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WINTER
ISSUE

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PUBLICATION

**TAKE OFF
AND DIE**

*An Exciting
Complete
Novelet
By JOE
GREGG*



**STRAFING
THE
JAPS**
*American Bombers
in Action*
**By MAJOR ROBERT
B. HOTZ**



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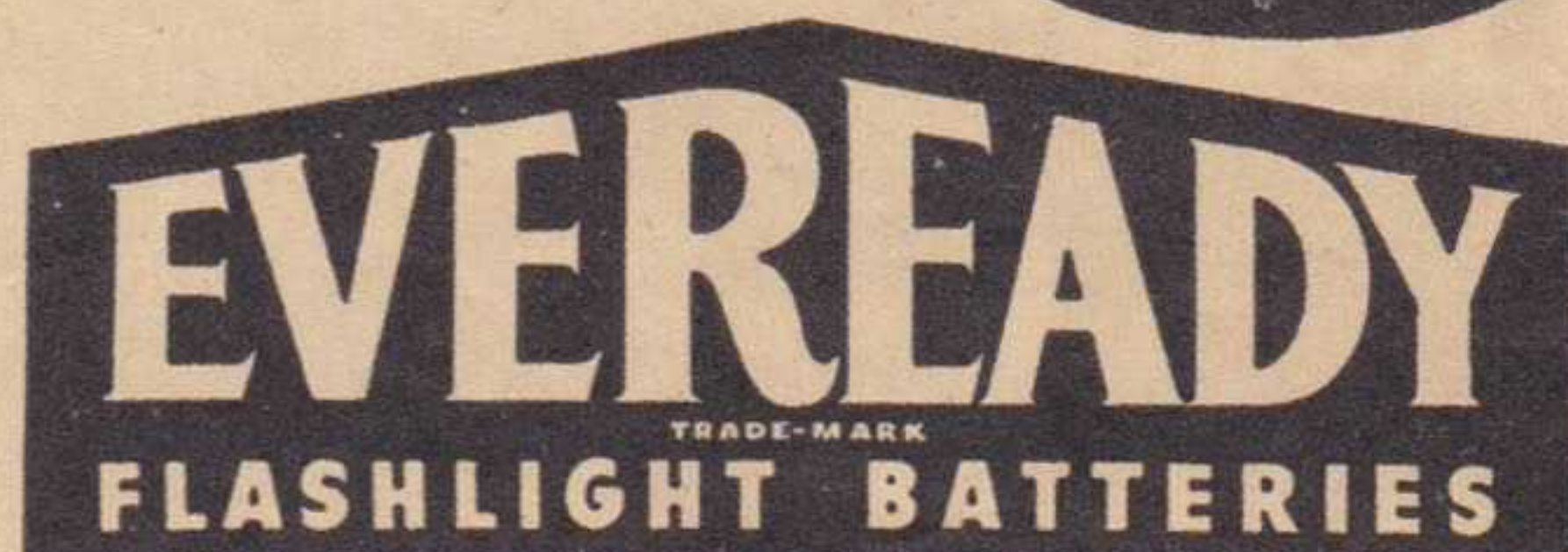


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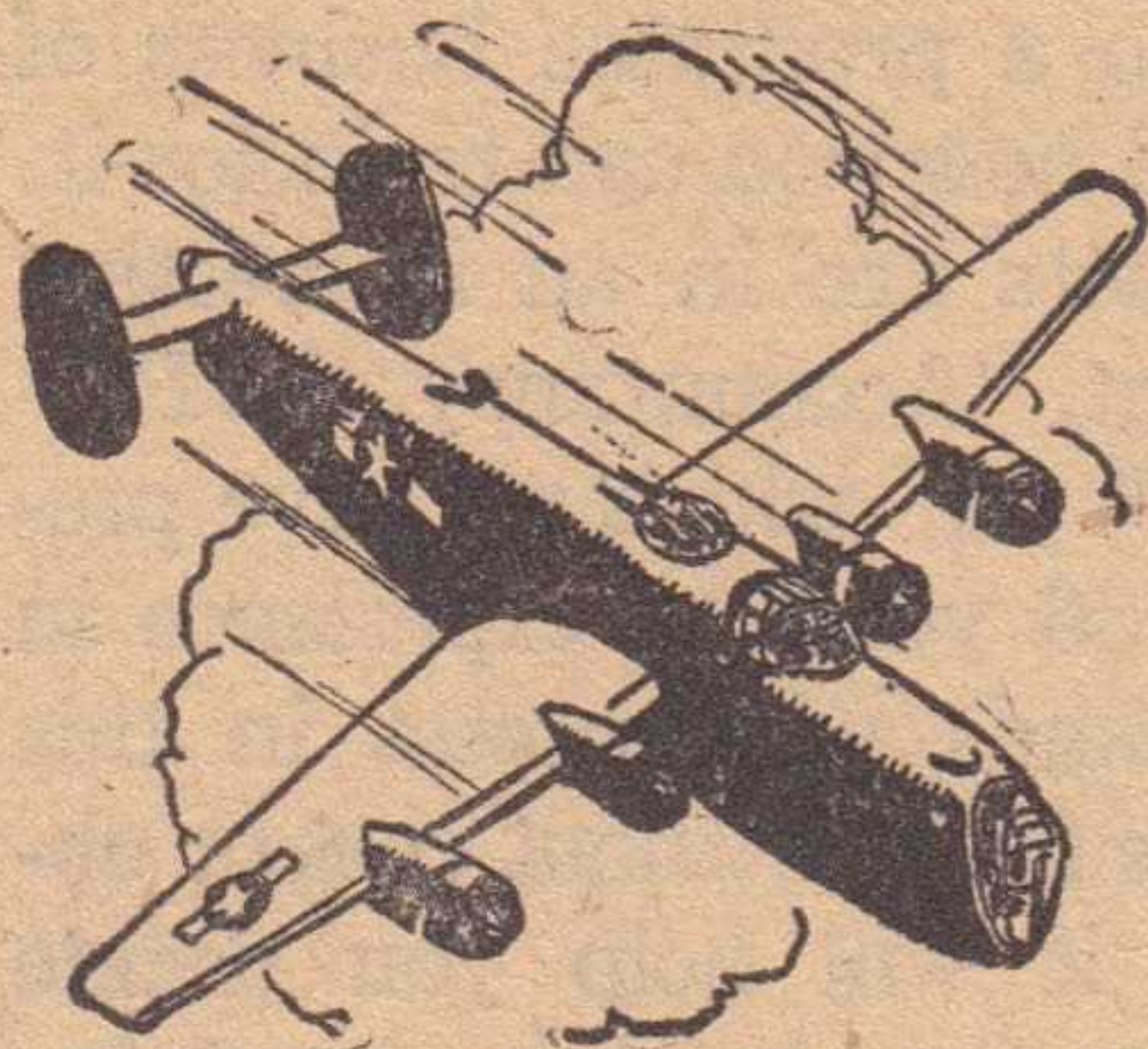
SKY FIGHTERS

