

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

# SKY ✖ FIGHTERS

Vol. XXVI, No. 2

LIEUT. EDWARD McCRAE, Editor

January, 1942

COMPLETE WAR-AIR NOVEL



## WINGS FOR A COFFIN

By T. W. FORD

*When Jeth Bane's Strange Fears Drive Him to Suicidal  
Combat Against a Jap Ace, Dead Men Show Him  
the Way to "Carry On"—Alive!* 15

COMPLETE NOVELET

STUKA STINGER . . . . . Alexis Rossoff 48  
*Wickey Warren, Otherwise Known as the Wren, Proves Himself an  
Avenging Eagle when It Comes to Battling Nazi Vultures!*

ZOOMING SHORT STORIES

THE HIGHER ACE . . . . . Norman A. Daniels 38  
*Bob Travers Goes After His Fiftieth Nazi*

SQUADRON OF HATE . . . . . Joseph J. Millard 67  
*Arch King is Forced to Carry a Weird Fight to the Enemy*

PRANKSTERS . . . . . David Goodis 81  
*Fighter Squadron Thirty-Seven Wasn't Strong on Discipline*

GROUND AGE . . . . . Robert Sidney Bowen 91  
*Jeff Baker Battles to Rescue a Determined Fledgling*

SPECIAL FLYING FEATURES

TARMAC TALK—A Department . . . . . The Skipper 10

PILOT'S QUIZ . . . . . A Test of Knowledge 13

LEARN TO FLY—Operation of the De-Icer . . . . . Lieut. Jay D. Blaufox 77

Join THE AIRMEN OF AMERICA! Coupon on Page 112

See The Swap Column, Page 11; Book Review, Page 101

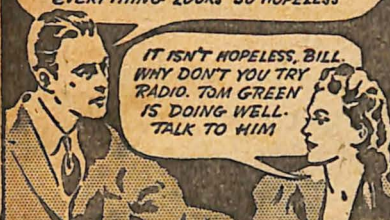
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READ OUR COMPANION AIR MAGAZINES: THE AMERICAN EAGLE, AIR WAR and R A F ACES  
PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

# HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED - THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH, MARY EVERYTHING LOOKS SO HOPELESS

IT ISN'T HOPELESS, BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY RADIO. TOM GREEN IS DOING WELL. TALK TO HIM



BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT. RADIO'S STILL A YOUNG-GROWING-FIELD



TOM'S RIGHT. AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR GOOD PAY



TRAINING AT HOME FOR RADIO IS PRACTICAL AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST

SOON I CAN START FIXING RADIOS

THERE'S NO END TO THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WELL TRAINED TECHNICIANS

OR WORK ON LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEMS

OR GET A JOB IN A BROADCASTING STATION



YOU SURE KNOW RADIO. MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THANKS! THAT'S \$10 EXTRA I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME



OH BILL. IT'S WONDERFUL. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO

I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME JOB NOW-- AND A BRIGHT FUTURE IN RADIO AND TELEVISION



## I Trained These Men



**Chief Operator  
Broadcasting Station**

Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operators license and immediately joined Station WMPG where I am now Chief Operator.  
HOLLIS F. HAYES, 227 Madison St., Lapeer, Michigan.

### Service Manager for Four Stores

I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N. R. I. I am now Radio Service Manager for the M— Furniture Co. for their four stores.  
JAMES E. RYAN, 119 Pebble Court, Fall River, Mass.



### \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time



I am doing spare time Radio work, and I am averaging around \$500 a year. Those extra dollars mean just barely getting by and living comfortably.  
JOHN WASHKO, 97 New Cranberry, Hazleton, Penna.

### In U. S. Signal Corps

I am in the U. S. Army, Signal Corps, as Chief Radio Clerk. My duties also include maintenance of the transmitter and receivers when the Chief Radio Operator is absent.  
R. W. ANDERSON, Radio Station WFL, Vancouver Barracks, Washington.



## I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME in your spare time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

Here is a quick way to more pay. Radio offers the chance to make \$5, \$10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now. There is an increasing demand for full time Radio Technicians and Radio Operators, too. Many make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. On top of record business, the Radio industry is getting millions and millions of dollars in Defense Orders. Clip the coupon below and mail it. Find out how I train you for these opportunities.

### Why Many Radio Technicians I Train Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Over 800 broadcasting stations in the U. S. employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are over 50,000,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportunities to have their own service or retail Radio businesses. Think of the many good pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for these jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained. Many are getting special ratings in the Army and Navy; extra rank and pay.

### Beginners Quick!— Learn to Earn \$5, \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start casing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable practical experience. You also get a modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.



**J. E. SMITH, Pres.  
National Radio  
Institute**

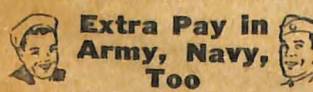
Established 25 Years

### Find Out How I Train You for Good Pay in Radio

Mail the coupon below. I'll send my 64-page book FREE. It tells about my Course; the types of jobs in the different branches of Radio; shows setters from more than 100 of the men I trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postal.  
J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2A09,  
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

**Extra Pay in  
Army, Navy,  
Too**

Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW.



## THIS FREE BOOK HAS SHOWN HUNDREDS HOW TO MAKE GOOD MONEY

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2A09  
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.  
Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Name .....  
Address .....  
City ..... State .....



**THIS MAN DIDN'T BELIEVE HE  
COULD LEARN MUSIC BY MAIL**



**THIS MAN DECIDED TO TRY THIS  
EASY, SHORT-CUT METHOD!  
(P.S. You should hear him play now!)**



# Do *You* Smile at the Idea of Learning Music by Mail?

*Here Are Some Facts That May Surprise You!*

**YOU HAVE** undoubtedly heard of the U. S. School method of teaching music by mail. This remarkable system of instruction has been in operation for over forty years and more than 700,000 people in all parts of the world have enrolled for it. Men, women and children of all ages and from all walks of life have taken up their favorite musical instruments this convenient, money-saving way. They have studied the piano, violin, guitar, accordion and, in short, every kind of popular instrument.

### No Special Talent Required

Many of these pupils did not know one musical note from another when they enrolled. Many had previously tried other methods of instruction without success. And not a few were frankly skeptical. They doubted whether it was possible to learn music by mail, just as you may doubt it.

To some of these "Doubting Thomases" it came as the surprise of their lives when they actually heard themselves playing. Simple popular melodies at first, then more and more advanced pieces, all the way to Grand Opera.

One after another, pupils testify to the amazing ease with which they learned, and the fascination and pleasure they found in the lessons. They say it was "easy as A. B. C."—"so simple that a child could understand"—that "with all the wonderful photographs and diagrams to guide you, you simply cannot go wrong"—that "it's really fun to learn music this easy, fascinating way."

### Will You Accept This Challenge?

The experience of thousands upon thousands of people should be proof positive that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument by the famous print-and-picture method of the U. S. School of Music. Is it not a pity, then, to deny yourself all the enjoyment, the good times and popularity that music offers? Do you not owe it to yourself, at least, to examine all the facts, and to decide, once and for all, whether you can afford to pass by this opportunity to enrich your life with music?

If you really want to play a musical instrument—if you are willing to devote just a few minutes a day to learning, not through tedious, old-fashioned practice, but by actually playing real tunes—then you should mail the coupon at once. It will bring you an interesting illustrated booklet and free Print and Picture Sample that tells all about this wonderful way to learn music at home—without any special talent—without any previous knowledge of music at amazingly little cost. Read it carefully and earnestly and act upon it. If interested, tear out the coupon now, before you turn the page. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) Address: U. S. School of Music, 2941 Brunswick Building, New York, N. Y.

(Established 1898)

### INSTRUMENTS

As a special accommodation to our students we can supply instruments at a special discount. Liberal terms extended. For particulars, inquire Instrument Dept.

U. S. School of Music, 2941 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home" and free Print and Picture Sample.

Piano	Cello	Trombone	Drums and Traps
Violin	Hawaiian	Cornet	Ukulele
Guitar	Guitar	Trumpet	Organ
Piano Accordion	Banjo	Flute	Modern Elementary
Plain Accordion	Mandolin	Piccolo	Harmony
Saxophone			

Name ..... Do You Have Instr? .....

Address .....

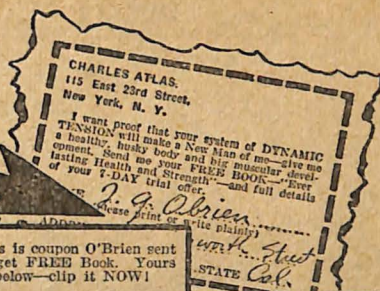
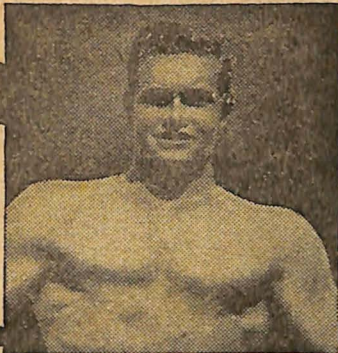
City ..... State.....

Check here if under 16 years of age.

# HE Mailed This Coupon

## J. G. O'BRIEN

Atlas Champion  
Cup Winner  
This is an ordinary  
snapshot of one of  
Charles Atlas' Cali-  
fornian pupils.



This is coupon O'Brien sent to get FREE Book. Yours is below—clip it NOW!

## ...and Here's the Handsome Prize-Winning Body I Gave Him!

J. G. O'BRIEN saw my coupon. He clipped and mailed it. He got my free book and followed my instructions. He became a New Man. NOW read what he says:

"Look at me NOW! 'Dynamic Tension' WORKS! I'm proud of the natural, easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"

J. G. O'Brien.

## "I'll Prove that YOU, too, can be a NEW MAN"—Charles Atlas

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

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

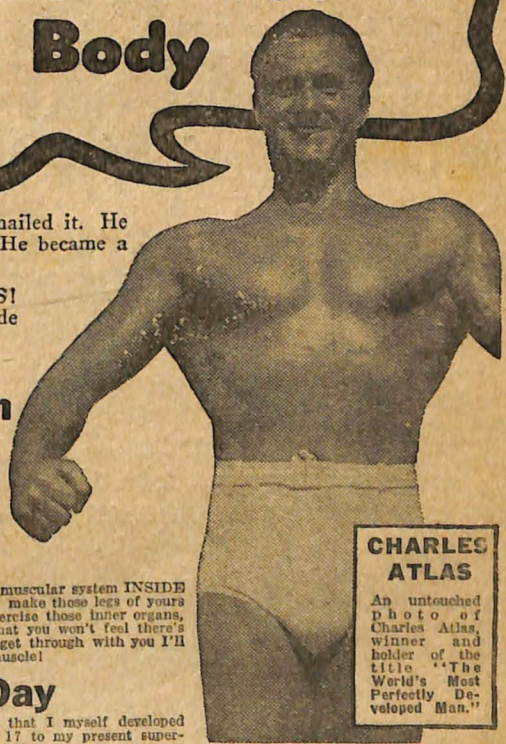
## Only 15 Minutes a Day

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. You learn to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension." You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

## FREE BOOK "EVERLASTING HEALTH AND STRENGTH"

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book today. AT ONCE. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77-N, 115 E. 23rd St., N. Y. C.



**CHARLES ATLAS**  
An untouched photo of Charles Atlas, winner and holder of the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

**CHARLES ATLAS**  
Dept. 77-N, 115 E. 23rd Street  
New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" can help make me a New Man—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your FREE book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." No obligation.

Name .....  
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State.....

# One LIFE INSURANCE POLICY INSURES YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY!



## TOTAL COST

Only \$ **1** A MONTH  
PAYS FOR ALL

## INSURES PARENTS, CHILDREN (Married or Unmarried) BROTHERS, SISTERS and GRANDPARENTS . . . Ages 1 to 65

★ Now, modern life insurance methods make it possible for *all* of your family, including in-laws, to be insured in one policy paying guaranteed benefits for death from any cause.

Instead of issuing five or six policies to include mother, father, sons and daughters, even grandparents, we now issue just one policy that insures them all . . . and at one low cost price of only \$1.00 a month.

## Guarantee Reserve FAMILY POLICY

INSURES FROM 2 to 6  
MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY

**\$1,422<sup>00</sup>** For Natural  
or Ordinary  
Accidental Death

**\$2,844<sup>00</sup>** For Auto  
Accidental Death

**\$4,266<sup>00</sup>** For Travel  
Accidental Death

The figures shown above represent the insurance provided by the policy on a typical average family of five persons.

GUARANTEE RESERVE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY  
DEPARTMENT 17-A, HAMMOND, INDIANA

**NO AGENT WILL CALL**  
10-DAY FREE INSPECTION OFFER  
**SEND NO MONEY**

### COMPUTED ON LEGAL RESERVE BASIS

To guarantee payment on each death that occurs in your insured family, we have figured this policy out on the strict legal reserve basis, complying with State government requirements in every respect. This is your assurance of *Cash When You Need It Most*. Claims are paid at once . . . without argument or delay. State records verify our fair and just settlements.

Guarantee Reserve specializes in full family coverage, that's why we can offer safe, guaranteed life insurance on your whole family at one low price of only \$1.00 a month.

### NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

To eliminate costly doctor fees, etc., we have eliminated Medical Examination. All people from age 1 to 65, in good health may be included in this new type Guarantee Reserve family policy. No membership fees, no examination fees, no *policy fee* . . . \$1.00 a month pays for one policy that insures all.

### RUSH-MAIL AT ONCE-DON'T DELAY

Guarantee Reserve LIFE INSURANCE CO.

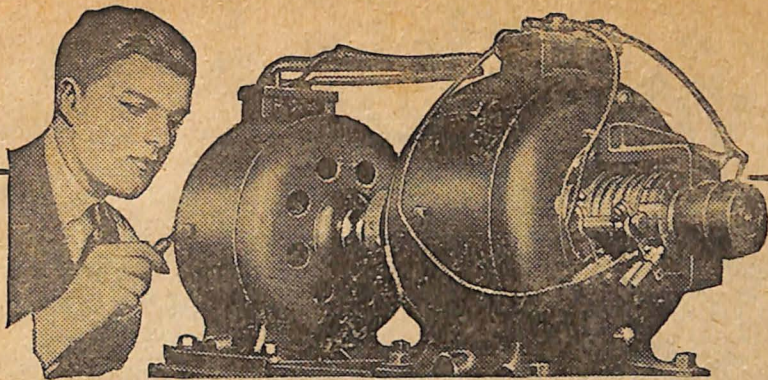
GUARANTEE RESERVE BLDG., Dept. 17-A, Hammond Ind.

Gentlemen: Without obligation, please send me at once complete information on how to get your Family Life Policy for FREE inspection.

Name .....

Address .....

City.....State.....



# Amazingly Easy Way to get into **ELECTRICITY**

## I'LL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING

Don't spend your life hoping for a better job and a better salary. *Let me show you how to train for positions that lead to \$35.00, \$40.00 a week and up in the great field of Electricity.* NOT by correspondence but by actual shop work right on real electrical machinery. Then on my "PAY AFTER GRADUATION" PLAN YOU CAN PAY YOUR TUITION AFTER YOUR TRAINING PERIOD IS OVER IN EASY MONTHLY PAYMENTS.

# Learn Without Books in **90** DAYS

Lack of experience—age, or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! It makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have. That's why I have worked out my astonishing offers.

### Earn While Learning

If you need part-time work to help pay your living expenses I'll help you get it. Then, in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained...on one of the greatest outlays of electrical apparatus ever assembled... real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations...everything from doorbells to farm power and lighting... full-sized... in full operation every day!

### No Books—No Classes

No dull books, no baffling charts, no classes, you get individual training... all real actual work... building real batteries... winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses, etc., etc. That's a glimpse of how



### PREPARE FOR JOBS LIKE THESE

Our Employment Bureau for graduates gives FREE lifetime employment service.

Armature Winder  
Sub-Station Operator  
Auto & Aviation Ignition  
Maintenance Electrician  
Service Station Owner  
Air Conditioning  
Electric Refrigeration  
Radio Servicing  
and many others

we help to make you a master electrician so you can cash in on the opportunities ahead.

### Jobs, Pay, Future

To get a good job today you've got to be trained. Industry demands men who have specialized training. These men will be the ones who are the big-pay men of the future. After graduation my Employment Department gives you Lifetime Employment Service. J. O. Whitmeyer says: "After I graduated, the School Employment Service furnished me with a list of several positions... I secured a position with an Electrical Construction Company paying me 3 to 4 times more a week than I was getting before I entered Coyne and today I am still climbing to higher pay."

### Get the Facts

Coyne is your one great chance to get into electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 40 years old—Coyne training is tested and proven. You can get training first—then pay for it in easy monthly payments after you graduate. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book... facts... jobs... salaries... opportunities. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

Get  
this  
FREE  
Book



### THE HOME OF COYNE



This is our fireproof, modern home wherein is installed thousands of dollars' worth of the newest and most modern Electrical equipment of all kinds. Every comfort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and contented during your training.

H. C. LEWIS, Pres.  
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, DEPT. 12-34  
500 S. Paulina Street, Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Lewis:  
I'm really in earnest. I do want to get ahead. Send me your big free catalog with full particulars about Coyne training and your plans to help a fellow, who hasn't a lot of money, to get ahead.

Name.....  
Address.....  
City..... State.....

**COYNE** ELECTRICAL SCHOOL  
H. C. Lewis, Pres., Dept. 12-34  
500 S. Paulina St. Founded 1899 CHICAGO, ILL.



**H**ELLO, peelots. Three guesses why we arrive with such a broad grin on our mush. Our mother-in-law didn't pack her reticule and decide to go out and live with a relation in Walla Walla. Some things just can't happen, like a Nazi victory. We might as well tell you that one of our old pals who fought side by side with us in France in the last scramble has got himself a job with the government. Sideslip Gooch found himself a natural at last and this is how.

We doubt very much if any of you zanies read full-sized newspapers so you would not know about the odd character named R. F. Knucklehead who will teach our brave airmen the wrong way to fly. Knucklehead at present is a cartoon character created by an artist named Jack Zumvauld and he will appear in a series of animated flickers for the consumption of army pilots who wish to know how not to fly while training.

We immediately wired the authorities at Randolph Field regarding Sideslip and advised them to look up his record. We assured them that Sideslip knew more ways to wreck a crate and do more things wrong in the air than anybody in the world.

#### Stand-in for Knucklehead

Almost immediately we received word from "The West Point of the Air" to send Sideslip down immediately. They will give him the job as stand-in for Knucklehead, that is, make him the living counterpart of R. F. Knucklehead. Sideslip will get forty a month and victuals and free hospitalization but will not be guaranteed funeral expenses.

We are proud of Sideslip and knew he would become famous some day. We just put him aboard a day coach after having a snort or two with him. Sideslip was beside himself and said, "Well, ol' pal, at last I'm goin' to git the 'breaks' I been lookin' for. An' don't think I'll forget you just because I reached the top."

#### "Metallergic!"

No, that word is not spelled wrong. We have taken liberties to coin a word of our own as the only thing Winchell has got that we haven't is almost a million bucks. The U. S. Air Corps is allergic to citizens who like to fly light planes made largely of metal for all the aluminum and such has to go into warplanes destined to shoot the empennage off Hitler. So, you peelots of

the light jobs take note of the following:

The Timm light monoplane has been constructed by a moulded plywood process. There is another light bus made entirely of plastic plywood and it is called the Libra-Det. The machine is powered with a 130 h.p., air-cooled Franklin engine. Both crates are doing nicely, thank you. So you light plane patrons can keep on flying despite the shortage of the vital metals, which all goes to prove the soundness of the wheeze from a very famous old gent, "Necessity is the Mother of Invention."

#### One for the Book

In a recent copy of one of England's leading journals of the trade *Aeroplane*,



the editor came through with this one and we cannot resist the temptation to pass it along to the citizens on this side of the pond.

A rigger was up for examination and he was asked this question, "Suppose you were the pilot of a two-seater and had the King of England as a passenger, and suddenly the plane felt a little light behind you, and you looked around and saw that the King had fallen out and was descending in his chute. What would you do?"

Naturally we would suppose that the rigger answered in this manner, "I would adjust the trimming-tabs to put the aircraft in proper trim, Sir." But he did not. Instead the rigger replied, "I should dip the aircraft in salute, Sir."

#### Stratosphere Statistics

What are the sensations of the pilots and crews of the Boeing Flying Fortresses? Both engines and men have to be supercharged while at an altitude of six miles. Gunners give themselves more oxygen than the others, as if they were five thousand feet higher than the rest of the crew, for they do more manual work.

They wear electrically heated Irvin suits, the type of high-flying burlap used by the

(Continued on page 102)

## THE "SWAP" COLUMN

Here's where you can exchange something you have but don't want for something someone else has that you do want. This is a FREE service.

For example, if you have a camera and don't use it, and would like to have a stamp album, write: "Have Eastman camera, No. 1, Jr. make, 3 years old, good condition, will exchange for stamp album with 3,000 stamps, 25 countries.—John Smith, 49 Park Street, Albany, N. Y."

Limit your request to 25 words. No goods for sale listed, nor requests concerning firearms or any illegal articles.

Type or hand-print clearly in submitting announcements. SKY FIGHTERS will not be responsible for losses sustained. Make very plain just what you have and just what you want to "swap" it for. Enclose a clipping of the announcement with your request.

Send me a picture postcard of your town to help my collection. Herbert Sichler, 173 Frebis Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

Will swap Imperial Stamp Album, 150 mixed stamps, for old coins. Don Salmons, 654 Eighth St., Beloit, Wisc.

Have 2,000 picture postcards. Will exchange for airplane photographs. Four postcards for one photo sizes 116-120. More for larger photos. Daniel Edelstein, 967 Aldus St., New York, N. Y.

Have two modern stamp albums, Falcon camera to trade for stamps or aviation pictures. Paul Reardon, 9 Manning St., Oil City, Pa.

To increase my U. S. silver coin collection, will swap a rare English envelope over 100 years old for two old U. S. silver coins. Jerry Frankel, 441 Alabama Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Will trade 700 stamp collection, mounted in album, good condition, for model airplane gas motor, any type, good running condition. Roy Kramer, Box 211, Hamberg, North Dakota.

Wanted: Fast Shutter camera, 300 watt amplifier, Trade: Enlarger, photo equipment, cameras, radio parts, or what have you? Wendell Hansen, 422 26th St., Ogden, Utah.

Will swap match book covers for gas model, engine, plane or parts. Harold Gauthier, Box 6, Lafayette, Louisiana.

Have latest Scott stamp album for U. S. stamps. Will exchange for baseball bat and ball. Melvin Jankelwitz, 1618 Mermaid Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Lot in Boise, Idaho, worth \$100.00 Swap for good typewriter, B. S. Lather Mixer. Good offer. John V. McConnell, Camp McGregor, Keasey, Oregon.

Have a lot of stamps to trade for any you have. Nick Kelly, 1501 W. 4th St., Texarkana, Texas.

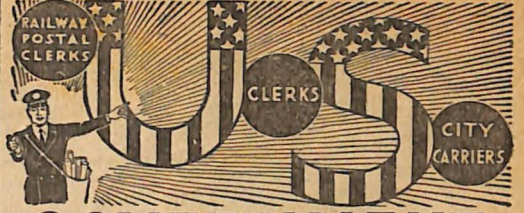
Have almost New Agfa Chief camera with flash unit. Will trade for Gas Model Airplane Kit, United States stamps, or what have you. Jack Healy, 6024 Old Harford Rd., Baltimore, Maryland.

Send me picture postcards of your town and receive some of mine. Benton Swartzwelder, 711 Blackstone Ave., Connellsville, Pa.

## RUPTURED? Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write: **CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 33, Bloomfield, New Jersey.**

## WORK FOR THE



## GOVERNMENT

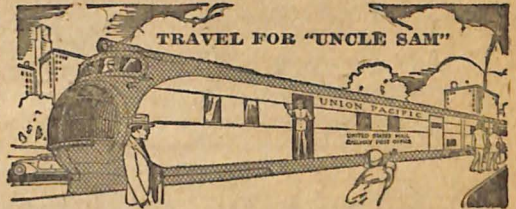
### START

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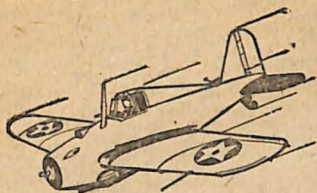
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1. Which of the following are in the category known as attack airplanes? Boeing B-17, Kellett Autogiro YG-1, Seversky P-35, Curtiss A-18, Consolidated PB-2A, Bell XFM-1 and Northrop A-17.
2. Who constructed the first successful hydro-airplane in America?
3. What was the accomplishment of flyers Anderson and Stevens on November 11, 1935?
4. Name three winners of the Bendix Trophy Races.
5. Who is in charge of the Bureau of Aeronautics of the United States Navy?
6. Which state leads in the number of airports and landing fields?
7. What do the letters "V" and "Z" signify in the designation of an airplane?
8. The designation of airplanes of an experimental design are prefixed by what letter?
9. Name five makes of airplane engines manufactured in America.
10. Supply the missing word: "----- Supermarine Spitfire."

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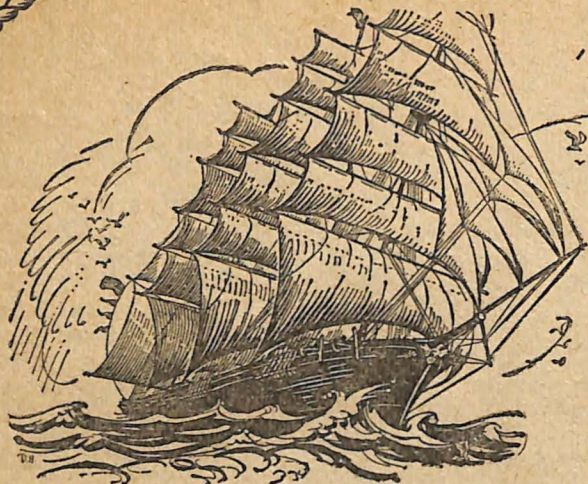
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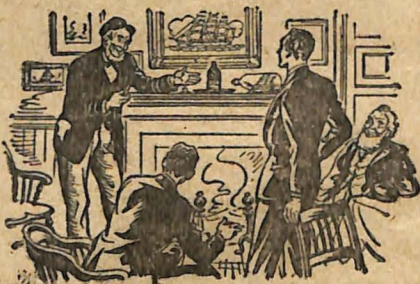


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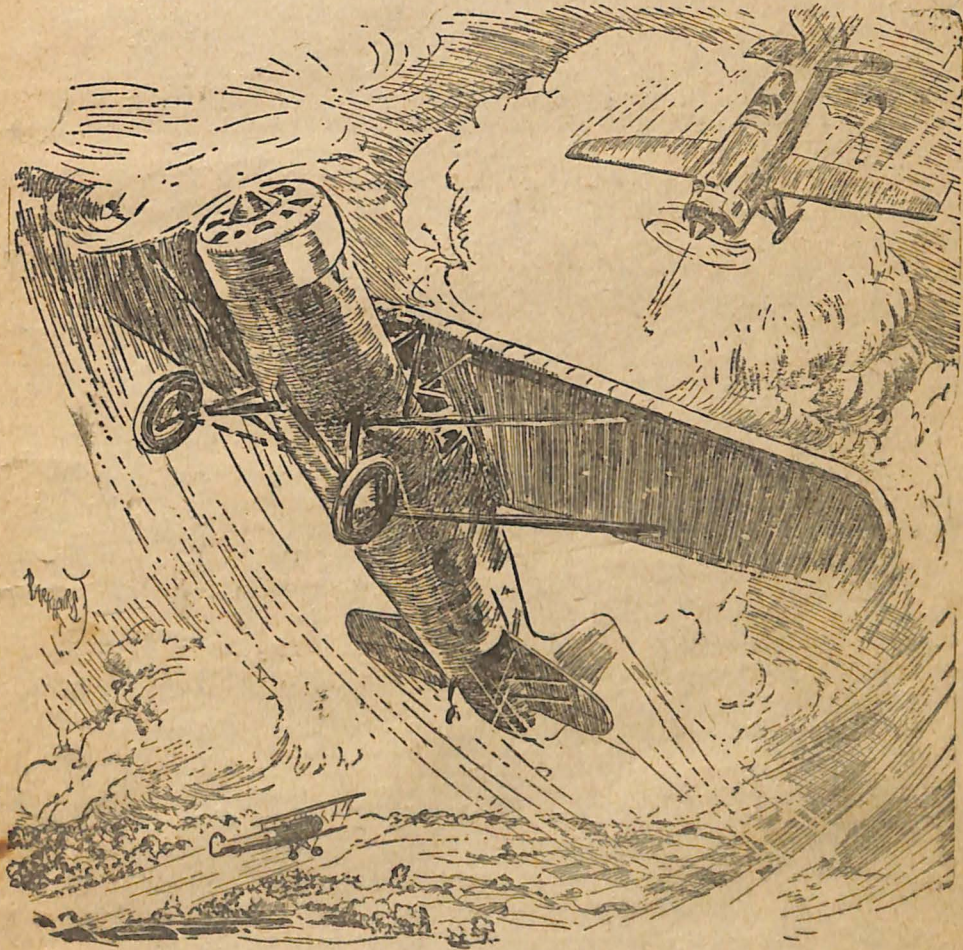


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The Jap pilot yanked up too late—flame spread from the nose

## CHAPTER I

### *Home Again*

**I**T WASN'T a pretty picture. Only nine of them were riding back across the cloud-strewn dawn skies in their Curtiss Hawks. Twelve

of them had winged over on that egg-laying raid, before daybreak, playing escort to a couple of bombers.

It had been doomed from the start. As they'd crossed into Japanese-held territory, a night patrol had contacted them. Young Evarts had gone down

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## Jeth Bane's Strange Fears Drive Him

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a flamer then. And when they reached their objective, a huge supply depot, a flight of Kawasaki single-seaters had slammed into them. To top that off, a direct hit had been scored by a Jap A.A. tube.

Then had come the task of cutting their way back in a night sky filled with a macaber cargo of cordite and guncotton and sharklike slashing ships. Smythe had got his in that mess. He was dead at the stick when his ship shed the port wing in its final plunge. Then, after they'd come through and reformed, the third man, Hinson, had been discovered missing.

Thinking back on it, Flight Leader Jeth Bane scanned the horizon through his plexiglass dome and cursed bitterly. It had been a ghastly flight, nine coming back with haggard faces, nerveless from staring too closely at death. It was rotten to take out twelve men and have three killed. It made Bane's stocky body tremble with nervous reaction. And his baby face, misleading in its softness, writhed.

"Don't go screwball, stupid!" he snapped at himself as he checked his instruments and glanced down at the muddy Yangtze, slithering along below his wings like a great yellow snake.

Grimly he tried to throw off that haunting sensation, twisted around for a check-up of the flight. He ought to feel he was all right with the other three of the "Cloud Musketeers"—as they were called—behind him.

There was the taciturn, but eternally dependable Hector "So" Long, back there at Number 3 on the right side of the echelon. Good old So Long was always playing the worrying mother-hen for his friends. And

yet he was a man who, despite his dour face and pessimistic outlook, could take a 100-to-1 gamble with the coolness of the devil himself when it was necessary. Right behind So, in the Number 4 spot, was the grinning "Big" Jean, big, powerful as a veritable bearcat, the kind of man who'd have a jest on his lips even when he was being shoved onto Purgatory's hot griddle.

Jeth Bane knew So Long and Big Jean inside out. He should have. He had played football with them on the championship West Coast Wildcats for two years. And the three of them had taken up flying, more for the fun of it than anything else, and had become just as good pilots as they had been football players.

Then, when the Japs started that bloody, endless, undeclared war that they called a Chinese "incident," So Long and Big Jean had decided to skip across the Pacific and have a go at flying in earnest. It had been just natural for Jeth Bane to tag along. He wasn't the kind to miss a bit of excitement. Another thing, he felt it wasn't in the books for these three birds to be separated, even by an undeclared war.

**B**ANE straightened his head and looked before him. He checked his course by the third bend in the Yangtze, which flowed sluggishly more than twenty thousand feet below his right wing. Then he twisted his glance to take in the left side of the "V" formation.

The fourth man of the Cloud Musketeers was at the Number 2 position there—Lieutenant Mattin. Nobody knew much about him. Mattin was the kind of man who had no nickname

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## Dead Men Show a Flight Commander

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## to Suicidal Combat Against a Jap Ace!

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and whose first name nobody knew. He was a hundred and forty pounds of whiplike body behind a blank smile and cynical eyes. He said he came from Texas. When somebody once asked him what part, Mattin answered "from a part where they taught a man not to ask questions." He acted as if ice-water would be too warm for his veins.

On his second day with the outfit,



FLIGHT LEADER JETH BANE

fate had simply made him one of the Cloud Musketeers. During a routine patrol the flight had simultaneously run into blinding scud and a Jap bunch. The three men had got cut off, yet somehow hung together. As they'd fumbled their way homeward, the covey of Jap ships had jumped on their tails.

The greenhorns had made a stiff running fight, but two of the E. A.s had herded out Big Jean and almost shredded his Hawk to bits. It was

little less than a miracle that he'd been only slightly wounded himself. As they hounded him low to the ground, it looked like good night for the ever-smiling right-end. And then Mattin had struck.

Like a plunging falcon in a precipitous power dive, he had slashed between the two diving Japs, raining a leaden hail on them. He sent one scuttling off, wounded. And the almost suicidal dive gave Big Jean time enough to slip away, while Mattin pulled clear of some treetops by inches.

When they got home, Mattin's left wing was hanging on by a mere thread.

"Well, so what?" had been his disinterested query. "If it had come off, I'd have crashed and died. We have got to die some time."

After that, naturally, he'd been one of the Cloud Musketeers. It was simply a fact. He hadn't tried to force his way in among them. He just sat silent with them while they drank Hollands. But he had saved Big Jean, so he was one of them.

Bane nodded as he saw Mattin nod to him, then straightened out again. It looked as if they'd get back all right now. If it hadn't been for the Hinson accident—

Then he saw Hinson!

Hinson was racing up from the south. He had his cowling shoved back, and that shamrock-green scarf he always wore upstairs was plain as it flapped in the slipstream. By some freak of fate, though cut off from the main flight, he'd slipped free. Now he was rejoining them. He came slanting up at better than three hundred per to take his place in the formation.

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## the Way to "Carry On"—Alive!

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Jeth Bane felt like cheering.

The next instant a voice came faintly through his phones. It was from Group H.Q., under the command of General Wung Li.

"Fourth Group! Fourth Group!" it called out blurredly. "Calling Captain Bane! Come in, Bane. Come in, please. Japanese Nakajimas reported by observer at—"

It whined out and was gone. Desperately Bane tried to contact them again, in vain. He switched on the sending apparatus, started to speak, to report his position. He had no way of knowing whether he was being heard or not.

His mind clamped on one word of the broken-off message—Nakajimas! And, as if conjured out of the ether, they came. They shot out of that cumulus layer to the northwest, below them. But they were streaking up, pounding for altitude, spearing at the Hawk bombers. They were the crimson-streaked planes of Baron Yagisaki's outfit.

It was like Yagisaki to gamble on the surprise of an attack from beneath.

**Y**AGISAKI was the kind of man who'd start his play on a breath-taking gamble, then back it with sheer wing genius. On top of that, Baron Yagisaki was said to be slightly mad.

It was more than just a wild rumor that he had vowed to smear the skies with the blood of these Yanks. It was said to be in retribution for his younger brother, who'd landed badly wounded behind the Chinese lines some months before. The lad had died in a hospital and the baron, head of the Imperial 10th Squadron, had blamed it on the inefficiency of an American medical missionary, and taken his vow. Already he numbered six victims of the foreign outfit among his victory bag of ten.

Now, at the head of his red-streaked devils—Japan's best airmen—he came

in a cresting wave, machine-guns already flickering, prowling for more foreign blood. And Captain Jeth Bane, after signaling to his flight, adjusted his variable pitch prop and power-plunged to meet the threat. Right on his tail feathers winged Hinson, the pilot that Bane had feared dead.

The Jap ships were braking in sharp banks to meet the counter-thrust. Hurriedly Bane checked them roughly as the sky gap narrowed like something in a nightmare. There were ten fresh Nakajima pilots against ten battle-battered Americans and two bombers, one crippled, as a handicap. And from the tail of his eye, Bane saw one of his own outfit pulling out westward with engine trouble, trailing black smoke. Still, there was a chance.

Fabric flicked up from his right wing as lead from some of those Jap guns reached out at him. Then Jeth Bane's hand, deadly steady, hit the broad, flat lever that unleashed his Brownings with their converging fire. The frothing flame spat from his gun ports. He kicked his rudder pedals to fishtail his ship, making it as difficult a target as possible. The blinding force of his dive had kicked him back against the bump of his parachute pack.

Then one of those darting Nakajimas in front of him was abruptly twisting away, minus its propeller. Lead rattled against Bane's engine cowling, drilled the plexiglass cowl above his left shoulder. And he was yanking back that stick to scream from the dive and whip over on a wingtip to come curling back at Yagisaki's flight.

Bane's face seemed as babyish as ever, despite the pain of a leg gash from a slug that had penetrated the cockpit. His blue eyes looked merely sleepy, but his mouth was a pale, lipless gash of determined ruthlessness.

Below, as he roared with wings al-

most vertical, he had a glimpse of the pair of bombers. They'd pulled up in tight formation to keep from being ganged up on singly, making a veritable rampart of fire of their fore and aft guns. And as Hankow neared, they'd slanted earthward to shield their vulnerable bellies. But that was when a pair of devilish-hued Jap buses came diving like streaks out of the east, heading straight for those bombers.

Promptly Captain Bane heeled over to go down, too. A tornado of steel smashing into his tail made the whole fuselage vibrate above the blast of the Cyclone engine. His rear-view mirror, installed at his own orders, showed him a Jap flashing in from behind. The Jap's guns were stuttering.

