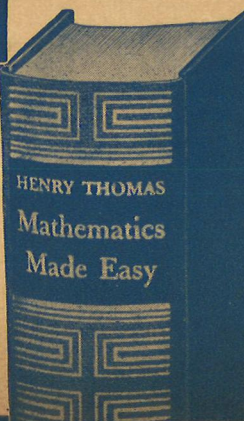
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