Vol. XXXIII, No. 1

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

Winter Issue

FEATURED ACTION NOVELET



TAKE OFF AND DIE

By JOE GREGG

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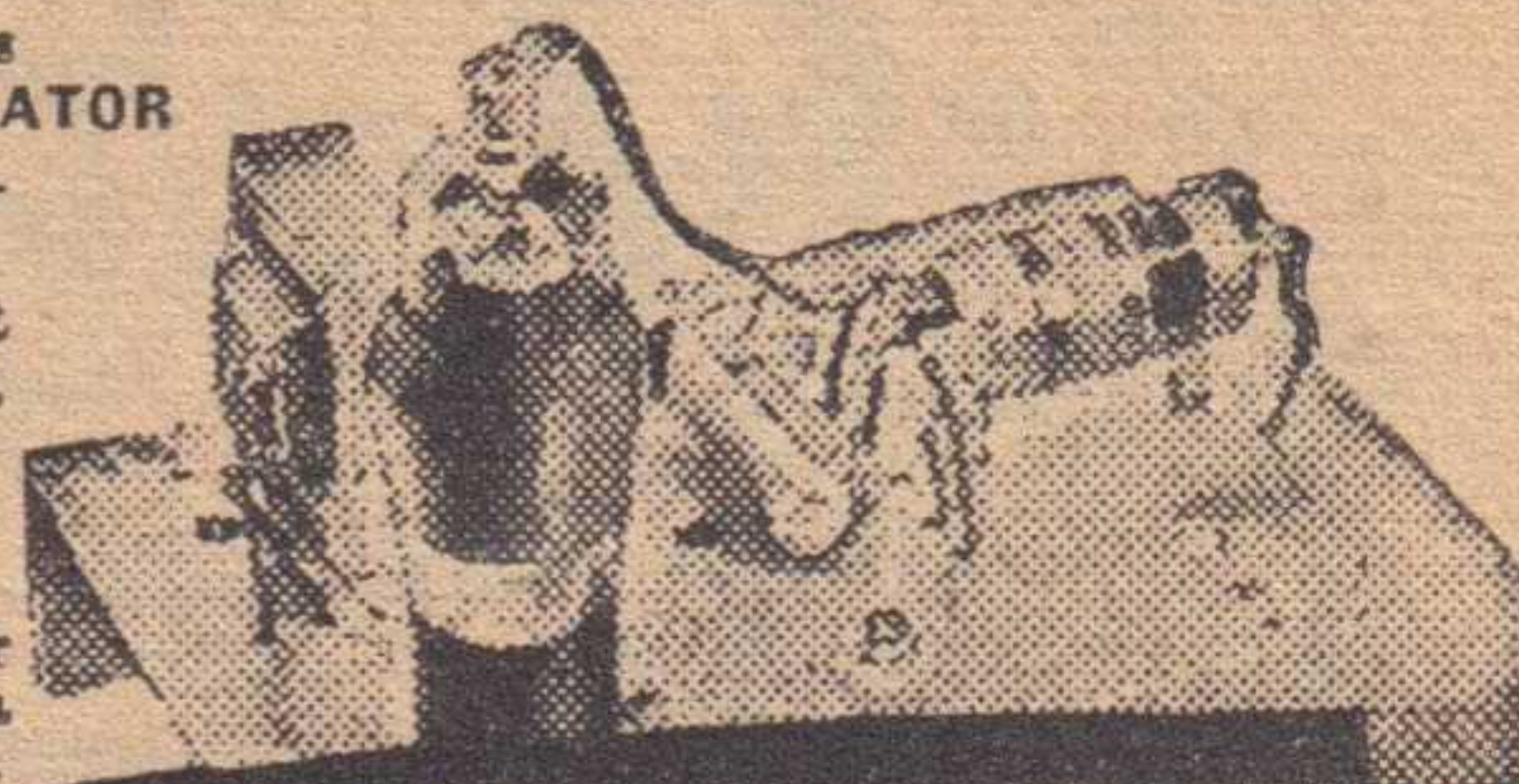
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IT IS a fortunate circumstance for those still residing in the unhappy land of the set sun that their war lords elected to say "Uncle" when they did last August 14. The preparations for the blasting of the Japanese home islands, to say nothing of Manchukuo, from the air, were truly awesome to contemplate. Nothing like them has ever been mounted and, it is fervently to be hoped, ever will again.

For instance, SKY FIGHTERS' own war correspondent in the Pacific, Leo Margulies, caught a glimpse of one segment of this might when he heard Lieutenant General Barney M. Giles, USAAF, deliver the following statement at an advanced base in the islands south of Japan proper less than a month before Japan quit. Said the general:

"As you gentlemen know, the very long range bomber—the B-Twenty-nine—has tremendous range and striking power, which are unique in warfare. When the Twentieth Air Force was created, as you may remember, General of the Army George Marshall spoke as follows:

"... It would be uneconomical to confine the Superfortress organization to a single theatre. These bombers, therefore, will remain under the centralized control of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with a single commander, General Arnold, acting as the Joint Chiefs' agent in directing their bombing operations throughout the world."

"This original concept of global aerial warfare still holds true. But since that day our strength in B-Twenty-nines has grown and multiplied. We have extended our bases and are about to push them still farther.

"Today, therefore, the United States Army Strategic Air Forces begin operations against Japan. Under the Joint Chiefs, and under General Arnold as executive agent of the Joint Chiefs, USASTAF will take over control of the entire very long range bombing program and its long range fighter escort operations.

General Spaatz in Command

"The commander of USASTAF will be General Carl Spaatz, soon to arrive in this theater. You all know General Spaatz, who commanded our strategic air forces in Europe so successfully. I have been assigned as deputy commander.

"Under USASTAF will be two air forces composed of very long range bombers and long range fighters to protect them. One will be General LeMay's present Twenty-first Bomber Command, operating out of bases on Guam, Saipan, Tinian and Iwo Jima. Henceforth, this will be known as the Twentieth Air Force. It will continue to operate out of the Marianas and will have P-Fifty-one Mustang fighters based on Iwo Jima for escort and protective strafing missions.

"The other will be the Eighth Air Force, which, as has been announced, will be commanded by General Doolittle. This air force will be composed of B-Twenty-nines and P-Forty-seven Thunderbolt fighters based in the Okinawa area. The first contingent of Doolittle's B-29s will arrive by the middle of next month. Thereafter, the numbers will be increased rapidly until his full force is in action.

"The aim of the Strategic Air Forces is to crush Japan's capacity for making war. USA STAF will throw the full destructive weight of the B-29 program at whatever points and in whatever way will put Japan out of the war-making business as fast as possible.

"To Japan, I should think the meaning of this announcement will be terrifyingly clear. Our B-29 program has burst its old bounds. Its fury is about to be doubled. To coordinate this doubled effort, the Joint Chiefs have created the United States Army Strategic Air Forces and given them authority to strike where Japan will be hurt most and fastest!"

And That Isn't All

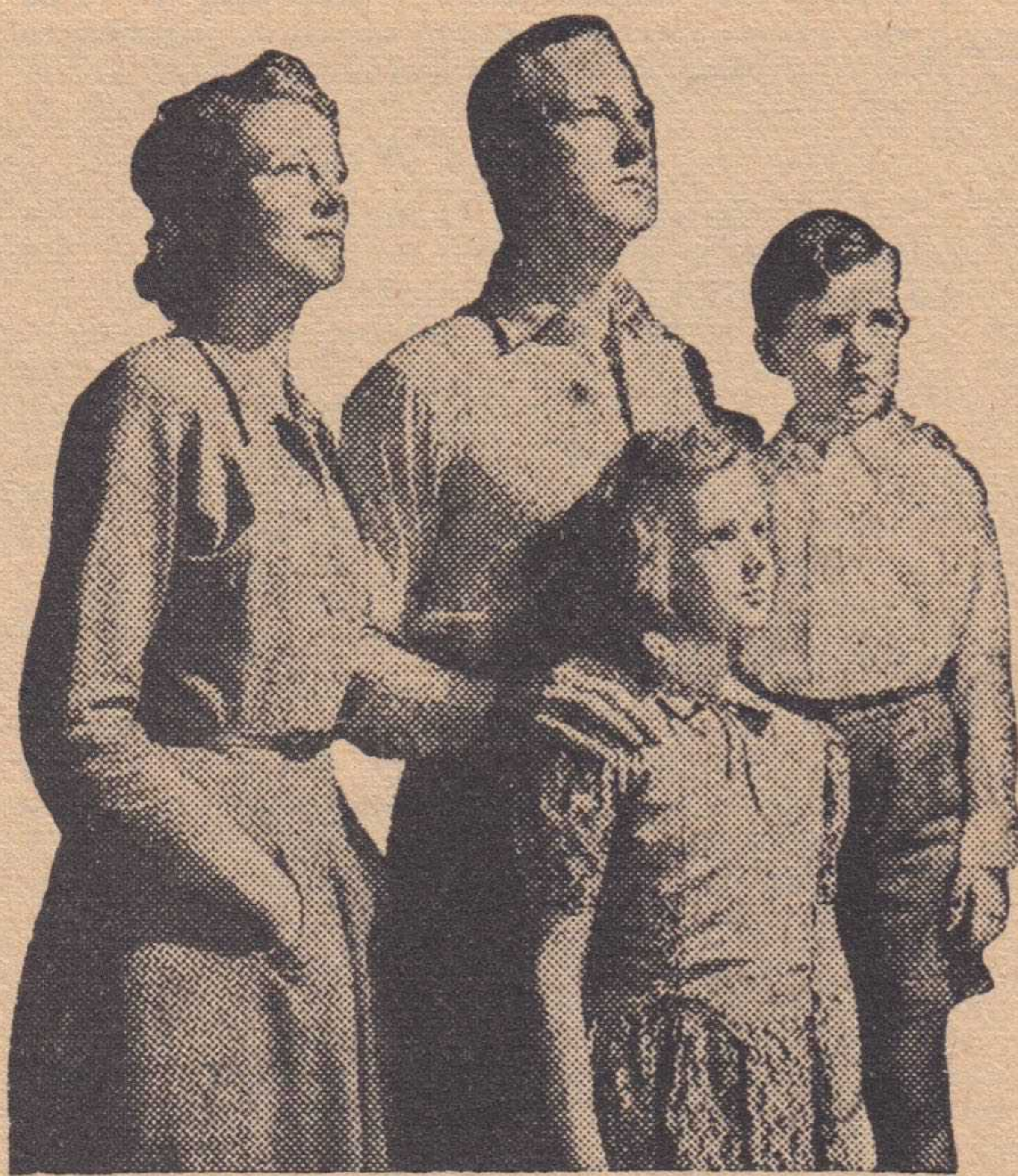
Actually, the B-29 program, vast as it is, was but a small part of the fury from the heavens that was about to be unleashed on the unhappy Nips when they surrendered. A couple of days after General Giles' announcement, AAF authorities unveiled the Consolidated B-32, only slightly smaller sister plane of the Superfort, and revealed that squadrons of this immense new superbomber were already in action against Japanese installations in the far Western Pacific.