Desperately, yet with deadly coolness, the baby-faced flight leader wrenched up in a tight loop. At the top he rolled out and sent his ship in a dancing wing-slip. But he couldn't find the Jap ship, which he now realized was piloted by Baron Yagisaki himself. A split-second glimpse of the fuselage number "13" had told him that.

Down to the aid of the bombers Jeth Bane headed again. Big Jean Armandou came cutting from the south to join him. And then the show was over. The Nakijimas were breaking eastward fast at the sight of a Chinese outfit of pursuit ships streaming out of the cumulus layer near where the battle had begun.

**F**LATTENING out, Bane rocked his ship for a look below to check up. It was almost too good to be true. Not a man had been lost! There was Mattin, helmet shoved back as he pawed at a scalp scratch, but he was winging ahead steadily. And Hinson was still there, his green muffler flapping.

Laughing a little crazily with reaction, Bane led them westward. And

soon the muddy field they called home came into view. He set the wing flaps and worked the hydraulic gear to lower his retractable undercarriage as he circled the sun-baked tarmac.

Suddenly Hinson's ship flashed out ahead and dropped swiftly to the tracked field. Jeth Bane stared, went in quickly himself. Braking, he tugged open the cowling and clambered out.

A knot of Chinese mechanics had already reached Hinson's ship. When Bane got there, they'd lifted Hinson out. One end of his gay, green muffler was crimson-splotched. And the chunky Chinese medical officer was taking his stethoscope from the pilot's chest and shaking his head.

It had been a fatal wound that had bled Hinson to death even as he landed.

Bane's head drummed with pounding blood. Yagisaki had collected another scalp. And—his own dream had come true!

Like an automaton in a trance, Jeth Bane filed his flight report laboriously, dully. His hands shook badly, but he finally finished and got out.

He joined the others for a drink in the shade of the mud hut they called their operations office. Big Jean was guffawing heartily as he downed a slug of gin.

"Too bad that Chink outfit showed up. Wish they hadn't scared away the baron. Some day I wish to knock a little chunk off this great Yagisaki. Haw-haw! I would like to see what he is made of. Maybe not so tough. Maybe—well, *qui sait?* Haw-haw!"

That was Big Jean, laughing in old man danger's teeth. But, in true character, So Long's dour face went more so. He shook his head.

"We were lucky to get home alive. I don't know how we did it. When the baron's tribe showed up, I thought the red light would be flashed on us sure. Yes, sir!"

"Well, we're here," Bane said with



feigned cheerfulness. "Probably get back a lot times more, too."

Mattin spoke into the bottom of his emptied tin cup. It sounded like the hollow voice of doom.

"Yes. Sometimes a man dies a dozen deaths before it actually gets him. I don't know which is worse—the dozen or the real time."

Big Jean banged down his tin cup boisterously, rolling against Bane. The captain winced from the pain of his bound-up leg scratch.

"The real time? A man can't know about that till it comes to him, and then he isn't talking any more. No? Haw-haw! What do you mean, hey?"

Jeth Bane felt himself go pale. He got out hurriedly and struck up the lane to a little mud hut tucked out of sight among a cluster of willows. That remark had struck home hard, for he'd seen young Hinson die before actual death came today. Bane had seen him die last night in a dream!

## CHAPTER II

### *Death as Scheduled*



IN THE hut, Captain Bane trembled as if in the grip of the ague. It was ghastly to have such foreknowledge, made him feel as if there were blood on his hands. He even caught himself staring at them.

Hastily he took a bottle down from Big Jean's shelf, poured himself a powerful slug and dumped it down. That steadied him.

It was a mere coincidence, that was all. Men were dying all the time in this high-sky game they played for keeps over the Yangtze. Let your nerves get you, and your number would be up, too.

He put it out of his mind.

There was a stiff session of stud after dinner, and he caught Big Jean bluffing on a pair of nines for a fat

pot of Mexican dollars. Then worn out from the strain of that hideous flight, his eyes closed as soon as he lay his weary head on the pillow.

"Just a coincidence about Hinson," he muttered to himself. "Just a coincidence. . . ."

But, a half-hour before his Number One boy was supposed to wake him the next morning, he found himself sitting bolt upright, hands clenched, sweat pouring down his face. Across the room, Big Jean snored and So Long smiled in his sleep in the other bunk.

The thing that had shocked him into consciousness came back, taking form like an apparition. The outlines of the hut faded. It was a tarmac scene. A single plane was standing, its prop spinning idly. There was no sign of damage. Yet, through the plexiglass cockpit dome, its pilot could be seen lying back, upthrust face almost turned from view. Dead!

Bane got himself a cigarette. After awhile he dressed. It was absurd, he told himself. Men don't die sitting in undamaged planes on peaceful fields. He even laughed aloud at himself as he got a whiff of the mud flats when he went down to the field.

Some of the group were going out on the dawn patrol. Visibility was fair, with a northeast wind. The sullen rumble of guns drifted indolently from down the river. Everything was normal.

He was whistling as he went down to eat.

Mattin came in. Even at a yard's distance, his breath reeked of gin. His eyes were heavily bloodshot for want of sleep, but he wore his usual blank smile.

"Morning, Bane," he said dryly. "Lovely day to go out and look for death. Want to bet on that — that somebody dies? We could get up a little pool. Everybody in the outfit could put up a buck before we take off and—"



"Pilot hurt!" cried the Chinese mechanic. "Shot from Nakajima go through head!"

Bane whirled on him savagely.

"Shut up, Mattin!" he barked. That kind of talk, on top of what he was trying to keep out of his mind, was too much.

So Long had come in the side door. As Mattin left, he dropped into the chair beside Bane's.

"Something's eating you, kid," he said. "I saw it yesterday after we came in. What is it?"

Jeth Bane forced a smile, shrugged. "Falling hair."

So sipped his tea, studying his friend.

"You're sweating about the men we lost yesterday. I know. Listen, that's just the luck of war. Forget it. It might have been us, any one of us. Honest, I don't know how I stay alive myself, so why worry?"

Bane laughed as So Long, fretting

over somebody else, absently dropped a lump of soy bean curd in his tea. But he was cursing after being summoned down to the Chinese leader's headquarters.

They were to escort bombers over the enemy lines to drop—propaganda!

"It's bad enough to have men risk their necks in a real raid like yesterday's!" he fumed. "But to drop little paper pamphlets that look like laundry tickets—"

"What the devil!" the irrepressible Big Jean guffawed. "If we see some of Yagisaki's little brown devils, we got guns on our planes, haven't we?"

"Remember, don't worry," So Long repeated as he stood with Bane beside his ship. "We're all lucky to be alive. Don't know how I keep from getting killed myself. It's just luck. Remember!"

**W**INGING at eighteen thousand, they passed over Jap territory, unloaded the thousands of fluttering handbills and turned back through increasing masses of scud. And as the Yangtze appeared through a rift in the mistiness, Bane saw a small bunch of Mitsubishi MKIIs down to the south. They promptly vanished.

Without further incident, the group returned. When Bane pulled up on the field he expelled a sigh of relief and gayly saluted So Long, behind him. So Long was struggling with the plexiglass dome of his cockpit from the inside. The cowl had jammed on its runners and would not slide back.

Then the siren knifed fiercely into the settling soup. Enemy aircraft approaching!

There was barely time to do a thing. Off by the low hill, the m.g.s of one of the Chinese anti-aircraft units chattered into action. And scaling out of a low-flying chunk of scud, like some hunted, wounded thing, came a wild-twisting ship with the blood-red symbol of Nippon on its wings. Hard

on its heels, one knifing up from a little below, raced a pair of Boeings with the white star on a blue field.

It was all a matter of split-seconds. The trio were at about a thousand feet, the m.g. fire of the Chinese planes like molten threads spearing through the film. Bane saw that the E.A. was a low-wing Nakajima 97, then that it was one of the red-streaked devils of Yagisaki's outfit.

Tail assembly fabric flapping in ribbons, it zoomed in a frantic attempt to get out of the leaden hail. But one of the Boeings, in a climbing bank, slapped death into the vertical enemy cockpit.

The Nakajima wrenched over on its back, careened crazily out of the loop. Then, its guns blasting, it came slamming down, ground-hopping, smack at the drome. Another moment and a running Chinese mec went down in a heap. A newly landed ship stood with shattered prop stubs beside Bane's bus.

Slugs from the bobbing Jap crate caromed off Jeth Bane's nacelle. Then he was bucketing toward it, for he'd already released the wheel brakes and slued the tail around to nose toward the insanely winging invader.

The Cyclone blasted sharply as he advanced the throttle. With the Hawk roaring across the field, he backsticked quickly. The ship lifted, staggered, but he had her flat when she bounced. And a few yards farther he bounced it again, slapping his nose high enough to draw a bead on the onrushing Jap ship. His Brownings snake-tongued into action and a barrage of lead lashed the Nakajima.

The game Jap pilot, wounded, was seeking to sow as much destruction as possible before doom hammered home his coffin nails. He sighted the lethal nose stabbing at him, felt the slugs chopping into his ship. He had to break, screaming in a bank that whisked him between two trees.

The Chinese planes swirled after

him, darting down, but unable to get in a finishing burst because he was slashing so close to the earth.

His starboard wing just grazing a tree, the Jap arced in a swath. Then he came biting back at the north end of the field, smashing away with his full armament as he hedge-hopped to spray the drome. But, taxiing furiously between the scattered ships, Jeth Bane was rushing to meet him again.

Bane got the Hawk off and up a few feet. And again, hurtling nose to nose, his Brownings fanged and clawed into the Jap.

It was too much. The Jap pilot was forced to yank out of it and zoom, a serpent of wind-flattened flame leaping back at his cockpit from the nose. He was swallowed in the mist to the south, the Chinese pilots now hammering him to bits.

Bane came down, pancaking hard and just swinging it off the barbed wire barrier at that end of the field. He went taxiing back as the moan of the siren died. A heavy silence settled as he clambered out and a young Chinese major, who had been educated in the States, came up to congratulate him.

"Nice bit of work, Captain! That Jap pilot could have raised plenty of trouble. He only wounded a mechanic, though."

But Jeth Bane was already running, remembering how So Long's cockpit dome had been jammed. He came around a wing. A mechanic was up on the stirrup of So Long's ship, tugging at the cowl dome, then recoiling.

"Pilot hit!" the man cried out. "Shot from Nakajima go through head. Look, pilot shot!"

Bane looked. It seemed as if Yagisaki's bloody hand had reached even into the drome to claim another victim.

The picture was the same as Bane had seen last night in his sleep—the

head twisted back, face staring ahead. The ship, on the ground, was still undamaged.

The dream had come true again!

**I**N THE tiny bar they had rigged out of engine crates, the baby-faced captain stood slugging down Canadian Club and staring at the yellow mist swirling across the field, as if trying to blot out the picture of So Long's dour face. So Long, the way he'd looked that day he'd kicked a field goal from the 50-yard line to nail the West Coast title for the Wildcats. So Long's twisted countenance out in that ship.

Big Jean had strode off to the hut, tears running unashamedly down his cheeks. Other pilots came up to Bane to sympathize. He was only vaguely aware of them. Then Mattin was leaning beside him.

"Well, Bane, I was ready to bet you one would die today. Yep. But you wouldn't take me up on our little Corpse Sweepstakes. The money would have come in handy, too, and—"

Whirling, Jeth Bane threw out a savage right, then swarmed into him tigerishly. Mattin was swept backward, still smiling blankly. Bane lashed out again, hands pistoning. Mattin simply knifed in and grabbed at his throat. A chair crashed over. Their bodies threshed around as they battled without a word.

Other pilots tried to pry them apart. Then Big Jean, entering by the side door, leaped on little Bane, sent him spinning with a body check. Pinioning him from behind, he lifted Bane bodily from his feet and hustled him out.

Bane almost broke loose in the lane, but Big Jean got him inside and forced him down on his cot. Bane lay panting, a haunted, mad look in his eyes. Minutes inched by. The door opened and Mattin stood there, a whiskey bottle in each hand. Bane ripped loose with savage curses.

Mattin nodded. "Go ahead, slug me. I won't put up my hands. Guess I asked for it."

There were long seconds, with Jeth Bane standing a-quiver, staring at Mattin. Then he dropped back on the cot and gaped in horror at his writhing hands. Something hard and yet knowing in Mattin's eyes, the utter dispassionate look of a man who's seen death and learned not to fear it, made Bane sick.

"Look at me!" he cried. "Look at my hands! There's blood on them—like a murderer's! I dream of a man being dead, and he dies!"

Mattin whistled softly. Then he proceeded to fill three cups and pass them around. When they were emptied, he nodded.

"Tell us about it, Bane. We've got nothing else to do today. Everybody's too broke for a good crap game."

Jeth Bane talked then. He told them the story of the two dreams, and then how Hinson and So Long had died.

Big Jean snorted and slapped his knee.

"Ha! Then you better start dreaming quick about Yagisaki dying, because I am hunting that guy."

"Chuck the heroics," Mattin said. "Kid, you're all shot about So Long. You're blaming yourself for both of them because you had some crazy nightmares."

"Crazy?" choked Bane, swaying erect. "Yeah, crazy like a fox! Hinson's gone, isn't he? And So Long is, too."

The battered alarm clock by So Long's cot opened up with a rattle. Bane sloshed himself another drink, eyes staring.

"Now who am I going to dream about?" he croaked. "Who's going to die next?"

Mattin stood staring out the door.

"It's Yagisaki. He's driving us all to the cracking point. Maybe if we got him—"

But there was no escaping it. Bane dreamed of a man dying, and the man died. Who would be the subject of the next dream?

**A**FTER that, it was like living on borrowed time, only none of the three knew whose borrowed time it was. The strain grew tenser almost every hour.

Bane caught the other two watching him, studying him. Mattin calmly and impersonally, Big Jean furtively. Circles like great charcoal smears stamped themselves under the captain's eyes. His face became a taut, hueless mask. It was as though he was waiting for a bomb to burst.

Three days passed, then four, yet nothing happened. The whole countryside seemed unduly quiet. If Bane hadn't been so obsessed with the haunting dread in his mind, he would have suspected something.

Coming in the fifth day, he almost washed his undercarriage as he landed on the rutty field. He had, of course, been thinking of something else.

Wobbly-legged, he came to the bar. Mattin, who'd seen, nodded.

"Yeah, I know. Waiting is the worst part of it."

Bane clamped his teeth to steady himself.

"If it happens again—if I dream and—well, then it'll be my turn to go. I know it. I won't want to live any more then. I'll feel like a walking curse."

"Let's get a drink," Mattin suggested quietly. "A man can't fly on one wing. Something'll break soon."

It did, the next day.

On an early reconnaissance patrol, swinging westward over Japanese territory, Bane led his bunch up through a strata of mackerel cloud as the sun abruptly burst through in its full power. And up ahead at twenty thousand, returning from a photographing flight over Chinese terrain, was a Jap observation bus, accompanied by a

handful of the red-streaked Nakajimas of Yagisaki's outfit.

Flashing the signal to his men, Bane went boring up. Right out of the low sun they came, unsighted until they were halfway in.

It was short and fierce. The Nakajimas' whole object was to divert the attackers long enough to let the obs bus chase to safety. So, blasting heavenward, Bane screwed in a climbing turn. Winding, he abruptly hung it in a whipstall as a pair of Jap wings wheeled into his sights. Then his gun-ports were banging away and the ship above heeled suddenly on a wing.

It tried to roll and dive to safety. But Bane was already powering over on his back, fishtailing himself as lead *tat-tatted* into the dural of the left wing, then whipping out of the loop to land on the Jap's tail. The Jap went whacking for home.

Pouring it into him with his Brownings, Bane followed hard. The Nakajima began to wobble, verging on a spin, as if out of control. Bane held his fire, having no itch to butcher a dying man. But he followed farther to be certain.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Doom Unforeseen*



LIKE a statue in his cockpit, Mattin had cut through the dropping Nakajimas. He banked to drive back when a Jap came slicing up out of nowhere to hammer at his belly. Rolling and wing-slipping hard, Mattin found himself dashing right into the circle of two dueling ships. The Jap duelist stormed past his nose at right angles, scarcely ten yards away. And Mattin had his guns going in a split-second. The Jap jerked convulsively, twisted in mid-flight, then fell away like a wounded bird. Pulling out of his slip, Mattin went after him like a

cold-eyed wolf. In a matter of seconds, risking a direct hit by the Nakajima's guns, he winged into the nose and lashed it again with his Brownings. He'd seen that numeral on the Jap fuselage side as it flashed by. Thirteen—the number of Baron Yagisaki himself! That was why Mattin had taken the risk.

The Jap crate nosed down in a wild rush, zigzagging crazily. Coming around, the nerveless Mattin dived after him. Even with the Nakajima under full gun, however, he couldn't close the gap. His fuselage quivered with the straining wings. Then the Jap ahead began to flatten slowly.

A sun-cracked rice paddy leaped at them. The red-streaked ship went into a spin, then yanked out of it to shoot off at another angle. Mattin lost valuable time coming around. By then the other ship was settling behind a hedge of stunted willows.

Mattin came roaring down in time to see the Jap pilot drop from his wing, reel, then run stumblingly toward the cover of the trees. Without a flicker or a grimace, Mattin put his nose down and sent his Brownings hosing a lethal stream at the helpless Japanese pilot. He was a killer to the bone, and this time he was hunting a king-killer.

When he saw the man crumple and somersault twice, riddled with lead, Mattin simply banked around to climb. And then he got a clear look at the numeral on the side of the motionless Nakajima. It was 18, not Baron Yagisaki's 13!

Mattin's mouth jerked spasmodically as he climbed to rejoin the flight in the south. They hadn't seen him, luckily. Things like that weren't so easy to explain to some men.

But northward, where the Yangtze angled sharply westward around a hill, the observer of the Jap bus had seen through his high-powered binoculars. One of Yagisaki's best pilots had been shot down in cold blood as

he left his plane, shot by a pilot of the foreign squadron. That would go in the observer's report. The mad baron himself would like to know about that killing.

When they got down at the home field, the haggard Bane felt a little better. Whether it was the action or not, his spirits rose as the individual reports were filed. Big Jean had got one, dropping a Jap right into the rapids. Bane himself had seen his enemy go earthward, dead at the controls. And Mattin had another to his credit.

"Enemy pilot died in landing," he put it curtly.

Three of Yagisaki's men had been smacked down, and without a single casualty on their side. Let the blood-hungry baron smoke that in his pipe! It brought Big Jean's score to an even dozen, which called for a celebration. Jean was going on leave, so the drinking served a double purpose.

After they had eaten and drunk a toast or two to Big Jean, Bane went out and sat down on the clay steps to write a letter to his kid brother back in the States. As he started it, from inside he could hear Big Jean's hearty laugh. He remembered once before when Jean, flushed with victory, had laughed like that. It seemed ages ago, more than two years.

Bane forgot the letter as he began to day-dream. He found himself thinking about that game, the one that had brought the championship to the Wildcats. Sure, So Long's field goal from the 50-yard line had clinched the championship, but it was Big Jean's toss of a forward that had put the Wildcats in a tie.

A slow smile crossed Bane's face as he recalled that pass. He himself had caught it just on the goal line. It seemed to him that he'd been standing there for hours, while Big Jean stood like a statue behind the line, shaking off man after man as he sought a receiver. He could remember how he'd

yelled his head off for Big Jean to heave the pass.

"Jean! Here, Jean!" he'd yelled. "Jean! Jean!"

Then the pass had come, arcing through the air for what seemed miles, straight into his waiting arms. He'd caught it taken a step and—

**H**E SAT up with a jerk, for a moment. Then he realized where he was, saw the unfinished letter. He'd dozed off. It was his own shout of "Jean" that had wakened him.

Propping up slumber-starved eyelids, he looked into the hut. Big Jean wasn't there. Strange, the big fellow was usually the last to leave a party.

Bane ran to the quarters. Jean was on his cot in the darkness and didn't answer Jeth's call.

"He'll be gone tomorrow," the captain muttered as he hit the pillow. "I can't dream of Yagisaki's getting him, anyway."

It seemed as if he'd barely closed his eyes when a Chinese lad was shaking him in the sickly green of the pre-dawn light. Every man out. A Jap bomber raid was reported down the river.

Struggling into his fur-lined coveralls, he bumped into Big Jean, slapped his back, sleepily wished him happy landings. Then he was stumbling out toward the line of ships.

He joined the others around the little operations office. It was a big enemy bombing flight, course computed to be straight up the river toward Hankow.

The Chinese ground crew were distorted automatons wheeling the Hawks from their hiding places and into position. The crackle of warming Cyclones sounded like a devil's diapason.

Still in a daze, Bane found himself climbing into his own vibrating ship, slipping his copy of the course under the instrument board clips. He turned to close the plexiglass dome and had

a glimpse of Big Jean as he passed before a guttering flare.

Bane swore. The fool didn't have to come. Jean's name wasn't up for duty. Then there was no time to say anything, for he got the three winks of the Aldis lamp send-off.

The compact Hawk bucketed across the field toward the river.

At ten thousand, cruising in slow circles, he waited for the others to form. It was lighter up there, a palish, unreal haze, as if they drifted in an opaque sea. At a two-fifty-per clip, they took the course.

Bane flashed his identification lights as a Chinese beam reached up. He was still vaguely worried. He tuned in his receiving instrument to see if there were further orders about Big Jean's coming along.

Time seemed to stand still, locked in the monotonous drone of the Wright Cyclone under the cowling. East of the second bend they ran into cumulus. With Bane checking his compass and his chart closely. When they emerged from the layer, there was no further need for either.

Over to the northeast, great batlike creatures sliced and dipped and pirouetted. Frothy smudges of fire that were machine-guns dappled the scene. A Kawasaki bomber, a bluish-green thing like some prehistoric monster out of an unknown sea, swam through a spot of effulgence, then vanished in an enormous gout of crimson-jetted black. From above it a single ship came, twisting down with a comet's tail of flame, blazing more and more furiously as it neared the ground.

The whole inferno reminded Bane of a skating carnival he'd once seen back at the New York Garden. Then he was signaling his flight, mounting, curving a little to get set before tumbling down into the high-sky inferno himself.

Chinese flights had intercepted the Jap bombers. Bane identified some Boeings and spotted a Curtiss Hawk

as it came plummeting right down a slender sword of light. The enemy flight had already turned and was headed back eastward, abandoning the objective. Down nearer the ground, a bomber went up with a blast that showed it still bore its cargo of eggs. Then he recognized the red-smeared pattern of one of the Yagisaki outfit, and his eyes got that distant, intent look.

"CALLING, Fourth Group!" blared the radio. "Come in, Captain Bane. Come in, please."

"Bane calling," he said tersely as he switched on the sending. "Come in, General."

And he got his orders from General Wung Li to turn back. A second bomber flight had been reported to the south. Evidently H.Q. felt confident that the Chinese pilots had this show well in hand.

Bane was shaking as he signaled and banked for the turn. It was like getting keyed up to give somebody a sock in the nose, then being called to the telephone.

Southward they retraced their course, just as another flock of Boeings came slashing out of the shadowy depths of the lower air to hack at the retreating Japs.

"They drag you out of a warm bed to come up and see somebody else fight!" he was grouching as he turned to check the echelon.

There was a gap on the right side of the V. Number 4 was gone—Big Jean!

Tensing, Bane rocked his ship to look downward for a falling plane. Nothing. Then he glanced to the east and saw Big Jean's Hawk nosing from a brief dive to arrow toward the retreating Japs, already well down the river.

Bane stared as the pale, phosphorescent daggers of jeweled fire from Jean's exhaust stack waned. It was sheer suicide. It was—



Then it came to Bane. Jean had always been talking about getting Yagisaki sometime. Now the fool was taking a crack at it before he went on leave. For So Long, maybe.

Signaling with his lights, Bane gave the Number Two man on the left the sign to take over. A second later he'd pulled out in a bank and was pouring the throttle to the 840 H.P. radial as he hurtled on Jean's air trail.

Glancing in his rear-vision mirror, he saw another Hawk tailing him off to the right. It was Mattin.

With the dawnlight waxing in a steady tide, Bane blasted eastward. Nervously he pressed the trips to test his guns, saw the yellowish tongues of the Brownings lick out.

He thought he saw the dim shape of Big Jean's ship as he winged over the Yangtze. Then it was gone and he climbed.

Northward, some of the Boeings were slashing at the Nakajimas. Nearer, angling into brown hills, were the remaining bombers with their escort.

"Jean! Jean!" Bane heard himself howl in his cockpit as Mattin edged up alongside his right wing.

They pierced the topside of the cloud, moisture dotting the cowl domes for a moment afterward. A few miles ahead were the Japs. But there was no Hawk with Big Jean!

Mattin waggled his wings to get Bane's attention and gestured southward. Like a derelict left in a killer's wake, a Nakajima over there was pouring down the sky face, red ribboning from its inverted nose.

In a diving bank they plunged toward and beyond it. Seconds of eternity died. Then, far below, a lone Hawk in a twisting imbroglio was enmeshed with three ships of the baron's tribe. Big Jean!

A Nakajima lanced out of nowhere as Bane dived. He had to roll out of it. Another pocket handkerchief of cloud intervened. Bane dropped

lower, still lower, seeking, ferreting, the altimeter needle going under the five-thousand mark. Then he saw a ship crawling like a bug on a withered field below, another already down there.

**T**HE Yank streaked toward them. As he came in from the flank, the outlines of the Curtiss Hawk 75 took form. The other was a red-smearing Jap crate. Even as he cut the gun to flatten from his dive, he made out the 13 on the Jap's side. It was Baron Yagisaki's plane.

A figure was striding from it toward Big Jean Armandou, who'd dropped out of the Hawk to slump back, wounded, against its wing edge. The baron held a drawn Luger, though Bane could not detect it at his speed.

Supremely confident in his pilots, unaware there were any more E.A. in so deep, the chieftain of the red-smearing Nippon circus was calmly dealing his own retribution for that pilot of his, reported machine-gunned from the air after landing wounded behind enemy lines. Eye for eye, murder for murder.

Jeth Bane saw. It looked as if Big Jean was going to be taken prisoner, but something told the captain otherwise. He cursed hoarsely at his own helplessness as he slapped in from behind the Jap sky king. His guns were cocked and ready, but to unleash them would mean to mow down Jean as well.

Then he half-saw a faint puff from Yagisaki's hand, Big Jean going over face forward, flat.

Bane's gloved hand jumped for the gun control lever. Simultaneously a savage rafale of fire from a Nakajima, slanting at him from above, buffeted his ship in a leaden storm. His engine cowling washed away in a sea of dancing black spots. He slumped sideways, even as he yanked back instinctively on the stick.

A slug had knifed him across the side of the head. . . .

He came out of it with warm stickiness on the side of his face, began climbing in a crazy wobble. Fighting off the nausea, he looped over, rolled right-side up, and went coursing back.

Another ship with red disks on its wings dived on him, but he rolled from the line of fire almost absent-mindedly. That close to the ground, they could only stab at him. A real dive meant crash-up.

A shelled structure leaped into being off his right wing and he banked sharply away from it. His eyes strained for sight of that field where Big Jean had been murdered. Then

almost before the ship ceased rolling.

"He got it!" Mattin cried. "Yagisaki—you saw?"

Bane nodded sickishly as hands reached in to help him out. Mattin, beside him, was cursing in a murderous growl at the baron. He broke off to go on:

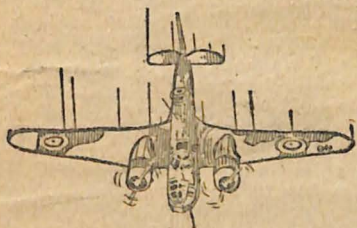
"He knew you'd dreamed it was his time, so I guess he figured to get it."

As the field swirled slowly before his eyes, Bane pushed up his head.

"That dirty, assassin, Yagisaki, murdered him in cold blood! But I never dreamed that. I didn't! I never—"

Mattin's fingers tautened on Bane's shoulder.

*Todd Bancroft and Larry Leadbeater Go to the Rescue  
of Twelve Stolen Flying Fortresses in*



## SHAMBLES FOR SINGAPORE

*A Zooming Action Novelet*

By ARCH WHITEHOUSE

COMING NEXT ISSUE

he knew he was never going to find it. Yellow mist, boiling up from the river like a shroud to cover the dead, was blotting out the details of the landscape.

Jap machine-gun lead played a tattoo on his tail assembly. Bleak-eyed, Bane kicked a rudder pedal, then mounted in a writhing turn. He was dully aware of explosions. The heavy three-inch stuff of the anti-aircraft batteries was spattering in bursts all around him.

He cut over on a wingtip and arrowed westward. . . .

As he came into the field, he almost passed out from loss of blood, caused by that bullet-crease across his scalp. Then he was down, Mattin was beside him and prying back the cowl dome

"You fell asleep outside the hut last evening. Jean heard you calling his name as if you wanted to warn him. You were calling him desperately. And he knew. Well, he tried to get Yagisaki, knowing he was going out, anyhow."

Bane went chalk-white. He remembered dreaming of that football game and how he'd cried Jean's name aloud. And Big Jean, hearing, had taken it to mean but one thing. Banners flying, he'd deliberately gone to meet his destiny.

Bane swayed. He hadn't foreseen a man's death this time. He'd as good as sent him to it!

The whole field seemed to vanish through a knothole before him. He folded up.

## CHAPTER IV

*Thwarted Destiny*

IMPLY he was aware of the antiseptic, ether-tinged odor of the medical hut. The Chinese M.D. probing around his head wound. A voice saying as if from afar:

"Just a bad scratch."

Then a needle bit into his arm and he was floating through clouds without the aid of wings or engine. He began to sink deeper and deeper into the fluffy softness of them. It felt as good as a rubdown when you'd come off the gridiron after a tough game.

Then something was passing through the clouds alongside him. A coffin with wings, ferrying its way slowly and inexorably onward. The lid of the coffin was open.

When he strained up to see its interior, there was Mattin's body stretched out, the face strangely contented in death. And above it a feathery figure 13—Yagisaki's number—drifted.

Bane tried to get up and yell a warning to Mattin, whom he knew to be still alive. But something stronger than his will held him down. And then the fleecy fluff of the clouds was swallowing him. . . .

When he woke, it was in the familiar surroundings of the hut. A Chinese orderly was seated beside him. Bane fumbled up at his head bandaging. He felt pretty good, a little sluggish, that was all. Then that hallucination of the flying coffin he'd had as he went under the drug flashed across his mind.

"Where's Lieutenant Mattin?" he choked out frantically. "Bring him here at once."

The orderly was already pouring him a stiff slug of whiskey.

"Mista Mattin, he go," he said slowly. "Mista Mattin take ship and

fly 'way. He no come back. You like little drink?"

Taut, Bane gulped the drink and stared hard at the dusk purpling the window.

"How long ago?" he whispered.

"After they bring you here from field, Mista Bane. He leave letter for you."

Bane took it and ripped it open with a ferocious eagerness. Then small, neat writing—Mattin's—confronted his clearing eyes.

Bane:

I was in the M.O.'s hut when you started to talk, after they gave you the shot in the arm, so I know my time is due.

The captain swayed back and the orderly quickly poured him another drink. In a moment Bane read on, the lines hurried, short now.

Don't worry. I only hope it's a nice coffin they give me to ride to hell in. Once I didn't expect that.

I'll tell you about it so you won't blame yourself for anything. Before I came here I was in the death house of a certain State prison, condemned to die for a murder. Yes, I did it, too. A governor was running for reelection and they made a political football out of me. I was given four reprieves. It was like dying a thousand times. That's why I was so nasty about death sometimes. Forget it if you can.

I escaped and got up here. Never mind the details. I never did feel I had a right to be alive, so now it's easy for me. I'm going out for a whack at Yagisaki. I thought I got him once. I'll tell you about that when I see you in hell.

Van Lorimer Mattin.

Slowly Jeth Bane, last of the Cloud Musketeers, pushed himself from the cot and motioned for the surprised orderly to help him on with his tattered uniform. It was a painful job, for it seemed as if every fiber in his body cried out in tortured protest. Then he was moving along the shadowy lane toward the battered little hut they used as an operations office.

Now and then he passed the Chinese mechanics, sweating despite the fact that the hot sun had not crept up out of the east yet. Those men were doing a job they had to perform, twice a

day at the least, and sometimes more.

They were wheeling the planes down the lane toward the muddy little field, bringing them out from their hiding places—ruined stables, an old temple, a row of shell-battered shops at the head of the lane, for they had no hangars. The Japs had taken care of that long ago. And with Jap planes buzzing around like sand fleas, they were forced to keep their ships as far away from the field as possible when not in use.

**B**ANE finally reached the mud hut by a twisted clump of willows and went inside. There he found General Wung Li, seated at a makeshift table, poring over a huge map. Two of the general's aides carried their traditional swords strapped across their backs as they leaned over the map. Everybody, including the general, sat with their tunics unbuttoned, watching a thin pockmarked officer trace a course on the map with the muzzle of an ugly German automatic, while a group of pilots behind the general watched.

Now and then the general helped himself to a dish of millet and curds, which he washed down with hot tea from a rough earthen bowl. It was like a stage setting as Bane stood looking at the sweating faces lighted by the wavering flame of a candle set in the mouth of a wine bottle.

"Any report on Mattin, General?" Bane asked slowly.

The general rubbed the back of his hand across his gleaming face, then reached out and took a handful of peanuts from a bowl at his right. He cracked them noisily as he looked up at Bane.

"He took a plane without permission," he said curtly, chewing on the nuts. "He would have been court-martialed if he had returned."

"If he had returned!" Bane gasped. "You mean . . ."

The general nodded. "There will

be no court-martial, my friend. Mattin was shot down on the bank of the river, after attacking a flight of Nakajimas single-handed. He shot down two of them. His ship has been found, but not his body. It was Baron Yagisaki, they say."

Yagisaki again! Bane's fists knotted at his sides. Yagisaki had murdered Big Jean to keep his blood vow. And it had been Yagisaki, through the agency of one of his fanatic wing brood, who'd done for So Long.

Bane stood reeling a little. Now it had come down to a matter of the Jap ace and himself. And he knew his time had come at last.

Those words with Mattin at the bar came back to him. He himself had said that if he dreamed of another man dying and it happened, it would be his own turn next. Well, he had dreamed, and another, Mattin, had died. Now his time was here, his last chance to settle the score with Baron Yagisaki. Somehow the two, the hideous dreams and the king-ace of the Japs, were interlocked.

The general was speaking again, asking him if he felt fit for duty. Bane nodded. Somewhere upstairs he had an appointment. So Long and Big Jean and Mattin had kept theirs. He *had* to fly!

"Good," the general said softly. "We need every man."

The general was convinced that a Japanese offensive was about to explode. Last night's huge attempted bomber raid was but a preliminary gesture. With wave after wave of planes, the Japanese would attempt to isolate the Chinese from communications and supplies. The Chinese war chiefs had determined to strike first to disrupt the concentration for the blow, if possible. Tonight one of many bombing raids would be made from this group.

Then the general was asking for volunteers. As the men showed their surprise, he half-explained.

"The raid will be conducted in two sections. Section One will be composed of a pair of bombers, accompanied by six pursuit ships. They will cross the lines half an hour before the main attempt. Then—"

Bane understood it first. Section One would be a decoy, cold ducks to divert enemy attention while the main group slipped through at another point. Perhaps even as the Japanese believed they'd repulsed the attack.

He stepped forward.

"I volunteer to take over Section One," he said quietly. "But I may be late for breakfast afterward."

**H**E WAS walking down to the readied Hawks with the five volunteers he'd selected. Despite them, he felt alone, like a man walking with three ghosts, for he was the last of the Cloud Musketeers.

This was a suicide mission, he realized, yet that made little difference. His turn had come. He *knew!* Some vengeful, baleful destiny that patrolled the war-torn heavens, with Yagisaki himself as its tool, had ordained it.

He climbed into his ship calmly. Gasoline flares winked along the runway. Above, long layers of clouds, dyed faintly from behind by the hidden moon, flew past. The moon should rise in full glory about an hour after the main bomber bunch crossed the Yangtze.

He glanced at the others, nodded and then shoved up the throttle as he released the wheel brakes.

"Well, So Long and Jean and Mattin, here comes nothing," he muttered.

He flashed down the rutted sod.

A motorcycle and sidecar came careening around the corner of the willows, ducked around a knot of mechanics, flashed by a nest of machine-gun mounts. It came bumping across the soft earth of the field ahead of the rolling ship, looked as if it were going to cross almost under the nose of the

plane. Then it switched parallel to the course of the Hawk. In the flickering glow of the line of flares it went racing along. The man in the sidecar half-rose unsteadily and then waved frantically to the pilot.

Bane saw him, curveted away, and looked again. The passenger's narrow, cynical face was caught in the light haze an instant. Mattin!

Bane's ship slued and wobbled and almost dipped a wingtip to the clay before he got control of it again. Mattin himself, come back to life! Mattin not dead, giving the lie to that last dream!

Bane got the ship steadied, twisted her around out past the middle of the field, then came bucketing back. And just as the Hawk's leading edges gripped the air to rise, he saw Mattin again. It was no ghost. Ghosts don't sit thumbing their noses, as if to call you a cockeyed liar.

Mattin had come back. Mattin hadn't died. That was all Jeth Bane could think as he led his flight eastward across the lines, just below the cloud-line level, at eighteen thousand.

The bombers had been awaiting them over the field. Behind him was his tiny V of five. A little below now, the bombers trundled.

Sleepy-looking eyes whipping constantly across the skyscape, he huddled in the pit, thinking of it. The shackles of fatalism had been struck from him. Mattin had returned to give the lie to the curse of dreams.

His head jerked. A little back to the southwest, a rift appeared for a moment in the cloud ceiling. Something that might have been a furtive moth danced through it. Pale shafts of moonlight filtered through. The captain's head bent as he spoke to the bombers through his radio. Enemy aircraft coming in from the southwest.

He flashed the signal to his doomed handful. Hard they banked, Cyclones blasting bejeweled globules from the

exhaust ports. The rising wind whipped the cloud layer open wider to let more light from the lopsided, rising moon ribbon through. The enemy came dropping through those broad bands, revealing themselves as the red-smearing hellions of Baron Yagisaki.