This overgrown Liberator is an all-metal, high-wing single-tail monoplane with a cylindrical semi-monocoque fuselage and a modified Davis low-drag wing with fowler type flaps. The tricycle landing gear, which uses

(Continued on page 8)



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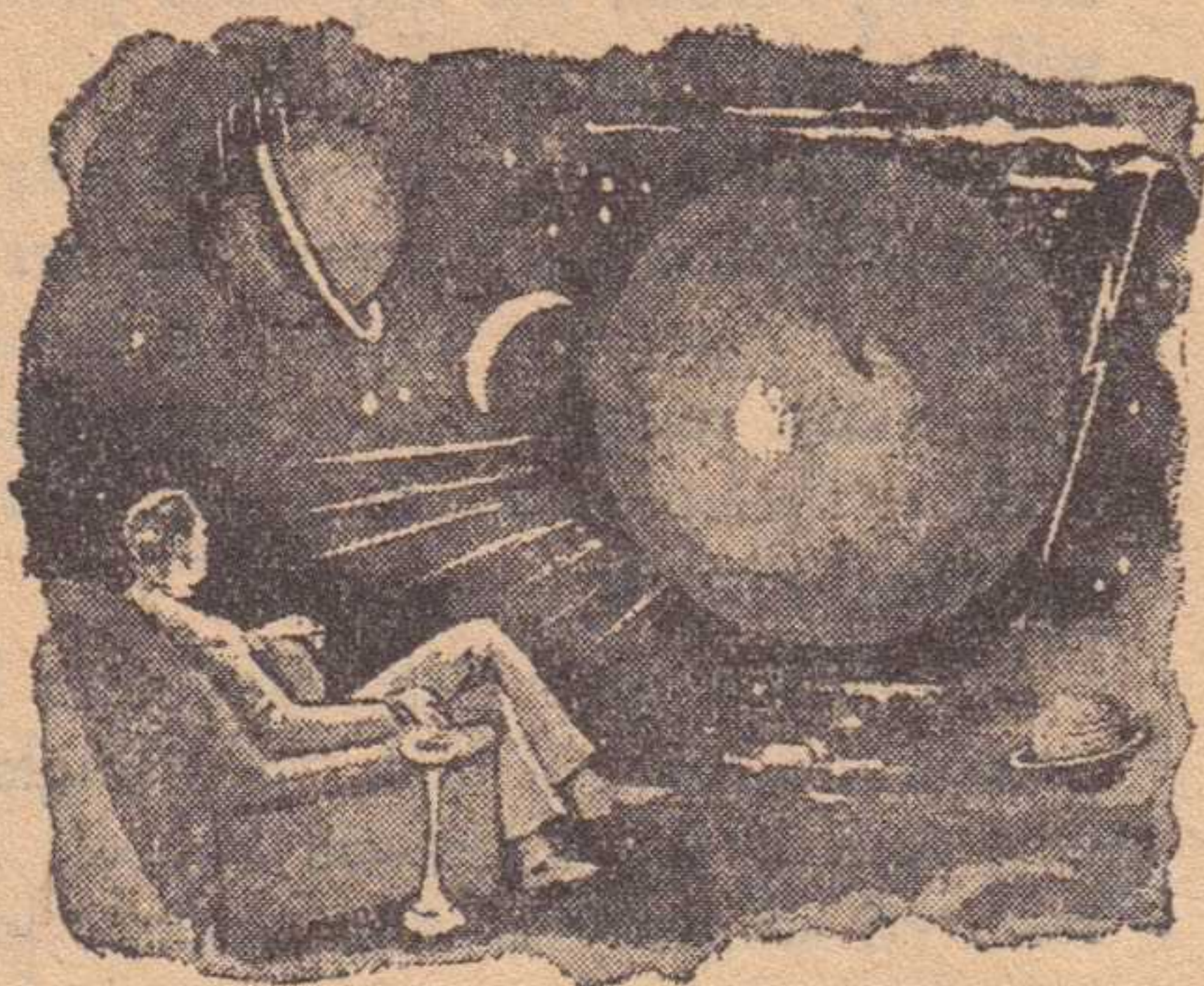
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TARMAC TALK

(Continued from page 6)

dual tires, is full retractable and has a completely swiveling nose wheel.

Power is supplied by four double-row, 18-cylinder Wright Cyclone engines of 2200 horsepower, each equipped with two exhaust-driven turbo superchargers. Wing span of the B-32 is 135 feet, length is 83 feet plus and height is more than 32 feet. With a gross weight of about fifty tons, it weighs sixty when fully loaded, thirty when empty. The big plane carries a crew of eight, thanks to new automatic firing and other equipment.

Still More Wrath

As if this were not enough trouble for the Mikado's minions, the AAF celebrated its thirty-eighth birthday in early August by flying one of the new Lockheed P-80, jet-propelled Shooting Star fighters from Chicago to Mitchel Field, Long Island, in something just over an hour and a half—at a mean average speed of more than 520 miles per hour. The plane, which has been in production since early in 1944, was just about ready to add its grief to the Mustang, Tiger Cat, Thunderbolt and other strafing woes of the Japs.

By way of making the birthday more memorable, the AAF flew a P-63 Lockheed four-engine Constellation from Mitchel to Le Bourget Field outside Paris in less than fourteen hours. This plane would have been a big help in transport had an invasion of Nippon been needed.

And if the war had dragged on, Howard Hughes was about ready with his new plywood monster eight-engine air transport, a plane of more than 200 tons gross weight which can transport a battalion of 750 men with full equipment on long hauls. Its cargoes will now be of a more peaceful nature.

Science Fiction Touch

And then, of course, just to give the month of August a true touch of scientific fiction horror, the Army finally dropped its first two atomic bombs on the Nipponese naval bases of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with such devastating effect that the dire results of its un-

(Continued on page 75)

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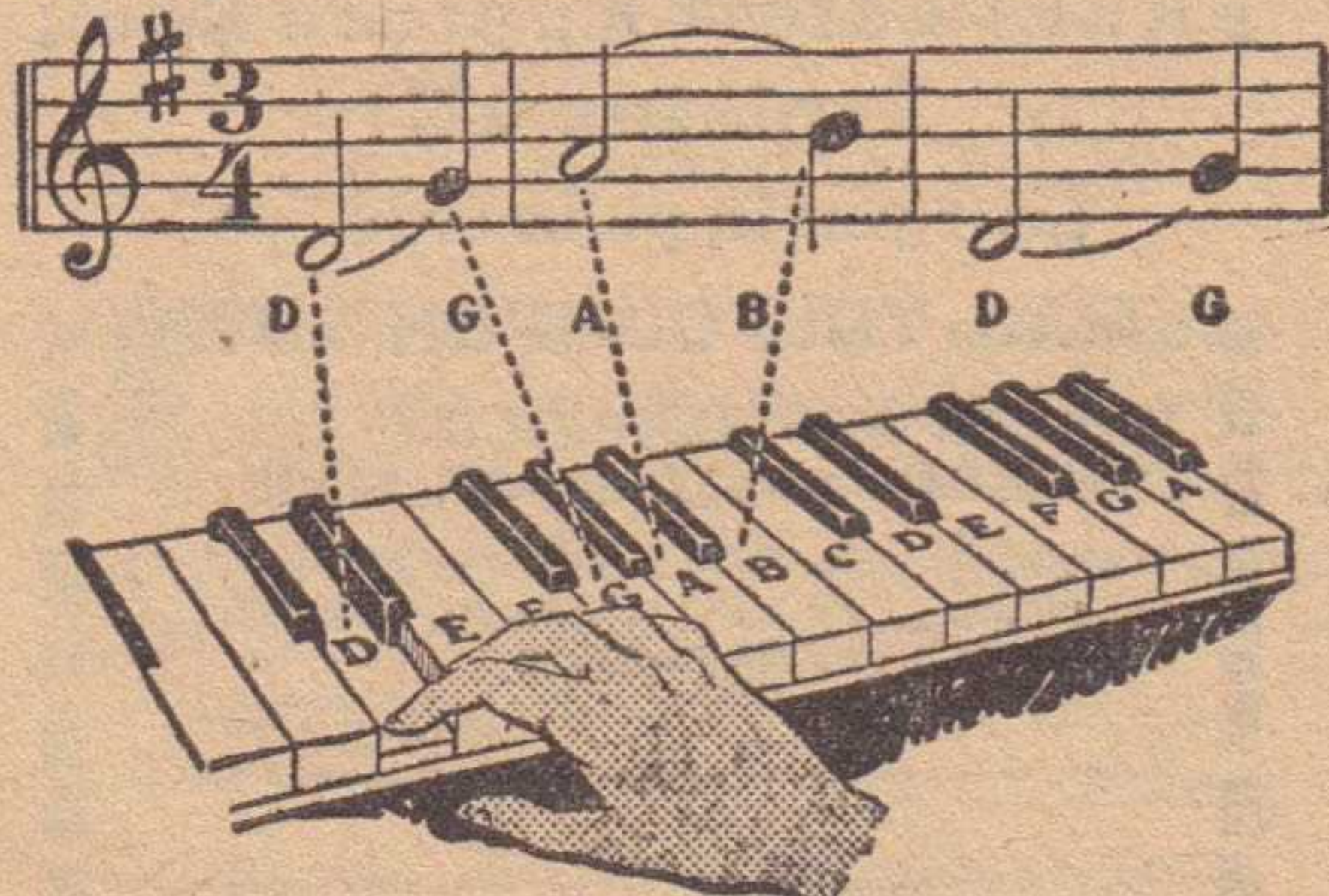
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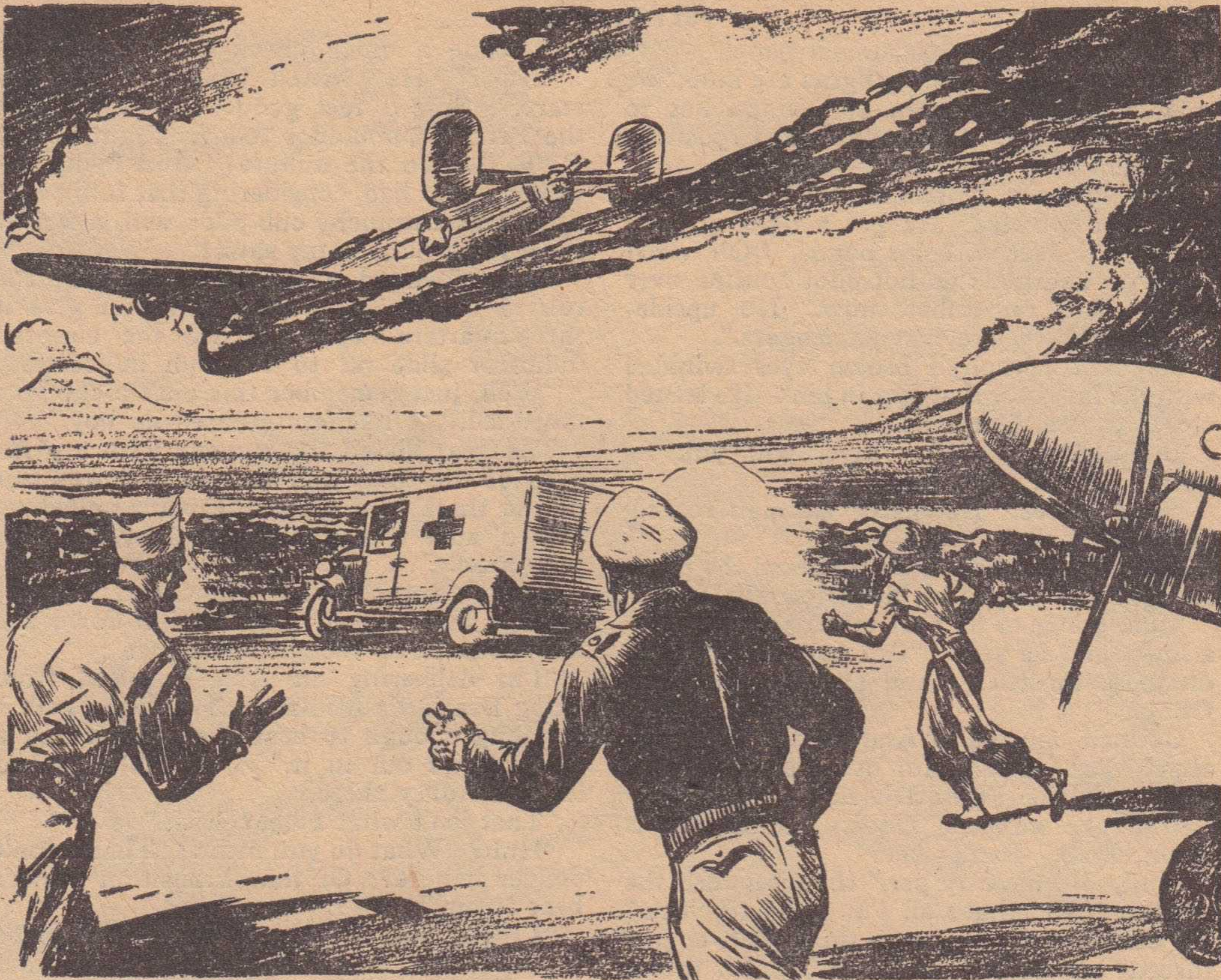
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The stricken plane was staggering in the sky, with flames spurting in dazzling plumes from the side

TAKE OFF AND DIE

By JOE GREGG

When sudden death and disaster stalk the ferrying service, Pilot Bick Cannon takes desperate risks in a grim battle to smash a gigantic plot directed against the war effort!

CHAPTER I

Ordered to Doom

THE pilot of the speedy new attack plane—an A-26 Invader—cut a sharp turn close over Memphis Municipal and grinned briefly at the two men who squatted tandem-bike style at his right.

“Legalized buzzing is in order.”

The rear-rider of the two dead-heads, a youngster with gold bars and navigator

wings, raised his voice above the drone of the two 2,000-h.p. P & W’s.

“Now, listen, Bick,” he said. “I got no safety belt. Me and this metal bicycle seat can be separated right quick. Go easy on the rough stuff. I shoulda waited at L. A. for an airliner.”

In the wooden ferry-seat crowded almost into the navigator’s lap sat a leathery-skinned flight engineer with the double-bowed non-com’s stripes that proclaimed him a technical sergeant. The engineer pointed a horny

AN EXCITING COMPLETE ACTION NOVELET

finger at the pilot's instrument panel.

"Landing gear warning lights are inop," he said, boredly. "Lieutenant Cannon has to check his gear, down-and-locked position with tower."

"Aw, Murphy, he can see for himself," the navigator growled. He got a tight grip on the bicycle seat with his hands. "Oh, well! Let's go and get this hot-pilot routine over with. But, remember, now. No upside-down stuff. We're just passengers."

Sergeant Murphy's brown eyes twinkled with the laughter that was in him. He leaned closer to the pilot.

"Lieutenant Garman says, will you fly upside down?" he shouted.

"Like blazes," Navigator Garman roared. "I said—don't."

The pilot laughed as he ruddered the plane straight and dipped his nose down at Tower.

"Just going to fly past tower to give them a look-see," he said. "Got no warning-horn on these throttles. And anyway, it's Regs. Okay?"

Garman snorted. "And suppose I say it ain't? Bah, a navigator never throws much weight in the Ferry Division. Hey, Bick. Lookit the airspeed clock. Your gear is down, Bick. Remember?"

"Only one-seventy per," the pilot read the needle. "And that's all I'm going to clock." He thumbed the button in on the left-engine throttle handle and spoke through his throat mike.

"Memphis Tower from Able-Two-Six-Baker, Number Two-Eighta Eighta. Pilot Cannon. From Midland, Texas, Number Two, on an Instrument Clearance. Destination Memphis Fourth Group. Gear warning-lights inop. Will you check for position as I fly past you?"