Lead hammered on Bane's fuselage as he batted upward at the spearhead. To the right he cut as his fingers pressed the broad lever that gave the "go" signal to his Brownings. Over farther to his right there was a white, blinding flare where a Hawk had been, then a flame-gutted frame chuting earthward in a livid swath like a weary star. One of the baron's brood must have scored a direct hit.

A red-splotched ship twisted across his sights. He kicked left rudder and dropped to feed it the full hail of his converging gunfire. He had a blurred glimpse of the enemy pilot cringing away, bullet-seared, before he was gone. Another Nakajima was suddenly drifting down the sky with the stubs of a shattered prop swinging idly.

**T**HE first round was over. The Jap vultures had passed. In a flash Bane was kicking his trembling Hawk over in a tight loop. But, led by a rectangular-winged ship bearing a big 13 on the side—Baron Yagisaki's lucky symbol—the Naks were driving in a stiff bank, instead of diving on down at the racing bombers.

Rolling out of the loop, Bane swung at the head of his men to meet them as they whipped back. It was strange, this war over the Yangtze. It struck thunderbolt-swift out of the serenity of the heavens. There might be brief, fanging moments when wing-riding death-dealers at four miles a minute tangled with each other. Some emerged from it. Planes parted only to come clawing back. But in those few seconds, with the guns momentarily muted, the fathomless peace of the high heavens reigned again where

frothing guns had drawn their lethal stripes.

Fabric ripped up from Bane's left wing. He fishtailed, then danced on a wing-tip and went knifing in. He hurled a blast at a Jap bus that started to corkscrew upward, wheeled himself. The whole cockpit vibrated with the smash of a Nakajima's gun-spawn into his own tail feathers. Then he was ripping in one of those deadly circles, rolling and twisting, with two Jap ships hacking away at him.

An instant later the patchwork-lit arena of tumbling ships was illuminated with a blinding glare. Jeth Bane glanced down. He saw why the diving batch of Nakajimas had ignored the vulnerable bombers. They had sprung a pincers-trap!

With the Hawk convoy diverted above, a fresh line of the crimson-smearing ships had snaked up from the shroud of darkness in the river gorge. Even as he glanced overside, he saw the two trailers of the ambush batch climbing to batter at the belly of the second bomber. The first was already a down-twisting, flame-ridden holocaust.

Something deep in Jeth Bane told him he couldn't be killed now, for Mattin had come back to laugh in the teeth of that man-racking curse.

## CHAPTER V

### *Help from the Dead*



**W**ING-SLIPPING away from one of the red tigers chewing on his tail, he dropped his nose stiffly and fed the throttle to the radial. From the tail of his eye he saw a sieve pattern describe itself on the side of his cowl. A moment later he felt a searing pain spread through his right shoulder. It went numb, as if paralyzed. He knew he'd been hit, but he paid no heed to it.

He was going down. His mission was to get at least one bomber through. He had to make every pretense of attempting to execute that duty, for it would set the stage for the main flight that would try to slip through.

It was a nerve-defying dive such as even the icy Mattin himself would have been proud of. Like a scimitar out of the roof of heaven itself, Bane's greenish-gray Hawk swept. The gun muzzles became winking eyes of malevolent powder-flashes. Vaguely he was aware of another Hawk sledging down on his flank.

The upthrust wings of a banking Nakajima jumped into his sights. It jerked as if feeling the leaden stab like a mortal thing. Then it was twisting away in a fatal spin, one wing already tearing from the main assembly.

Another of the red-tinged ships dashed from behind and beneath the tail of the lone, beleaguered bomber it had been strafing. It was so close that Jeth Bane could have told on which side the Jap pilot parted his hair, if the man had been helmetless. Bane's guns literally scrubbed him right out of the pit. Then the Hawk was lurching sickishly as it passed through the back-draft of the big bomber.

A ship with the red disk of Nippon had dived on the bomber's snout-like bow to get at the pilot and fore gunner. It came slanting across as Bane's Hawk snatched out of the strain of the dive, came along the far side like an apparition. Lead flails raked the Curtiss.

The Wright Cyclone stuttered with a banging in the ports for an instant. Then the baby-faced devil had it blasting full again, had rolled upside down to feed his Browning spawn into that Jap's tail as he dived past. Nothing seemed to happen. But the red-blotched ship kept going down and down, roaring full-power. It

never did pull out, for dead men don't make good pilots.

Nosing over, the captain snaked up and around in time to see a flaming Hawk plunge from above. But a short distance over, a Jap crate was accompanying it on the death ride with gouts of ebon smoke flushing from its engine cowling. Meanwhile the bomber, like some ancient behemoth, had veered to the north and was cutting deeper beyond the Yangtze. The gunner in the jacked-up aft pit was bathed in the moonlight as he waited at his post with his scarf-mounted m.g.s ready.

But the last die wasn't quite cast. Into the ragged, switching beams of greenish moonlight, constantly varied by the break and shift of clouds, a pair of Yagisaki's circus raced to overtake the bomber. Back beyond them, a circling duo, a Nakajima and Hawk, were staging a personal duel.

Banking stiffly, Jeth Bane cut to intercept the first pair. Ten seconds sped, then another ten. He set his guns frothing. He never did know whether he or the bomber's aft gunner had got the second, lower ship. It simply veered away sharply and then moved out of the fight. And the first one wheeled in a rising climb to meet the new adversary who'd churned out of the dimness. As it wheeled, Jeth Bane saw the 13 that was Yagisaki's on its fuselage flank.

**I**T SLANTED toward him like a veritable projectile. The Yank cut throttle and back-sticked to get into the whipstall spot. But Yagisaki hadn't been called the Scarlet Knight of Nippon for nothing. He wasn't being sucked in by kindergarden stuff like that.

He rolled as he came a-slashing. Bane's bullets crackled past him, drawing bright threads through the half-night. The baron was already poised on a slicing wingtip. Wing-slipping, he came sweeping out of it

for a try at Bane's underside as the Hawk pendulumed at cut speed. Bane could feel the lead beating at the Hawk's belly, but he gunned up and over in a tight loop grimly, the count turning fast to ride his tail.

It was a chilling few seconds as they whirled in a darting, weaving circle like some kind of human pinwheel dance. Twice the king-killer's guns almost ferreted home with their steel missiles. The Jap's guns gouged a ragged hole in the port wing. Once the hunted Bane thought of pulling out in a dive and fleeing for it.

Then he remembered who this Yagisaki was. Yagisaki, their sky Nemesis, the man who unknowingly made those dreams come true. Yagisaki, who'd served as a one-man firing squad for the landed, wounded Big Jean. And a cold, steely fury filtered through Bane's veins and gave him a diabolical desperation. It was he or Yagisaki, and he himself had been slated to go, anyway. He was like a man reprieved.

Slamming in that tight circle, he abruptly pulled up almost perpendicularly on his tail and cut the throttle. The onrushing Jap had to veer sharply to avoid a collision. Then it was Bane on the baron's tail feathers. After that it was a couple of sky sharks at the game you lose only once, kill or be killed.

Once Bane saw the baron squeeze back as Browning hail hammered at his cockpit side. Seconds later, half the Hawk's instrument panel was hewn to bits as Yagisaki came bucketing from above.

Both pilots plummeted straight at each other, Yagisaki's high-checked, cruel brown face an inflexible mask. He meant to shoot through or ram this upstart of a foeman who'd literally slashed his flight to shreds. Bane, bandaged head throbbing to the point of blindness, bent against the pain of his wounded shoulder, hunched with fingers on the button.

The baron's guns blurred first as they bridged the air between at hurricane velocity. Then the Hawk's armament added their discordant chant to the murderous hymn. And it was the Jap ace who veered. He never meant to, but a bullet caromed off something in front of him, stabbed like a gouging blade into his chest.

The spasmodic reaction made him backstick and depress one rudder pedal hard. He tobogganed upward at a tangent. Jeth Bane was after him even as the back-draft of the baron's plane sucked him down a moment.

Hunter and hunted, they streaked toward the bowl of the night. Slowly the Hawk began to pull up closer, creep nearer. Haggard now, Bane gave it to the guns again. And nothing happened. No smuggy froth from the Brownings. He was out of ammo, the belts emptied in that moon-dyed shambles.

So Long's canniness, Big Jean's bravado and Mattin's fatalistic ruthlessness ruled him then, plus the nerve of all three together. It almost seemed as if So's wise, worrying voice were telling him it was the only way. As if the laughing Big Jean were waving him on from the sidelines up there. And as if the cynical-faced Mattin were nodding from a cloud and telling him it didn't matter.

Bane kept on blasting up after the Jap king-killer. It was the only way. Swerve from the attack, and Yagisaki would be on him, riddling his weaponless ship. Veer one split-second from the wild bluff, and the baron might guess. It was just a case of looking death right back in the eye and telling it to wait awhile.

**T**HE answer came. Yagisaki's crimson-dappled Nakajima wobbled. Slowly then, slowly he flattened from the climb, looked back at the gaining Hawk. And he swung in a wide circle with trembling, fast-failing limbs jig-



gling the controls. If that Hawk pilot had but loosened his fangs but for a moment, he might have—

It was too late. Yagisaki's wing, the left one, started to dip. He looked across at his last foe. His weary hand lifted to a ragged salute. Then he plunged forward in his bullet-hacked pit and the Nakajima started on its final, screaming dive.

Jeth Bane watched it for a moment. He stared eastward. Far off, there was a speck that was the bomber, still on its mission trail, still a decoy. The dueling pair he'd seen as he closed with Yagisaki were no more. A flickering speck of red on the earth far below might have been one of them.

Then, as he came around again, through a parting in the clouds above them, high accurate A.A. fire, a majestic procession passed. Bombers, hemmed in by swarms of Boeing and Hawk fighters, was flowing eastward unimpeded to their destination. They had gotten through.

A little weakly, Bane laughed.

"Objective attained," he muttered.

Then he headed the battered Hawk's nose homeward. He would be no help to that lone bomber with empty guns. . . .

Reaching the field, he cut the gun and dropped down. They greeted him like somebody from the grave, the general himself running from the operations hut as Bane stepped out shakily.

"Where's Mattin?" the captain panted.

The general looked away. Somebody passed Bane a fresh-lit smoke as he stood swaying on the wing. Then one of the general's aides, a giant of a man from Kao Shien, told him.

"You did not see friend, Mista Bane?"

"I saw him in that motorcycle," Bane replied wearily. "I saw his face, that's all."

A grim smile crossed the face of the giant Chinese.

"That is all he want. Mattin a brave man."

"Say," demanded Bane, "just what are you trying to tell me? Was that Mattin, or wasn't it?"

"Was Mattin," said the aide soberly. "Motorcycle driver tell me that Mattin crawl away from plane crash with very bad leg. Leg almost off. Doctor might stop bleeding in time, but no doctor near."

"Might have?" Jeth Bane repeated blankly.

"Yes, Mista Bane. Your friend think duty more important than life. He catch motorcycle driver going by, point pistol at him and make him bring him here. He keep saying something about giving lie to dream. Funny thing to say while dying."

Bane nodded slowly. He was beginning to understand.

"He made the driver pull up alongside of me so that I'd be sure to see him and think he'd come back. He's dead. You're trying to tell me he's dead, aren't you?"

The chunky little Chinese M.O. stepped up and placed his hand on Jeth's arm.

"He not live five minutes after you fly away. I could do nothing, but he ask me to give you this."

He held a pack of crumpled cigarettes out to Bane.

With a crazy sort of grin, Jeth Bane wrapped his fingers around the package. He understood. It was Mattin's way of saying he knew Jeth Bane would come back.

It was Mattin boasting how he'd beat the curse at last.

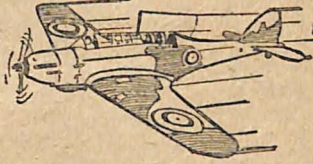
**B**ANE, the last of the Cloud Musketeers headed for the pile of engine crates they'd called their bar. "I'm buying a drink for Mattin," he murmured.

Mattin had blasted the curse. His brief return had convinced Jet Bane he wouldn't die after seeing one more corpse in a dream. And he hadn't.

Somebody swung into step with him. It was the general.

"I am sorry, Bane, but I would like to congratulate you. Your mission was a success."

Bane nodded. "I had help. Three other pilots came after the rest had gone down. And no Jap on earth could have shot down those three, either!"



FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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# The Higher Ace

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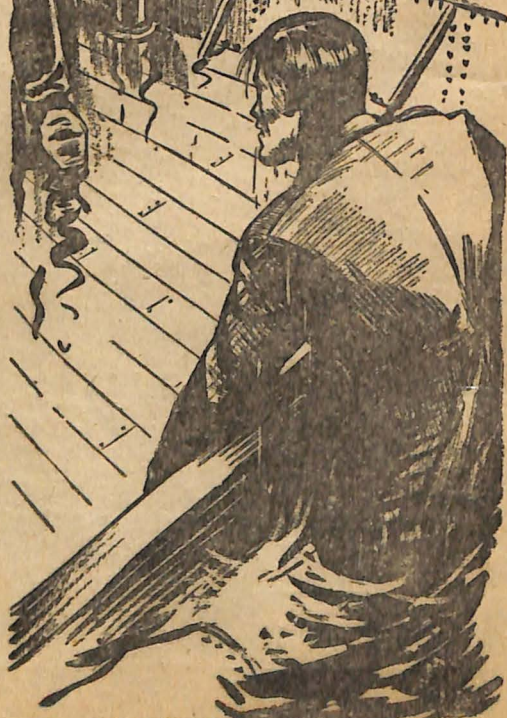
The entrance to the cabin was blocked by a Nazi flying officer

*Bob Travers Was After His Fiftieth Nazi—And He Had to Fight in Double Talk to Do It!*

**T**HE motor of the Spitfire idled lazily while a ground crew carefully arranged the long belts of ammunition. Lounging on the grass, not far away, were half a dozen pilots. Bob Travers, distinguished among these, because of his R.C.A.F. insignia, flipped away a cigarette and grinned.

"Last night I bagged Number Forty-six. Four more and I break the record for that big party you mugs will owe me. Shall we have it, say, tomorrow night? At a swanky place, no doubt, with champagne and everything that goes with it?"

"Don't be so hasty," Flying Officer Fenwick derided. "I've got forty-nine Jerries—three up on you, old man—and if I knock down the fiftieth be-



fore you do, it's my party with you on the paying end."

"Sure," Bob Travers replied, "but I've got the advantage. Within ten minutes I take off for a routine patrol of the coast. Jerry's been quiet lately, but we've given him a terrific pasting and he's about due to retaliate so—when the sun goes up, I'll have my Number Fifty—wait and see."

He arose, stretched and buckled his flying coat tight. Someone helped him with his chute. The Spitfire was ready, several others were taking off. A motorcycle dispatch rider came wheeling up, braked his bike and supported it with one foot. He raised goggles and grinned.

"Got some news," he said. "The boys over at Eldon just forced a nasty Messerschmitt down. The Jerry landed without firing a shot, and believe me he was smart because four of our boys were right on his tail. They'll be taking the ship here for you men to look over in the morning. Nice going, wot?"

Bob Travers climbed into his plane, waved to his friends and shot across the field. He simply *had* to get four of the Jerries before morning. Fenwick, the foremost ace of the squadron, only had one more enemy ship to knock out of the sky to win that big party offered to the man who got his fiftieth ship. Bob was four behind, but he grimly determined to make up the difference if his luck held out.

He headed straight for the sea, riding low until he saw the shimmering water. Then he nosed up to the prescribed height for patrol work. It would be dark in about three hours—none too much time. Fenwick would take off soon too, and he had only one more Jerry to get.

It wasn't the party which intrigued Bob so much, but the prestige he'd garner for the Canadians. There was a certain amount of friendly rivalry between the R.C.A.F. and the R.A.F. It gave the boys something to strive for, and they all enjoyed it.

Bob edged out a little farther, saw something bobbing on the water below and dived. He leveled off very soon though because the object below happened to be a life-saving raft—one of those first-aid floating hospitals meant for the use of flyers who had to bail out. Bob had never used one yet, and he hoped he wouldn't make his first attempt to do so tonight. Yet that red cross looked very inviting and comforting. They were spotted all along the shore, and more than once had saved the life of some pilot shot out of the sky.

IT WAS an hour later when Bob first spotted the enemy, and he emitted a long groan. There were a whole fleet of them. They were flying very high and heading for the coast, where the fifteen or eighteen Heinkels would drop their eggs. In formation, just above the bombers were an even dozen Messerschmitts.

Bob licked his lips. It was the chance he asked for. Of course, all odds were against him, but he'd been with the R.A.F. ever since the Nazis made their bold attempts to control the skies over Britain and were knocked out by forces they outnumbered five to one.

That was why taking on a dozen German planes hardly bothered Bob Travers. He knew that they must have spotted him by now, but they hadn't broken formation yet. Perhaps only three or four of the fighting ships would come down to give battle, and he fervently prayed this would be the case. Four more wins, and he'd have the party in the bag. Bob Travers began humming gleefully as he nosed up and simultaneously snapped on his radio.

"Bomber flight proceeding eight miles off Middlesbrough, probably toward Hull. Taking them on. Cheerio."

The Messerschmitts took the challenge and left the bomber formation to its devices for the time being. After all, what did one lone Spitfire

hope to accomplish against a dozen of the Luftwaffe's mightiest?

The Germans were a little too sure of themselves. Instead of breaking formation, they dived down in perfect alignment to polish off this intrepid fool who dared them to a scrap.

Bob Travers was a flight lieutenant, and he'd won that commission by clever and fast thinking. He suddenly leveled off and drove straight ahead while the first batch of Messerschmitts passed above him. Then he zoomed up and got the rear enemy plane in his gun sights.

He tripped the firing button and death blazed up at the German's belly. The Messerschmitt wobbled badly, smoke streaked out behind it, and Bob gave her one more burst—a conservative one because he still had three more of those babies to get. This one did it—the enemy plane swooped toward the sea.

Bob went into a loop then and at the very top of it, rolled out to find himself diving straight at another of the German rear guard. His guns spat their V-shaped formation of doom. The Messerschmitt seemed to fly into pieces.

But now the others had split up and were intent on taking him in the quickest possible way. They came at him from all angles. Bob saw streamers from one plane and knew it was that of the squadron leader. He grinned tightly.

"Okay—you'll be Number Forty-nine," he shouted gleefully.

Diving straight through the pack, shaking off their bullets easily, he looped again and at the rise met the squadron leader almost head on. Bob's guns blazed defiance. That battle lasted about a third of a second, for the squadron leader took the blast squarely in his motor. Number Forty-nine went plummeting oceanward. Bob barely had time to see a parachute mushroom out.

Then all hell broke loose. Bullets whizzed from every direction. He

felt his rudder control go and then what seemed like a million slugs smashed into his motor. Others hit the cowling, the wings and riddled practically every inch of the plane.

He was going down, and there was a sinking sensation in his heart much deeper than the wild spin he'd gone into. He'd missed. The party belonged to Fenwick now even though he'd matched that flyer's record. It was tough to take, but then Bob Travers had other things to think about—like saving his own neck.

**H**E HAD inflated a rubber raft, and now he chucked it overside. Then he climbed out and jumped with one hand clasped firmly around his chute ring. The silk checked his crazy descent. He saw the life raft bobbing below and gave a hard tug on the right risers of his chute. The silk responded beautifully, and, guiding it with skill born of practice, Bob managed to land within a dozen yards of the raft.

He disengaged his harness and swam to the raft, crawled up on it and bailed out some of the water. Things were a bit blurred for a few moments. The activity in the sky had been enough to upset anyone's equilibrium. Then he heard the roar of motors, looked up and saw three Messerschmitts diving toward him, guns blasting.

With a yell of derision, Bob gave a leap overboard and dived as deep as he could. Rising again, he felt the whip of bullets smacking against the water all around him so he went down again. The second time those Jerry pilots figured he was done for and headed back to join the formation.

Bob swam back to the raft and groaned when he got close to it. They'd peppered the thing in a dozen places. He crawled aboard, unstrapped the oar and wielded the short-bladed paddle furiously. If he could only reach one of those regular life rafts, everything would be quite serene.

Between bailing water and padding, Bob began to ache all over. His tired muscles didn't want to respond, but he kept going—more slowly perhaps, yet always in the direction of a life raft whose position he'd noted from the air.

He saw it half an hour later, and put on a little more speed. Nothing had ever looked more welcoming. Once aboard, he'd find food, drinks and a spot of whiskey to keep from getting a cold. In a short time a motor launch on patrol would visit the raft, and he'd be whisked ashore. Maybe he'd even have time to secure another plane, go up and get his number fifty. Bob still rankled against the luck that made him lose out only one point short of his goal.

He bumped against the big life raft, seized ropes dangling overside and hauled himself up. He flopped on the deck, watching his rubber raft give its last struggle for existence. It slowly vanished beneath the water.

He raised himself to a sitting position and took stock of things. There was a comfortable little cabin on the raft, and he crawled toward it on all fours. He stopped suddenly because the entrance to that little cabin was blocked by a pair of booted legs. Bob looked up and stared at a Luger held by a grim-faced Nazi flying officer.

"Hello," Bob said. "Looks like we are in the same boat—or isn't that funny?"

"It is not funny," the German replied in good English. "Nothing is funny in war, or do you *dumbkopfs* never realize that?"

"Oh listen," Bob objected wearily, "I'm in no mood to argue. We're both trapped on this raft, so we might just as well make the best of things. For heaven's sake, put your gun away. The war is over as far as you're concerned. I—say, wait a minute. I just noticed your rank. You must be that squadron leader I put out of business. Nice little argument, wasn't it, only you should have dived. I'd never have—"

"Silence—dog," the German snarled. "You are my prisoner. Let me see you laugh now."

**B**OB did laugh, uproariously. "I'm your prisoner, yet we're both aboard a British life raft. It can't move from this spot. Every few hours they send out a launch. They'll be here soon, and then whose prisoner will be who? What's the use of talking about it? If it inflates that Teutonic ego of yours, okay. I'm your prisoner. Just show me where the food is—and a spot of whiskey."

"No food—no whiskey," the German snapped. "I have taken them as spoils of war. So—you are the man who shot me down. A lucky burst did it because no *Englander* could have shot me down unless he was lucky. I am Major Henkels, and there are seventy-five planes to my credit. After this flight I was to have received oak leaves to wear with my iron cross."

"Seventy-five, eh?" Bob looked surprised. "Not bad. I've accounted for forty-nine. When I reached my fiftieth, I was to have been given a swell party — champagne and everything. We like that stuff better than medals over here. Well, it looks as though the plans of both of us are about washed up."

"Washed up?" the German scowled. "Hardly—because I am going to reach Germany again if possible. Do not underestimate me, my friend. We Germans are not beaten until we are dead."

"I heard differently," Bob grinned. "No matter now—we're both trapped here until the launch on regular patrol shows up. That will be right after dark. Look—why not be a good fellow and let me at the whiskey?"

"Turn around," Henkels snapped. "Turn—or do you want me to put a bullet between your shoulder blades? There—you are showing good sense. Stand just as you are and remember—what you feel pressed against your back is my Luger. It was well—"

wrapped to keep it dry so do not entertain any hopes that it will not go off. You have told me exactly what I wished to know. I am sure of getting back to Germany now."

"Mind telling me just how you'll do it?" Bob asked derisively.

"No—I shall tell you. For several years I lived in the United States, as an unofficial military observer. I learned to speak English there so my accent is quite the same as yours. Canadians and Americans are practically out of the same pot. Therefore, with your uniform on, I can easily pass myself off for you. I shall reach a flying field and steal a plane. You will accompany me back—as a trophy—unless you get in my way."

Somehow Bob knew this Nazi meant every word—that for the glory awaiting him in Berlin he was prepared to take any risks. Bob wanted neither to die nor to see Berlin as a prisoner of war. He kicked out suddenly, moving his foot backwards. It hit Henkels on his left shin and made him leap away. Before he could pull the trigger, Bob had turned, crouched and was charging at the German. But Bob had forgotten one thing. He was soaking wet, his clothes had practically dripped a pool of water on the deck, and his flying boots were slippery.

Both feet went out from under him, and he crashed down on his back. Momentarily stunned he could do nothing as Henkels leaped upon him with clubbed Luger. It smashed against Bob's temple, and the glowing red in the afternoon sky turned into a rainbow of flashing colors that were blacked out as consciousness abruptly departed.

**H**ENKELS went to work immediately. He removed Bob's uniform and put it on his own back. He even pinned his iron cross to Bob's chest after he had dressed the unconscious man in the Nazi uniform. Then Henkels went for a bottle of whiskey. He sat on the deck, eyes alert for the

first signs of the rescue party, and sipped his whiskey.

An hour went by. Once Bob moaned and stirred with returning consciousness. Henkels slugged him again, as callously as though he were nothing more than a piece of wood.

Then Henkels was on his feet, waving wildly. A fast launch was heading toward the raft. Two men in British Naval uniforms were plainly visible in the prow. The boat came alongside. Henkels hastily examined Bob to be sure he'd not awaken and upset his plans. Then he helped one of the boarding party to the deck of the raft. It was a petty officer.

"Well, well, what have we here?" he asked.

Henkels prodded Bob's body with his foot.

"I shot him down and, in turn, was shot down myself. When I reached this raft, he was here and believe me, these Nazis are thickheads. He tried to make me a prisoner of war. Naturally I took his Luger away and slugged him."

"Of all the fools," he takes the prize," the petty officer laughed. "Well—he'll be taken off your hands soon, Lieutenant. It's a prison camp for him."

"No—not yet," Henkels hastily amended his flat rejection. "This man is an important German pilot with many victories to his credit. He is a major, as you can see from his uniform. He boasted, when I was his prisoner, and from what he told me, this man knows a great deal of information that might be useful to Intelligence. I want you to ferry us ashore, get me a car and let me take him to my own operations base."

The petty officer looked doubtful.

"You'll have to get the commander's consent as to that, sir. He'll naturally want to look both of you over anyway, so let's get aboard and start back. Won't take long."

A naval lieutenant-commander looked at Henkels with a speculative

eye. He looked at Bob too—still unconscious.

"I've no reason to disbelieve you, sir," he told Henkels. "Still we can't afford to take chances. Supposing I phone your operations base and tell them you're coming in. I'll provide the car."

"Good." Henkels lit a cigarette and parked himself on the edge of a desk—something no German officer would ever have done. "I prefer it that way. But I wish to impress upon you that this Nazi major is my personal prisoner. I want the job of taking him back."

The lieutenant-commander phoned Bob's base. He asked a few questions, eyed Henkels again and didn't notice that both Henkels and Bob were almost the same weight, height and build.

"Lieutenant Travers," he said, with one hand across the mouthpiece of the phone. "One of your friends back at the base is inquiring about the success of your plans for this afternoon. How'd they come out?"

**H**ENKELS was no fool. He was an aviator, like Bob, and thought in the same terms. He recalled that Bob had told him about his forty-ninth victory and how he'd been promised a banquet.

Henkels smiled broadly.

"Tell him I'm up to forty-nine, and if they don't consider this German major as a double victory, I'll go up tonight and get my fiftieth."

The naval officer transmitted the gist of Henkel's words, laughed and hung up.

"That rather clears things for you, Lieutenant. Sorry—but we can't afford to pass up any risk of a spy getting into our midst. Now—about this Nazi—don't you think he needs a doctor?"

Henkels, a sneer on his face, looked down at Bob.

"Hardly. I just laid one alongside his skull. Takes a lot to kill one of

them. I'm sure he'll be all right. What about the car?"

"I've ordered one already. You're quite far from your base, Lieutenant. Find your way back all right?"

Henkels frowned.

"I really don't know. Suppose you furnish me with a map—the route all marked out on it. I'd appreciate that very much."

Henkels carried Bob to a waiting car, put him in the back seat and cuffed him to the foot rest with handcuffs provided by a naval officer. The key to the cuffs he placed in his pocket.

Bob moaned, and his head rolled a bit. Henkels took a long breath, turned to a couple of sailors who were standing by and gave them orders to see if the map was ready. Henkels waited until they disappeared into the building and then he slugged Bob once more.

A map, with the route laid out in pencil, was handed to Henkels. He studied it for a moment, saluted the naval lieutenant and shook hands all around.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said. "Military Intelligence will also be most grateful when this Nazi major talks. Just between us—he boasted about the invasion. Must be off now. Good luck."

He got behind the wheel and drove away, his heart pounding almost as fast as the pistons. When he'd put the naval base well behind him, he heaved a great sigh and began to laugh raucously.

"These *Englanders!* Gullible fools! Stupid pigs! They believe anything. Now to reach one of the closer airports on this map, steal a plane and fly back. What a reception I shall get. How Herr Goebbels will use this story in the propaganda division. I shall be a colonel within a week."

He drove for about half an hour, frequently glancing back to see that Bob was still unconscious. Bob kept rolling with the motions of the car,



but his cuffed wrist kept him from banging against the doors.

Twice, Henkels broke out into a cold sweat when he saw road barricades ahead. But these were opened readily. It was apparent that word had been passed along about his journey.

He came to a fork in the road, stopped and consulted the map intently. There was an airport about fifteen miles north—at least it seemed to be due north. He decided to make for it. Any kind of a plane would serve in such an emergency. He draped the map on the back of the front seat and settled down to drive. It was dark now, the blue air-raid headlamp bulbs gave off faint light so that he couldn't travel too fast over these unfamiliar roads.

**FIFTEEN** minutes later he consulted the map again, grunted chidingly at himself and turned left at the next intersection. He could have sworn the marked-out route indicated that he was to keep on the main highway, but—here it was, all marked out plainly.

Just about the time that Henkels decided he was hopelessly lost, a plane zoomed overhead, and its landing lights flashed on for a moment or two. The pilot wouldn't have used them unless he was preparing to sit down. That meant a landing field was nearby. Henkels slowed up and finally pulled well off the road where the car was hidden behind a big tree. He shut off the motor and heard more planes coming in—Spitfires and Hurricanes, back from patrol.

Henkels got out, opened the back door and hoisted Bob into a sitting position. He slapped his face several times until Bob opened his eyes and groaned feebly.

Henkels laughed.

"So you did not believe I could get away with this, eh? But I have. They even furnished me with a car, a map and opened all barricades for me."

"Where are we?" Bob blinked and tried to look through the darkness.

"I am not sure," Henkels answered. "Near an airport certainly; because I heard the planes coming in. It is camouflaged, of course. Perhaps tomorrow I shall lead a flight over here and blast it to pieces. Now you are to obey me—or I shall kill you instantly."

"I don't feel so good." Bob tried to move, but the chain around his wrist stopped him. He looked down at it with considerable awe.

"Oh, yes," Henkels gloated, "they provided me with handcuffs too. They think you are a very important and dangerous prisoner, you see. Soon you will be a prisoner too—though not very dangerous and certainly not important except to me. They'll parade you for the cameras, my friend. The story will tell how you were made a prisoner of war in your own country. Now I am going to remove the handcuffs, but remember that I have a gun, and I shall not hesitate to shoot."

Henkels unlocked the cuff, stepped back and brought his gun to bear. Bob slid out of the car, tried to get on his feet and fell flat. Henkels didn't fall for this ruse. He just moved further back and growled an order for him to arise and to keep utterly silent.

"You must know this airfield," Henkels whispered after Bob was on his feet again and swaying drunkenly. "How far is it from the coast? Are there anti-aircraft batteries nearby—or other air fields from which more planes could take off to intercept me?"

"How do I know where we are?" Bob mumbled. "Lots of airports in England. I'm sick—need a doctor. Get me a doctor."

"Later—when we land in Germany," Henkels grunted. "Listen well, Lieutenant. We are going to crawl on our bellies to the edge of the air field. The slightest sound means your death and the deaths of any who approach. I have extra ammunition and I shall

not allow myself to be captured. If you wish to save the lives of many of your comrades, obey me."

"Yeah—sure," Bob muttered. "I'm not crazy. I don't want to die. You lead the way. I can't see very well, and my head aches."

"No—you will lead—under my guidance," Henkels snapped. "Then I can always keep you within range of my gun. Down—on your belly. Crawl and be careful that you make no noise."

**B**OB went down on his hands and knees, moved slowly in the direction of the airport and fought to avoid waves of dizziness that swept through his brain. He was able to think clearly enough, but those blows had taken their toll. His head really did ache badly. He was trapped in a web from which escape was practically impossible.

Henkels kept right on his heels, never allowing him to get more than two or three feet ahead. Bob groaned every time he thought of the victory party that should have been his. It looked now as though that party would be held in a prison camp, with thin soup, black bread and ersatz coffee.

A fairly stout bush impeded his path. It was low, limbs touching the ground. He seized the strongest of these and pulled it back as he advanced. Suddenly he let go of it. The limb sprang back, hit Henkels full in the face and sent him flat on his stomach.

Bob made a dive for him, managed to pin his gun hand to the ground and tried to straddle the German. Henkels' left hand came up, grasped Bob's throat and closed like a steel clamp. Weak, his head thumping like a thousand-pound bomb as it detonates, Bob was no match for the German. In another moment he'd be choked to death.

He collapsed, and Henkels pushed him aside, thrust the muzzle of his

Luger against Bob's temple and then, slowly, lifted the gun. Henkels realized his victory would be even greater if he brought a live prisoner back with him.

"You fool!" he growled in Bob's ear. "I give you one more chance. We are close to the edge of the field. One false move now, and for you the war will end. Start crawling again, and this time be careful that you do not allow branches to slap into my face."

Bob had to obey. For himself he didn't mind so much. A man had to die some time or other. But—Henkels had fooled them at the naval base. He'd probably fool any sentries who came to answer the shot that Henkels would put through his prisoner's head. Henkels, in a British uniform, might get by with saying his Nazi prisoner had tried to escape. Then he'd reach one of those planes, take off and probably strafe the whole airport. Dozens of men would die. Bob was thinking mostly of them.

They came to the very edge of the field. It was skillfully hidden from the air. A dozen Spitfires were lined up. Only a sentry or two was on the field, while the pilots and ground crews undoubtedly were assembled in the barracks, listening to stories of the patrol.

Suddenly Henkels gave a gasp of astonishment.

"A Messerschmitt," he grunted. "Intact! Set for a take-off too. What luck! Listen to me, my friend, we are going to steal the Messerschmitt. It is meant for only one man though—too bad for both of us."

"What do you mean?" Bob asked in a whisper.

"I cannot take you along and parade you before the High Command. That is why it is bad for me. Certainly I cannot just leave you here—to fly again and shoot down more of my comrades. That is bad for you."

Henkels started to raise his gun. Bob, for the past five minutes, had

felt strength flowing back into his muscles and nerves. Before the Luger could level, he sprang at Henkels. Surprised, the Nazi held his fire too long. Bob whacked him squarely on the nose, slammed another blow against his throat and closed in to finish him off. Noise meant nothing now.

Then Henkels seemed to recover from the shock of the sudden attack. He managed to get the Luger into position for shooting. It banged once. Bob was hurled back by the heavy slug that all but shattered his shoulder. He went down. Henkels bit off a curse, got ready to put a finishing bullet through Bob's brain and then heard sentries running up. There was no time to carry out this minor detail of his plans.

Henkels dived through the bush. The sentries were about a hundred yards away. One of them brought his rifle to shoulder. Henkels fired two quick shots and kept on running. The sentry ducked for cover and before he could get a bead on the fleeing man, Henkels had reached the Messerschmitt.

He got aboard, started the motor and grinned broadly as the plane began to move across the field. He felt it leave the ground and with a yell of triumph he sought altitude—just enough height to dive and strafe the field.

**B**OB was on his feet and running. One sentry had rushed off to sound an alarm. The other saw Bob and took a pot shot at him, missed by a close margin and Bob reached one of the Spitfires. There were more shots from the sentry, but Bob paid no attention to them. As he cleared the field, there was a grim smile on his face.

Pilots and ground crews were rushing from the barracks as Bob nosed up. Henkels, circling the field, saw this lone Spitfire rushing to meet him and decided not to push his luck any

more. He streaked toward the coast.

Bob checked the fuel supply, found it none too good, but the ammunition belts were intact. This Spitfire hadn't found any trouble up there in the sky. She was going to now.

Bob spotted the outlines of Henkels' plane. He gained more altitude until he was fairly certain that Henkels must have lost sight of him. Then he put on all speed and gradually overtook the Messerschmitt. There was a three-quarter moon, plenty of light by which to keep Henkels in full view all the time.

When he was directly above the Messerschmitt, he went into a slanting dive, leaned forward and caressed the firing buttons. As he came within range, he sent a short burst into Henkels' ship. The Messerschmitt went into a loop, striving to get above the Spitfire and polish it off.

Bob was wise to this stunt and he was already in a loop himself. As he came out of it, Henkels was just below and roaring straight toward him. Bob held his fire although the Messerschmitt was squirting death. His wounded shoulder dripped blood, but if there was pain, he was not aware of it in the heat of the enjoyable chase with death.

Bob pulled down the cowl, swerved close to the Messerschmitt and as he flashed by it, he waved. Undoubtedly Henkels must have recognized him and guessed what Bob's concluding plans meant for him.

Henkels dived wildly, and Bob got squarely on his tail. He put another burst into the German plane, saw it wobble, but Henkels hadn't been bragging. He was a good pilot. He came out of the dive, and Bob found that Henkels was chasing him now. The Spitfire shivered under the impact of the bullets, but miraculously, it held together. Bob zoomed upward again. Henkels tried to follow him, but Bob had the lead by several seconds so that when he came out of the loop again, Henkels was still climbing and pre-

sending a whole broadside for Bob's attack.

Henkels suddenly started waving his hands in a token of surrender, but Bob knew what that tricky Heinie would do if he got a chance. He leveled off, got the Messerschmitt squarely in his sights, and the eight Browning wing guns thundered, throwing their V-shaped line of fire directly into the side of the Messerschmitt.

Bob saw Henkels rise up, clutching at his throat. Then the German plane went into its final spin. Bob roared down behind it, saw the ship sheer off tree tops, hit a field, nose down and smash into a million pieces.