"Roger, old boy!" came Tower's cheery answer.

The silvered plane hurtled past tower and the propellers moaned when the pilot notched them up to 2400-rpm.

"Gear appears locked down," Tower announced. "We'll have the Foam Wagon and the ambulance out to meet you, just in case. Wind is south, twenty miles. Landing on Runway One-Seven-Zero, old boy. You are cleared to resume traffic pattern, Number One to land."

"Roger Dodger, Wilco Philco!" Cannon miked to Tower. "The Green Hornet reads!"

GARMAN, now listening through his ear-phones, blinked, and a grudging grin eased his face. "Man alive! You're really feelin' good today, huh? What gives? You getting a leave?"

Bick Cannon tooled the Invader in a climbing turn into the downwind traffic leg, snapped the fuel-boosters to low, and laid the plane on course with a turn to the left. He swung his fuel selector valves to Mains

and made a quick check of the pedestal.

"Huh?" He twisted to meet Garman's stare. "Sure I feel good. Three years in the Ferry Commandos today. Right on my E. T. A. To the minute! And flying Invaders. Not bad, considering that four years ago I was a raunchy cub pilot, with a waiver for a silver plate in my skull!"

Garman waited until Cannon had the plane turned on final approach, saw him give it three-quarters flaps, watched the airspeed indicator slide off to 145-mph indicated.

"Well, just remember this ain't a cub," he muttered. "I like 'em greased in, boy."

The gear kissed the runway with a grrp-grrp of the tires, and tenseness flowed out of the three men when the plane rolled on locked, sure wheels past the East-West intersection. . . .

Cannon turned his Flight Clearance over to Ops and walked a few steps down the long counter to Weight & Balance.

"I'm delivering an Able-Two-Six, from Long Beach via Midland. Transition gets it for long enough to beat it up and check a few fellows out in it," he told the second looey on duty there.

"That isn't what I hear, Bick."

"Huh? What do you mean? That I don't deliver it here? Or that Transition doesn't beat it up?"

"I mean, you figuring on taking this plane to Savannah, and then down the line and across?"

"Dunno." Bick Cannon's blue eyes were puzzled. He pushed his visored hat back and scratched a mop of reddish hair. "Why?"

"That isn't what I hear," the man behind the desk replied. He nodded at the telephone on the counter. "Call your squadron."

Bick frowned. "I got to check through Group Control first. Look, I been out nearly three weeks. I've delivered some B-Twenty-fours, B-Twenty-fives, B-Twenty-sixes; a B-Seventeen; a couple of Vegas, and a Hudson. All domestic deliveries, of course. But I got to turn in my memo receipts, and my itinerary."

"Okay, don't call your squadron," the Weight & Balance officer said. "Be like Speedy Casey. Just ignore your squadron."

Bick's young face broke in a wide grin. "Where is Speedy?"

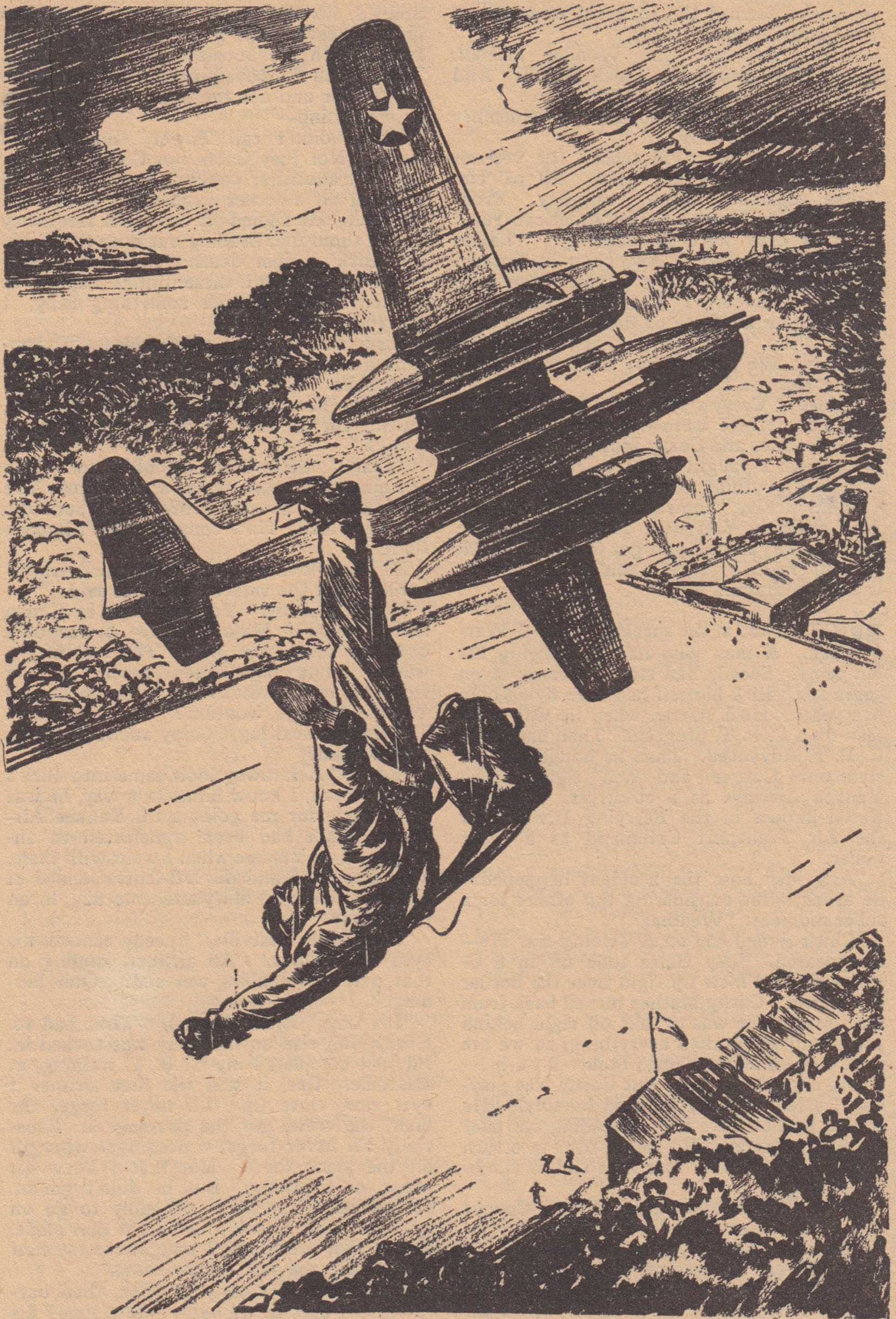
"Group Control. Just got in from some Grandfather's Delight deals. C-Forty-sevens. He's all worn out from trying to figure his per diem expense money."

Bick went along the counter to where a sign said GROUP CONTROL. A knot of men formed a close group, blocking the narrow aisle. Like a football huddle, it was, only tenser.

Bick was easing himself past them when he looked closer, then stopped.

"Speedy? Hey, what's up?"

The big-shouldered, middle-aged, graying



Vantyne dropped over, falling head foremost toward the ground far below as the A-26 went into a steep bank

man who formed the focus of attention of the huddle, turned slowly.

"Oh! It's the Cub Wonder himself. Look, Bick—remember Chick Ardell? And Joey Gates? And Corny Mather?"

Bick blinked. "Whaddya mean, remember them? I know them."

"'Knew' is the right tense," the veteran pilot said. "They are dead. All of 'em. Three separate crashes, yesterday. From Station Five, on the South American run."

Bick's eyes were unbelieving. "Latest rumor?" he asked. "Aw, chop it, Speedy. You can hear anything if you listen long enough. Shucks, I just don't believe it. Why, I saw all three of them, not ten days ago. They were tied in at Atlanta by weather. We had dinner, the bunch of us, at the Hangar Inn."

"Speedy" Casey's eyes were tired, and the lines on his face were deep-etched.

"Joey Gates and Corny Mather were two of my boys. I taught them to fly. I'm not rumoring anything about those lads."

"Station Five," someone else said. "Again. And always. You hear some buddies are knocked off, and all you got to ask is, south run, or north? If it's south, the answer is always Station Five!"

BICK looked at the speaker. "Slats" Warren. A man who had been flying for ten years. Speedy had started twenty-seven years ago. Bick himself had been flying only five years. He'd started when he was nineteen on a C. P. T. program. Then had come C. P. T. Advanced. Then he bought an Instrument Course and had signed with Yankee Airways as a co-driver. Co-pilot. Better-known in the Ferrying Division of the Air Transport Command as a "gear puller."