**T**HE table was long and well laden. There was a single bottle of champagne on it—standing in front of Bob Travers' place. Fenwick was at his right, morose, but willing to acknowledge Bob's fiftieth victory. Bob arose, holding his glass of champagne high. His left arm was in a sling.

Everyone else stood up with beer mugs raised.

"To Henkels—a two-timing, double crossing sport," Bob said. "An egoist, a menace to world security and—a good pilot."

"Might I add something?" Fenwick broke in. "Good! Then here's to Bob Travers—a better pilot—who won his fiftieth victory by helping the enemy

into the sky so he could shoot him down. Maybe it's not exactly in the rule books, but it goes with me.

"Henkels was armed, in one of his own ships, and had as much of a chance as Bob. They were both aces, but Bob was higher in the deck. Now Bob, tell some of these newcomers how you helped Henkels find a Messerschmitt."

Bob grinned, took a sip of champagne.

"He got away with it neatly enough. I was barely conscious when he asked for the marked map. Then he slugged me. When I awoke again, he held all the cards, but I saw the map on the back of the seat, took it long enough to alter the route with a pencil I found in Henkels' uniform.

I knew there was a captured Messerschmitt at Eldon, so I routed him there. Naturally, if my plan worked, I didn't want to shoot him down in one of our own ships. I don't think you gentlemen would have classed that as my fiftieth victory."

Lieutenant Clark, at Bob's left, looked sour.

"All I can say is—I'd take on fifty Nazis for a sip of that champagne. Look at Bob—swilling the stuff while we drink beer. That was the only bottle of champagne for a hundred miles around, and I had to keep it hidden, knowing this bloke would drink it all up in front of my eyes. It's the war that does things like this."

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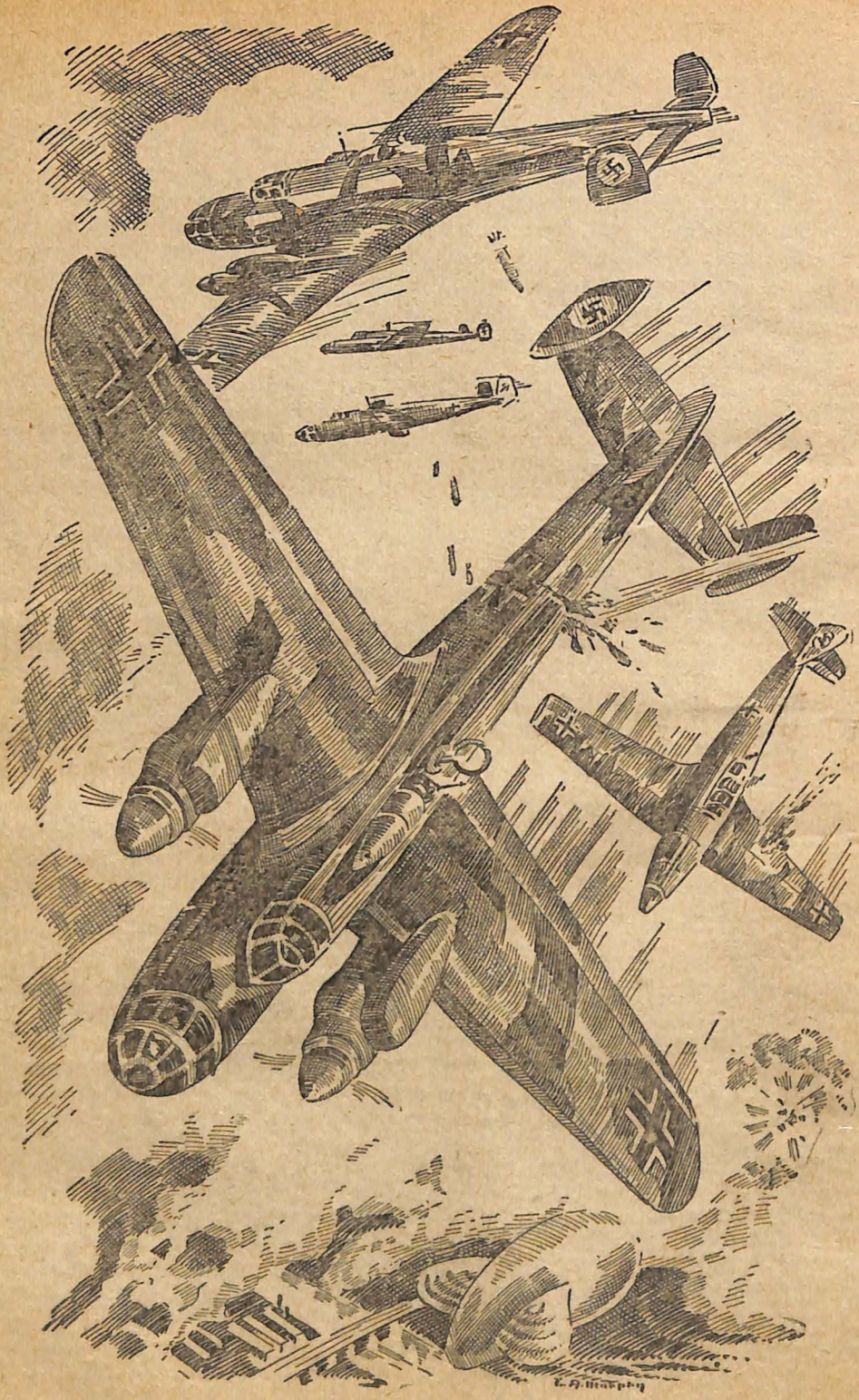
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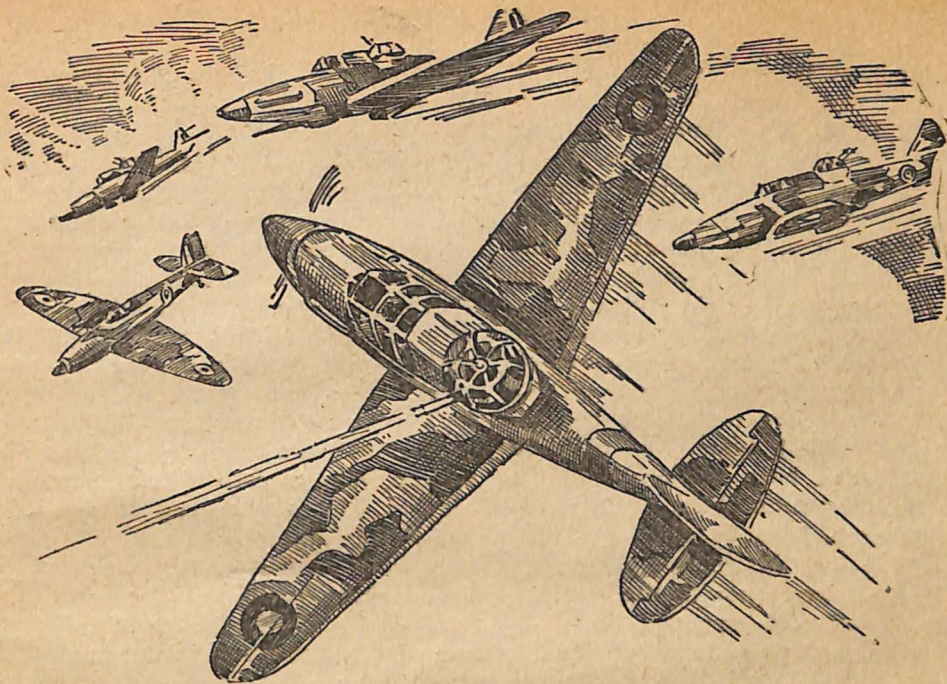
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The aft section fell away and the black Dornier hurtled earthward

# STUKA STINGER

By ALEXIS ROSSOFF

Author of "Baron Blackout," "Red Skies," etc.

*Wickey Warren, Otherwise Known As the Wren, Proves Himself an Avenging Eagle When it Comes to Battling Nazi Vultures!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Bird Without Wings*

"WICKEY" WARREN, Flying Officer—better known to his familiars as the "Wren"—with twenty-four free hours ahead of him and the pavements of London under his feet, indulged in a bit of pardonable primping as he neared the sandbagged entrance of the Dorchester Hotel.

Behind the ugly protecting barrier was the world's most fashionable lounge. There lights, music and laughter, wine, women and song were waiting for him.

The Wren squared his shoulders inside his glaringly new tailor-made uniform tunic. Wine and women were not for a bird of his odd feather. While as for song, Mrs. Warren's flying son, Wickey, could not carry a tune in a tin pail.

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A COMPLETE AIR-WAR NOVELET

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Light was what the Wren craved most at the moment—brilliant all-revealing light. He planned to stride up to the cocktail bar over which Harry, the famous American mixologist, presided. Harry would dish out a potion of amazing power, and the Wren would bask and bathe there in the soothing glow of the lights.

The ride from Paddington in the limping, wheezing taxicab powered by low-grade gas, through gaunt streets tinted a macaber purple by the recently installed system of diffused lighting, had been too much like a funeral procession. Now Flying Officer Warren jauntily quickened his pace. He was instinctively heading for the blackest spot in the sandbag rampart—when it happened.

Nearby, a siren suddenly made the night hideous with its banshee screech. The Wren froze in mid-stride. His mind, however, revved up instantly. Other Alerts by now were adding their frenzied warnings to the growing din.

Bombers overhead!

Somewhere beyond, in the distant darkness, his chums of the crack Spitfire fighter squadron were probably tumbling out of concealed Dispersal Huts, ready to joust with the raiding Jerries in the sky. But Wickey Warren, in a sweat of apprehension, jerked this way and that until he suddenly realized why he was panicky.

Here in London he was out of his natural element. He was a bird without wings, a dodo!

Grounded by circumstance, Flying Officer Warren helplessly rolled his eyes heavenward. Jerry blackbirds of ill omen already were devilishly flitting above the clouds. One of the raiders, perhaps manned by a fledgling crew, dropped its load of eggs all in a single lump, which exploded like the end of the world.

Giving no second thought to his spotless tailor-made tunic, the Wren had the presence of mind to flop face-down on the wet pavement, as per in-

structions for all those caught in the streets and unable to reach shelter.

"**B**LASTED blighters!" he cursed the jittery Jerry who had hurriedly unloaded a whole stick at once. A new note in the insane cacophony abruptly silenced the Wren. It reminded him of the coughing bark of an old and faithful watchdog. The anti-aircraft guns had taken out a stack in the grim game.

Despite the fact that devastating explosions were rimming the area all around, Warren daringly clambered to his feet. Flaming bursts of red, yellow and white now bloomed like poisonous toadstools in a devil's garden under the flashing bellies of the hovering blackbirds. He fervently hoped that one of the murderous bombers might fly into the path of a steel-filled package.

A mobile medium-caliber gun on a rubber-tired "jinker" came squealing into the seemingly deserted street. Working in conjunction with "George," the new mechanical raider detector, the gun's long, inquisitive snout tilted up.

*Bam!*

The impact of the smashing report lifted the goggling Wren clear off the ground. "Flack"—falling shrapnel—began to hammer about him in a deadly metallic rain. His senses reeling, Wickey Warren groped his way to the thin shelter afforded by a huge heap of rubble.

Destiny, in a mocking mood, was now writing a new chapter in his unfinished book on the war. Dazed and a mite sick, he clung to his small island in the midst of what he realized was orderly confusion.

Ambulances and weird-appearing rescue trucks dashed by with their heroic volunteer crews of sturdy civilians. The Wren shook his buzzing head. It slowly dawned upon him that there are heroes other than those who so proudly wear the wings insignia of the Air Arm.

Searchlights, moving like ghosts through the upper darkness, singled out a diving blackbird in the act. But before the ack-acks could do anything about it, the hurtling Jerry spewed a mess of incendiaries down on the target area and twisted away again.

Londoners came pouring out of darkened doorways to combat bravely the newest menace. And contrite for having funked it under his baptism of bombs, Warren pitched in and lent the courageous taxpayers a hand.

"A right narsty to-do, I calls it," a bare-chested workman angrily commented. "I'd arsk no better than to get within reachin' distance of them hit-'n'-run blokes."

The Wren, gingerly sanding a thermite squib, grunted a terse:

"You and me both, chum." Sensing a pronounced slackening off in the ground fire, he snatched a quick peek at the ugly business still going on upstairs. Chalk-like streams of tracers were chopping the upper darkness into a crazy quilt pattern. British two-seater Defiants, radio-directed by Operations Headquarters, had swarmed up to exchange steel compliments with the unwelcome visitors.

"And little good they are at night," the bare-chested workman sourly observed. "Our chaps can't 'it what they can't see. If a Jerry or two get bagged, it'll only be because they got chased into the lovin' embrace of them new 'igh-altitude barrage balloons."

Flying Officer Warren, blindly loyal to the R.A.F., indignantly puffed up, then as quickly subsided again. The man toiling at his side had not sliced it thick in giving credit to "Ossie the Octopus"—the barrage balloon. It was freely admitted that the R.A.F. had yet to work out an effective counter to the night raiders.

The Wren did, however, derive a small measure of solace when the persistent Defiants at last scattered the formation of blackbirds.

Ground guns instantly resumed their former drumming tempo.

Teamed up nicely with "George," the raider detector, the mobile gun at the far end of the street gave out with a jarring *thud*.

SECONDS later a bird of ill omen, flying off by itself, yawed drunkenly. Searchlight fingers quickly groped for and found the wounded bomber. Little more was needed. Ack-acks flung revenge into the careening monster, all of which added to the ever-increasing number of Nazi widows. "Got that ruddy bounder," the Wren's unknown companion expressed deep satisfaction.

Before he could say more, the thin rising wail of the All Clear siren came across the Thames. And it so happened that a warden, padding by, turned his flash full upon the slightly drooping wings on the Wren's muddied and bedraggled tunic.

"Lor' luv a duck!" exclaimed the official. "Don't tell me you rode down here on your broolly!"

"Hardly," the Wren said grimly. "Came to London for a bit of an earned rest, you know. I'm feeling top-hole now, thanks. Invigorated no end. That's why I'll be aboard the first train leaving Paddington for points east."

He turned and pressed a whole quid into the bare-chested workman's hairy fist.

"Have a decent sup of beer on me, chum," he invited.

"Oh, now, that wouldn't be sportin' of me," the home-fronter protested. "I was pretty narsty, pullin' your leg by namin' Ossie the Octopus above you flyin' chaps for the night honors."

"Quite all right. Quite! Head was becoming too large for my cap, anyhow. Obligated to you, old son, for reminding me that war is more than a daytime flying job. I'll be pushing off now. You're doing a proper job here of scrambling Jerry's foul eggs for him."

The home-fronter continued to stare owl-like after the queer bird who



had laid the golden quid on his perspiring palm. He judged the rapidly disappearing Wren to be a right gent, despite the evidence that he also was slightly bunty in his crumpet. All R.A.F. pilots were more or less balmy, he had been told. . . .

Wickey Warren slowly awakened on his cot within the camouflaged Dispersal Station. The hand that had been rocking him, like a wood-chip adrift on the Channel in a storm, loosened its grip on the rumpled front of his pajamas.

Grumbling, the Wren glared up into a circle of solemn faces.

"A wicked liquor-swilling sot, if I ever saw one," the familiar voice of his special chum, labeled the "Ghoul" by the Spitfire outfit, harshly criticized.

The Wren lashed out at the ring of tormentors.

"D.T.s," the Ghoul mockingly diagnosed from a safe distance. "I'll wager that his wild carrying-ons in London placed a lasting black mark against the fair name of the R.A.F."

"Like as not a Bobby fetched him home, manacled, in the early dawn light," a second voice chimed in.

The Wren waved a blanket in token of complete surrender.

"I'll talk," he promised.

Grinning, his flying mates hurriedly drew up old bucket seats, rescued from obsolete and written off crates.

"And don't spare the gory details," the Ghoul hungrily pleaded.

The Wren's story of his adventures in the bombing raid greatly disappointed the hard-flying Spitfire brood.

"Nary a drink or a smile from a damsel," Warren dispiritedly concluded, testifying in his own behalf.

"Now isn't that like a blooming timid wren?" the glowering Ghoul growled in disgust. "Wore his wings thin with flying and fighting to win a holiday. Then, just because a blinking Jerry blackbird happens to bust a bomb under the seat of his pants, he lights out of London ahead of sched-

ule and trots back here to this funk-hole, hoping his mates will protect him. A miserable pip-squeak, that's what he is!"

THE condemned Wren smiled at the verdict. Those "pips"—ribbons—on the breast of his tunic gave the lie back to its source. He had earned his "tin" medals—in the hardest possible way. The guns of his sleek green Spitfire had knocked no less than twenty Nazi yellow noses out of the world.

None knew the truth better than the gang who were now ribbing him unmercifully. At bottom they were a grand lot, but such was the unwritten code governing all R.A.F. pilots. It frowned upon the practice of bestowing words of praise for a deed well done. Praise, like wine, could easily intoxicate a chap and create within him a craving for more of the same, to a point where he might turn into a reckless "honors-hog." A sorry condition, that, for not only did the rash honors-hogs die young, they usually pulled a mate or two along with them to Valhalla.

Though he was technically off duty, the Wren rolled out from under the blankets and joined the others at breakfast. On his way from the forest-concealed Dispersal Station to the mess, he had tarried to bid good morning to the canvas-overcoated, drab-green bus that had seen him safely through a score of scrapes. He took it for granted that the ground mechs had neatly soldered over her most recent wounds and marked each one with a swastika.

Stout lads, the conscientious and unsung "engine docs." Wickey Warren was always ready to concede that the best flying officer is no better than his mechanic.

The Wren was not yet comfortably seated alongside the Ghoul at the table when the alarm for the flight's designated defense area was touched off. The Ghoul gulped down his coffee

and jumped up. He angled a questioning glance at the Wren, who remained seated. Wickey Warren's eyes were steady enough when they met his chum's.

"Off duty," he quietly answered the unspoken question. "Bring your bus back whistling, me boy."

Silent, the Ghoul hurried out of the mess. He would give a month's pay to know what had suddenly come over the Wren. Never before had Warren allowed a flimsy technicality to hold him on the ground when there were blackbirds to be bagged.

Outwardly calm, the Wren listened to the hunters howl up and over the roof.

Their absence would serve to simplify his hard task.

In almost no time at all Warren was closeted with the outfit's most attentive adjutant, who was striving to live up to his reputation of being an understanding officer.

"Dash it, Warren!" exploded the adjutant.

"There's neither rhyme nor reason to your request that you be transferred to one of the Special Defiant night fighter squadrons. Why, you're a natural Spitfire driver! I'm not spoofing when I say I have yet to see your equal."

Unmoved, Wickey Warren carefully ground out a half-smoked cigarette under his heel.

"All tosh," he rejected the accolade. "I've been rather lucky up until now, but luck is a lot like a wind-sock, you know—liable to turn the other way without the slightest warning."

The adjutant was proud of his imagined ability to sift out hidden meanings.

It came to him of a sudden. Flying Officer Warren evidently was harboring a hunch that the sand of time was running low in his glass. In the easier argot of the air the Wren, what with thinking how destiny was getting ready to draw his number, had got the wind up his tail.

## CHAPTER II

### *Short-fused Reprieve*



HE adjutant picked up the phone and put through a call to a certain air vice-marshal. A change of scenery, he decided, might serve to rid the likable Wren of his cursed fear complex. Seeing a chap, even though he be an enemy, spin down to eternity, was bound to play hob with any pilot's nerves in time. And Warren was officially credited with having tipped twenty Jerries over the brink.

Such was the trend of the helpful adjutant's thoughts while waiting to be put into direct contact with the influential V-M. Buzzing about with the "Bats"—night patrols—Warren at least would be spared the ordeal of watching potted birds tumble off their perches.

The adjutant of a sudden came to life.

"Hello. Yes. Good morning, sir."

Ever so discreetly the Wren arose and strolled into the adjoining cubicle. A moment, no more, and the adjutant summoned him back.

"That eliminated considerable red tape, Warren," he smilingly announced. "Barring a surprise invasion of our tight little isle by the Nazis, you will be moving into a new nest tomorrow."

They shook hands. The desk soldier was genuinely fond of the Wren.

"Dash it, Warren!" he complained. "A bird of your feather won't be lost in the fog forever. And when you do finally snap out of it, get in touch with me. I'm only a pen-pusher in this dashed war, nevertheless, I have friends in the high places. No trouble at all to fetch you back to the Spitfires, you know."

The Wren modestly dropped his eyes.

"Awfully decent of you," he murmured politely. "I'll remember your

kind offer, if and when I shake loose from my present funk."

Shoulders resolutely squared, Warren took final leave of the sympathetic adjutant. But when the camouflaged shack was a good distance behind him, the Wren sat down on an empty gas drum and gave free vent to his long pent-up emotions.

He laughed until his outpouring of mirth caused him to shake like a blob of grape jelly. He would always remember the adjutant as being a naïve but sincere old codger. The Wren actually had the man believing that his cast-iron courage had cracked under too much flying and fighting!

Following an impromptu farewell binge tended by his sorrowing mates of the Spitfire Squadron, the Wren light-heartedly departed to join his new outfit, the night-patroling Bats. He found the Defiant bunch to be just another group of R.A.F. pilots, confident youngsters up to their chins in the fight and punching every minute of the day for England.

The one disturbing factor, if it could be called that, was a tendency on the part of the pilots to inquire solicitously about the state of his health. Wickey Warren eventually came to resent their interest in his physical and mental well being. Confound it, couldn't they see that he was disgustingly healthy?

What he desired most was an early bout with the enemy's blackbird bombers. Perhaps the Bats were interpreting his restless eagerness as nerves. If that should be the case, it behooved him to throttle down the open display of his innermost feelings, lest the ruddy war end before he could repay the Nazi night raiders for having ruined his last visit to London. The hit-and-run rotters couldn't do that to Wickey Warren and get away with it.

The Wren had already spent three days of torture on the ground when he resolved to calm down. Three long days in which he had not once been

called upon to kick a bus upstairs. His mates of the Dispersal Station that he had been assigned to, however, had winged up all of five times.

**D**ISTURBED, but determined to see it through, the Wren mingled with the mess that evening. More than once he sensed the eyes of the assembled flying officers upon him.

"You're beginning to look quite fit again, Warren, quite!" a smiling bird wearing the D.F.C. ribbon congratulated him.

"Aye, easy does it, Warren," a flight leader seated at the Wren's left softly chimed in. "There's no medicine like inactivity for a chap who's been burning the flaming war candle at both ends." The flight leader started to reminisce. "And I'm a laddy who knows of what he speaks. For example, after that unpleasant Dunkirk thing, I was proper done in, completely puffed from having been on the go sixteen hours out of twenty-four—"

*Bang!* Warren, his eyes almost literally giving off sparks, had smashed his fist down on the table with a resounding thud.

"What's going on around here?" he harshly demanded. "I'm not wrapped up. I can whip the tar out of any crackpot buzzard who thinks so!"

Having tripped his guns, the enraged Wren let go with his cannon.

"I had myself transferred to a night-flying outfit only because I think I have figured out a way to stop the Stukas. Granted, you lads are doing your best to hold up that end for the R.A.F., but your best is not good enough. Under the protecting cover of night, the bombers are subjecting all Britain to a brutal battering, and I propose to do something about it!"

The Bats, sitting like so many graven images, took no offense against the new man for telling them what for. They had been tipped off in advance by the adjutant of Flying Officer Warren's former outfit that the

ruddy war had slightly warped his thinking apparatus. That he now had become obsessed with some fanciful idea for stopping the Stukas only served to increase the Bats' pity for him.

The flight leader's hand closed gently on the aroused Wren's trembling shoulder.

"Right you are, Warren," he replied soothingly. "In a way we have been letting London down. Did I hear you say that you think you have devised a Stuka snare? Well, we're desperately in need of such a counter move, so keep plugging on your plan. Take a week, a month, but perfect it."

Under the sympathetic pressure of the hand, Wickey Warren wilted into black despair. The tone of the flight leader's voice confirmed his suspicion that the Bats deemed him an object for pity. Blast it, why couldn't they understand that he had no need of coddling? Them, suggesting that he sit out the war for a month, or even a week! Another week of moping on the ground, twiddling his thumbs, and he *would* be nutty as a fruitcake. Everything was happening to him and none of it was good.

Muttering, the Wren angrily pushed back from the table. The door slammed behind him and he was gone. "I'll ask the medico to check him over," the flight leader announced sadly. "He might grow violent."

Warren stamped into the Dispersal Hut. Crying mad, he flung himself face-down on his cot. He did not stir when engine thunder rumbled overhead. The Bats, lucky stiffs, were barging upstairs to transact a bit of urgent business with the blackbirds.

Wickey Warren vowed he would forever hate the holiday that had drawn him to London to be blitz-baptized by the bombers. He had been well off and hadn't known it, when strutting his stuff in a Spitfire.

Gloomily smoking a cigarette, he glanced up as fresh trouble, in the guise of the medical officer, entered.

"Was just doing a solo ground flight around the drome when I decided to pop in here," the jovial doctor explained.

The Wren stiffened, instantly suspecting a ruse. Strong was the urge to tell the medico bluntly to toddle along and peddle his pills somewhere else, but in the end he succeeded in staying the wild impulse. He now realized that a chain of innocent-appearing events was pulling him into a tight spot. A wrong word or move could easily clinch the case against him. The M.O. would be duty-bound to ship him off to a base hospital for observation. That, a trifling matter on the surface, could write him off the roll of the R.A.F.

**A**LWAYS at his best when under pressure, the Wren resorted to some nimble counter-maneuvering.

"Pull up a seat, glad you dropped in," he lied like a soldier and a gentleman. "My conscience has been troubling me ever since I hit this drome. Been ducking duty, you know, but on a fair enough excuse."

The M.O. watchfully loaded his pipe. He had come prepared to cope with a budding mental case.

Ten minutes later he was talked into examining a perfectly healed scar on the Wren's right shoulder. Wickey Warren had added that one to his assorted collection when bailing out of a bullet-crippled crate.

"Arm started acting up a short while back and interfered with my handling of the controls," he explained. "Didn't dare confide in anyone, sir. You know how it is. The lads would promptly label me a gold brick and laugh if I tried to tell them that my concern was for the plane, not myself."

"Hmm!" breathed the gullible doctor in his best professional manner. "I daresay the injury has mended right enough. Still, I can readily understand that it remains rather painful."

There was the air of martyr about the Wren when he answered:

"It is not the pain, sir. It's the dashed annoying awkwardness. Jockeying a Defiant about at night demands split-second timing and action from a pilot." The M.O. sagely nodded his head.

"Tell you what, Warren," he proposed. "Taxi over to the infirmary first thing in the morning, and I'll do a thorough job on your wing. Have it right as a trivet in no time at all."

"Righto," the relieved Wren said gladly. "And, Doc, please be a good egg and don't breathe a word to the lads. You know how it is."

Once again outside the hut, the puzzled M.O. reflectively rubbed his chin. Devil take the flight leader for his pranks! He'd wager a pound and his reputation that not a cog had slipped out of place inside Flying Officer Warren's wheel-house. And the wager went double in contradiction of the numerous rumors that had preceded the former Spitfire chap to the Defiant drome.

The Wren, chastened by the narrow squeak he had experienced, derived no pleasure from having talked the M.O. off the course. Instead, he savagely drove his right fist against the inoffensive door. So hard was the blow that it splintered the wooden panel.

A ghost of a grin tugged at the corners of Wickey Warren's mouth. Tomorrow morning the unsuspecting doctor would earnestly probe and manipulate the identical arm that had propelled that powerful punch.

The Wren shrugged in resignation. It was better to endure such an ordeal than be bundled back to the base hospital, ticketed a mental washout. Warren excused his subterfuge on the ground that he was now fighting a second and personal war for the privilege of staying in on the bigger Battle of Britain.

And next day, of course, the Wren's lease on an R.A.F. job was extended after the M.O. forwarded his report

to the squadron leader. The doctor stated he had discovered, after great trouble, that Warren's trouble was in his shoulder, not his head. He recommended that the pilot's tour of duty on the ground be continued until such time as the slow-healing injury should respond to a prescribed course of treatment.

Always a good sort, the leader of the Bats unhesitatingly accepted the report. He was familiar with the Wren's fine record as a fighter pilot and knew that a bird of Warren's feather preferred death to having his wings permanently clipped.

Grateful for the small break, the Wren did his fretting in silence. Only too well did he realize that fate, for some mysterious reason, had forced him away out on the skinny end of the limb. The trick was to hang on by the skin of his teeth, if necessary.

**U**NKNOWN to Wickey Warren, at that moment a certain adjutant of a crack Spitfire outfit was sincerely proposing a toast in a tot of rum to a former member of the brood. "Got it over the wire," said the adjutant excitedly. "The old Wren's chances of finding his way out of the fog have definitely turned for the better."

"It couldn't happen to a nicer chap," replied a flight leader. "Even though I, for one, will never believe that Warren's brain strayed off the beam. There was a method in his seeming madness."

"Tosh! No pilot in his right mind would switch from Spitfires to Defiants," the adjutant contradicted.

The attentive and proud Spitfire pilots were inclined to agree, being strongly imbued with *esprit de corps*.

"Have it your way, old boy," the F. L. conceded, "but mark this well. We'll be hearing a lot more about the Wren, one of these nights. Spitfires or Defiants, he's a proper rare un'."

Grounded by orders, the Wren did

not bide his time in idleness. He patiently and smilingly took onto his own shoulders numerous tasks that were all but swamping an already overtaxed Operations personnel. He inspected ammo, armament and planes—nor did he draw the line at helping out with tedious office paperwork, or standing an occasional watch in the radio control room. Many and varied were the questions put by the Wren to senior officers, pilots and even the enlisted men.

Did the Jerry bombers that flew over nightly bent on reducing London to a rubbish-heap, have any known flaws in their steel-feathered outer shells? Where were the blind spots? Which was best, attack from above or underneath?

The result was that the Defiant bunch sat down in secret session. In it they changed their previous opinion that the Wren was completely off his beam. It was then decided that the fugitive from the Spitfires was daft only on the subject of how to bag the black bombers.

Meantime, Wickey Warren was proceeding with caution, lest he place his short-fused R.A.F. reprieve in jeopardy. Taking with him his gathered store of knowledge about the blackbirds, he began frequenting the underground repair shop in his spare time. There, among blocked-up sick engines and the reek of fuel sludge, he at last found an out-of-the-way nest that suited his purpose.

Free-handed with his money and obligingly deaf whenever an enlisted man took it upon himself to criticize bitterly the Brass Hats and their method for winning the war, he won the respect of the "mech" crew. They accepted him as a bit of all right. Further, the ground men gave the "thumbs down" sign to all ugly rumors about Flying Officer Warren.

Later, however, their staunch loyalty was subjected to a severe strain. A soft-footed non-com caught the Wren red-handed, tossing twisted

wire at the whirling blades of a small blower fan, installed to clear the atmosphere of the underground repair shop.

### CHAPTER III

#### *The Price of Victory*



PROFOUNDLY shocked, the non-com made known his presence only when the innocent-looking wire made a mess of the blower fan. Soberly regarding the wreckage, the enlisted man said:

"Begging your pardon, sir, but what you just did is sabotage of a sort. Might easily cost a life or two, should monoxide gas from the engines collect in this cavern."

A fanatical gleam in his black shoe-button eyes, the Wren fell to chuckling.

"Right you are, Sergeant," he readily agreed. "I was aware of that danger, so I came prepared." He produced a spare fan and calmly proceeded to replace the broken one. "An experiment, you know."

The perplexed non-com did not know. Furthermore, he disapproved of commissioned officers tilting with windmills like Don Quixote. It wasn't either becoming or proper. Those who were of the Air Force had a high standard to maintain.

But a generous donation of beer money, donated by grinning Flying Officer Warren, worked a miracle in smoothing the man's ruffled plumage.

"And mum is the word about this, Sergeant," the Wren hinted in farewell.

"Quite-o, sir," the non-com said, and thus became a party to the crime.

He had to admit that Warren, known as the Wren, had a most persuasive way about him.

The blower-fan episode was but the first step in a new direction for Flying Officer Warren's eccentric behavior. Smiling a lot and saying little, he

cadgered the puzzled mess-cook into saving a number of emptied jam tins for him.

"Blimey! It's not pattycakes and mud pies you're planning to make, is it, sir?" The cook blurted out. "Like the little kiddies do on the beach at Brighton?"

"No, but it's a topping idea, nevertheless. Mud pies? Mud in Jerry's eye!"

Amused at what he considered a prime pun, the whimsical Wren walked away.

That same evening he touched off a bomb for himself when he confiscated the Dispersal Station's faithful alarm clock and calmly vivisected it. Outraged, his hut mates were all in favor of subjecting him to a thorough drubbing.

"Selfish optimists, what's the good of knowing what time it is in a ruddy war?" he retorted. "You're all flying on borrowed time as it is." With his next breath he dropped the bantering tone. "You're bally old clock held the answer for the blasted Jerry blackbirds who've been making chumps out of you chaps."

The Bats' rancor dissolved like a patch of windblown scud. Being reminded of their inability to checkmate the marauding night raiders hurt. They sullenly retreated, leaving the triumphant Wren to dawdle and dally with his jam tins, clockworks and other assorted junk.

Patience had its reward. One hectic and danger-fraught night, Flying Officer Warren was restored wings of a sort and returned to active duty.

Nazi bombers, escorted by clouds of fighters, were swarming over the Metropolitan area in an all-out attack. The *Luftwaffe*, still smarting from the savage beating dealt it by the eight-gun Spitfires and Hurricanes in the history-making daylight blitz raids of the past autumn, was out to lay London low. This time they were flying under the oft-tested mantle of darkness.

From early evening, wave upon wave had roared in over the Channel. How much longer could London take it? Flying Officer Warren, pressed into service as a Number Two man because of the great emergency, was being ferried up to the battleground in the power-operated four-gun turret of a B-P Defiant.

The Wren tried to avoid looking down at the damp crimson stain between his boots. He did not approve of the poignant reminder that a dead man had warmed the seat for him. Stevie Nash, the former occupant, had ended up in the red.

Nash's chum, still at the controls of the death-visited Defiant, had repeated the story. He had been waiting on the drome for the funeral ship to be refueled and with Wickey Warren as replacement in the rôle of the listener.

**I**T HAD happened rather suddenly. Magnetic-detector directed, the Defiant had all but maneuvered a bomb-laying blackbird into its gun-sights. Quite pleased about the whole thing, Stevie Nash was ready with the turret guns. Then, in the wink of an eye, the horrified pilot saw Nash groveling belly-down on the boards.

Thinking about unfortunate Stevie's too sudden demise, the Wren's roving gaze focused on a jagged-edged hole in his side of the hull. The lethal slug that had Nash's name on it must have entered there.

Wicky Warren instinctively drew in his own stomach until it was no longer lined up with the aperture. Immediately the pilot's voice rattled inside his helmet.

"That bullet-hole fixes the guilt on me for him being brushed off. Nerves played me a nasty trick. Lord, I'm a rotter for keeping back the truth this long. Steve Nash was nicely set to bank the 'black ball' in the side pocket, so to speak. But then I thought I saw a 'yellow nose' loom up in the darkness directly off our right wingtip.

"It proved to be a horrible figment of my own imagination. But I had already kicked our kite around and full into the teeth of the real target. Unforgivable, my coming unraveled like that! We in turn became the target. That is, poor Stevie did." The pilot's haunted eyes jerked toward the incriminating hole in the hull. "Jolly decent lad, Steve. 'Don't take it to heart, chum—after all, a chap can't live forever,' he told me with his last dying breath."

The mechanically distorted voice ceased on a dismal note.

Wickey Warren, a veteran steeped in R.A.F. lore, maintained a rigid silence. If he tried to sympathize with the conscience-stricken Bat pilot, it would be to hear his sympathetic words spurned as eyewash and tosh.

A sudden drumming tattoo, like the sound of hail beating on a tin roof, seeped in through the surrounding shell. Despite the close proximity of danger, the Wren welcomed the interruption. His grieving pilot companion would perhaps be washed clean of guilt in the rushing, ever-changing tides of battle.

Relegated to the rôle of gunner, Wickey now found a use for the night flying Bats' answers to his endless chain of questions. It was an easy matter to burn out one's guns with long bursts of firing, trying to tag an elusive opponent in this deadly game of blind man's buff. The grim business called for plenty of watchful waiting and no missed signals in teamwork.

The Wren put his eye to a turret port. Life and death hinged on the morose bird handling the controls. Warren tried not to think about the confessed wrong move that had set Steve Nash up as a mark for destiny's executioner.

A lacy pattern of glowing, silver-like threads formed in the darkness up front.

Tracers! Evil green pinpoints of light licked out from gun muzzles.

The Wren saw a flash of flame, followed by a second flash, little red scratches on the bleeding and tortured sky.

Judging from the accompanying sledge-hammer thuds, aerial cannon had made the fresh wounds. This was indeed a proper show!

The Defiant buck-jumped in avoiding the saber slash of a searchlight. Somehow the glaring beam did catch a diving Nazi yellow nose. Out of nowhere a B-P Defiant pounced. Tracer bullets descended in sheets. Steel rain, falling in a devilish thunderstorm, set fire to the Jerry's tail and converted it into a comet. Trailing a funereal plume of smoke, the doomed Messerschmitt dived down to oblivion.

Neither Ossie the Octopus, nor the ack-acks could snatch the credit for that one.

The blazing flamer scattered the viciously fighting night birds like a covey of frightened quail.

**W**RRAITHLIKE, a shadowy bulk churned up and melted into the concealing darkness beyond. It vanished before the Wren could power his turret guns into firing position. Chagrined, he was sorely tempted to trust to luck and send a random burst after the enemy blackbird.

"Steady, Warren," the alert Number One arrested him in the act. "Might pot one of our chaps, you know, up there in the bally blackness."

The Wren sheepishly withdrew his hand from the button.

But bitter as gall was his next thought. Fortune, in spreading her cloak of mist, was favoring the fiendish *Fuehrer*. Wickey Warren saw it as a mocking challenge to the guns, ingenuity and men of the R.A.F.