"Any idea how the accident happened?" he asked, after considering the others for a sober moment. "Weather?"

"Chick Ardell had an A-Twenty-six. He—disappeared. Joey Gates took off in a C-Forty-six and blew up right over the border of the field. Corny Mather turned back from the runway—he was to take off right behind Joey—and re-checked everything, so we are told. Ops—a major named Stahl—S-t-a-h-l—finally argued him off. But Corny was playing it safe." Speedy laughed harshly. "He circled Station Five before heading out over the water stretch. He heeled over in a turn and crashed with all four fans still at climbing settings."

"Gosh!" Bick murmured. "Poor Corny! What was it—a Lib?"

"Uh-huh," Slats Warren nodded. "A C-Eighty-seven. Same deal, only a cargo job."

Bick considered. "Station Five. The last mainland stop before the jump to The Rock." The Rock was the name for that pinpoint of volcanic lava far out in the Atlantic. He

nodded, his lips tight. "Sure. All of 'em loaded heavy with gas. Maybe piling up fumes, with the boosters on and climbing. Then, when the boys hit the mike buttons to call Tower and ask for time off the ground, or something—"

"They didn't call Tower," Speedy said flatly. "Not Joey Gates, nor Corny, anyway. So the transmitter couldn't have arcked and touched off a fumes explosion. Ardell did transmit. He signed off the tower frequency at five thousand, heading out over the drink. No, Bick, it just doesn't stand up. How come we have all these things happen at Station Five? There's something fishy, I tell you."

Bick tried to shrug off the idea. "It happens a lot of places. You read of a bunch of wrecks. You remember the ones at Station Five because everybody there is tense, waiting for the take-off over the long water stretch."

"Yeah?" Slats Warren took it up. "You got almost as much water stretch from The Rock across, haven't you? And about the same gas load. How come it doesn't happen there?"

Bick was looking at Speedy again, remembering what the veteran had first said.

"Look, Speedy. You say Ops is a man named Stahl? Major Stahl? I was only over the south run once. The rest of my water jumps have been north. But it wouldn't be the Stahl who was once with Yankee Airways, would it?"

"The identical lug," Casey answered flatly. "Know him?"

"Sure." A faraway look came into Bick's eyes. "Yeah, I know him. In a way, he was responsible for me going with Yankee Airways. Stahl had been transferred to another run on Yankee when I went with them. You see, Stahl and his DC-Three landed at Eastville, back in Maryland, one day, in an emergency."

"Landed in Eastville," Speedy echoed, his eyes incredulous. "An airliner, landing on that patch of soaking-wet sod? Quit kidding."

"It's true," Bick affirmed. "They had to. Everything else up that way was socked in. I'd just completed my C. P. T. training, at Eastville. Gee, it was the first airliner I ever saw, close up. I'll never forget the liner, the crew, nor the passengers. Especially I'll never forget a passenger who got off the plane there. Not that I knew his name, or anything. But he didn't go on. He canceled out there, probably to go on by train. But I took one look at that plane, and at that crew, and I bought me my first airline ride the rest of the route."

Speedy stared closely at Bick, then narrowed his eyes in thought. He slapped his knee and guffawed with laughter. "So you fell for the plane and the crew, huh? Look,

was the stewardess a girl named Doranne Harden? Boy, was she a good-looker!" He glanced at the others. "Remember the kid? She won some sort of stewardess cover-girl contest?"

Bick's red face was enough to send the other pilots into great howls of derisive laughter.

"Aw, let up, Speedy," the young pilot growled. Then he joined the laughter himself. "I seem to remember that it was a girl named Harden," he admitted. "But she also transferred to another run. With Stahl. She's an Army nurse now."

"You wouldn't know where?" Speedy asked. He indicated the papers that Bick carried under his arm. "Clean up your book-keeping, call the squadron, and come on back. I'll tell you where Doranne is, kid!"

"Hey, Speedy," another of the men said, "the squadron wants you to call them, too, Weight and Balance tells me."

Bick considered, then looked at Speedy. "How about it?"

The veteran grinned. "I can wait. Get going, kid."

BICK checked in by phone with his squadron.

"That you, Johnny? This is Bick Cannon. You want me right away or can it wait?"

"Oh, yes, Bick," the voice on the other end of the wire said. "We needed a Class Five peilot in a big-a-da-rush. Been trying to get Speedy or someone all morning. Orders, kid. And since you are the first to call, you get 'em. P. C. S., boy. Permanent Change of Station. Understand? Overseas duty, pal! Lucky you!"

Bick yelled for joy.

"Swell, Johnny. Swell. Where, when and how?"

He heard where, when and how. Then he hung up and came back over to where Slats Warren and Speedy and a few others stood, watching him.

Despite himself, Bick couldn't banish the tightness that rode his breathing.

"Smart fellow, Speedy," he said, his eyes trying to laugh. "Boy, you old-timers know all the corners. Know what the squadron wanted? Or is this a Mother Goose tale?"

"Give with the news," Speedy chuckled. "A trip over the North?"

"P. C. S. South." Bick looked at the circle of interested faces. "Away South. In fact, Station Five. I'm taking a C-Forty-six there."

Slats whistled softly. "Station Five! Take off and die!"

Speedy Casey's face had gone taut, his eyes suddenly sorry.

"Look, Bick. I swear I didn't know. Sure, I knew they wanted something. And I figured it was a north trip. And I don't need to tell you that the north run isn't hay for a

fellow my age. Iced wings and hatches and carbs. Instruments most of the way. Storms galore, unless you climb plenty high, and my tender years don't mix with altitude. Even on oxygen. So I ducked until someone else could get a crack at it. But I swear I didn't know it was to be Station Five."

Bick shrugged. "Okay. I wanted foreign duty, anyway. You know that. Well, now I got it."

Slats Warren turned to one of the other pilots.

"For me, it would be just like a free ride in the meat wagon," he said. "Ordered to my doom. Boy, I'm sure glad I'm still only a Class Three stick-wrassler."

Bick laughed. "Aw, stow that stuff. Station Five is no different than any other. It's just that, being the last stop on a long jump across, everyone gets jumpy."

"Maybe." Speedy smiled, but his eyes didn't cooperate. "I—I hope you are right, Bick. Because the Ferrying Division is unique. It has private pilots, airline pilots, ex-cropdusters, ex-barnstormers, instructors, Army pilots, sky-writers, stunt pilots, wing-walkers. Everything. Wreck morale, and you wreck the Ferrying Division, pile up a bunch of undelivered planes. That would prolong the war for years and cost millions of Yank lives. So, brother, I'm hoping you are right."

Bick laughed. "Well, it sure sounds important."

"Yup." Speedy nodded, then grinned. "Something else may please you. Doranne Harden is now a Nursing Corps Looney. Kid, she's stationed at Station Five, too. On a Hospital Evacuation deal—flying!"

"Yeah?" Bick stared. "Not that it matters so much. She—she's a nice kid, sure. But I'm in this to fly, not to get moonstruck over a good-looking stewardess."

"Seems to me you're doing okay at both jobs," the veteran grinned. Then he sobered. "Just keep your eyes very wide open. Because if you don't, you'll get 'em shut permanently. Luck to you, fella!"

CHAPTER II

The Clouds Gather

BICK tried to laugh off his feeling of depression and danger, following Speedy Casey's grim warning. Yet he only succeeded after he had checked his C-46 Commando out of the Port of Embarkation and down along the Islands Route toward Station Five.

Aside from an occasionally burping engine—a characteristic of the C-46—he had nothing tougher to contend with than towering, marshmallow piles of Strato-Q and Cumulo-nimbus that stood sentinel-like along the blue-vaulted course. Those, and

the usual drenching, tropical rains that he had let down through to one or another of the fueling stops—palm-fringed islands with their generously adequate landing strips, their tropical-scented, riotously colored sunsets, their cool, breeze-filled nights.

Then came the mainland of the southern continent, and with it appeared squalling cataracts of hourly rain. The nights were hotter. The days were stretches of flying over jungle that was an unbroken carpet of green-and-gray-and yellow.

Here it was that the true business of the Ferrying Division, ATC, was to be found.

A steady train of bombers and cargo planes and attack planes and aerial-tankers roared off each day from each great airstrip with the coming of light, and sped on to the next stop. There they circled down through the "soup" and settled to a landing.