It contributed nothing to the Wren's peace of mind when his companion was forced to send the Defiant, too, upstairs to escape the furious barrage thrown up by the ground guns.



The stout, restraining "gut-girdle" buckled fast around Flying Officer Warren's middle was doing its best to cut him in two.

"Dash it, what's the big idea?" he complained into the flap mike.

"Can't educate shrapnel to recognize friend from foe, Warren," came the pilot's laconic answer.

The Wren was positive that Hades itself could not be worse. The concussion of a high-flung shell that detonated nearby caused the climbing Defiant to dance on its tail. He was on the verge of a mental blackout when the voice of the Number One pilot knifed through the brain-fog.

"The Jerries are chucking it! Look alive!"

Wickey Warren's reflexes were all instinctive. Night was lending the garb of a blackbird to R.A.F. fighters and Jerries alike. How might he distinguish one from the other?

"You're in a bit of a dither, old boy," the pilot said kindly. "Suggest you try my system. I bang away at every shape that appears to be twice the size of an ordinary fighter. Our big fellas take no part in this sort of row, you know."

The Wren ceased his griping. Why hadn't he thought of that? Also, he was by now convinced that the number one chap possessed psychic powers.

Though he had come to the Bats accredited as an ace, Flying Officer Warren admitted to himself that he was just another fledgling in the night fighting phase of winged warfare. His admiration for the Bat pilot, who was shrewdly manipulating the controls in the cold reflected light of the panel board, grew still more.

The Defiant was really stepping it off in hot pursuit of the fleeing Jerries. It required plenty of courage to pilot a bus through the night at blinding speed. The dreaded Grim Reaper with the ready scythe lurked everywhere.

Wickey Warren shivered in inde-

cision when the full-gunned Defiant came upon a more solid black bulk in the inky gloom. His companion, calm and confident, gave him the good word.

"Have at the bleedin' bandit, me boy!"

The button throbbed beneath the fierce pressure of the Wren's hand. White lances instantly stabbed empty air underneath the black raider. Close, but a miss.

Furious at his own futility, the former daylight ace gnawed his lower lip. A fiery stinger in the blackbird's tail stabbed back at the Defiant. Alert, the fighter pilot darted off on a new tangent.

"Jolly game, what?" the capable Number One chap asked calmly. "This is a sport designed for owls, cats and other night prowlers."

The Wren got it. His companion had put aside his own troubles to tend the hurt of failure in another. If the Wren had not hurried his burst, the blackbird would be a dead pigeon by now.

"I'm going in for another brush with the bouncer," the pilot cheerfully announced. "Chin up!"

The Defiant headed straight into the teeth of the sullen blackbird's wrath. This time Wickey Warren doggedly hewed to the line. If his number had come up—well, he would not be wanting for company on the long one-way flight to the other side of the horizon.

Now!

His tracers lashed out. The next instant his controlled fire steadied and concentrated in the pale, broad spearhead of a long burst. The answer came back in hot lead, and each kept groping for the other's entrails.

**F**IGHTING was second nature to the Wren. He betrayed no more emotion than would a man hosing a flowerbed.

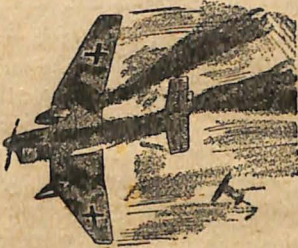
Closer and closer crept the transparent cabin that held a desperate

Nazi rear gunner prisoner. Suddenly the bullet-amputated aft section separated from the black Dornier's body and plunged earthward.

It was all over. The Defiant up-nosed and hurdled over the mortally wounded blackbird.

Though he had regained his winning form, Flying Officer Warren neither gloated nor crowed. He sensed that something was amiss. The bus was acting up like a nighthawk on a spree. There was no joy in being hiked up to heaven while literally standing on one's ear.

The Wren managed to bend an anxious glance in the direction of his companion. Stick hugged tight against



his chest, the pilot was hanging grotesquely in the supporting gut-girdle.

A Jerry slug had fetched the Bat flyer his discharge. He was all through in this war and this world.

**B**UFFETED and knocked about like a bug in a floating keg, the Wren finally managed to free the controls and take over after what seemed like an eternity. He considered it a miracle that he was still alive.

Bird instinct and a fair helping of luck assisted him in getting oriented. Nose down and tail up he turned the Defiant down in a long slant. The Bat nest was his destination.

He had had his fill of fighting for one evening. True, he had participated in the bagging of a blackbird, but at what a price!

First, Stevie Nash had given up the ghost in part payment. So had Nash's chum.

The Wren accused himself of being a dirty blighter. He had not even

thought of asking the late Number one lad's name. And now the chap was dead—or was he?

"Ah, fancy meeting you again, Stevie," a tired and pitifully weak voice whispered through the flap mike.

Recovering from the initial shock of surprise, Wickey Warren recklessly poured the soup into the engine's pots. Speed was essential. While there was life, there was hope. Given half a chance, it was a good bet that the doctor would snatch the pilot back from death.

"Stevie, I must've fallen asleep at the switch," said the eerie whisper. "And you did want to bag a blackbird badly. Your first! A bit of a rat, aren't I?"

The Wren did a poor job of swallowing the uncomfortable lump in his throat.

"Nothing of the sort, me lad," he answered for the departed Stevie. "I—that is, we did pot our bird. Yep, we finally pulled it off. You turned in a neat stunt in placing me right on the bandit's tail. Got yourself pinked doing it, too."

There was a short pause.

"Sporting of you, Stevie, to share the glory, but I won't have it. I've been a selfish, grasping parasite for the last time. You gave Kathleen up to me when I ruthlessly trespassed on your territory. I know a thing or three, chum. You lied like a gentleman when you said she was only a passing fancy in your life. Gallant as all get-out, aren't you? And a bloody, blind fool, to boot!

"Well, monkey sees, monkey does. I'll have you know that you're still the Number One chap in lovely Kathleen's affections. Bruised my vanity no end when the damsel told me so. Couldn't bring myself around to admitting it to you. Suggest you contact Kath—"

Another pause.

"Thoughts a bit fuzzy around the edges. I'm tired, Stevie, rotten—tired."

## CHAPTER IV

*Hero or Ham?*

WICKEY WARREN raced death, the black pilot, down to the Bats' nest—and lost.

He did not retire to his cot until long after the final score was posted. Red-eyed, he scanned the consolidated report of known losses. Blackbirds—3, Bat fighters—7. In addition, London had suffered a severe combing. Also the girl, Kathleen, rated a sympathetic thought.

The following morning, Wickey Warren disconsolately wandered into the subterranean shops.

It remained for him to discover a trio of superstitious mechs hard at the business of maligning the well-riddled Defiant that he had brought back to the drome.

"A scurvy jinx bus, that's what she is," one of the group bitterly snarled.

"Boneyard bait," another aircraftsman scowlingly agreed.

"If the brass hats do the proper thing, they'll write off the unholy terror without further to-do," the third added.

Smiling, Flying Officer Warren horned in on the conference.

"Twaddle and tripe," he stated flatly. "She's a rare loyal kite. She winged through the valley of death and fetched her honored dead back for decent burial. No ship can do more. I'd team up with her and gladly."

The group eyed the hex-defying Wren with suspicion. They saw nothing that indicated the eccentric bird was swanking it in giving his bold challenge to evil. He was obviously sincere. They began to wonder if the Wren's topper weren't tilted a bit, after all.

Finally the ranking senior spoke up.

"Don't hold me to it, sir, but I've a feeling you can have the bloody crate for the mere asking. The engineer

officer ordered it. We're to check over the remains."

The spokesman waxed confidential.

"It's an established, if unofficial custom in this outfit, sir, to scrap a jinx job discreetly. It's known that flying officers, while not saying so, regard a bad luck bus as a mental hazard. My mates and I were on the verge of reporting this devil as being only fit for salvage."

Wickey Warren thoughtfully rocked back and forth on his heels and toes.

"But the truth is that she can be patched?" he asked quietly.

"Righto, sir! Mechanically speaking, there isn't anything wrong that a minor face-lifting job won't cure."

Smiling again, the Wren spun a coin into the air. He waited until a hand plucked it out of the ether.

"Your original report should be changed, I believe," he suggested.

"It will be changed considerable, sir. But beggin' your pardon, sir, aren't you rather young to go out of your way to flap your wings in the face of fate?"

The Wren shrugged it off.

Warren spent the greater part of an hour holed up with the decidedly adamant squadron leader.

"Unethical, without precedent, and bad for the general morale," the stubborn S. L. countered the Wren's best argument. "Bless me buttons, Warren, you are leading me to think that you are off your beam. Away off!"

Hearing a suspicion that he was demented was an old story by now to the ex-Spitfire pilot. Tenacious, he calmly continued to argue his point. And in the end perseverance rewarded him.

If he swanked in the least bit after parting from the irate S. L., it was excusable. The jinx job that the outfit had turned thumbs down on was his to tinker with and gad about in.

On the other side of the closed door, the squadron leader was endeavoring to salve his own conscience,

with the grave-visaged adjutant for his witness.

"Warren is crazy as a loon, but I'm honor bound to humor the chap. Those pips on the front of his jacket entitle him to write out his own ticket for the last take-off. More merciful, you know, than striving to butt his brains out in a padded cell. Gad!"

**H**APPY as a little lad with a shining toy wagon, the Wren set to work on the Defiant. He removed the extra bucket seat, since no Bat would willingly sit in it. Next he cut two holes in the floor boards and closed them over with makeshift sliding panels.

As easy as that, the slight change in construction was accomplished. And as for the wounds and other superficial injuries that the bus had sustained in the course of battling the Jerry blackbirds, the mechs tended them with loving care. They deemed their contribution as little enough to do for the rash but likeable chap who, they were confident, was teetering on the springboard, preliminary to bounding into the Great Beyond.

Night brought the blackbirds of ill omen once more. This time the Jerry bombers flew high in pairs and threes, seeking for the hidden nests of the R.A.F. night fighters that had broken up the previous evening's party.

Tension was high in the Dispersal Station that Warren was assigned to. That particular flock of Bats vengefully hoped to take a crack at the invaders for having pushed Steve Nash and his chum over the brink. Nocturnal flyers, harking to the alarm signals and the reports coming in on the teletype machine, fumed helplessly.

The snooping bandits had circled the Metropolitan area and were bearing inland. What was the big boss of the Defiant brood waiting for? Was he expecting Hitler to drop in for tea, *a la Herr Hess*? Like as not, Mr. Big would come to his senses too late,

and with a Nazi explosive egg scrambled in his wig and necking with his dandruff.

The grouching pilots jumped up expectantly when a glum-looking, war-bitten flight leader clomped into the room.

"It is not our show tonight, gentlemen," he announced bitterly. "Believe it or not, our choice little chum, the Wren, has received official blessing to stage a solo stunt."

Chins dropped down on chests. It was unbelievable. The F. L. must be spoofing.

"Cross my heart and hope to die, if it isn't true," the tight-lipped flight leader said. "Oh, yes, I all but forgot. You boy scouts are to ride out with me into the adjacent wilderness. S. L.'s orders. We're to dash hither and yon, flashing various-colored electric torch beams on and off. Business of misleading the Jerries into thinking that they were feasting their eyes on an unsuspecting Dispersal Station. Decoy drome, to coin a name. And then, when we are positive that the bandits are taken in by the trick, we're instructed to light up a bonny bonfire or two.

"All very realistic, what? Scenery, sound effects, and mayhap we will even shed a drop of gore, just to make a prima donna out of that weird fella, Wickey Warren. Let's go, gentlemen. We're on our way to do nothing in particular."

A raging pilot flung his cap at the wall.

"Blast it for a cockeyed caper!" he raved. "If I must be a boy scout, I insist that I be issued a ration of marshmallows. They're delicious when toasted over a bonfire."

Still raving, the enraged Bat was hustled outside and loaded with his mates into the waiting lorry.

But a short distance removed from the budding revolution, Wickey Warren, the cause of it all, was busily placing the last of a strange cargo on board the jinx bus. He hummed a

ditty to the roaring accompaniment of the ticking engine.

Mechs were swarming over and around the quivering Defiant. If the hex should claim Flying Officer Warren, it would not be through any oversight or fault of theirs.

"Just about ready, Warren, I see," the uneasy Communications officer observed.

Puffing on a last minute cigarette, Wickey Warren nodded.

"Just about," he answered, along with a cloud of smoke.

**T**HE Engineer officer was next to put in his appearance, followed by the worried S. L.

"This stunt promises repercussions that will be heard throughout the entire R.A.F.," the squadron leader unhappily predicted. "Worse yet, I am an idiotic party to the crackpot idea."

The lighted end of the Wren's gasper waggled like an admonishing finger.

"Don't let your daubers down, gentlemen. Mrs. Warren's boy, Wickey, won't miss the boat. Neither did my Mother raise any foolish children, despite the apparent evidence accumulated against me."

Before he could say more, a cover-alld figure moved into the circle.

"The lid's up, sir," the mechanic reported.

There followed a bit of handshaking all around, and the Wren quickly ladled himself into the glass house.

"Thumbs up, Warren!"

"Good luck, and Godspeed, sir!"

Flying Officer Warren rocketed up to a rendezvous under the stars. This was the life! The stage was set for the final act in the play. He, in the rôle of the tragic clown, was now strictly on his own. Would he die a buffoon?

The Wren settled himself more comfortably in the seat. Wickey Warren had never missed the boat—yet!

He hit twenty thousand feet, for he had an urgent need of flying room.

On his high perch he took up the lonely vigil. He throttled down, tooled the Defiant around and around in a wide, sweeping circle. It was monotonous for both himself and his mates, who were sentenced to serve as scene-shifters for the coming show, somewhere down there on the darkened stage.

The fifth time around, the magnetic detector warned the Wren that he was no longer alone in the sky. Blood, warmed by the sudden excitement, pounded through his veins.

"Easy is the answer," he muttered, and brought himself back under control.

Seconds later, tiny eyes of light winked up invitingly to the stealthily approaching bandits. It was the decoy drome.

"Nice timing, chums," he paid an unheard compliment to the stagehands.

Purple eyes, blue ones, and a brighter red one that had a come-hither look about it.

Instantly a huge black shadow glided in between the Defiant and the earth, a sinister sky-shark scenting meat already dead.

Wickey Warren could see the prowlers now. There were three in all, two swishing along in the wake of the leader.

The Wren opened the home-made floor panels with his foot. But even while he was doing so, a flaming mushroom sprouted up from the earth. There would be five more, he knew.

One of the black bandits had spread a stick of bombs across the drome that existed only in the Jerry's imagination.

The hovering Wren grinned a tight grin. He was confident that the Bat scene-shifters, having lured the enemy into the theater of operations, were now where the exploding eggs were not.

So far, so good.

It was time for him, the leading man, to respond to his cue. But was

he hero or ham? The answer lay in the future.

Wickey Warren did not recklessly roar to attack with his guns spitting lead. Instead he gingerly picked up a jam tin and dropped it down through the hole in the Defiant's belly. Another, then a third, followed the first, then more and more until twenty jam tins had been added to the circle.

Two and one-half turns completely depleted the Wren's stock of jam tins. Then he sat back to watch and pray.

He had staked a hard-won and brilliant fighting career on the outcome of the night's experiment. He, whose deeds had earned him a chestful of tin, had had to endure the ignominy of being looked upon as a nut. Was Fate, examining the cards, planning to discard an ace?

The Wren rebelled. Dash it all, he was not going to submit without a struggle! His great experiment had proved a dud, so he'd tackle the bandit trio single-handed. Warren fully ex-

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The sharks were still pleasantly occupied with torturing the bait, making of it a bloody red mess. Thus they did not see the numerous downward-floating puffballs that blossomed directly over them with puny and ridiculous-sounding pops.

This was the Jerries' idea of a perfect evening—no meddling ack-acks to contend with, no furious British fighters—nothing! Moreover, there was a surprised drome to be battered to bits at leisure.

Flying Officer Warren, meanwhile, was running the gamut of emotions.

pected to be written off by the unholy three, but he felt it was fitting for a loon who had messed up things as he had done.

**B**UT suddenly one of the sinister sharks began behaving oddly, a lot like a fish that had blindly blundered into a fisherman's net. The black monster was wildly thrashing about.

As though interested, a pale moon peeked through a rift in the clouds. The Wren distinctly saw four Jerries bail out of the bomber.

Flying Officer Warren exulted. The

tentacles of wire and spring-steel that he had packed so carefully into the crude jam containers had not failed him! The laborious job of devising time fuses and correct powder charges had not been in vain!

Each had detonated at its proper time to free the jam tin's content. Dangerous clutching arms were now groping in the darkness—miniature balloon barrages, but with the added advantage of mobility.

Wickey Warren alone knew of the new floating menace filling the air above and around the blackbirds.

He knew that the bomber's prop was ensnared and smashed by the snake-like wires that had gripped it in a hug of death. Hungry eyes ashine, the Wren saw the helpless victim rear up, then back-dive to a shattering end against the hard, unyielding earth.

"Chalk that one up to the memory of Steve Nash," he murmured piously.

By now the remaining two bandits were also experiencing unseen difficulty. Trapped, a second Jerry was forced to land somewhere in England, in an emergency crash landing.

"And that one's for Stevie's chum," Wickey Warren said between his teeth.

Less than a minute later, he saw the third and last of the outsmarted sky-

sharks zoom up through the darkness like a giant sky-rocket. At the top of its mad climb, the blackbird suddenly fell to pieces.

Looking down from his safe high-up perch, Warren nodded.

"And you, my dirty bandit, recompense me in full for that rotten evening in London."

The Wren closed the account book and winged back to the Bats' nest in triumph.

Within the hour the amazing story of Flying Officer Wickey Warren's successful jam tin barrage had been relayed to the furthestmost stations of that intricate maze that is the R.A.F.

On a certain drome, where nested a crack Spitfire squadron, the adjutant of the outfit solemnly arose to face a hard-boiled gang of grinning critics.

"I still insist that our honored friend, Wickey Warren, is crazy," he maintained stubbornly. "That is, he's as crazy as the bird we often refer to as the owl."

"Hear, hear!" the assembled pilots roared in answer.

Foaming beakers, raised high, flashed approval in the reflected light. Wickey Warren—the formerly pitied Wren—had indeed proved himself an eagle of the air.

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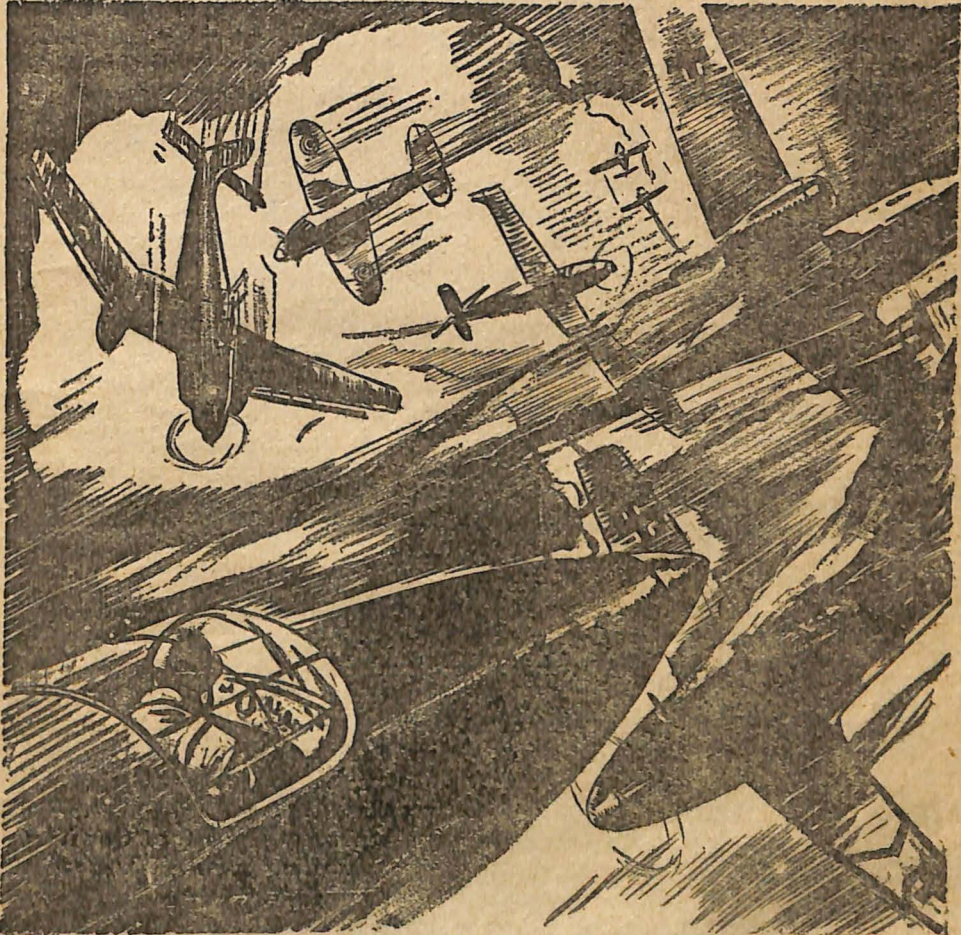
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# Squadron of Hate

By JOSEPH J. MILLARD

Author of "The Crystal Invaders," "Deadline for Death," etc.



King saw the Spitfires peeling off to right and left

*When a Clerk at Adastral House Fumbles, Arch King Has to Pick Up a Ball and Chain and Carry a Weird Fight to the Nazis!*

**A** MINOR clerk at Adastral House, bogged down in the red tape of a war that constantly baffled him, made the ghastly blunder. And the horror of his mistake was that not a single man, from the king down, dared to mention the

hideous situation he had created. The damage was done and nothing short of an Empire emergency could undo it.

"Immediate transfer," read the order that came into his fumbling hands. "Pilot Officer Arthur Shepley



Kingsly, Number 185317, from Squadron 23 to Squadron 1313."

There were a lot of orders that day and a simply bewildering number of cards in the K File. The harassed clerk fumbled with these cards, dropped a handful, lost the original order somewhere in the scramble and decided to rely on his memory. This was a mistake. How fearful a mistake, he could not even be told. . . .

Pilot Officer Arch King stood his Spitfire on the tip of its left wing, pulled back the stick and stared disgustedly at the patch of green earth wheeling majestically below. This, he decided, was just about the climax to a string of incomprehensible idiocies.

He had been making out fine at Squadron 22. He liked every fellow in the outfit and they all liked him. Working together, they had coordinated a beautiful piece of fighting machinery that was beginning to give Herr Adolf a glorious headache. Then had come this utterly inexplicable transfer order, cloaked in a dark aura of mystery. And who had ever heard of Squadron 1313? No one, so far as Arch King's cautious inquiries could discover.

"Didn't know the jolly numbers ran that high," was Ashley-Peeten's startled comment. Most of the others were equally amazed.

The transfer itself was wacky enough. To make it worse, he was instructed to memorize directions on finding his new base, then totally destroy the sheet and mention his objective to no one. Now he was at his destination and there was nothing below.

Nothing, that is, except a small patch of green pasture, a cluster of tumbledown barns and sheds, and half a dozen cows grazing placidly in the middle of the pasture. A cryptic phrase of the mysterious instruction sheet popped into Arch King's mind.

"Land around the cows," the last sentence had read. "They'll stay clear of your craft."

Arch King snorted angrily and dropped the Spitfire down toward the pasture. In line with the general insanity of the whole situation, one of the cows would probably salute and offer him a love letter written in Hindustani. King thought wistfully of the boys at 22, who were probably up mixing it over the Channel this morning, while he played games with somebody's Guernseys.

The Spitfire chased its shadow down and caught up with it, just inside the east edge of the pasture. The wheels settled down and some of the mystery cleared up for King.

**I**NSTEAD of sinking into grassy turf, the balloons squished onto smooth concrete that was beautifully painted an artistic and natural green. The cows up ahead naturally showed no flicker of interest in the approaching Spitfire. They were cowhides, expertly stuffed and sewn, with small wheels under their hoofs so that the herd could be shifted occasionally to fool nosy rec pilots from across!

By the time the Spitfire had skirted the fake menagerie, it didn't surprise King at all to see one whole side of the rickety barn roll up like a theater drop. Inside were the shadowy shapes of Spitfires and waiting men in grimy coveralls. A long shed beside the barn, whose sagging roof apparently covered nothing but a pile of hay, became a closed hangar with a haystack painted on its canvas walls.

The strain suddenly left King's nerves and a little chill of excitement chased itself down his spine. A camouflaged field so close to the embattled Channel waters promised something better than boredom, at least.

He braked the Spitfire down close to the open barn. Before he could slide back his cover and pull himself from the pit, men were running out, catching the wings, rolling the plane into the barn. The canvas wall came down with a roar and a rush, cutting off the light.

Arch King climbed down into thick gloom, staring at the man who materialized from nowhere beside the Spitfire's wing.

He was a gaunt, cadaverous giant whose grayish skin draped his big frame like a shroud, whose tattered uniform was as baggy and wrinkled as his flesh. Though his clothing had apparently never known a pressing, every button and buckle gleamed incongruously with a polish that must have cost someone hours of burnishing.

King's bewildered gaze traveled up the big figure and came at last to the giant's face. The shock was like the impact of cold water on the fier's nerves. It was not in the big man's haggard ugliness so much as in his eyes. They were the blazing, restless eyes of a man close to a mental crack-up.

For a moment Arch King could only stare. He was staring when the big man took one step forward and hit him. The blow was no more than a back-hand swipe of one immense hand, but to King it felt as though his head were half-torn from his shoulders. He staggered back, skidded and went down in a puddle of oil.

"Get up!" the giant snarled, standing open-handed above him. "Get up and talk. Who are you? What are you doing here? And what the devil are you gaping at?"

Anger exploded in King's brain. He scrambled to his knees, fists ready to start swinging.

"Put up your hands," he choked furiously. "I came here to see Squadron Leader Heick, but I can spare the time to settle this first."

**T**HE big man slapped his hands onto his hips.

"Oh, get up and stop grandstanding. Nothing's hurt about you but your feelings, and if you had many of those left, you wouldn't be here. I'm Heick. Get up and salute and answer my questions."

Heick! Was this slovenly maniac the squadron leader to whom he had been ordered to report? Dazed, trembling with suppressed anger, King got to his feet and forced a haphazard salute.

"Pilot Officer Archer King," he reported stiffly. "Assigned to Squadron Thirteen-thirteen by transfer from Squadron Twenty-two."

It was Heick's turn to stare. Suddenly his breath exploded noisily and anger flamed in his eyes.

He whirled, jerking his head sharply.

"Come in here. If this is what I think it is, I'll kill somebody with my bare hands."

Torn between rage and bewilderment, King followed the shambling figure into a small shed that had become, by virtue of a packing-case desk and some ammo-box chairs, a flight office. He stood stiffly while Heick jammed himself behind the desk, rifled through a pack of unopened official envelopes and finally slit one. He watched a terrible rage grow murderously in the big man's eyes, and then slowly dissolve to a sudden, utterly human weariness.

Heick looked up at last, nodded toward a box.

"Sit down, King. Sorry I bopped you, but in a day or two you can bop me back to square it." He slammed a hard fist onto the open message and his voice thickened. "This is a fine, rotten mess. If I had some dim-witted clerk here now, I'd—"

"What's a mess?" King demanded. "If I knew what this was all about, it would be a help."

Heick eyed him narrowly.

"Mean to say you don't know where you are? Didn't they tell you anything when they sent you here?"

Arch King shook his head.

"Judas!" Heick's big hand clawed at his hair. "You poor, blasted devil, didn't you even know that Squadron Thirteen-thirteen is the Squadron of Hate?"

King's breath exploded and the dingy room swam before his eyes.

The Squadron of Hate! Who hadn't heard of that semi-mythical squadron of madmen—pilots who had cracked under the ghastly horrors of war, men transformed into raging beasts when the Nazi baby-bombers had destroyed their loved ones at home. Men kept alive, not by hope and patriotism, but by an all-devouring hatred for Nazism. Men for whom there would never be a war's end, never a victory or a peace.

They had begun to show up in various outfits shortly after hospitals and tenements and orphanages went on the Nazi list of war objectives. Nerve-ridden wrecks, unable to sleep or relax, they could never get along with fellow-pilots or obey their leaders. They were blind to everything but the consuming fever of vengeance.

Men like these were a menace to efficient air organization, yet they were competent and nerveless pilots. What to do with them had been a major problem until someone made a shocking suggestion. And unofficially the Squadron of Hate was born. Their location was a secret, their very existence denied, but the rumors would not die.

SO there was a Squadron of Hate! And Arch King, as normal and mentally sound as any young Englishman in the R.A.F., had been condemned to membership in the ranks of the men who challenged doom, courted death for the sake of grim revenge.

"B-but why me?" he faltered.

"I'll tell you why!" Heck roared. "Because some loopy clerk left his one-cylinder brain at home, that's why. Look at this—a notice that Pilot Officer Arthur Shepley Kingsly is being shifted here from Squadron Twenty-three, for the usual reasons. That means he was cracking up, going off his base. But what happens? Some clerk grabs *your* card by mistake and

*you* get shipped here, instead of Kingsly."

"They can correct it," Arch King said eagerly. "I can transfer back to Twenty-two and this man Kingsly—"

Heick bent forward, staring at him with those chilling eyes.

"You don't hear very well, do you? I said this was the Squadron of Hate. Churchill himself couldn't make Adastral House admit we exist, or tell where we're located. Half the Nazi Intelligence is trying to spot us because we've downed more ships than any other two outfits in the R.A.F. Nobody drops in here for tea and then goes on about his business, fellow. This is the Squadron of Hate and the only transfer out of it is to the nearest graveyard. You got in by accident and you don't belong here, but you're here to stay!"

A cold sickness clawed at Arch King's middle. The rage came to wash away the first wave of hopelessness.

"You can't keep me here," he gritted. "I'll get out. I'll make them shift me back. They know I won't talk."

Heick banged a huge hand down like a gavel.

"When you get through pumping your nerve back," he roared, "go to your quarters. As soon as you get there, take a handful of mud and smear that pretty uniform so you look like the rest of us. And then start polishing your buttons and buckles."

"What?" King gaped at him.

"I said polish your buttons!" Heck thundered. "When we aren't fighting in this outfit, we polish buttons." He leered wolfishly at King. "It keeps us from going crazy."

It turned out that the mud-smearing order was unnecessary. By the time King had squirmed through a converted pigsty into the cubbyhole assigned him for sleeping, no one could complain of the freshness of his uniform.

During the ensuing two hours he raged inwardly, rubbed buttons and

met the pilots of the Squadron of Hate. Rather, they met him. Singly and in pairs they came to stare at him, as though he were some strange animal on exhibition. Men racked with fever no medicine could cure. Men whose nerves and muscles jerked constantly. Men with twitching faces, wildly shuttling eyes, men who constantly mumbled profanity under their breaths.

Few of them greeted Arch King or even spoke to him. He read resentment in their eyes, resentment because his presence was a constant reminder of their own irrevocable losses. Seeing these lost souls, envisioning all their nerve-destroying peculiarities and fixations herded together in his enforced companionship, King could realize the immensity of Squadron Leader Heick's task. He must, King thought, be a superman to keep these wrecks under any sort of discipline and away from one another's throats.

**H**EICK dropped in late that afternoon. The big man looked tired and the weariness robbed him of some of his unhumanness. He dropped onto King's bunk, with his big hands hanging between his spread knees, and stared at the floor.

"Don't let it get you down," he said abruptly. "We're not such beasts, actually. Perhaps we're rather worse than usual today because there's been no fighting for twenty-two hours. I purposely bunked you in here, away from the rest."

He glanced up at King with a faint smile.

"Some of the boys don't sleep too well. They're a good lot, though, only stay clear of Dobrech. His wife had just given him a son, his first, when a Nazi bomb landed on the hospital. He has spells now when he thinks anyone near him might be a Nazi. As for the rest, talk to them. They'll appreciate it. Just don't talk of the past or the future."

"What—what can I talk about?"

Heick's savage face showed a flash of white teeth in the gloom.

"The Nazis. What else is there to talk about for us?"

He got up suddenly, his head turned away. In the doorway, he spoke without turning.

"There's no discipline here and only one regulation. Anyone who steps outside the barns during daylight, except on my order, is shot by the first man who sees him. We fly only at night."

Supper was a still greater shock to Arch King. He answered mess call with an instinctive shrinking, a dread of meeting the squadron all at once. He was afraid he would go half-mad himself from intimate contact with the weird crew.

But he hardly recognized them when he entered. Gone were the twitchings and mumbblings and jerkiness of movement. Except for the deep flames in their eyes, the men were normal and even cheerful in their conversations. King realized, then, that this was a phenomenon of the tension of approaching combat. Only when these men were tautened to battle-pitch did the kinked nerves and warped minds straighten out. With battle over, relaxation once more brought hysteria.

Heick greeted him warmly, made room beside him at the grain-bin mess table. Between bites, he tutored King.

"We'll fight tonight. There was a fifty-plus bomber raid doped for last night, but the moon spoiled it. Tonight the clouds are low and they'll come. You fly Number Five on right wing. We hold a straight V until the fighting starts, and then it's every man for himself. Come home when there's nobody left to kill. There's only one order—don't come back after daylight.

"If one of us exposed this field to a lurking Nazi, Adolf would send half his *Luftwaffe* to bomb us out of existence. Anyone still out at daybreak

stays out for good. Murchison got caught last week with his ammo gone and the sun rising. He picked a Junker, followed it home and crashed it head-on over its own base."

That picture of the suicidal frenzy of these doomed men made King's blood run cold. He could suddenly feel the invisible aura of malevolence constantly present in the room, like the dank miasma from some foul swamp.

**T**HE realization that he was condemned to end his life as one of these maniacs made him fight down the urge to yell and curse as madly as the maddest of them. Like a prophecy of doom, he heard again the squadron leader's grim words—the only transfer out is to the nearest graveyard. He bit down hard on his lower lip to suppress a wild, futile protest against his fate.

"Here's a tip you won't understand, but take it," Heick was saying. "The Squadron of Hate has no code and no honor. A man goes up to meet his enemy and kill until he is killed. Don't be too eager to jump in and help the other fellow, even if you see him outnumbered. Just remember that death is the best friend most of us will ever have."

He got up abruptly, without another word, and stamped across the room to talk to Fletcher and Candless, who flanked him in formation. Arch King turned back to his meal. Suddenly he stiffened as the blinding flash of an idea exploded in his brain.

Heick had unconsciously given him the tip. Arch King was not, after all, doomed to end his days with the mad crew of Thirteen-thirteen!

There was a way out, an easy escape—so easy that he cursed himself for not having thought of it before. He would fight with the Squadron of Hate this night, match their fury with his own cold mastery of aerial combat. But he would not return with the survivors to the secret base.

It would be simple to fake a forced landing in a ship that would undoubtedly be bullet-riddled before dawn. Once down, he could simply report himself as separated from his old outfit, Squadron 22. He would automatically be returned there to rejoin his former comrades. It was doubtful if anyone below the air chief marshal even knew of the Squadron of Hate.

The chances were a hundred to one that, once he was back in 22, Adastral House would be content to leave him there as recompense for their error. As long as he never spoke a word of the Squadron of Hate, no one would ever molest his position. Certainly no one wanted the subject aired under any circumstances. King, with his previous record spotless, could pass it off without trouble.

For a moment exultation almost made Arch King burst into joyous laughter. The knowledge that he could escape his destiny lifted his spirits. He wanted to laugh and sing and talk breathlessly with everyone around him.

Then he looked up and a cold blast struck his nerves. Heick was still across the room, in earnest conversation, but his strange, blazing eyes were fixed on King with an expression that chilled the pilot officer's enthusiasm. They seemed to bore through him, to dig and pry into his innermost thoughts.

King bit his lip and looked away. After that he was careful to keep his expression sullen and faintly resentful, though he was uncomfortably conscious of Heick's burning gaze through the rest of the meal.

Had Heick guessed the plan in King's mind? If so, what was he planning to do about it?

The question made King jumpy and nervous. He was glad when the word finally came through that the bombers were over the Channel, heading for London. With the others, he stumbled across the dark field a few minutes later, his flying boots clumping hol-

lowly on the camouflaged concrete apron.

Spitfires were warming on the line and the men were running toward them without the customary huddle for last-minute instructions. Apparently the Squadron of Hate simply went up and fought itself or its enemies to destruction, and that was that.

**I**T WAS a blow to King's nerves to realize that there were, with his own Spitfire, just thirteen ships in the squadron. How many would there be at dawn? One less, at least, King promised himself grimly.

He settled himself in the pit, turned to slide home the heavy glass cover. He froze, his breath caught in his throat. A big hand was blocking his movement. The savage face of Heick stared without expression over the padded rim of the pit. After a moment of tense silence, the giant withdrew his hand. "Remember what I said. 'It's every man for himself.'"

He turned and stalked away. King found his hands trembling as they closed and fastened the cover. What had Heick meant? Certainly there seemed to be some deep, hidden significance in the repetition of his earlier remark, but it eluded King.

Then his mind was absorbed in the problems of take-off and formation assembly. He forced everything but the coming conflict out of his thoughts. Speeding through the night behind the thousand horses of his Merlin II, he cleared the button of his Brownings and readied for battle.

The clouds were low over blacked-out London, set alight by Paul Pries and bursting shells and the glow of fire below. Like swarms of bees, planes darted in and out of those clouds, winging around each other and around the lumbering forms of the bombers beneath.

King waited for orders, but none came. His phones remained silent until, on the very fringe of the tur-

moil, Heick's voice barked the Tallyho and that was all. The Squadron of Hate was on its own.

King saw the Spitfires peeling off to right and left, flashing down toward enemy fighters or bombers. He experienced a moment of confusion. Used to close coordination and wireless control, he felt alone and deserted when the formation broke.

Then the sensation was gone, ripped away by explosive action. King felt it first as the softest of shivers that rippled up the stick of his Spitfire and communicated itself to his hands. He twisted and saw the bright flame of tracers almost in his eyes and the flutter of cloth where their questing lead had touched his wing tip.