There, came refueling. There, came briefing on the route ahead. There came minute inspection of every part of the great Birds of War. There, too, came the freighted wings of "Fireball," the ATC-operated cargo and passenger planes with VIP's—Very Important Personages—and with priority cargo, bound both east and west. There came the southern flow of Hospital Evacuation planes, with their weary and groaning loads of the wounded, crippled and maimed from the battlefields of Europe and the East.

There also came the planes of combat crews, finished their training and ready for action, to gather confidence with each new stop put behind them, and to mingle with the hodgepodge of ATC and Ferry-crewmen who thronged the PX's and the Officers' and Noncoms' Clubs of those tropical bases. Here could be seen combat crews whose pilots and co-pilots and bombardiers managed a jaunty carelessness of mien for men who listened with all but wiggling ears to transport and ferry pilots talk of the routes ahead. They heard of storms, of the little, sly tricks of the radio range-stations, stations they would have to fly to by ear, by dit-dah, by aural signals, when they couldn't see—the chartered unseen sky-roads over water and jungle and desert. . . .

Here, on these hacked-from-jungle airstrips, was the meeting ground of the old and the new in the air game. Here the young combat pilots rubbed elbows with grizzled veterans of tens of thousands of hours fighting an enemy armed with whirlpools of air, blinding shafts of lightning, plane-wrecking turbulence, death-laden fog and torrential rains. And all bore a mutual, if unspoken, respect for the other.

Here, too, came Bick Cannon in his C-46 with its crew of co-pilot and engineer. Bick was envious of the youngsters his age who were bound for the war of noise and steel and, when viewed from the proper distance, glamor.

"Me and my metal skull!" Bick grimaced, looking around him at Station Four and seeing the combat planes and the combat crews. "Oh, well, that's the way things go."

Unlike the closely supervised combat crews, the Ferry crews could have short passes to towns along the route.

"I will see plenty of these places from now on," Bick told himself. "Anyway, being dragged out of BOQ at Three Hundred-and-thirty hours, or Four Hundred hours, takes the sightseeing urge out of a fellow."

Not that Bick wasn't already somewhat of a traveler, with his half-score of North-run trips to U. K., and his hundred domestic trips in the States, trips that took him from one ocean to the other in the space of seven fast, or twelve long, hours of flying. Anyway, Station Four itself was across the Equator. You became one with Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus when you crossed the line. For the first time, anyway, you felt like that.

Bick had eaten an early supper of the usual avocados, spam, some depressed vegetables and coffee with a hair-shirt on its chest. He was getting ready to turn in—he had been to the early, open-air, rain-drenched movie—when a surprising call came over the P. A. system.

"Lieutenant Cannon, report to Operations," a voice said. "Lieutenant Bickford Cannon, report to Operations. Immediately."

Bick's co-pilot, Slick Devers, looked up from his fourth orange. "What gives, Skipper? What you been into?"

SLOWLY Bick got to his feet, his eyes puzzled. "Something with the plane, maybe. Anyway, you finish up. I'll meet you here on my way to bed. Oke?"

"Oke, Skipper."

At Ops, a youngish Lieutenant-Colonel, a former airlines pilot in the States, looked him over.

"You're Cannon? Headed for Station Five? We have an official passenger to ride with you."

Bick glanced at a captain who was leaning quietly along the counter nearby. Bick frowned, stared again, then shook his head. The man who had sent for him gazed from one to the other, at Bick, the pilot, then at the ground-officer captain.

"You know Captain Maglone, do you, Cannon? He is your passenger."

Maglone, a round-faced, blue-eyed man with a huge chest and short, powerful arms, came over.

"Don't believe I've ever seen Lieutenant Cannon before, Colonel." He scrutinized Bick closely. "Nope. Never saw him before in my life."

Bick was puzzled. "It's funny, but I could swear I'd seen you before, Captain."

The Colonel said quietly, "Well, you see him now, and you'll see him again at Five hundred hours tomorrow. We take off early, from this station, Lieutenant."

"Yes sir." Bick nodded. He looked at Captain Maglone again. Although he stared, he couldn't place that familiar face.

"Have you your baggage weight, sir?" he asked. "We've got to have it for the Form F. The Weight and Balance sheet."

"That's already been done," the man behind the Ops desk said. "Also, your Form Twenty-three, your flight clearance, has been altered to include the captain's name, and the new weight totals. Right?"

"Roger, sir," Bick answered.

The Colonel smiled at the Captain's puzzled look. "Flying jargon, Captain. 'Roger' means 'Okay.' 'Understood.'"

"Oh," Maglone smiled, showing strong, even teeth. "Er—Roger!"

But one thing still wasn't Roger with Bick. He knew he had seen Maglone somewhere before. He knew that Maglone knew it, too.

He had caught a widening look of surprise when the Captain had looked at him that second time.

"Imagining things," he told himself, as he broke into a run to escape the major part of the new rainstorm that was spattering along the jungle paths for the field. "Station Five nerves!"

Bick chose the inland route in his last leg to Station Five, a route that carried him over the northerly section of the most dense and wild jungle in the world.

Sergeant Murphy was sleeping atop some cargo, back aft. Bick had invited Captain Maglone to come forward. Upon seeing the man anew, the conviction grew stronger than ever in him that somewhere, somehow, their paths had crossed.

"But where?" Bick asked himself, puzzledly. "How. I sure didn't know him well. But he just made a strong impression on me. Somehow."

At length, partly to avoid turbulent clouds, and partly to satisfy his own curiosity, Bick dropped lower and lower until he was tooling the great transport and cargo plane directly over the treetops.

"Slick" Devers gave up his right-hand seat to Maglone, and the powerful, compact, dead-panned man stared with undisguised interest at the tree-scape below. Now and again, roaring over a clearing, they would surprise ghostly, squat figures in the act of running headlong for the cover of the trees. Again, colorful parrots or a swarm of monkeys would show against the green foliage of another clearing.

Once, some raised stone altar to a strange god of these all-but-mythical ghost people of the jungles flashed into view. It was gone again beneath fleeting wings.

Maglone lighted a cigarette after Bick, then exhaled and looked at the pilot.

"Aren't you—er—afraid to do this?" he asked.

Bick looked at the man. "Not unless you are Gestapo."

Maglone's eyes narrowed, and the set of his thin mouth was visible. "What do you mean by that?"

Bick forced a grin. "I mean, I'm not afraid unless you would turn me in for flying low." He shrugged. "After all, there isn't any more danger here than up there in that heavy turbulence. And I can't climb over it, because I have no oxygen for you. Nor for us, either, for that matter."

MAGLONE'S features relaxed slightly. "Oh. What I meant was, aren't you afraid if you went down here you would never get out again?"

"Not afraid of it, sure of it," Bick said softly. "This is the bad country. The headwaters of the Kuluene. Where Redfern and Fawcett are supposed to have disappeared. There are savages here who know nothing about civilization." He grinned. "What do you suppose they think when they see us roaring over here? That we are some peculiar kind of bird?"

"Let's not land to ask them," Maglone answered drily. "Let's just sit up here, safe, and guess. Are we very far out of Station Five?"

"Three hours more," Bick answered.

Maglone ground out his cigarette in the ash tray. "Okay. Thanks for the look. I'm going back and sleep."

But when Bick looked back through the open cabin door, he saw Maglone wide-awake and reading.

"I wonder why he looked so hard at me when I said 'Gestapo'?" Bick mused.

"Huh?" Slick asked. "Whazzit?"

Bick sighed. "Skip it. Just losing my marbles, I guess. Talking to myself."

"Station Five Fever," Slick pronounced gloomily. "Me, I got it, too!"

The huge cargo plane—for all its two engines, the C-46 is longer and wider and higher than a Fortress—slid down the sky-ramp and burped its tires on Station Five's long southeast runway.

"Greasy Joe from Buffalo," Slick said. "That's landing 'em, Skipper. Wing flaps coming up, cowl flaps open, fuel boosters off, tail-wheel unlocked." He peered around him. "Got the landing jeep?"

"Got him," Bick acknowledged.

They parked in the lee of Priorities & Traffic and Bick checked Murphy's entries in the Form 1 and Form 1-A.

"Take the First Aid Kits in, and all the papers," he instructed. "But wait until they spray us with their darned Aerosol bombs. Gee, that stuff must kill the bugs, okay. It

darn near kills me, too."

The ground crewmen caught the 'chutes as they were passed out and set the ladder in place, and the four followed the Customs and Health Inspector.

At Ops, Bick was looking for the well-remembered figure and face of big, florid Airline Pilot Stahl, now Major Stahl, FD, ATC, AAF. Also he kept a half-watchful eye out for maybe a trim figure in Nurse's uniform. Then he stopped and shouted his surprise.