A Heinkel was on his tail, gunning down for the kill!

The sight banished King's momentary uncertainty. He sent the Spitfire screaming down and aside, fleeing from what would have been, in another moment, his permanent release from the Squadron of Hate. The Nazi started down in pursuit, rammed into the tracers of another Spitfire, cutting in from the side, and went down with controls dead. It was like that all over the flaming sky, with friend and foe inextricably whirling in an inferno of blood and fire.

Zooming down, King blasted his Brownings at a Messerschmitt that rocketed past and lost it before he could tell the effect of his shots. He fumbled for the rheostat, toning down the bright orange image of his gun-sight on the windscreen before him, fading it to a soft glow that gave him better vision.

**T**HE gray back of a bomber spread under him. He dived at it, whipping through a trail of protecting tracers to pour cupro-nickel death into its vitals. He saw it go down, trailing smoke, and yelled exultantly.

For a time he had lost the members of the Squadron of Hate in the general tangle. Then they began to

separate themselves, standing out unmistakably by the utter, reckless ferocity of their fighting. Again and again he saw their Spitfires hurled through walls of flaming death to strike at a target. The sky seemed full of flaming hulks and the pinkish bloom of chutes.

He saw a Spitfire he thought was Dubrech's twisting and turning away from a bevy of pursuing Messerschmitts, its guns silent, either jammed or empty. He watched the Spitfire roar down and bury its nose into the back of a Junkers bomber, saw the two ships explode violently as the Junkers' load of bombs went off.

The madness went on without end. King struck again and again, flashing in and out. Twice more he saw his tracers cut down Nazi ships and times without number he missed death by a hair. He knew that his ship was literally shot to pieces around him, though it still responded to the controls.

Then suddenly the sky was clearing and he awoke with a start to see the searchlights winking out and the Nazi planes edging away. Spitfires began to pull back and form ragged flights for the return to their bases. The attack on London was over.

King looked around and saw war-torn wrecks drawing reluctantly together, heading back toward the hidden base of Squadron 1313. He flew toward them.

Of the original thirteen fighters, only nine, including his own, were in the returning flight. King felt a gnawing sickness at the loss.

The survivors of the Squadron of Hate thundered on ahead and he followed. The clouds were still low and heavy. He flew close to their ceiling. When they reached the hidden base, he would slip up into those clouds and go on to make his landing as close as possible to the base of Squadron 22. This would be his last sight of the Squadron of Hate.

Ahead, the ragged V streamed around into a circle and began to drop

down. The base was down below, which meant it was time for Arch King to get away. He flipped a weary salute to the vanishing shapes and pulled the Spitfire into a climb. There was a queer tightness in his throat, a great pity for those poor maniacs who must go on and on as long as any of them survived to fly.

He pulled up through the cloud layer and burst out into brilliant moonlight. The clouds rolled under his wings, a sea of shimmering whiteness under the moon and stars, cutting him off from the war-torn land below. He pointed the Spitfire northwest and opened the throttle gate.

Abruptly he was slamming around in a tight turn, staring back at a shape that had come bursting up through the clouds a scant half-mile away. Another plane had climbed from somewhere just above the hidden base of 1313. Was it Heick, hunting for him?

Then he saw that the other ship was headed away, thundering for the Channel, toward occupied France and the slave lands of the Third Reich.

**W**ITH his heart in his mouth, King slammed the throttle full open and tore in pursuit. He had to overtake that strange plane. A terrible fear was digging at his nerves.

The Spitfire was roaring at full speed, but the other plane was also making tracks and keeping its distance. Suddenly King saw his quarry bank and change its course to a more easterly direction. For a moment the moonlight fell flush on the wings.

Now he knew! A Messerschmitt 109 was racing back toward Germany from the point where the Squadron of Hate was landing!

King immediately understood the whole picture. The *Luftwaffe* knew and feared the Squadron of Hate, would do anything to wipe them out. Identifying their ships by the ruthlessness of their fighting over London, a Nazi pilot had stayed in the clouds and followed the survivors

back to their base. Now, having located the squadron, the pilot was rushing back to report.

King could visualize the result—wave after wave of bombers hurtling back to unload dead and destruction on the helpless men below.

It must not happen! King forgot his own flight, forgot everything but the desperate necessity of stopping that enemy plane before it could contact the bombers. He bent forward, slammed the extra throttle open.

His engine began to cough and blurp. Something, a slug or the terrible punishment of the night's fighting, had taken its toll. King eased back the throttle and the power plant resumed its steady thunder. He shoved the throttle to full and again it coughed and spat. The ship ahead was a mere speck on the sea of clouds now, drawing rapidly away. He could never overtake it in time.

With a groan, King banked away from pursuit. There was only one thing to do, only one hope.

Five minutes later he dropped the Spitfire down through the blackness, praying that he could hit the almost invisible field. At the last moment hooded marker lights came on, invisible from above, guiding him to a safe landing. He blipped the Spitfire across the apron and up to the huddle of planes and men before the shadowy barn. Figures came running to meet him as he climbed out. The shambling bulk of Heick was in the lead.

"You fool!" roared the giant, rushing up. "What did you come back here for? Haven't I trouble enough without—"

Panting, King cut in with his story of the Nazi pilot who had tracked down their hidden base. He saw a subtle change come into Heick's gaunt face. But when he had finished, the big man repeated harshly:

"I asked you why you came back. You had your chance to get away and stay away. I did everything but draw pictures for you. Once you got back

to your old outfit, do you think the higher-ups would drag you back here? You could have cleared out for good."

A wave of anger washed over Arch King and he was suddenly too weary and furious to check it.

"To blazes with you!" he shouted hoarsely. "You and your whole pack of melodramatic failures can go hang! I didn't come back to save your lives, if that's what you think. I came back because England needs its planes and its fighters, because I didn't want the Nazis to have the satisfaction of even a victory like this. You can fight for hatred or memories or anything else you please, but I'm still fighting for England."

**H**E STOPPED, slumped against the bullet-torn wing. Heick and the others were staring at him. He could see their white, strained faces and the dark pits of their hollow eyes, but he could not read their expressions in the darkness. He was too tired to care what anyone thought or did. Instead of the explosion of fury he half-anticipated, there was a long silence. When Heick spoke, it was to the others.

"Get these ships gased and new belts run into the guns. I'm guessing we'll have visitors within a half-hour."

Twenty minutes later the nine Spitfires roared across the apron and back up into the night sky. King, driving weary nerves and muscles to the limit, had climbed into a reserve Spitfire until his own could be repaired. During the feverish moments of preparation, neither Heick nor any of the others had spoken to him.

Back beyond the tabs of the ship, he could see the soft glow of the field lights click off and darkness close in. Suddenly, out across the meadows, other lights came on. They outlined a square, perhaps half a mile away from the hidden base. Heick's chuckle sounded in the phones.

"Let the Nazis bomb that one to pieces. It's the finest piece of worth-



less bog in Britain. Now climb into the clouds and stay in formation. I'm going upstairs to watch for company."

There followed tense moments of circling in the clouds. Then Heick's voice spoke again.

"Here they come! They look like Dorniers and Heinkels. Wait until they drop below the clouds and start dumping their coal. Then dive at them from on top. And don't let one get away, or we'll have week-end guests from now on!"

Arch King felt like a sleep-walker. He was flying and moving automatically, preparing for the coming onslaught, but his mind felt dead. He was too tired to think, too tired even to remember that once more he was being given a chance to escape from the Squadron of Hate.

The battle flowed past him, a few moments later, like a panorama of Armageddon. He was in it and a part of it, yet it never really registered on his consciousness. The word came at last and the nine planes rocketed down through the clouds, pouring death onto the backs of unsuspecting bombers and fighters. That first attack sent two bombers down in flames, joined a moment later by a Heinkel that was flying convoy.

King remembered the fury of the Squadron of Hate and remembered that his own guns had accounted for at least two Nazis. Somehow, though, the fighting of the other Spitfires seemed different from before. There was still the same nerveless daring and relentless fury, yet there appeared to be less of the old suicidal recklessness. They fought coldly and mercilessly, smashing away shrewdly.

When the last Nazi was down and the squadron was landing, King realized with a shock that the survivors of the first battle were still flying!

Nine Spitfires taxied to the line and cut their motors. King saw men climbing out, watched the shambling figure of Heick going from plane to plane. He sat slumped in the pit, too tired to

climb out or do anything but watch.

When he finally did clamber down, the knot of pilots was coming toward him. "Here it comes," he thought wearily. "Now I'll pay for what I called them. I'm in the Squadron of Hate for good. I had my chance to escape and I let it slip away. . . ."

**S**OMEONE was putting a glass into his hand, a cool glass that held the weight of liquid. The men of Squadron 1313 were pressing close. Heick was beside him, staring at him, his expression unreadable. "So you came back again!" Heick growled.

King was too exhausted even to think of an answer. He remained silent, holding the glass.

"Well," Heick snapped sharply, "what are you waiting for? Go on and drink your drink. We're waiting to make it a toast." He raised his glass.

"To England!"

Other glasses were lifting. The words ran like a murmur through the knot of pilots. "To England!"

Not to death, nor to destruction. Not to hate, but a toast to England!

The weariness began to flow out of Arch King's muscles. He straightened, lifted his own glass.

"To England," he said in a low, tense voice. "And to—the Squadron of Hope."

There was a moment of intense silence. Not even a whisper of breathing or the rustle of a garment broke that silence. Then someone among the pilots echoed softly: "To England and the Squadron of Hope."

Heick drank, slammed his glass onto the concrete apron.

"Are you going to get out of here now?" he roared. "Clear out while you've still got a chance?"

Arch King set his own glass on the Spitfire's wing and quietly began to unbuckle his Mae West. A smile touched his lips.

"No, I think I'll stay," he decided. "I have an idea maybe I'll learn to like it here now."

# Learn to Fly

## A Complete Course in Aviation

By LIEUT. JAY D. BLAUFox

### OPERATION OF THE DE-ICER

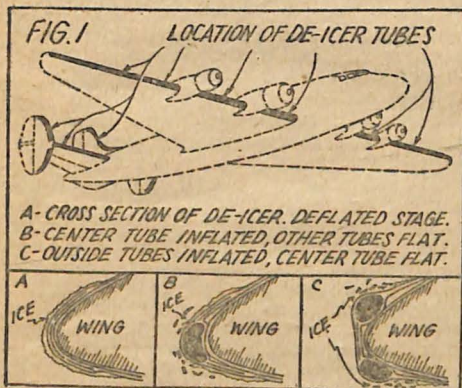
**E**VERY possible device has been or is being invented to guarantee an airplane's safe arrival at its proposed destination. Weather no longer grounds an airplane if there is the slightest possibility of the craft pushing through. The mailman's motto is true of the pilot and his craft. Neither snow nor sleet can keep the pilot on the ground and the devices created for his flying safety and that of his passengers see to it that he gets off when he must. One of the most serviceable of these in-

distributor valves to the rubber "boots" attached to the leading edge of the wings and stabilizer causing them to inflate alternately and rhythmically. The tubes or boots run laterally from the fuselage to the wing tips. The air is forced through them, inflating them alternately, or withdrawn, thus deflating them at timed periods.

As the air enters one of these boots (Fig. 1), it causes it to expand, breaking off what ice there is frozen to that section of the wing. Air is forced through the next tube or boot and that in turn expands and similarly with the other tubes until the ice running from the wing tip to the keel is broken off and blown away in the wind.

A glance at the illustration of the transport wing and the manner in which the boots are attached to it will clear up the description above if any doubt still remains about the action of the De-Icer.

I said that this action of inflation and deflation was timed. This is taken care of by the Distributor valve. This valve regulates the distribution of air to the De-Icers so that at specific periods of time the rubber boots or tubes which break off the ice are automatically inflated and deflated.



ventions is the Goodrich De-Icer designed in conjunction with Eclipse Aviation.

The icing of wings in a cold, moisture-laden area is well known. The results of early transatlantic hops that ended in the loss of the ships and their crews is also too well remembered to go into here.

Your lessons on Meteorology have given you an insight into what causes ice to form on the wings and propeller; now I'll tell you here how the De-Icer disposes of it.

To begin with the De-Icer equipment consists of many parts; the pumps; the distributing valves; the control valve and switch; the pipe lines; the rubber "boots"; the electric motor; the suction regulating valves; Vacuum relief valves; check valves and oil separators.

#### How It Works and What It Does

Combined in the System, the pumps distribute air under pressure through the

#### The Fundamental Principle

The fundamental principle consists of a constant speed electric motor which drives a worm and wheel reduction gearing combined with connecting ports and rotary distributor valve.

There are three types of valves for different installations of the De-Icer Systems running from the small light plane to the multi-engine transport, but in each the principle of operation is the same. The only difference is the number of ports and the control of each unit.

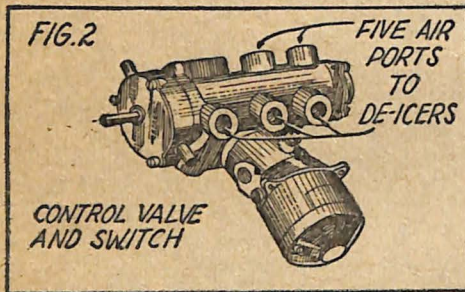
However, the action is the same in each and provides one complete cycle of inflation and deflation in approximately forty seconds.

An accompanying illustration offers the unit which combines the basic unit with integral control valve and switch (Fig. 2). The basic unit is exactly the same except that it does not have the switch and control valve attached.

The two models have the five air ports for the connection to the De-Icer pipe lines, but because the control mechanism is built into the larger model the construction and shape is of necessity different.

#### The Control Mechanism

The control mechanism comprises a switch mounted on the shaft of a gate valve so that a single operation is needed to direct the flow of air to the distributor valve and to close the motor circuit. The control valve also vents the De-Icers in the "off" position. This makes it possible



to obtain a suction action on the De-Icer boots which draws them down flat on the wings and holds them there when not in operation against the ice.

#### The Ten Port Unit

The ten port unit is designed for use on the larger ships such as the continental transports, the Clipper ships, the flying fortresses and others of the long range, multi-engines type.

This type is controlled by a 4-Way Control Valve and Switch, the sectional drawing of which is shown in Fig. 3. The ten ports are divided into two groups of five, both of which are synchronized during operation. Each group has an individual rotary distributor valve, connected by a single shaft driven through the worm and wheel reduction gearing by a single electric driving motor.

#### 4-Way Control Valve and Switch

This control valve and switch was designed for use with the ten port distribut-

ing valve. It simultaneously directs the flow of air to the distributing valve and closes the circuit to the electric motor. The unit consists of an operating shaft that is manually controlled and carries attached to it an electric switch.

This operating shaft is assembled to a four-way valve designed so that when it is on the "off" position, air from the pump is by-passed to an overboard port while at the same time the De-Icers may be thrown to a suction outlet when required so that the boots may be deflated and held tightly against the wings, as in the case of the previous valve I told you about.

An examination of the sectional sketch of the 4-Way Control Valve will show you what the inside of this useful device looks like.

As for the other parts which make up the De-Icer system, you have already had information on the pumps in the lesson of the Sperry Gyro Pilot, so we won't repeat it here. The same type of pump operates the De-Icer System, as you will soon see in the description of operation.

#### Description of Operation

I've told you the separate functions of the various parts which make up the De-Icer System, and now we'll learn how, together, they combine their various duties to perform a most valuable service for the airman.

If you will follow me by an occasional glance at the schematic diagram (Fig. 4) of the entire system and the different units, you'll understand how the final result, the breaking and blowing away of the ice on the wings is accomplished.

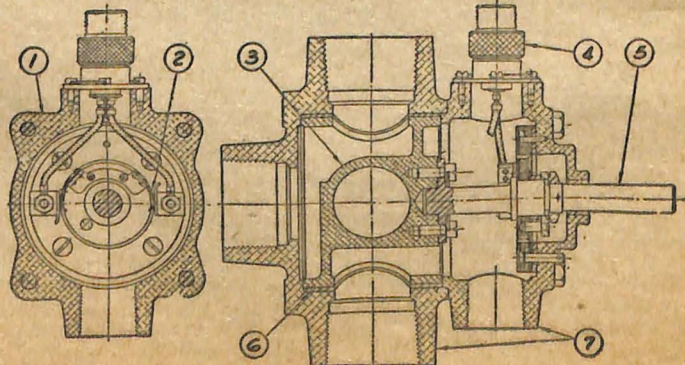
First, in examining the diagram, unless you do so with extreme care and thought, you may be confused by the two pumps. The left hand pump is used by the De-Icer System; the right hand pump by the Gyro Pilot, both of which are connected in the System together but functioning independently as you can see by a close look at the Pump Selector. But let me take you through the works one step at a time.

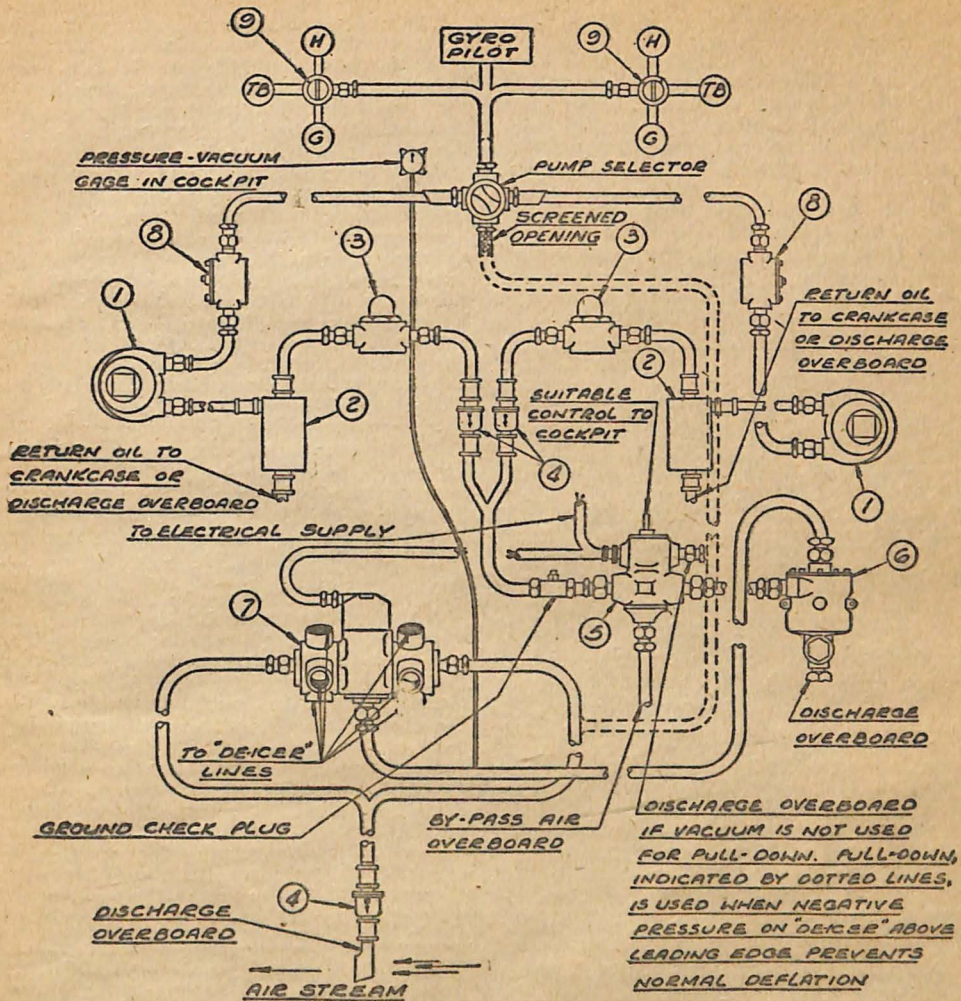
#### Step by Step'

Through the screened opening in the pump selector free air is drawn by the

(Fig. 3) Typical Cross Sectional Views of Type DV-1 4-Way Control Valve and Switch

1. Mounting bracket
2. Electrical switching arrangement
3. 4-way valve
4. Quick disconnect plug
5. Manually operated control shaft
6. Steel sleeve
7. Top housing (may be rotated thru 90 degrees with respect to lower housing)





(Fig. 4) Schematic Diagram of a Typical "De-Icer" Installation

## KEY TO ECLIPSE DE-ICER EQUIPMENT

1. Type B-4 air pumps
2. Centrifugal type oil separator
3. Pressure relief valves
4. Check valves
5. Type DV-1 4-way control valve and switch

6. Pressure type oil separator
7. Type DD-10 "DE-ICER" distributing valve
8. Vacuum relief valves
9. Suction regulating valves

left hand pump (1) with the "pump selector" valve in the position shown. The pump discharges this air under pressure to the Oil Separator (2) where the oil vapor is separated and drains out at the bottom. The clean air then leaves at the top of the Oil Separator and enters the Pressure Relief Valve (3) where its pressure is reduced to a predetermined value. The air under reduced pressure passes through the Check Valve (4) to the "Y" connection.

The right hand pump, you will observe, during this time has been supplying the suction necessary for the instruments and automatic pilot, taking in free air through

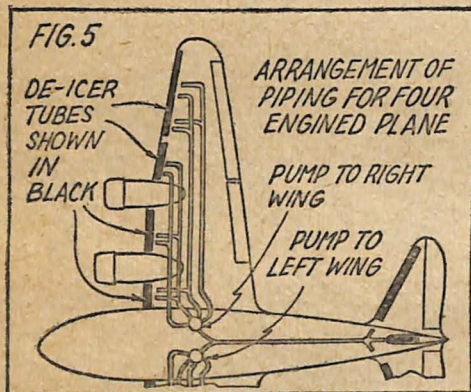
the screened openings of both the Suction Regulating Valves (9) and the Vacuum Relief Valve (8) and exhausts it under pressure to the oil separator, pressure relief valve, check valve and to the "Y" connection. At the "Y," the air from both pumps is directed through the Control Valve and Switch (5) to the Oil Separator (6) where its pressure is regulated by the integral relief valve to that demanded by the De-Icers and where any remaining oil vapor is separated.

The air is led from the separator to the distributing Valve (7) so that it may be directed, with proper timing, to one De-

Icer Line in each group of air ports at a time.

The eight additional lines are then connected to a suction source by the rotary valves within the unit. The left hand pump then supplies the necessary suction and the single check valve closes. When the De-Icer System is turned "off"—this is done by rotating the control valve and switch handle to the "off" position—the air is by-passed overboard through the Control Valve (5) and the distributing valve motor circuit is open.

Eight of the De-Icer lines are connected to the low pressure area of the airplane



through the two end ports of the distributing valve, and the remaining two De-Icer lines are connected to the low pressure area through the control valve and switch.

In this way with the De-Icer System in the "off" position, all the boots are under suction and are held flat against the surface of the wing.

#### Boots in Sections

You will note that the boots or rubber cells which, when inflated, break off the ice that forms on the wings are not comprised of a single piece from fuselage to wing tip. The engine nacelles prevent this. The boots therefore are provided in sections and are fed as you can see by separate sections of pipe lines. It is needless to add, however, that all these lines are fed air at the same time during the process of inflation. That is to say that all boot sections from wing tip to fuselage along the same level are inflated at the same time.

#### Goodrich Propeller De-Icer

In spite of the fact that the propeller revolves at high speed, it is not altogether immune from icing conditions. The tiny water droplets that are present in the atmosphere at temperatures often far below the freezing point cling to the surface of the propeller as they do to the surfaces of the wings. These water drops have been found to vary in size from less than 0.01 to drops of more than 2.0 millimeters in diameter.

Their own surface tension prevents them from crystallizing as does the fact that they are not agitated into ice or snow. But being of intensely low temperature, they immediately turn to ice the moment they touch a solid object such as an airplane wing or a propeller blade. Ice may result from saturated or super-saturated air masses.

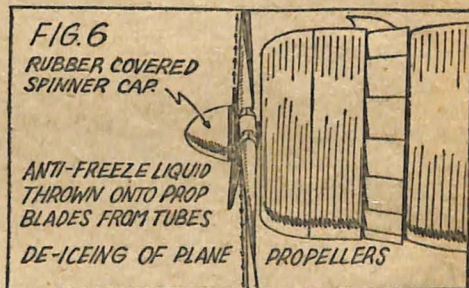
In some weather conditions the normal operation of the airplane may be materially affected in as little as five minutes. An ice surface has been built up of one inch a minute, and in some instances two inches a minute have been known. You can readily see what this will do to the aerofoils and how it will affect the flying stability of any ship without even considering the additional weight put upon the plane. Loss of power, loss of flying speed must follow.

Therefore, to prevent ice forming on the propeller, the hub is protected with a spinner cap covered with specially compounded rubber treated with a special anti-freeze solution to minimize the clinging of ice (Fig. 6).

#### The "Slinger" Ring

A device known as a "slinger" ring was developed for the propeller blades. This ring throws an anti-freeze solution over the surface of the blades spreading over the vital areas by centrifugal force. As in the case of the spinner cap, this treatment reduces the adhesion of ice and allows the revolution of the propeller to throw it off in small pieces before it becomes a solid mass and causes the propeller to become unbalanced.

For the slower turning, larger diameter propellers which do not throw off the ice as readily and as easily as the smaller and more rapidly turning propellers, an auxil-



ary device has been designed by the Goodrich designers. This device consists of a special grooved rubber "shoe" attached to the leading edge of each blade. This shoe directs the flow of fluid so as to wipe off all formations of ice.

All of the airlines are using De-Icers on their ships, as are some of the privately owned aircraft.

#### ANOTHER IMPORTANT LESSON ON AIRCRAFT ACCESSORIES

Next Issue!

# PRANKSTERS

By DAVID GOODIS

Author of "Hot Lead for Heinkels," "The Token of Glory," etc.



*The Pilots of Fighter Squadron Thirty-Seven Didn't Exactly Set an Example of Good Discipline—But There Was Very Little That Could Actually Be Done About It!*

EVER since the beginning of hostilities in Northern Africa, Fighter Squadron Thirty-seven, nineteen miles east of the Libya-Egypt border, had been gaining a reputation as vicious air warriors. At the same time, and perhaps quite reasonably, it was also known as a group that very calmly thumbed its nose at such absurd factors as regulations and discipline.

Little could be done about the matter. Thirty-seven was composed of top-ranking aces from all parts of the Empire. MacGarney from Scotland, Gellwaite from London, Hedburne from Australia, Haines from Canada,

Adworth from India—they had been especially selected from their respective outfits, sent to the trouble area in Northern Africa, and had quickly started to make life miserable for Fascist aviators.

But the Italians were not the only ones to suffer from the troublesome gentlemen of Fighter Thirty-seven. Sharing the misery were the unfortunate squadron leaders.

There had been seven of them so far, and not one had been able to stand it for more than two months. No sooner did any of these C.O.s make an attempt to instill discipline than the flyers began to work on the squadron leader, to show him by rather violent methods the error of his ways.

They would put sand in his bed and tooth-paste in the toes of his boots. They would salt his coffee and spray his uniform with ill-smelling anti-insect liquid. A succession of such tricks would finally bring about the desired result. The half-crazed squadron leader would finally beg for a transfer.

The matter could have easily been corrected, had Headquarters understood that these men of Thirty-seven were under a terrible strain. Normally they would have respected authority. They would have submitted to regulations and acted their age. But they were working in a climate quite conducive to a temporary loss of sanity.

The Libyan frontier, three-quarters of the way up the border, is a blazing inferno during the day, a frigid torture chamber of knife-like winds at night. And either the sand is a leering monotony of yellow-white glare, or it is wilder than a stormy sea, driving across the desert in billions upon billions of tiny goblins that seem to strike against a man's skin with the force and pain of bullets.

In such surroundings, Fighter Thirty-seven was expected to go about the daily task of aerial defense

and offense, working at full tilt to clear the skies of Fascist bombers, reconnaissance ships and the new Fiat and Macchi fighters. The outfit was doing a good job, a brilliant job—and the only reward wanted was to be let alone, to do as it jolly well pleased.

When these men came down from the skies, they did not want to be bothered with formalities, with traditional military stiffness and polish. They were tired, throbbing with the heat of the last battle, keyed up for the next battle. They were high-strung, short-tempered, and half crazy.

As well meaning as Headquarters tried to be, that was not understood. High-ranking officers reasoned that an outfit like Thirty-seven needed discipline, or else it would collapse in a froth of disorder and disinterest and complete loss of morale. Even the failure of seven rigid squadron leaders was not enough to convince Headquarters of that mistake.

They sent an eighth.

**H**IS name was Brimber, and he was in his middle thirties, and he was short and stocky, with flat-combed chestnut hair, and gray eyes and deep tan skin. Not much was known about his qualities as an officer, but he had been sent down from England with an excellent record in actual sky combat. A highly talented flyer might automatically command the respect of Thirty-seven.

But Headquarters told Brimber what he was up against. They told him of the failure of the seven preceding squadron leaders. They impressed him with the idea that he would have to be very, very tough.

Brimber did not have much to say. He never did. In the fewest possible words he told Headquarters he would do his best, then climbed into a Hurricane and pointed westward across Egypt.

When he landed, no member of

Thirty-seven was there to welcome him. The planes were lined up and the mechanics were sweating, their noses buried in Rolls Royce engines. In front of the canvas-roofed hangar a group of flyers were playing poker, laughing loudly, slamming cards on the sand.

Brimber walked up and looked on at the game. Glances were cast at his squadron leader's insignia, but though there were mutterings, no word was said to Brimber. Nobody stood up, made the slightest gesture toward a reception, let alone respect.

After a few moments, Brimber was ignored completely. One of the players, a short, rather slim fellow named Gebfrey, was having phenomenal luck. The others, having already lost their money, and now forced to part with various prized possessions, were not too happy. In particular, Hedburne from Australia, was quite emphatic in his expressions of disgust.

He was a big fellow, this Hedburne. He was exactly six feet tall, and he weighed two hundred twenty pounds. He had closely curled red hair, a hard, squarish face, and most of his weight was in his chest and shoulders. He seemed quite well aware of his physical power, and his every word, every action seemed a challenge to someone to knock a chip off his shoulder.

Finally he managed to get into an argument with Gebfrey, who was no set-up for any man, for all his short stature and lack of weight. One word led to another, then Hedburne, letting loose a string of curses, leaned across and slammed a fist into the smaller man's mouth.

Gebfrey did two somersaults backward and came up bleeding from the lips, but with his fists up. Hedburne was already on his feet, waiting. The other flyers reacted automatically. They moved back, formed a circle. Gebfrey's winnings had not pleased them. Eye gleams were telling Hedburne to take some of the cockiness from the little fellow.

Brimber, watching them, studying them, could see that these men were normally good sports, gentlemen, decent and kind and considerate. But in the midst of Libyan Desert warfare their personalities had become twisted animal brutality had come to the fore. But Brimber, looking at the sun, at the sand, at the endlessness of white glare that had no horizon, could understand.

**H**E STEPPED into the circle, and his voice was low, quiet. "We don't need this sort of thing, gentlemen."

Hedburne looked him up and down.

"Who are you?" he growled.

"My uniform ought to tell you that," Brimber said simply.

"It's easy to fake a uniform," Hedburne snarled. "How are we to know you're from Headquarters?"

"I'm telling you," Brimber said. "Either you believe me or you're calling me a liar."

That made Hedburne hesitate, though he muttered a little under his breath.

"Out here we settle our own personal affairs," he said then. "We don't want to be interfered with. We get our flying orders and we follow them out. Aside from that we want to be let alone."

Brimber allowed a half-smile to touch his lips.

"That's all right with me," he said, as quietly as he had first spoken. "But I don't want to see anybody get hurt."

Hedburne let out a laugh, loud and harsh. It annoyed Brimber.

"If you don't want us to get hurt," the Australian said, "you better ship us back to England. This area is no place for lads who want to save their bloody necks."

Gebfrey moved his fists in a circle.

"Come on!" he challenged in a high voice. "Let's get this row over with."

Hedburne moved forward, ignoring Brimber, who stood to one side. Brimber allowed the Australian and Geb-



brey to come close together, then he stepped between them.

"You heard my orders," he said coolly.

"Out of the way!" Hedburne muttered.

"That's insubordination," Brimber said.

"It is," Hedburne blurted, "and do you think I give a hoot? It's enough that we lads are giving our best out here, trying to do a job in the clouds, without having to cater to the will and whim of every stiff-neck that Hear'quarters sends out here. Go on and report me, blast you! Report every one of us, and have us put behind bars! Then see what those Fascist flyers will do to the pretty lads who take our places!"

"You have it all figured out, haven't you?" Brimber said. His voice was still quiet and even.

"Sure I do!" Hedburne shouted, and his face was mahogany as, at the encouraging murmurs from the other flyers, he took a step nearer Brimber. "You won't get away with any parade-ground stuff out here!" he shouted. "We'll break you! Just like we broke the others."

"That's putting it rather strongly, don't you think?" Brimber said, and once again on his lips was the half-smile.

"Well, that's the only language you fancy-dress chaps understand," Hedburne shot back.

"Not exactly," Brimber murmured. "Here's a new kind of talk that might interest you."

He swung back, as if trying to grab a hunk of sky. Then his right arm swung forward, over his head in a whistling arc. His fist crashed full in Hedburne's mouth. It was a terrific blow, and the big Australian flew back and twisted over as he landed on the sand. His feet were kicking from the shock of the punch as he tried to climb out of dizziness and darkness.

The other flyers were gasping, sur-

prised not only at Brimber's assault, but at the fact that Hedburne had gone down.

But he was getting up. Slowly, trembling, he was on his knees, then straightening, spitting blood and teeth from between swollen lips. His eyes were glazed, but there was hate in them.

"I'll kill you for that, you—" he screeched.

But before he could get the last word out, Brimber came in fast and hit him again. It was a ripping jab, worked from the left shoulder. It caught Hedburne in his left eye.

ONCE more he went down. And once more he got up. One eye was closed, and he was weaving and trembling, but still trying to get his fists up. Brimber came in and reached down to ankles. Then he brought up a right fist, full on the point of Hedburne's chin. The Australian was lifted seven inches off the ground. He landed flat on his back and his arms spread out wide. He was asleep.

For exactly nine seconds there was dead silence. Brimber stood waiting, his fists still clenched, although he knew that Hedburne would be out for another half-hour. But he wanted this quiet to impress itself on the other flyers, who gazed at one another with amazement, then looked at the unconscious man, and then looked at Brimber.

The half-smile once more was on his lips as he said:

"I'm sorry I had to do that, gentlemen, but maybe it's best that it happened at the very beginning. From here on we ought to understand each other. I was sent out here as your commanding officer, and I'm going to do the job. If there's anyone else who has any doubts of that, I'll talk it over with him."

His eyes circled the group, and he waited for a reply. He got none.

"All right," he said. "You seem to get the idea. Now, here's another

point, and we'll understand it clearly. I'm not an advocate of strict discipline or stiff regulations. When you're out of the air, I don't particularly care what you do, as long as there is no outright violence, and you don't drink yourselves to death, and you follow the routine. But I'm commanding officer here, and when I give an order, it's going to be obeyed. That goes for when we're in the clouds, as well as on the ground."

"You mean—you're going up with us?" Haines, from Canada, asked, surprised.

"Of course. I've always understood that it's the duty of a squadron leader to lead his squadron."

"But—well, we've never had an S.L. go up with us. They've always given their commands from the ground. Hedburne's always been our flight leader." Haines nodded to the sleeping Australian.

Brimber's smile widened. As he looked toward the figure on the ground.

"He doesn't look much like a flight leader," he said dryly.

That got a laugh. Gellwaite from London nudged Adworth from India.

"He seems to be an all-right chap," he muttered.

Brimber heard that, but saw no reason to be too much encouraged. He already had partial respect from these men, but the question of full respect would be settled by his showing in the skies over the Libyan Desert. . . .

**L**ATE that afternoon a radio call hit Fighter Thirty-seven, asking for Hurricanes, to offset a combined bombing and strafing attack against a British concentration. When the orderly made the report, Brimber was going through a lot of maps, also going through a lot of gin and limes and soda. The heat lay heavy, and somehow the drinks were failing to give the usual refreshment. Brimber didn't even care for the taste. But he couldn't bother to mix the drinks

himself. He didn't even have time to give detailed mixing directions to the orderly.

Now, on top of all his map and diagram and chart calculations, he was faced with a call to sky combat. He stood up, then abruptly sat down again, wondering what was the matter with him. It was hot and sticky and downright nasty here, but it should not be affecting him this way. He had been in the desert before. Not so long ago he had made himself quite useful against troublesome Arabs in Mesopotamia.

Why should this weakness have enveloped him now? And the headache that was a circle of agony, from his eyes to his ears to the back of his head? He stood up, sagged again, then forced himself to straighten. He took another drink.

The orderly had already called flyers and mechanics, and now the Hurricanes were being warmed up. Brimber snatched a beige chamois jacket and a helmet from the wall-rack, and went out. He got the situation details from the radioman, then he called the flyers together.

"We'll use nine planes," he said. "The rest of you will wait until you get a call. We might need you up there or else you might be called to another trouble area. I want the first eight men in the squadron, and the only way I have of knowing your ability is to go by your respective victory records."

An orderly brought the list, and Brimber called the names, trying to keep the weakness out of his voice, trying to keep himself steady. What the devil was the matter with him? It couldn't have been the encounter with Hedburne. His only injuries from that were skinned knuckles, a kind of pain he liked.

Rolls Royce motors were roaring, and flyers were climbing into quivering Hurricanes. Then nine planes followed one another across hard sand.

"We'll use a straight-line formation," Brimber said into the speaking tube of his radio. "I'll take the middle. Gauge your speed by me."

He urged the Hurricane to three hundred miles per hour. Then he looked over to his left. Haines grinned at him. He returned the grin.

He looked over to his right, and saw Hedburne. The Australian was looking straight ahead. His face was set in stiff lines, and he still seemed to be suffering from the effects of his argument with Brimber.

The half-smile came to the squadron leader's lips, and he turned forward, concentrating his attention on the sky and the sand that blended into a sea of heat in the distance.

Then, against the white glare, bursts of smoke showed in the sky. Blobs of orange fire and sizzling streaks that were the fiery trails of shells. Beneath all that was a dark, snaking line that seemed to be wriggling convulsively. And Brimber knew that it was the front, that far off along that line men were fighting and dying.

**I**NTO the speaking tube he gave an order for a wide-spread V-formation, and then he was checking his maps, following the course given in the radio call. Then he could see Italian planes in the sky—Macchi fighter planes, Breda dive-bombers. The Fascist air group, swooping low over the British lines, was releasing a hail of small bombs, spitting bullets into Englishmen.

"Walk up to seventy-five hundred," he ordered. "Don't go down until I give the word. We break formation when I say 'cheerio'."

He frowned as he watched the Italian planes, now less than two miles away; frowned because it was hard to see. The weakness and the headache were getting the best of him. It was difficult to keep his eyelids from closing. He fought hard against the sickness, tried to convince himself that he was only imagining it.

The British group moved up to its battle perch.

"Full speed now—and retain formation, closing the V," Brimber said. "When we break we'll spread wide and clip the outsiders first."

The nine planes formed a close V. They hit seventy-five hundred, then they were entering the combat area, and Italian fighters were coming up to meet them.

The Italians were using a high-grade piece of airplane, the Macchi C-200. A single-seater fighter powered with an 870 h.p. Fiat radial engine. A constant-speed Hamilton propeller, with the necessary drive to push the ship forward at a maximum speed of three hundred and thirteen miles per hour. The C-200 used four guns. Two Safat 12.7 mm. jobs in the fuselage and two 7.7 mm. guns in the wings.

Although the British had an altitude advantage, they were faced with a numerical superiority of Macchi planes. The Italians had twenty-odd fighters, moving up fast, and wisely spreading wide so that the Englishmen would have a difficult time on the initial dive.

Brimber looked down, saw the Macchis coming up, saw the Bredas far below, still pouring death on the English trench-line. There was no time to wait, to measure for an opening.

"All right, break wide and get them on the outside—'cheerio'!" he said crisply into the speaking tube.

The nine Hurricanes went down, breaking out of their V, spreading out like the splash of a rocket in the night. Leaping down in a series of sizzling arcs, they poured Browning slugs into the climbing Macchis. The hard, experienced, brilliant flyers of Fighter Thirty-seven were only too eager to trade lead with the Fascist pilots.

In the first exchange of fire, the Macchis came out a poor second. Four of them went down, and although the

Hurricanes took Safat slugs in wings in from the side, and urged his Rolls and fuselages, not one of them was forced out of battle.

Brimber worked into a vertical left turn, set his wing-guns to bear on two Macchis that were bothering another Hurricane. He flashed down and his Brownings talked a fire language. Then he continued the downward course, sliding fast through the smoking skies, and getting away from the Macchis, concentrating now on the Breda dive-bombers.

He leaped down on the nearest of the Italian planes, flipped a two-second burst and watched flame leap along an engine cowling, start fire disease along a wing. He was aiming at another Breda, when he seemed to be falling into a lot of thick grayness.

He knew what it was—the headache, the weakness, and the queer sickness were getting the best of him. Again he was trying to fight his way out of it. But it was hard going.

He could feel himself giving way. He cursed, he writhed, he begged himself to hold on. He knew that he had enough strength left to turn back and race home, but he couldn't do that. He couldn't run away while his men were engaged in combat.

Ironically, he was thinking of how eager he was to gain their respect.

To desert them now, in the heat of battle, would certainly help the picture.

Yet, as leader, he had the responsibility of looking after himself, in order to retain his leadership as long as possible. And it was downright ridiculous to try and continue fighting, while this sickness blanketed him.

Making the decision, he pushed the Hurricane into a fast climb. Above the roar of motors and the clatter of machine-gun fire, eight Britishers heard him say:

"Give them enough to discourage them away from this area, then come home. Haines, you take command!"

He skidded into a steep turn, dodged fire from a Macchi that came

in from the side, and urged his Rolls Royce to an all-out effort. The Hurricane speared eastward. Less than fifteen minutes later it was landing at the drome of Fighter Thirty-seven. Brimber climbed weakly from the cockpit. A mechanic saw him sag, and ran over to help him.

"Wounded, sir?"

"No—I'm all right. Just a little sick."

The mechanic looked at him queerly, and he knew what the fellow was thinking. Then he was walking slowly toward his tent. He was barely able to reach the cot. His head hit the pillow and he went out cold. . . .

**B**Y EVENING he was all right. The weakness and the headache had passed, and after a miserable session of retching he was feeling light and balanced and actually hungry.

But at the mess-table he lost his appetite. Five chairs were empty. The flyers were not looking at him. He sat down, picked up his knife and fork, put them down again. Then he stared at Haines, kept staring until the Canadian was forced to turn.

"All right, let's have it," Brimber said.

"We followed your orders," Haines said. His voice was cold, thin. "We drove them off."

Brimber pointed at the five empty chairs. "What about them?"

A bitter smile touched Haines' lips.

"They were shot down," he said. "It's the first time we ever lost that many, and we've been in worse shows. I guess they must have been discouraged."

Brimber stood up. "You'll have to explain that," he said.

"Sure, I'll explain it!" Haines shot back. "They saw their squadron leader turn yellow!"

Brimber's fists closed, and he moved forward. Then he was holding himself back.

"You've got it wrong," he muttered.

"I ran out of that fight only because I had to. I—I was sick."

He knew how lame that sounded. He saw the disbelief, merged with derision and disgust on the faces of the flyers. They were paying no attention to him, talking to one another, acting as if he wasn't there.

All but Hedburne. The big Australian was not eating. He was staring at his plate, and his features held the same expression that Brimber had noticed during the flight toward battle. And it was not physical pain that tightened Hedburne's features. It was something deeper, something that turned a slow wheel of anguish.

For a moment Brimber was puzzled. Then he was forgetting about it, overwhelmed by the thought of his own disgrace, his failure. He turned and left the mess tent.

He walked across the hard sand, gray now in the light of evening. He looked at the Hurricanes, lined up with noses pointed westward, ready for more battle. Somehow he felt far away from those planes, far away from the men who flew them.

And it brought agony, because he wanted to be near, he wanted to be a part of Fighter Thirty-seven. These men were bright and blazing symbols of valor, of the highest battle caliber. They were hard and mean, but they were sincere about their task, and they were doing a great job for their king and country. He *wanted* to lead them, to be one of them.

But he had failed, and because he was suffused by his own sense of shame, he could not believe that it was because of the sickness. Maybe it had been downright fear.

"No, no—it couldn't have been that," he muttered.

**A**ND although he kept trying to deny it, the feeling forced itself upon him. Without knowing exactly how he got there, he was in his tent, banging his knuckles together, begging himself to believe that he had

not turned yellow. But the fear that he had overpowered him, and the sweat was running from forehead to cheeks to jaw-line, dripping.

"I'll go back!" he said aloud. "I won't stick it. I can't—I've lost my nerve—I ran out on them! I'm not fit to even shine their boots!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Brimber!"

Hedburne stood in the triangle of the opened tent-flap, then he ducked low and came in. He reached down and his fingers moved toward his revolver holster. Then the revolver was in his hand and he was offering it butt first to Brimber.

"What's that for?"

"Take it," Hedburne said. He was trying to be nonchalant, but it was a poor act. He was quivering. "Take it—and shoot me."

"Are you out of your mind?" Brimber demanded. He ignored the proffered weapon.

"I don't deserve to live—after what I've done," Hedburne said.

"It might be a good idea to tell me about it," Brimber said.

The Australian gulped hard, "I mixed those drinks for you this afternoon," he blurted then. "I used just enough drugs to make you sick."

"You tried to poison me?" Brimber said.

"Not exactly," Hedburne choked. "I threatened the orderly, forced him to let me take care of the mixing. He knew what I wanted to do. It's an old trick we have around here, drugging a drink to make a squadron leader weak and sick and miserable. But when I did it, I didn't know that you were going to lead us up on a combat flight. And when I did find out, it was too late. You had already started to feel the effects of the drug. And I didn't have the nerve to come out and admit it. I—"

There was a shout from outside, then another yell. An orderly was running toward the tent. There were sounds of excitement from the hangars and mess tent. Brimber moved to-

ward the opened flap, almost collided with the breathless orderly.

"Emergency call, sir!" the orderly panted. "Another big show up ahead. We just got the radio on it, and they need every available plane. The Fascists are making a surprise attack. It's on the hurry up, sir!"

Brimber ran out on the sand, clipped orders. Something in his voice made flyers and mechanics forget what had happened earlier in the day. There was something crisp and authoritative in his commands.

The Hurricanes roared into battle song, and pilots were running fast toward their planes. Brimber waved them in toward him. They hesitated. He cannoned the order, and they obeyed it, made a circle about him, as he zipped up his chamois jacket.

"I don't care what your personal opinion is," he said shortly, "but I do know this—we're on an emergency flight and you're going to follow orders. If there are any objections let me hear them now!"

Not a flyer opened his mouth.

"Very well," Brimber said. "Anyone who disobeys my orders from here on is classified as a sneak and a coward. I want that clearly understood. Climb into your buckets and follow into formation!"

**H**E WHIRLED, ran toward his Hurricane. He was climbing in when fingers tapped against his ankle, and as he turned, saw Hedburne. The big Australian was pleading with his eyes, trying to say something, but was unable to get words to his lips.

Brimber grinned down at him.

"Sure, Hedburne, you're in on this," he said. "And if they get me, you'll take over command. Now hurry and grab a plane and let's see some of that famous flying from 'way down under'!"

From eleven thousand feet the British unit speared down on the enemy. The Italians had been giving a lot of ground, had become fed up with the

idea, and were banking heavily on this surprise counter-attack. More than anything else they were depending on their aviation. Over forty Fascist planes had been harassing the British troops, strafing the trench lines, bombing communication roads and tanks and trucks that had been brought up close to the front.

But the lunge of seventeen Hurricanes made the Macchi fighters twist hard, climb up to meet the threat from above. Using the same maneuver that the other Italian unit had adapted in the afternoon fight, the Italians spread wide, trying to force the Hurricanes to rush into a cup of fire.

The British planes, however, were not taking the bait. Brimber had anticipated the Italian strategy, had ordered a feint, to be followed by a wide enveloping move. He was the first to break out on the offensive, then he was cutting in hard, glancing at his rear-view mirror and seeing that the other Hurricanes were following his orders to the closest limits of timing and spacing.

With the break in formation, it was a matter of every man for himself. Brimber went down low, nipped at two Bredas, and put one on fire. Then Macchis were rushing him, and he had to take the defensive. When he came out of his get-away loop, he carved into a roll-out, leaped down on a Macchi and sent Browning slugs through a Fascist skull.

He was up again then, finding another Macchi that had centered itself on Haines' tail. He poured a two-second burst, and the Italian went down, ignited. A wide grin came to Brimber's lips—a welcome to battle.

He was in a wide, outside loop, breaking out of it, crawling into a screw chandelle and trading fire with a brace of 12.7 Safats. He got the best of the transaction and the Macchi was spinning crazily, piloted by a blood-covered dead man.

Brimber dived again. He passed through a spray of Fascist fire, took

bullets in his wings, and heard the crackle as lead stabbed his greenhouse. But he managed to get through, and once again he was down there with the Bredas, pestering them with his eight streams of Browning.

He worked into an underside attack and pitched fire. A Breda tumbled down, aflame. He had started toward another dive bomber when three Macchis decided to make him regret that he was in the R.A.F. They converged on him from the left rear, closed in with Safats blazing. The Hurricane shuddered as it took more bullets through the fuselage, but Brimber was reining it in, then letting it slide back, on the inside of a hoop. Coming out of the circle, he pounced on the three Macchis. He put lead into the nearest Italian plane, and saw it break out in flame sickness. He started toward his next customer.

Then he saw he had entered a trap.

**T**WO more Macchis were coming down from perches where they had waited. Brimber was in the center of a square, from the four corners of which the Fascist planes were rushing at him. The law of percentages ruled that one of those planes must destroy him. He knew it, accepted it, and yet tried to work out of the death spot.

Safat-clatter tore through his eardrums, and he was falling hard on his right wing. Then something else pressed itself against his hearing—Hedburne's voice in his earphones.

"Keep rolling down! I'll take care of these Romans!"

Brimber continued the roll-out, slid through without taking bullets in motor, gas-tanks, or his own body. Then he was looking upward. Hedburne had taken his place in the trap!

But the big Australian had already disposed of one of the Macchis, and although hard put to it by the others, he was nevertheless giving them a slice of trouble. Brimber turned hard, roared upward, just as two Macchis lunged down on Hedburne.

Brimber made his eight guns send a stream of bad manners upward, interrupting the Macchis. They peeled off, and as one of them passed in front of his prop, Brimber threw more fire. The Macchi took on a costume of flame, went down blazing.

Hedburne was disposing of the other Macchi, and Brimber now leaped at the fourth Italian. But the Fascist plane was making a frantic runaway, westward, and Brimber could see that it was being joined by other Macchis. There weren't many of them. Fighter Thirty-seven had knocked out the Italian squadron, had utterly destroyed the force of Bredas, had sent most of the Macchis plunging down.

The outcome of the air battle seemed to have an encouraging effect on the British in the trenches. Looking down, with a wide-spread view of the ground situation, Brimber saw that the British had come out of their trenches and were making mincemeat of the Italian attempt at an offensive.

Again it touched Brimber's lips—the half smile. He set his Hurricane upward, clipped an order for formation. The Hurricanes formed a gradual V, made a triumphant sky parade as they headed toward home.

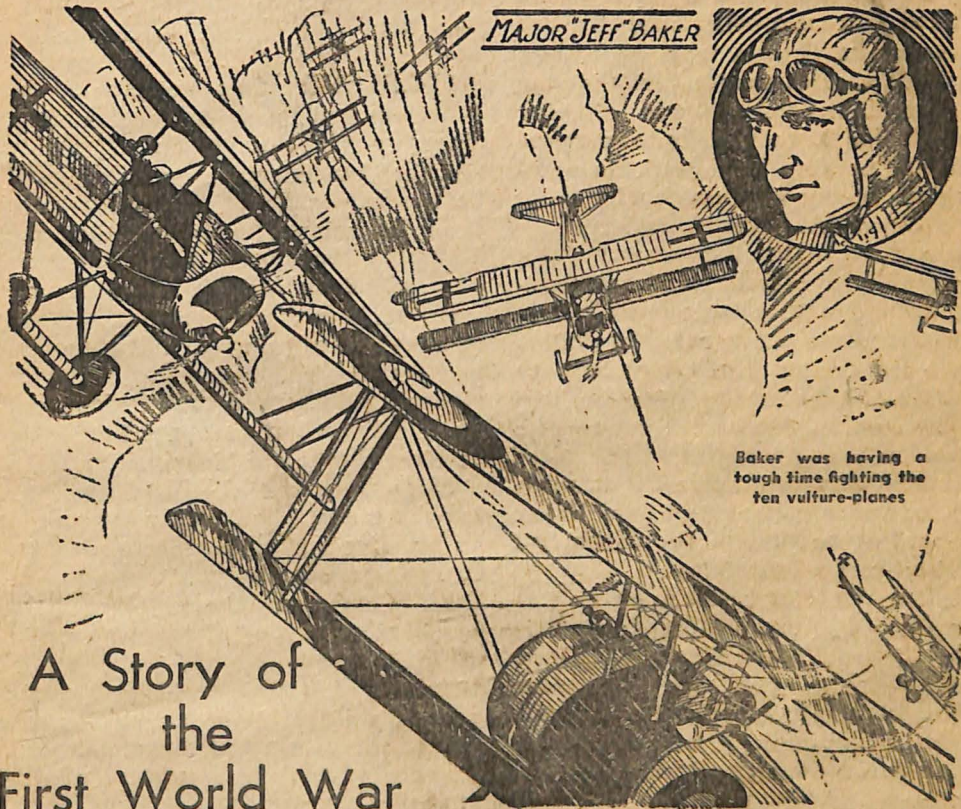
Brimber glanced to his left, looked at Haines, twenty yards away. The Canadian grinned at him, and there was more than admiration in that grin. There was something fine and deep, that only a warrior can bestow on another fighting man.

Then Brimber glanced to his right, and he was looking at Hedburne. He passed the grin on to the Australian, and Hedburne flashed it right back at him.

"We'll drink on this when we get back, lads," Brimber said into the speaking tube. "And I think I'd like a gin and lime and soda. Will you mix one for me, Hedburne?"

"I'll do that, sir," the Australian's voice came back. "And it'll be the best gin and lime and soda that ever was mixed!"

While Combing the Skies for an Air Coward, Jeff Baker Plummets With Flaming Guns into an Air Struggle to Rescue a Determined Fledgling!



A Story of  
the  
First World War

# Ground Ace

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

*Author of "Folker Fodder," "Flying Whiskers," etc.*

**M**AJOR JEFF BAKER, hard-hitting C.O. of the Twenty-sixth Pursuits, pursed his lips in a gesture of concentrated thought and squinted down over the leading edge of the Camel's left wing.

Some two thousand feet below, and about a half a mile ahead, a lone Ger-

man "Rumpty" two-seater was flying slow figure eights through the air. The maneuver had all the earmarks of the plane's occupants carrying out a routine gunnery observation job, but to a sky veteran of Baker's experience those capers didn't mean a damn thing.

When Baker first joined the U.S.



air force in France, he was just a fledgling who figured it was his duty to knock the German air force for a row of flat spins, and to do it single handed. But after being clipped a few times he had begun to learn things. And his studies taught him that the Rumpty down there was coasting around for a very definite purpose that had nothing to do with the spotting of enemy artillery shells plopping down into Allied territory.

Baker knew that the Rumpty was a decoy ship; a nice hunk of bait floating around with a wide open invitation for some Yank pilot to breeze down for a bite. But somewhere up in the cloud-dotted sky a brace or two of German Fokkers were set to pile down on the thoughtless Yank pilot and blast him out of this world. Sure, it was the war-old set-up and Baker realized it as though the Huns had written him a letter.

Yet at the same time the set-up was somehow a little different; that is from Baker's personal angle. There were Fokkers somewhere up in those clouds, but although he couldn't see them he was positive that one was a green and white striped job. And sitting snugly in the pit was a flat-faced, bull-necked louse known as Baron von Treummer. And the baron was what made the set-up different to Baker.

In the first place he didn't like the guy. In the second place he hated von Treummer's guts for his ruthless "sport" of shooting hell out of poor devils with jammed guns or conked engines. And in the third place, he'd been after the baron's hide for months. And in the fourth place the war would never be a success to him, regardless of who won, until the baron had been shot out of circulation; air circulation to be exact.

Baker squinted a bit and then made up his mind.

"Huts!" he grunted, and nosed the Camel over the hump and down into a screaming power dive. "This seems

to be the only way to get within Vickers shot of that lug, so here goes. If he hasn't brought more than six of his rats along with him it'll be a fifty-fifty bet."

**N**ODDING for emphasis he hunched forward over the stick, lined up the Rumpty in his sights and then waited, muscles tensed, until he was within range. A few minutes later he relaxed, knowing that the Rumpty's occupants had had their eyes glued on him all the time and now that they'd served as bait damned if they were going to hang around and get their pants shot off. And with lightning-like speed they lighted out for the *Vaterland* and left the rest up to Herr Baron and his boy friends.

No sooner did the Rumpty start traveling east than Baker eased out of his dive and then went nosing up in a wing screaming power zoom. Expecting it, he saw the six blurred silhouettes come popping down out of a cloud. And with the waiting vultures he saw the green and white striped ship that was riding the tail end of the dive-attack formation. His lips curled back in a grimace of disgust.

"Let the hired help do the dirty work, eh, von Treummer?" he grated. "And then you slam in to lick up all the gravy. Okay, just try and do it!"

The German pilots didn't hear his accusing words but that was their original idea anyway, so down they plummeted like six tons of jetting flames spewing death. Then a yammering symphony of machine-gun fire broke out in the heavens.

Now it would be very simple to say that Baker hurled his Camel this way and that, darted out from under deadly bursts of Spandau bullets, and nailed those bloodthirsty vultures to the last man. But the trouble is that it would only be two-thirds correct.

He did heave his Camel all over the sky, and he did rip out from under

several showers of hot lead that would have pinned him to a cloud if they'd struck home. And those Germans never remained in one place long enough for Baker to get a good burst in.

Those six Fokker pilots were veterans and they knew the tricks of the trade; and what's more they were able to prove it. They covered Baker like a blanket with their shots, and raked his ship mercilessly. They belted him here and they belted him there. If Baker had been one of those blow-me-down heroes he would have been sent spinning to earth in a flaming ship. But the Yank C.O. had a lot of common sense, and he was pretty fond of life, too. So when he saw his chance, he faked a quick head-on attack at one of the German Fokkers and then lighted out hell-bent for the American side of the lines when the German pilot veered to the side and left a gaping hole in the ring they'd formed about him.

Thirty minutes later Baker sat his bullet-riddled ship down on Twenty-six's field. His head was full of unpleasant thoughts, the main one being that this was attempt number umpty-ump to smack the baron, and like all the others it had flopped. When he legged from the ship the flight sergeant who had helped him swing around on the line took a look at the Camel and gulped.

"Gosh, see some action, sir?" the sergeant exclaimed.

"Me?" Baker grunted. "Hell, no! Six Fokker pilots saw it. I didn't have time."

The sergeant grinned, then snapped his fingers as he thought of something.

"Oh, yes, sir," he said. "I almost forgot. There's a fledgling who reported while you were gone. He's in the squadron office waiting."

"Let him wait," Baker muttered, and headed for the mess. "There's something I need more right now than seeing a glory-bound fledgling."

Three cognacs later, and his anger pushed down half a degree, Baker stalked over to the squadron office and shouldered inside. He took a look at what stood up and saluted; and his chin dropped a bit. The fledgling wore the uniform of a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Corps, but when Baker studied his face he saw a man who was forty years old if he was a day.

"You just up from Pau Pool?" Baker finally asked.

"Yes, sir," came the crisp reply. "Second Lieutenant Plummer. Here are my papers, sir."

Baker took them and gave them a quick once-over and then concentrated on a letter addressed to him. It was from Colonel Standers, C.O. of the Pau Pool. It read:

Dear Baker:

You sent in a request for a replacement pilot, and so here is is. 2nd Lt. Henry Plummer. Now don't start swearing in your drink at me just because he isn't what you asked for. His papers list his age as twenty-nine, and who am I to call a man a liar? Also, if he should crack up every ship you have, don't blame me either. We are fresh out of replacement pilots here at Pau, and Plummer is all that I have left. And frankly, he's been here so long I sort of got tired of his face.

Anyway, he can fly because I actually saw him take off and land. And while he was in the air I heard his guns, so at least he must know how to press the trigger trips. And after all, if he is fifty, like he looks, you've got to hand it to the old guy for being willing to take his chances the same as the young heroes like you and me.

And how about that fifty francs you owe me? Hoping you won't get smacked down until its paid, I am,

As per,

Colonel Standers.

Baker read the letter through twice, and then took another look at what the fates of war had put under his wing.

"So you're twenty-nine, Plummer?" he presently asked.

The fledgling nodded.

"Yes, sir. Be thirty next month."

"Yeah?" Baker echoed, and fixed him with a steady, calculating eye.

"Listen, Plummer, all we care about in this outfit is guys who can fly and shoot. Liars we don't like. How old are you?"

The lieutenant hesitated. Then his cheeks whitened slightly just under the eyes and his jaw came out a bit in stubborn defiance.

"Fort-one, sir," he said. "And I suppose that means I go right back?"

"And suppose I say yes?" Baker asked. "Then what?"

The fledgling stepped up smartly to the desk, placed both hands on it palms down and leaned forward confidentially. His voice was like ice cracking on a cold moonlit night.

"You've got the rep of a fighter, Major Baker," Plummer said, "so I'll give it to you straight. Send me back because of my age and I'll start a one-man war of my own that'll hit page one of every newspaper in the States. When we entered the war I damn near wore both feet off walking from one recruiting office to the next, and I always got turned down. Then I tried the Air Corps and the medicoes were so rushed that day they missed me completely and I was packed off to ground school without any questions being asked."

**T**HE man paused a second and licked his dry lips.

"That was perfect," he continued presently. "I was in the army, in the Air Corps, of all things! Then, to offset my good fortune in getting into the war, bad luck started catching up with me. The nearer I got to France and the Front the more my C.O.s figured a plane was no place for my age. I enlisted thirteen months ago! That's how long I've been held at this camp and that camp. But when your call came through, Colonel Standers had to send me because I've passed all my tests, and I was the only one left on the list. And here I am. And if you send me back I'll start my own war. What do you say, sir? Do I stick?"

Baker thought it over carefully be-

fore replying. He liked straight from the shoulder talk, and if a man could fly and do his share of Hun shooting he didn't give a dam if he was a hundred years old and had false teeth. Still an all, against Fokker pilots like von Treummer and his brood you had to be quick-moving and fast thinking. And if Plummer should get his on his first trip or so over it would make Baker feel as though he were...

But he shrugged away the rest of the thought and nodded.

"You get your chance, Plummer," he snapped. "If you shape up okay, you stay. If not, then you go back, one-man war or not. Tell the flight-sergeant to assign you a ship and take it up for a test. I'll lead you over in an hour. That's all."

"That's plenty for me, sir," Plummer said grinning. "And thanks."

"Never mind the thanks until you show me something," Baker grunted. "Then that'll..."

He stopped short because the air outside was suddenly filled with a sound resembling a piano falling down from heaven. In nothing flat he leaped around the desk and tore out of the door and onto the field. It wasn't a piano falling down, but a green and white striped Fokker roaring down with its Mercedes blasting full out.

Baker had no sooner spotted it than the ship was pulling out of its power dive and heading skyward again. The C.O. saw a colored message streamer was flip-flapping this way and that in the prop wash. A running mechanic snared it in a pretty shoestring catch and brought it back to the tarmac. In the weighted pocket was a note addressed to Baker. He read it and his eyes shot sparks and the blood pounded against his temples.

My Dear Major Baker:

Why do you always run away? Is it true you really are afraid to fight? I am most certainly beginning to suspect so.

However, I'll give you just one more

chance. At ten o'clock, an hour from now, I'll be alone at eight thousand feet over Issy waiting for you. If you don't show up I'll understand and put in a request that my *Staffel* be transferred to some other section of the Front where fighters are needed.

Baron von Treummer.

It took Baker five seconds to read the letter and five minutes to stop cursing and cool off enough to issue orders to the flight-sergeant.

"Have my ship ready in an hour, and I mean ready!" he rasped.

The sergeant grinned knowingly.

"Leave it to me, sir," he soothed. "I guess we'll have Fokker meat for supper, huh, sir?"

**B**AKER didn't reply. He was too busy thinking of what was going to happen in an hour. He knew perfectly well that von Treummer had no idea of meeting him alone in a man-to-man scrap. The German would have plenty of his hired help along in case things went against him. And after his recent venture Baker knew that his chances of knocking off enough of von Treummer's pilots to get at the baron himself were very, very slim.

"And so it's up to me to pull a trick or two, myself," he spoke the thought aloud. "Hey, Flight-sergeant!"

The non-com was halfway down the tarmac by then. He spun around and came back on the run.

"Yes, sir?" he panted. Then as though the words just sort of fell out of his mouth, "You've changed your mind, sir?"

Baker was too busy with his thoughts to take stock of the question and call the turn. He nodded absently.

"Yeah," he said. "I'm not taking up a full load. Put only fifty rounds in each belt, and put in only half a tank of gas. No, better make it three-quarters, I guess. Remove all spare ammo links, and take off the Cooper bomb racks, too."

The sergeant blinked, puzzled at the C.O.'s unusual request. It didn't make sense to him.

"Yes, sir," he finally said. "You figure that a hundred rounds is enough?"

"You got the order, didn't you?" Baker growled. "Snap into it!"

The non-com snapped into it, and Baker strode to the squadron office to put things in order just in case it might become necessary for Wing to send a new C.O. to Twenty-six. That business done with he downed two-fingers of cognac for luck and then it was time to hit the air.

It took him almost forty-five minutes to coax and curse the Camel up to twenty thousand feet. The ship's ordinary top ceiling was eighteen thousand, but with its war load reduced by over fifty percent the plane managed to stagger skyward an extra two thousand feet and hold that level. When he finally flattened out, Baker grinned in grim satisfaction and gently eased the ship around toward the northeast and the section of air over Issy about twenty-five miles distant.

Exactly at ten o'clock he was directly above Issy and mushing along just under a thin layer of cloud scud. Flying automatically he stuck his head over the side and peered down. For a moment or so he saw nothing but floating islands of cloud haze and the brownish blur that was the ground below. And then suddenly he spotted them!

Ten Fokkers were hugging one of those cloud islands at about ten or eleven thousand feet. He stared hard at them and then grunted aloud. Not one of the ten ships was green and white striped!

"The dirty louse!" he grated aloud. "Sent the hired help to do it, instead, eh? Why you—"

He didn't finish the rest, for at that moment he suddenly realized that he was all wrong. An eleventh pair of wings had flashed in the sunlight about three thousand feet below the

other Fokkers. And in the next moment Baker saw its green and white stripes. His original plan of coming over at high altitude and dropping down on the unsuspecting Baron floating around over a decoy ship was out, of course. Von Treummer, himself, was acting as the decoy. But that still made things very satisfactory as far as Baker was concerned.

"A nice power dive right through those bums of yours," he muttered his plan aloud, "and then it'll be just you and me before they wake up to what's happened!"

**F**ITTING action to the words, he made a quick check of his guns and then eased the Camel's nose over the hump and let it drop. Engine wide open, the trim Camel hurtled down like a thunderbolt on a holiday. High altitude hammered at Baker's ear-drums and tried to push the walls of his lungs up against his backbone. For a few seconds his eyes spun around dizzily in their sockets and everything in front of him was just one great ocean of swirling milk.

Then his vision suddenly cleared and he saw the ten Fokkers not much more than spitting distance below. One of them was centered in his sights and he was tempted to slam the trigger trips forward and give Satan another coal shoveling recruit. But he killed the urge, sighing. The yammer of his guns would wake up the other nine, but more important it would certainly let von Treummer down below know that all was not as it should be upstairs. And of course the German would light out for home before Baker could do anything to stop him.

Thinking thusly, he held his fire and veered a shade to the right of the Fokker in his sights. Like a rifle bullet zipping through a flock of ducks, Baker's Camel went zooming through that formation of ten Fokkers. Perhaps one or two of the Germans saw him go down by them, but

it is more likely that they thought the blur a falling meteor rather than a diving American ship. At any rate they had no time to shoot. In fact, before a single thumb could be slid up to the trigger trips Baker was a thousand feet below and picking up even more speed.

Face granite frozen, eyes narrowed and glittering, he touched left rudder just a hair until the green and white ship was directly in his sights. Another five seconds more and he would open fire. Another five seconds and Baron von Treummer would wake up and ask the Devil what had happened. Another five seconds and—

But even five seconds can be a long space of time, particularly when a lot of things are taking place such as did in war-torn French skies.

Just as Baker was starting to jab his thumbs forward against the trigger trips, he yanked them down and cursed savagely. A blurred gob of something had suddenly appeared in the air between his spinning prop and the top wings of the green-and-white striped Fokker. A gob of something that was blurred. And then Baker saw the outline of an American plane. In fact, he saw more than that.

He recognized that it was a Camel and that the fuselage markings were those of his own squadron! The plane was lumbering down on the Fokker with all the grace of a freight train. Its guns spat jetting flame and through rage-filmed eyes Baker saw the tracers miss the Fokker by a good twenty yards. That tipped over the apple cart. In a flash Baron von Treummer immediately woke up, and woke up fast. And by now his ten boy friends upstairs had removed every trace of sleep seeds.

In nothing flat a swarm of gun snarling metal wasps were on top of Baker and all around him. Cursing and shouting at the top of his lungs he charged blindly at one Fokker and let a short burst rip out from one of his guns.

The few shots were sufficient, for the German pilot's head snapped forward as though invisible hands had smacked him with a baseball bat, and the Fokker dropped by the nose and went plummeting down into oblivion.

"One!" Baker roared.

But there was no joy in his cry. The Fokker had not been one with green and white stripes. As a matter of fact, von Treummer's ship was out at the rim of the Fokker circle, and as Baker snapped his eyes that way he saw the German ace whip around in a dime turn and go tearing in at the floundering Camel that had spoiled the C.O.s perfect chance to finish his hated enemy once and for all.

AND in that same instant Baker saw the pilot in the pit of the American ship. Realization hit him like a sharp slap in the face and his smoldering anger boiled over.

"Plummer!" he howled. "Damn you, where in tarnation did you come from?"

He hadn't even thought about the replacement since receiving von Treummer's challenge. But seeing the fledgling striving hopelessly to get out from under the German's deadly charge caused Baker to remember that he had told Plummer that he'd lead him over. Of course he'd forgotten to call the patrol off after von Treummer's note arrived. Anyhow, the darn fool fledgling had obviously followed him over. Being green he had naturally fallen for the decoy ship bait, and so now he was very close to making his first and last flight in any war.

Still cursing, but his heart jammed up in his throat, Baker slammed his ship around in a wing screaming split arc turn and went barging recklessly past two Fokker pilots who were trying to "box" him for a cold meat shot. As he was executing that maneuver, a white hot spear of flame zipped across the top of his shoulder, but he hardly felt the pain.

Plummer wasn't even half a pilot. True, he was trying his utmost to stave off death in the form of von Treummer's fire spitting Fokker, but he just didn't have what it takes. The German beat him to the jump at every turn and was slowly closing in for a certain kill. Another few seconds and it would be all over for the brave but helpless old man.

But before those few seconds passed Baker had cut across the sky and was feverishly jamming his trigger trips forward. But his shots fell short of the green-and-white striped plane. If von Treummer had any guts at all he would have finished his cold meat kill and then wheeled to meet the attack. But he was von Treummer and the instant Baker's guns crackled in his ears the German hauled all the way back on the stick and went wing screaming up toward safe air.

Wild anger urged Baker to go on up after the German coward and pin him to a morning cloud, but better judgment told him that it was his job to ride cover the floundering Plummer and try to herd the fledgling back over on the American side of the lines. But even as he tore in alongside of the other Camel and waved savagely for Plummer to dive for the airdrome two Fokkers came ripping in from the opposite side and Baker saw slivers fly off the center section struts in front of Plummer's white-strained face.

"Dive, dive you damn fool!" Baker bellowed. "Don't just sit there and let them kill you!"

Plummer didn't hear the commanding words, but even if he had it probably wouldn't have done any good. The old fellow had a bad case of first patrol jitters and all he seemed able to do was to side slip first one way and then the other. Groaning aloud Baker heeled over on his wing and tore into a Fokker pilot trying to sneak up underneath Plummer. But that's all the German did.

He just tried, and then suddenly a load of made-in-the-U.S.A. slugs slapped him in the face and he was a dead man. And as though the Grim Reaper, himself, had hold of that Fokker's controls the ship spun around and went crashing nose first into another Fokker before its pilot could veer out to the side. A great sheet of flame blotted out the mess of tangled wings, and for a moment the ball of fire seemed to hover in mid-air before it slithered off and down.

**B**AKER, however, didn't watch it go down. The mid-air crash was a break he hadn't even dared pray for. The flames made the remaining Fokkers veer off and, before they could come swinging back in again, Baker had his wing tips almost touching those of Plummer's plane. He was gesticulating wildly toward the west and down.

For what seemed almost an eternity the fledgling did nothing but stare white-faced across the air space at his commanding officer. Then suddenly his brain seemed to snap into action. Plummer nodded, and an instant later he was roaring westward in a wing screaming power dive.

Choking out a prayer of relief Baker hesitated just long enough to trigger a short burst at a Fokker, swing around to drop on his tail, and then he too went hell-for-leather westward.

Body braced, he waited for the yammer of fire that was bound to come, and he breathed a fervent prayer that Plummer had a big enough lead over the Fokkers. But no bullets whistled past, and when he twisted around in his seat he saw the reason. The Fokkers had other things to think about.

Six British S.E.5s had suddenly appeared out of nowhere, and right now they were chasing the Germans way the hell and gone east. Turning front, Baker heaved a sigh and stared at Plummer still tearing earthward in a power dive.

"A break for you, Plummer," he grunted. "I'd hate like hell to bet on your chances if those six British planes hadn't shown up. Nor—"

He never finished the rest, for at that moment sudden death came screaming down from above and a row of tiny holes appeared in the top center section. For a split second his heart froze in his chest, then he snapped himself into action and hurled the Camel over and down in a wild half roll.

Pulling out of it he yanked the nose skyward again and turned to look. What he saw brought a bellow of surprise to his lips. A green-and-white striped Fokker was cutting down at him, both guns blazing.

"You, eh?" Baker roared. "Sneaked back for a cold meat shot, huh? Well, that makes you out of luck, louse!"

No sooner had the words left his lips than Baker kicked his Camel over on wing and faked a split arc turn under the diving German. Instead, he cut back and up just as von Treummer tried to pull out of his dive and go racing eastward. But it was right there that the German ace made his big mistake.

With the speed he had, he should have carried on down into the clear. But he elected to run for it instead, and in nothing flat Baker was on top of him. For about ten seconds the German tried frantically to break away, and then just as Baker was jabbing the trigger trips forward the German gave up. Both hands went over his head in a token of complete surrender. Baker cursed and reluctantly pulled his thumbs off the trips.

"You louse!" he grated. "Wouldn't fight it out, eh? You just had to quit like the yellow dog you are."

Nodding for emphasis, he flew close to the German and pointed straight west and then dropped into top cover position. Meek as a mouse the German ace signaled that he understood and then sent his Fokker coasting around and down toward the Ameri-

can side of the lines. Twenty minutes later Baker herded the man down onto Twenty-six's tarmac. Plummer had landed and stood with the rest of the squadron on the tarmac, but no sooner had Baker touched his wheels than they all came running out.

**C**LIMBING quickly to the ground Baker raced over to the German and took a good look at the prisoner. He liked the real thing less than he did the man's pictures. Without saying a word he turned from von Treummer and nodded at the flight-sergeant.

"Take charge of the prisoner, Sergeant," he ordered. "I'll talk with him later. Plummer! Come over to the squadron office with me right now!"

Without waiting for the fledgling, Baker walked over to the squadron office. He hated like blazes to do what he had to do next, but there was no alternative. Plummer just wasn't a Front pilot. Perhaps it was his age, and perhaps it wasn't, but that didn't matter. The main thing was that Plummer was the luckiest man in France to have come through the last two hours in one piece, and it would be a little short of murder to permit the man to take any more chances. And so, Plummer would have to go back to Pau.

However, before Baker could speak, once they were in the squadron office, the fledgling beat him to it. His face was drawn and haggard, and heart-aching bitterness was in his eyes.

"I know what you want me for, Major," he said in a dull voice. "Never mind saying it. I—well, I guess a combat plane isn't the place for me. But, I want to thank you for saving my life, sir, because you sure did."

Baker took the extended hand, feeling like an executioner.

"Forget it, Plummer," he said. "All in a days work. But I'm damn sorry it had to turn out like this. Still you had the guts to try, and that means a lot. You can stick around a couple

of days if you want. You don't have to go right back to Pau."

The older man shook his head.

"No," he said sadly. "I've got to go back sometime, so the sooner I do it, the sooner it'll be over."

As Baker stood there wanting to say something but not knowing what to say, the fledgling heaved a long sigh, saluted silently and retreated out the door. When it closed behind him, Baker cursed softly and sat down at the desk. His movement was punctuated by the jangling of the field phone on the desk. Pulling it over he took off the receiver and uttered a weary "hello." Then two split seconds he sat bolt upright in his chair.

"What, Colonel?" he shouted into the transmitter. "Say that again! Yeah? Well, I'll be damned! It's—"

The last froze on Baker's tongue because at that moment things happened, and happened fast! The squadron office door flew open and Baron von Treummer came leaping inside. In his upraised hand was a Yank servive automatic. Almost hypnotized Baker just sat there and watched the gun swish down through the air. It swished straight down on his head and he went out like a light. . . .

When he woke up he was flat on the floor minus his uniform. Beside him was a pile of German clothes. Cursing, he struggled up on his feet, hung onto the desk for a moment until his head cleared, and then went reeling through the door.

The exact instant he stumbled out into the open a Camel—his own Camel—shot away from the tarmac line and went ripping out onto the field. And hunched forward over the stick in the pit was Baron von Treummer! Baker had one good look at the thin-lipped, hatchet-shaped face; but that one look was all he needed. Running swiftly, he went bounding over to the tarmac line.

"Flight!" he roared. "Grab a prop, and—"



The rest of his order was drowned out by the roar of a second Camel streaking out onto the field. Baker saw Plummer in the pit and groaned aloud. Plummer, the damn fool, was just going to get himself killed trying to be a hero. He wouldn't stand a chance of being able to stop von Treummer even if he succeeded in catching up to him. Why, Plummer would—

Baker cut the thought short and stared goggle-eyed at the fledgling's plane. Plummer had the tail up but instead of heading straight out across the field he was tearing around in a half circle. And then it happened in a flash!

Too late von Treummer saw what was up, and Plummer went slamming into him just as the Camel's wheels were clearing the ground. Wings locked and crumpled like so much paper, and spinning props cut through longerons and spars like a hot knife goes through soft butter. Dirt and dust spouted high into the air and the two ships went cartwheeling across the ground to finally slither to a full stop.

"The damn fool!" Baker swore, and went pounding out onto the field. "He's a fool, but has he got guts!"

One hour later he sat beside Second-lieutenant Plummer in the hospital shack. The medico had set both broken legs in casts and had patched up the fledgling in half a dozen different places. Presently, Plummer opened his eyes, blinked a couple of times and then recognized Baker.

"Did—did I stop him, sir?" he whispered weakly.

Baker nodded and grinned.

"I'll say you did!" he approved. "You stopped him for good. Your prop almost cut his head off. But did you mean to hit him? And how did you happen to be there?"

The fledgling hesitated, then smiled slowly.

"I was going to start that one-man war I spoke about," he said. "I mean

I suddenly decided to swipe a ship and have at least one more try. The mechanics weren't around, and— Well, and then I saw von Treummer start off in your ship. I saw his face, so the uniform he wore didn't fool me. And just about then the flight-sergeant came running out of the guardhouse, and there was blood on his face."

As Plummer paused, Baker leaned forward.

"But did you really mean to ram him?" he pressed.

"Yes, sir," Plummer said, nodding. Then after a short pause, "When I started out I had ideas of fighting him in the air, but I decided there was too much risk of my losing him. And—well, he belonged on this side of the lines, so I made sure and rammed him. And say, Major?"

"What, Plummer?" Baker asked.

"Well," the fledgling whispered, and stared at the ceiling. "Well, his wheels were clear when I hit him. I mean, he was in the air. I know you forced him down, sir, but— Well, you've a lot of Huns to your credit. What I'm getting at is—well, do you think I could have just that one? His ship was off the ground, so I really did bring him down. The war's over for me, and it would be something to be able to say I nailed one of them at least. You get the idea, sir?"

"Perfectly." Baker grinned. "And he's your Hun, Plummer. I'll see that you get full credit for bringing him down. Of course, I'll have to lie about the time in my report, but don't worry, it'll get by."

"Time, sir?" Plummer frowned. "What's that got to do with it? Why will you have to lie about the time?"

Baker chuckled and stood up.

"To make it legal, I guess, Plummer," he said. "You brought down your Hun—as you call it—about ten minutes *after* the war was all over. The armistice was signed this morning at eleven o'clock—*before* that louse tried to escape!"

# BOOK REVIEW

GLOSSARY OF AERONAUTICAL TERMS. By Douglas H. Nelson. Chemical Publishing Company, Inc. Brooklyn, N. Y. 1941. \$1.50.

From time to time we have received numerous requests for information on books containing complete and detailed information on aeronautical terms. In the past it has been rather difficult to secure a good, reasonably priced glossary of these words.

Now, however, with the publication of Doug Nelson's little book, we have something that takes you from Abney Level to Zooming, and offers a lot of little-known information about some more common English words that have a peculiar meaning in the aircraft industry. For instance, you'll learn that an airplane Acorn has nothing to do with great oaks. A Bunt has nothing to do with baseball; and then there's the Sea Breeze. But you'll find all explained in this up-to-the-minute little volume.

An intriguing and effective part of this book is the series of charts explaining many of the important factors in aeronautics, and this might well serve as supplementary reading for anyone interested in airplanes from the kiwi to the transport and pursuit ship pilot.

For those of you that like to do your flying from the ground with your head slung back on your neck—in other words you terra firma observers, there is an interesting group of silhouettes showing the important details of German and Italian planes from all angles.

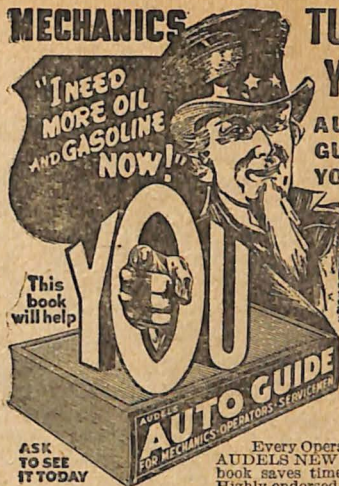
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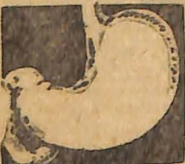
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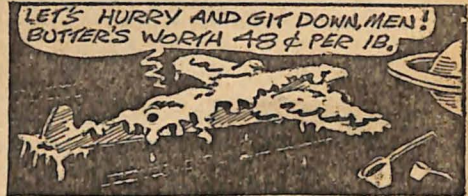
## TARMAC TALK

(Continued from page 10)

R.A.F. As the Boeing climbs toward the top of the world, the Boeing crew feel a tingling sensation just below the knees and ankles. At 20,000 feet, their stomachs ache for awhile. If any of them have a badly filled tooth, it will start aching at a height of 25,000 feet.

At 30,000 white frost a quarter of an inch thick, forms on the Astro hatch. The front perspex windows have to be opened at that height, for the windows get opaque. We doubt that they take ice cream along for lunch.

An R.A.F. officer, Flight-Lieut. Adams is supposed to be the bloke who has been closer to Heaven than any other man. In 1937 he went up in a kite to 53,937 feet. Now an Italian claims to have bettered that mark but we are inclined to doubt the



antipasto aviator. If he had said that he had gone that far along the ground in reverse, we would never contradict him.

However, stratosphere flying is no longer an adventure writer's dream. It has come to pass and there will be a day when some Astral corporation will start suing us for damages done to the big dipper or the ring around Saturn, and a stratosphere crate will get back to earth dripping butter churned up in the milky way. Who knows?

### No "Yellow Peril"

Several years ago, the late Floyd Gibbons wrote a story about the invasion of the Western Hemisphere and he called it "The Red Napoleon." The sinister conqueror, however, was not a Red. He was supposed to have been a descendant of Genghis Khan, and his epidermis was yellow. The scourge of the world today is Adolph Hitler and the yellow race are a thousand years or more away from the domination of the Universe.

China has been stalemating a Jap invader for many years and the sons of Confucius have done it without an air force of any significance. Japan's air force has never been able to blitz the vast expanse of territory that is China. The yellow races are fighting each other and Japan is part of Hitler's axis.

The Japanese air force? It is a woefully weak thing when you analyze it. Nippon depends on America and England for vital aeronautical equipment and at present her relations with the two great democracies are badly strained.

Japan builds bombers almost exclusively, forgetting the lesson offered by the battle of Britain and seemingly oblivious to the fact that raiding bombers must be escorted

[Turn to page 104]

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It is seldom that anyone becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their background and their confidence as nothing else could.

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by fighters or risk complete annihilation. Japan is short of machine tools, her aviation engineering industry is pitifully inadequate and pilot training has been paced by aircraft that is available.

Air power is absolutely essential to an invading army and it must be superior in numbers to the aircraft possessed by the country invaded. Even then, the aggressor is at a disadvantage and cannot be too sure of success. Look at Goering's Luftwaffe! It was not powerful enough to bring England to her knees.

Forget about the Jap boogie men, gents. Concentrate on the Jap beetle. There is no "Yellow Peril" anymore.

## Our Mailbag

Gilbert Magee of 196 Neches St., Beaumont, Texas, sends us off to the races with this effort and it is "all out" for us. Gilbert gives:

I have been reading SKY FIGHTERS for a long time, and I have enjoyed every one I have read. I would like to join your club, so please enroll me. And please put my name in Mail Buddies. I have just finished reading your November issue. I liked the EAGLE SQUADRON story, so try to put some more in like it.

Thanks for the plug for the old skipper and we will be glad to sign you up. Comes another nice letter, my lanceman tells me with incredulity written all over his pan. Let's look.

Bob Decker, 116 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., rushes this ducky initialed opus to the office. But he is all man as you fugitives from a horse and buggy will see:

A lady gave me SKY FIGHTERS to read, and I liked it so much I decided to start buying it. The book she gave me was the March, 1940, issue. I hope to be a constant reader from now on. Will you please list my name and address in the Mail Buddies column? I would like to get in contact with some fellow, so that I can exchange ideas. I'm now working on an invention which I hope succeeds.

That woman was a lady, Bob. Up to now we wonder if we are on the wrong tarmac as not one insult has come out of the bag. We hope you revolutionize something in the world with your invention and don't give up. Edison had some pretty dark days before he saw the light.

This contribution from Harold Burgess of 138 Elmwood Ave., Norwood, Pa., is a long one and we were tempted for the nonce to run it serially like a soap opera. But we've got room for Harold. Just pay attention to this masterpiece of alleged flattery:

I, too, like your magazine, but even more than that, I like your department. Now don't get excited, I know you're not used to praise, but whenever I inspect a new air magazine I read the departments first. As soon as I read yours I was filled with admiration for you, and I dug in my records of famous men to find out more about you, I'm afraid that you won't remember this because Pershing said that you had suffered from amnesia, but among the all revealing records I personally saw that General Pershing had given you all the highest medals for shooting down six balloons, a squadron of Fokker Grikes and strafing the enemy thus turning a disastrous defeat for the Allies into a glorious victory. (Marshal Petain actually kissed you on each cheek.)

Now back to the magazine. Don't let all these lit-

the kids persuade you to print only World War II stories. They're not aware of the true significance of the first war. I don't give a hoot about the inhuman unfailing modern planes, just give me a story of iron pilots and moth-eaten planes and I'll be happy.

I like this mag so much that I'm going to subscribe to it, but please don't clutter it up with World War II stories. Why, they even have magazines just for this war and nearly every story in all the other mags is of this war. Please don't let the heroes of yesterday be forgotten.

When I look in other departments of the mags, I see the fellows begging for World War I stories, please let this be the mag to answer this plea. You once were a great ace, you know how memorable those days were, so don't let these young upstarts make you print stories of this war.

Now don't take notice of these guys who say you're nuts, they're just jealous of your fame.

How about an English, French, German dictionary in your mag?

Our humblest apologies, Harold. At first we thought you were ribbing us as there are not many people who believe we even lived during the last guerre. For those skeptics, we have got up a cigar box full of locks of our gray hair and they are all tied up with red, white, and blue ribbon. The supply is limited so send in your order, all those of you who doubt everything.

You should have seen Petain then, Harold. He had moxie then and wouldn't touch a drink of Vichy. General Pershing forgot all that we did but he was a busy man. . . .

We will try and keep the old heroes in the public eye even though they will be as painful as motes to the young whipper-snappers.

From 317 Miller St., Bangor, Pa., we have Wilfred Crouch, a sixteen year-old who understands us. Wilfred claims he had his tongue out of his cheek when he penned this tasty dish:

I just got done reading your talk in the September issue, and I agree 100% with Don Roth. He's one guy with somebody home upstairs.

Some of the guy's motors must not be hitting on all of their cylinders, the way they go around griping.

All your stories are O.K., but that BOMBER STATION. It was all reet!

I am a comparatively new reader as I have wasted my time hunting up and reading other mags, but now I've found you.

Please enroll me as a member of the Airmen of America and also list my name in Mail Buddies.

You have been enrolled with record speed, Wilfred. The little goon who writes stories like BOMBER STATION, and who eats more tobacco than parasites, was worried for a minute though. He was not sure if you said his story was "all reet" or "all reek." He is still not sure. But he feels all right now and has run out to buy some more two-for-a-nickel factory scraps. Did we forget to thank you, Wilfred? Come often.

Clear the runway for Bob Jennings. He flew all the way from Route 1, Aurora, Missouri, and has to be shown the beam. Bob dropped this pamphlet and it is not propaganda but deserves a proper gander:

I've been reading SKY FIGHTERS for quite some time, and I enjoy it very much.

[Turn page]



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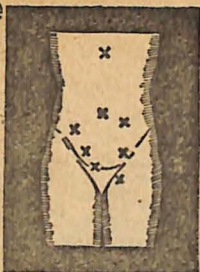
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**ANDY LOTSHAW**

Dept. K, 230 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago

Money back if not satisfied!

I have just finished your September issue. I thought **WINGS OVER KU LONG-SU** was the best although **WRONG WAY MULLIGAN** was pretty good.

Since we are in a modern war, I think modern war stories are more proper for novels. First World War stories are all right for short stories, though.

Sometimes we have to print anything. A smart bosco who corns his way about the pool-rooms of Freedom, Pa., starts off by addressing us as "Dear Drip." Bucky Mauk is his name and his address is 685 4th Ave., Freedom, Pa. But he calms down and is satisfied to leave this thought behind him:

I have been reading your magazine for some time now, and I like it very much. But then again I like all airplane magazines. I buy eight different airplane mags.

You know everybody ain't just perfect, and you are no exception. In the next few lines you will find some advice that I am giving you free of charge.

Kick No. 1—Why don't you put Ambrose Hoolley and Muley Spink stories in **SKY FIGHTERS**, too? Why limit them to **THE AMERICAN EAGLE** magazine?

No. 2—Tell your authors to stick to World War I stories. They can write those kind better.

No. 3—Last, but by no means least, I would like to ask this favor of you. How about having an amateur story writing contest for readers who like to write airplane stories? A group of judges could go over each one and pick the story they think is best. The winning story could then be published in the magazine for other readers to enjoy.

If I think of anything else to tell you, you'll hear about it.

Oh, we can take advice with the next man, Bucky. It is not for us, alone however, to decide the contents of our magazines. Like all gigantic enterprises, we have a board of directors and six assistant vice-presidents to say nothing of Miss Winch out at the info desk. Red tape again, Bucky. However, we shall toss your flimsy onto the mahogany and let the directors in our newly furnished salon, we said salon—anyway, you will be notified of any changes, Bucky.

Keep them coming, Foggy. We never enjoyed a better bunch of letters. So far our legal department has nothing to interest them in the way of libel and slander. You say that Jimmy Foster writes us a nice letter too? Well, fork it over and remember to keep your place. Jimmy enjoys an existence insured by the Bill of Rights at 1704 N. Chamberlain Ave., Chattanooga, Tennessee. He has a question for us.

I have just finished the September issue of your mag. I think it is colossal.

Why not put in a little more humor. (Hey, Archibald! Wake up.)

I would like to ask a question. Does a Boulton-Paul "Defiant" mount forward guns?

Your Bancroft and Leadbeater stories are stupendous and it would do my old heart good to see them more often.

How about more stories about commercial aviation? I'm sure the other readers share my views. The current war games were held in this area last month and those B-18's sure looked good and what a noise those "babies" make.

Archibald, wake up? That sawed-off chunk of driftwood sleeps out in the woods of Westchester every day until noon and the squirrels idolize him. One of his pseudo-screams came into us the other day all chewed up and we had to send a special

messenger to get his carbon copy of an Ambrose-Muley epic. We found the shrimp attending a wake for a squirrel and he told us between sobs that it passed away from type-lice. The boy is nuts.

Now to be serious, Jimmy, the Boulton-Paul Defiant, as far as we can make out, does not carry forward armament. A recent journal of the trade, recently arrived from England, gives its armament as one mechanically operated turret behind the pilot. If more recent developments have changed the picture, we will let you know.

What are we waiting for? We have an old campaigner's letter before us and he writes that he served in France. Maybe he fought in and around some of the towns in France where we did, but we doubt it. But everybody gather around and absorb all of this communique, especially the flip citizens. We want them to see who William F. Hoover of 242 W. Orange St., Lancaster, Pa., is related to. Maybe they will button up their lips from now on. So:

Enclosed you will find the coupon from the most recent issue of SKY FIGHTERS, to enroll me in the Airmen of America. Also enclosed is a self-addressed envelope for the membership card.

I am a veteran of the World War, having served from April 4th, 1916, to July 21st, 1921. When I was released from the Walter Reed General Hospital, and discharged at Camp Jackson, S. C., I served on the Mexican Border with B Troop of the 2nd U. S. Cavalry, chasing bandits and Mexican raiders. I am vitally interested in flying, and have been in the air several times with a friend of mine. I am looking forward to the day when planes will be so efficient they can be landed in the backyard, or parked in a parking lot. Aviation is the future method of transportation, as well as a means of communication with the other planets.

I feel sure this will come to pass, for "man is a restless being, seeking new places, and new worlds to conquer. Moving ever onward, and seeking knowledge of unknown things."

That was said by some one, but I forget who. Well, anyway, here is my request for membership and the coupon. I am the cousin of J. Edgar Hoover, chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D. C., and a member of the Home Guard (Company H) recently organized here. Hobby—stamp collector.

We welcome you to AIRMEN OF AMERICA, Mr. Hoover, wish you would call personally as we have a batch of papers in the files of our legal department that should be brought to the attention of Mr. J. Edgar Hoover. They contain barefaced slander, threats of blackmail and extortion and rank intimidation. One citizen who can't have much patriotism threatens to have us investigated and exposed as a fraud and we need help lest he succeeds, er, we mean frame us. We wish you would use your influence with your cousin, Mr. J. Edgar Hoover. After all, if we told about a town in France that never existed, it was because we were so wrought up after our terrible air battles—anyway how can they prove there wasn't places we claimed there were when the Krauts blew them up as fast as they did?

Now take Lousy-Le-Sec for example, but maybe you better not and just forget about our troubles as why should they

[Turn page]

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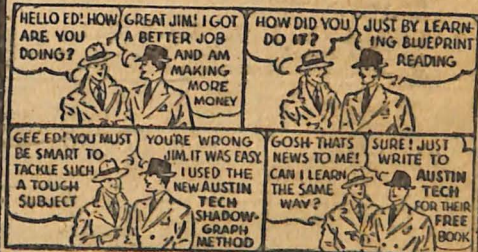
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worry you? It is an honor to have an old campaigner in our club and did we tell you we were almost the boss of a defense council in our town too? It is old warriors like us that is the backbone of this country and we should stick together. Thanks a lot for your fine contribution to this department.

Comes to our attention a nice try by a reader we know only as Dave as the drone out in the mail department must have lost his address. Clear us upon this, Dave, will you? But we've got the meat of the smash note for you. Dave questions the veracity of our quiz expert and claims he missed up on the eight buck question. Did he?

I've been reading SKY FIGHTERS for five years and never had a complaint, but I have now. Who is the guy that writes your quiz? The Spitfire is not the world's fastest pursuit. The Lockheed P-39 is. The P-39 does over 400 m.p.h., and the Spitfire does 387 and no more. That's like trying to say the Giants are better than the Dodgers. Please, skipper, tell that jerk to wake up and get the right answers to some of the questions he puts in that mag of yours. How about more World War I stories?

We sent out for the answer man but Miss Winch, talking through a mouthful of caramel, finally made us understand that he left early to think up some answers for his wife who wonders why he didn't get home last night.

Now, Dave, we will attend to this until he shows up. Perhaps it is a fact that the Lockheed P-39 did go over 400 miles per hour in a recent test but was the kite carrying the armor plate and the eight Browning guns that the Spit carries in actual combat? If so, there is room for a tilt between our expert and his readers. We hope you will both get straightened out regarding the tangle. Anyway, we must attend to a vital matter that has come up. Swiveltooth is handing me a suspicious-looking envelope and he holds it at arm's length. He might just as well get it over with.

It is John Duck in again and we have had trouble with him before. He still hides from the cops at 311 S. Meadow St., Richmond, Virginia. He claims we threaten the freedom of the press because we had to change a word or two in his last effort. After all, certain things have to be censored, even on this broad-minded tarmac. Get a taste of this bowl of Duck soup:

I have almost finished September SKY FIGHTERS and it appears to be all right, but we could use some more of old World War stories about Ritchie (or whatever you want to call that Hun) and other World War aces. Well, boss, I finally got my membership card and I thought I was going to get a pin. Boy, was I disappointed.

By the way, Skipper, what's the big idea of changing my letter that I wrote you? What's all this stuff about the freedom of the press?

How high can you and Foggy count? You are always shooting off your mouth about the Jerries you downed. I'll bet you and Foggy shook so much that the Squadron Leader had to put both of you on end positions. (That's where the Heinies would shoot first, eh what?)

Well, you chicken-hearted has-been (because you won't print what I tell you) I guess this is all for now, as I am on my lunch hour and I have to be going. Where I'm at, ink is something for the spiders to hang their cobwebs on, so I use pencil. So long, Skipper, and turn the beacon off as I am clear of the field by now.

You are just jealous because you never did anything more heroic than take an extra bath one week, Johnny. If you will look up our records in the ward—in the war department in Washington, you will find that Foggy and yours truly did more unusual things in the last guerre than most anybody.

We invented the first mooring mast when we tied a captured Heine sausage to the Eifel tower one Saturday afternoon in Paris. Then the following week, Sideslip Gooch lured us into flying a Frog Nieuport into the lobby of the Hotel Crillon—but we will save the best stories for those who believe them. You would be amazed how many people do and it all goes to show—but there is more important business to attend to besides clowning with the likes of you, John.

Waldemere F. Slisz of Detroit, Michigan, differs with our Professor Quizling again. We can't wait until the smart Alex gets back to the office. This reader seems to have his facts right on the nose. What do you think?

In your current issue of SKY FIGHTERS you have a Pilot Quiz on page 48 with answers on page 112.

The question which I want to bring to your attention is No. 3 on the list. I will quote both question and answer. Question: "Who was the only American war flyer to win the Congressional Medal of Honor?" The answer is "Frank Luke. It was awarded posthumously."

The question and answer are both wrong, because Luke was not the only one to win it. Besides Luke, there were others. Rickenbacker, who received the medal on November 6th, 1930, from President Hoover.

General Order No. 56, War Department, 1922, lists two others, namely: 2nd Lieut. Harold Goetler of Squadron 50 and 2nd Lieut. Erwin Bleekley of the same squadron were awarded the medals posthumously for action in dropping badly needed supplies to the so-called Lost Battalion, which was the 2nd Battalion of 308th Infantry, 77th Division. Both airmen paid with their lives for dropping these supplies. The supplies enabled the 2nd Battalion to stand the Germans off until help could arrive. I think if you would investigate more thoroughly, you could have some material for a story.

Otherwise I enjoyed your current issue thoroughly.

Our blood pressure has been going up like the price of butter the last few months, Mr. Slisz, and the M. D. warned us about getting into a heated argument, so to keep our hardening arteries from splitting a seam, we will not take up this fight for the professor. But we will bring it to his attention and if he has slipped up again, he will have to start looking around for his unemployment insurance ticket. We are very tolerant up to a certain point.

Keep checking up and—excuse us all of a sudden. There is a whiff of jasmine in this dump and we have no flower garden within six miles of this outfit. Foggy hands the dainty missive to us with one hand on his hip. "Yoohoo, Skipper," he yodels. "When did you ever play in the Junior League? It's from a babe."

We never could figure out some guys' sense of humor. But we felt almost sorry for slugging Foggy as he wasn't kidding too much. The letter is from Babe Pratt,

[Turn page]



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I've just finished reading SKY FIGHTERS and it's a grand magazine. I like the Tarmac Talk, but some times I wonder how you ever put up with some of the letters you get. Well, Skipper, cheer up, because I think your book is tops and so are you. Oh, everything is just dandy. And I wouldn't miss getting my SKY FIGHTERS Magazine if I had to walk ten miles for it.

Me and SKY FIGHTERS are as thick as soup. I would like to be enrolled in The Airman of America and listed in the Mail Buddies. I am twenty-six years old, about five feet tall. Well, Skipper, I'll say Adios, hoping to see my name in your magazine soon.

Swiveltooth, please check on the calendar. Are you sure we are not still in the first of April? Something is cock-eyed around here as why are all the clients so polite and considerate of us all of a sudden? Here is another bit of correspondence and the writer, Thomas Jones (Odd name) commiserates with us. Before we wake up, let us get through this batch of mail. Tommy resides in St. Albans, W. Virginia, and gets his mail at Box 301. He is a real SKY FIGHTERS lobbyist and says:

I am writing to tell you how much I like SKY FIGHTERS, as my friends could tell you because every time one of them says anything about a magazine I say something about SKY FIGHTERS. I am also writing to let you know that I don't think so much of the screwballs that write in saying that your column isn't any good.

Please send me some information on the present war planes. I would like to know their horsepower, speed, range, and distinguishing characteristics. I want the information on American, British, German, Italian and French planes if I can get it. I would like some mail buddies. A boy in Connecticut wrote to me last Fall, and I answered his letter but I have never heard from him since.

You fixed the wagons of our critics in no uncertain terms, Tommy, and keep gunning for them. We will try our best to get you the information you desire. We have to hurry along with the mail and especially hurry over such a stint as this one. It comes from one Donald Deutsch who gives his address as R. R. 4, Bement Avenue, Evansville, Ind. Donald has to be convinced that we were a big shot in the first war.

I read SKY FIGHTERS all the time, and I think it is a good mag. At least most of it. They could leave you out and I wouldn't miss you. I don't believe you were ever in the army because they don't take such screwy people in the service. If you were, what college did you go to? I like modern stories best. I have just finished reading the July issue. I liked AMBULANCE PLANE PATROL best. How about some more stories like BORDER BLITZKRIEG?

You think you've got us cornered, don't you, Bub? What college did we attend, indeed? Ask the old sports writers about Foggy Horn and the right halfback who used to throw passes at Foggy. Foggy was right end and we were right half on Texas A & P. We quit A & P the spring the money broke out. You will find out where Foggy and Yours Truly beat the Michigans in 1916 with the first great air attack in football history. And we only Sophs at the time. It is a good thing for the Michigans we wasn't Seniors.

Foggy never missed a pass as he always kept his pocket full of molasses. The

Michigans had A & P 18-0 when we unleashed our air attack in the last quarter. We won 187-18. Does that convince you, Donald? We'll bet you are sorry. So it was only natural that we should pick the air corps when we gave up our education to fight Germans.

Here is the one we've been looking for. It seems to come close to answering a customer named Dave, we hope. And this chap is named David Lockyer of 33 Vermont Avenue, Southington, Conn. He answers two characters by name of V. Morrison and Sandy Sanderson, and now we know the fur is going to fly, also engine feathers. Make room for David:

This is the first time I have written to you, but I hope it won't be the last. First off, I'd like to tell you that this magazine is the best out.

Now, with your permission I'd like to answer V. Morrison's letter, which he wrote in answer to Sandy Sanderson's letter. Maybe this is not my "fight," and I hope you don't mind my "butting in" on your personal disagreement with Sandy, but I'd like to tell you a little something about the R.A.F.

Well, sir, do you know that the Curtiss P-40 did 450 m.p.h. when they tested it, but when they clamped on machine guns, etc., it only did about 380? Also, do you know that the speeds of the Lockheed P-38, Republic P-42, etc., are given speeds WITHOUT the full military load? Another incident was when the Spitfire II flew at a speed of 400.8 with a full military load.

Now get to down to why the R.A.F. is using our planes. The reason is that Britain cannot manufacture enough planes to keep up with the German manufacturers (neither can we). I don't doubt that if Britain could manufacture 100 planes a day (which is impossible) she would not bother trying to get American-made planes.

Now you say why does not Britain do as good as the Curtiss did? Well, the answer is that she is doing much better than the Frenchmen did. For the plane ratio is 4 to 1. That means that for every plane Britain has lost the German have lost 4, and remember the British are doing it every day.

Also talking about light and medium bombers: Britain's will come up to ours any day in the week. I hope I have answered your questions satisfactorily.

We won't get into that argument, David. We will go out on a limb far enough, though, to say that you seem to know what it's all about when it comes to modern kites. If Sandy and V. Morrison care to get into this argument further we welcome them to the ring and will furnish seconds, and a water pail and collodion will be on the house. We hope the cops don't get wind of the battle. But after all, this is the arena where technical arguments can be settled by verbal uppercuts, right hooks and haymakers. May the best informed gent win, say we.

Steps Berton Swartzwelder to the front of the stage. He also has something to say about SKY FIGHTERS and it is good. Give Berton a hand for this nice boost:

The other day I found an old issue of your magazine—March, 1938, featuring "Treason Tarmac." I enjoyed it so much, I bought several recent copies of SKY FIGHTERS. From now on I'm a regular reader. I like the "new war" stories better than the old, but both are okay. Please enroll me in the Airmen of America and put my name in Mail Buddies. I am sixteen years old.

You're in, Bert. What's this, Gopher-face? A quick one from Fort Bragg? If that's from a soldier down there, don't waste any more time and hand it over

[Turn page]

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before we have to slap you down. Fritz Kohler of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, is an old customer of ours and he has an A-1 rating in this joint. Listen to Fritz:

I've had 12 hours of flying instructions and if possible I'd like to know all there is to know about flying.

I joined the Army in hopes of getting in the Air Corps, but landed in the heavy artillery. Hard as I try I can't seem to make any headway. But I'm not giving up hopes. Things will turn my way soon. So I just keep plugging right along.

I've been a reader of your books ever since 1935, and I really think they are swell.

That's life, Fritz. You would never think your skipper started out in the army as a valet to cavalry horses, would you? One day one of the cavalry officers' hayburners got us lined up nice and inserted both back feet into our empenage and gave us a lift back to the barracks. It gave us the feel of flying for the first time and we knew we would be expert at it.

Comes the last report from the reading front and it is from a new recruit who claims he is a pal until the wing struts. Ha ha-Hm-m-m-m-m. Anyway, Veryl Bidwell, no address on hand, is peaking:

Please enroll me in The Airmen of America. I just finished reading my first copies of SKY FIGHTERS, AIR WAR and the AMERICAN EAGLE. It was merely by coincidence that I picked those three. Although I wish I could find something to kick about, I'm afraid I'll have to admit that they were all pretty swell mags. I'm going to keep up on them.

I think that AIR WAR should be made monthly and a good model building page would help any air mag. I like the First War stories best.

Thank you, Veryl. Your very polite and flattering letter appropriately winds up a business session as peaceful as we've ever known. We guess most of the gang realizes

### NATIONAL COMMANDER, THE AIRMEN OF AMERICA, 10 EAST 40th STREET, N. Y. C.

Please enroll me as a member of THE AIRMEN OF AMERICA. I am sincerely interested in aviation and will do my part to further its advancement. I am a regular reader of SKY FIGHTERS.

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that we mean business and are a strict disciplinarian.

We will get very serious about everything until the second war is over; none of us can be sure about anything. So all you club members help out in keeping the boys flying and do what you can for civilian defense and cooperate in every way in the present crisis. We think it would be a good idea for you all to promote enthusiasm for aviation.

Until the next meeting, we will buzz off. So cheerio, as they say over where things are really tough. —THE SKIPPER.

#### OUR NEXT ISSUE

Now that The Skipper has done his stint it's my turn to chat with you a moment. The Skipper joins with me in inviting you to belong to **AIRMEN OF AMERICA**, our great organization for patriotic air-fans. All you have to do is sign, clip and mail in the coupon on the opposite page. Everybody's welcome and there are no dues or fees.

I know you'll all be around the tarmac for the next issue—and it's important for you to be here, because the next novel will be a humdinger you'll want to read! It's **NAZI VULTURES**, by Robert Sidney Bowen, a great yarn of air action over the Skagerrak, zooming with combat thrills and sky-high drama from start to finish. It's the "V" story of the year!

Another swell yarn to look forward to is **SHAMBLES FOR SINGAPORE**, by Arch Whitehouse, in which Todd Bancroft and Larry Leadbeater, those two favorite sky partners, perform some of their most exciting exploits. Other stories, too—all of them carefully selected for your entertainment. Also many interesting departments—including a list of **MAIL BUDDIES**, which has been omitted this issue. Be on hand.

Between issues, peels, read our companion magazines—**RAF ACES**, **AIR WAR** and **THE AMERICAN EAGLE** (combined with **THE LONE EAGLE**). The last-named will have a special treat in the February issue—**EXILED WINGS**, a novel featuring John Masters that will stir you mightily as it recounts the exploits of flyers of conquered lands who are battling for Britain.

I'll be with you again in the next issue of **SKY FIGHTERS**. Meanwhile, thanks for listening—and so long. —THE EDITOR.

P. S.—We still have available several hundred sets of sepia portraits of famous World War aces. Each set contains twelve portraits and is well worth owning. To get your set, send a name-strip from the cover of this magazine—plus 15 cents in stamps or coin to defray mailing and handling costs. OR, if you send name-strips from the covers of any three of the following four magazines—**THE AMERICAN EAGLE**, **SKY FIGHTERS**, **RAF ACES** and **AIR WAR**—you need only enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope.

#### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 13

1. Curtiss A-18, Bell XFM-1 and Northrop A-17.
2. Glenn Curtiss, in 1912, with the cooperation of the United States Navy.
3. They set a new altitude record of 72,394.795 feet in a balloon.
4. Any three of the following: J. H. Doolittle, J. G. Halzlip, Roscoe Turner, Douglas Davis, Ben O. Howard, Louise Thaden, Frank W. Fuller, Jacqueline Cochran.
5. Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy. The Chief of Bureau is Rear Admiral John H. Towers.
6. California, with 168.
7. "V" signifies a heavier than air craft, "Z" a lighter than air craft.
8. The letter X.
9. Any of the following: Alfaro, Allied, Allison, Angle, Briggs, Continental, Eclipse, Ford, Franklin, Gulberson, Hermann, Jacobs, Kinner, Lawrence, Lennep, Lycoming, Menasco, Monocoupe, National, Phillips, Pratt and Whitney, Ranger, Rearwin, Rover, Symmetric, Von Behren, Warner, Wright.
10. Vickers.

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28x5.00-19	2.55	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.65	1.25
5.25-17	2.80	1.25
28x5.25-18	2.80	1.35
28x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
20x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-16	3.75	1.45
4.00-17	4.00	1.45
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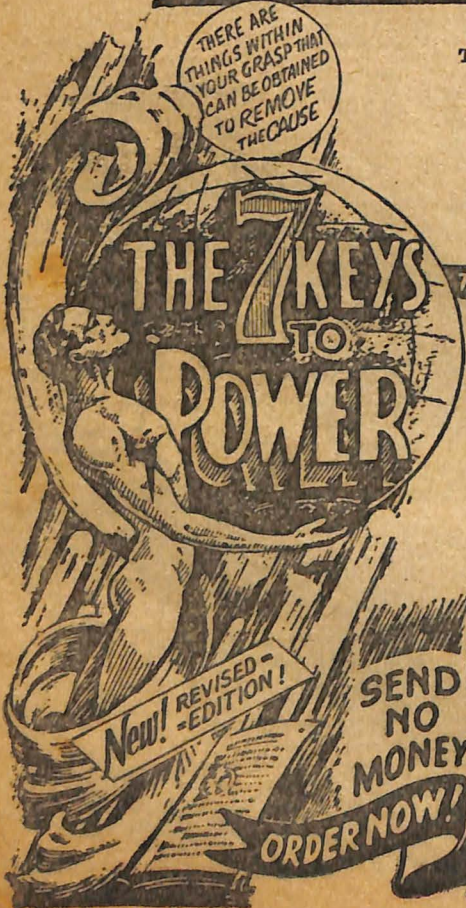
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