"Mr. Vantyne! Er, Captain Vantyne! Hey Captain!"

A smooth-faced, clean-cut man with Service Pilot wings turned, his brown eyes widening in surprise.

"Bick Cannon, as I breath. Well, shades of Eastville, Maryland."

Bick shook the older man's hand vigorously, and made the introductions to Captain Maglone and Slick Devers.

"Mr. Vantyne is Cord Vantyne, civilian sportsman-pilot from my old field back in the States!" he explained. He looked at Vantyne. "How are the old Widgeon and the Stinson Cabin and the Aeronca Chief?"

Vantyne smiled briefly at Maglone. "The boy has a memory like the elephants," he chuckled. "Fantastic memory. Well, Bick, the Navy took over the Widgeon amphib, the Army got the Stinson as an instrument trainer, and the C. A. P. got the Aeronca."

Bick laughed. "I guess I do remember pretty near everything connected with flying," he admitted. "Gee, why wouldn't I? Say, Captain, I hear Major Stahl and Doranne Harden are here? Did you ever know them?"

Vantyne blinked his eyes slowly. "I only know Stahl from here at Station Five. Harden? Doranne Harden? She's an Evac nurse. Matter of fact, she is right in there in Ops this minute, talking to Stahl, who is our omnipotent Ops Officer here at Station Five."

Bick walked into Ops, broke into a grin when he saw the huge Stahl, cigar gritted between his teeth. His cool blue eyes took in the newcomers thoroughly, if not coldly.

"Major?" Bick came close. "I'm Lieutenant Cannon, former co-driver for Yankee Airlines. I guess you don't remember me?"

Stahl removed the cigar from between his teeth. "Do I have to?" he asked, a sly look going from him to the nurse who stood nearby.

BICK flushed. "No. Only you gave me my first airline ride." He looked at the girl. "Miss Harden was stewardess. Remember? You landed at Eastville, Maryland? And were socked in there for two days?"

"I was never socked in anyplace two days," Stahl said. "What else can I do for you, Lieutenant?"

"I remember," Doranne Harden spoke. She was slight and dark. Her friendly eyes rebuked Stahl. "You finished the trip with us, didn't you? Then one of the girls you flew with later told me you were with the Line, that you'd mentioned having your first liner ride with me. And the major." She frowned. "But how did you get on at Eastville? We had a full trip, as I recall it, when we left Washington."

"Sure!" Bick helped her memory. "But one man got off. To go on by train. Or something. I remember him talking to Long Distance over our Operations telephone. He'd been looking at some of the smaller planes on the line; and talking to one of our pilots. I guess he heard the weather would stay socked, so he—" Bick broke it off frowning. He turned his head slowly to stare at one of the group.

"So he what?" Doranne Harden asked, her eyes following Bick's. "What's the rest of what you were going to say?"

"You ought to know," Bick laughed, and he turned to Captain Maglone. "By gum, I knew your face was familiar, Captain. Now it comes back to me. You were that passenger who got off! At Eastville!"

Maglone was smiling, his eyes riveted on Bick's.

"Aren't you over-tired, or something, lieutenant?" he answered. "I never rode an airliner in my life. I haven't been to Washington in years. I never even heard of Eastville, Maryland. Anyway"—his smile was very solicitous—"isn't there just too much of Eastville in all this? Captain Vantyne, Miss Harden. Major Stahl, yourself, and now me?" He laughed. "A bit of air fatigue, eh?"

It was Major Stahl who broke it up. "Let's have your orders, lieutenant. If interested, we can take up this 'Do you remember' game later. Turn over your ship's papers, and start signing in. That'll take you a day, anyway, to sign in. Then we'll assign you."

Bick acknowledged the order crisply. "Thank you, sir!"

"Don't mention it," Stahl grinned. "Make it a part of your Remember Eastville routine and don't mention it. Not to me, anyway. I've got other things to trouble me." He looked at Maglone. "Can I help you, sir?"

Captain Maglone shrugged. "I'm a new ground officer at the base," he said. "A paddlefoot, you call it? I'll report to Base Headquarters, thank you, Major."

Grim-faced and still smarting under Major Stahl's sarcasm, Bick went outside and started to load his baggage into a Recon. He heaved his B-4 bag up and stared at the clouds overhead.

"Storm coming," he observed morosely to Slick.

"You ask me," the co-pilot said drily, "we're right in the middle of the storm

now!" He looked at Bick. "This dump has me ready for a Section-8 already. And I ain't been here one hour!"

CHAPTER III

Lightning Strikes

BY THE evening of the following day Bick was signed in. He got a short pass to the near-by town. Then he boarded the G. I. bus with some of his old pals from the States, who were ferrying through, but his heart wasn't in it for a big night.

"Just off my feed, I guess," he told Mickey Luce, a B-24 pilot. "Sorta low. The climate, I guess."

"Uh-huh." Mickey disregarded the No Smoking sign and fired up a cigarette. "By the way, what gives with all the crack-ups here? Maintenance?"

Bick stiffened, musing, "So Mickey feels it, too!"

"Could be," he answered casually. "I haven't been here long enough to know much about anything. Maybe this is the crucial point in the hops. You know? The planes are getting their shake-downs to here. From here out they either jell or snafu."

"Yeah?" Mickey was impressed. "Some of the planes that have conked out here have had hundreds of hours. Anyway, how come nearly all happens on take-off?"

Bick didn't know.

But what he did know was responsible for his next remark.

"Look. The figures show that seventy per cent of all accidents are in landing, or taking-off. Right?"

Mickey snorted. "It must be closer to ninety-eight per cent here! Say, Bick, I'm not the scarey kind, but if anything looks fishy to me, I don't take off. Get it? And I'm not the only one in the Ferrying Division thinking that way! Well, here's town. What'll we do?"

"I'm for looking around, and then checking on back early," Bick told him.

"Me, too," Mickey Luce said glumly. "Gee, to think of the times I've tried to get to

town on these runs, for a few beers or what-have-you, with the boys. Uh-huh, Bick, Station Five smells somewhere. I'm not even taking a chance of having a headache when I get off. Let's see what our friendly neighbors are palming off for trinkets in this burg. Hey! There's some pretty good alligator-hide purses. I'm having a look. Come on."

SEVERAL hours later, they stood in the main square of the browned-out town. They could look down an almost-straight street to the waterfront and to the sea beyond. Natives were hawking dubious wares, shoe shines, gadgets, trinkets, perfumes. Mickey stood with his eyes thoughtful on the swarm of them that buzzed the square like moths around a candle.

"Didja ever stop to think maybe these mugs we think are natives here, are really natives of some other country down this way that isn't friendly to us, Bick? Some of them? I mean, how you going to tell 'em apart?"

Bick shrugged. "Their own police can."

Mickey laughed mirthlessly. "Hope you are right, pal. Because I, for one, can't. Look, anybody unfriendly to us could do a lot of damage. Hey? At Station Five? They got a lot of civilian employees there, remember."

"But they can't get to the planes," Bick countered.

"Once again, I hope you are right." Mickey looked down the street. "Here comes our bus."

Bick awoke with the feeling that someone was in his room. He was right. The grinning porter stood barefooted, outlined in the light of his flash.

"You get up, no?"

"Yes," Bick yawned. He pushed back the mosquito-netting and found his towel and shave-kit.

Outside, engines were running up in the dark to a steady roar.

The sun was breaking out of the east when Bick started across the grounds from his

[Turn page]

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barracks to the Officers' Mess. As if in tribute to the disc of light that was breaking from the waters, the full-throated paen of a four-fan job raised into the lighting skies.

"A B-Twenty-four." Bick recognized the sound. "Lucky man. Off on a swell trip like that. To India, maybe. Or even China."

The plane swept along the runway, its wing-lights marking it clearly. It raised, its landing lights arcking into the sky and then settling again as the pilot lowered the nose of the great ship to gather more speed.

Then the landing lights snuffed off, and the plane started its climb, its wheels dimly silhouetted against the crimsoning horizon as they raised slowly into their wells. The power was being cut gradually back to climbing setting when a muffled, dull explosion cut in on the roaring engines. Then came a gruff grrmpf. A louder explosion followed. The stricken plane was staggering in the sky, with flames spurting in dazzling plumes from the side.

ALMOST simultaneously, the wail of the crash siren raised its eerie moan, to be lost in the thunderous explosion of the doomed plane as it dived headlong into the ground.

Bick was running, running! Not that he could be of any use, but it was habit, that springing into action in the hope of being of help, after a plane crash. His blood was pounding in his ears, as he rounded a dimly outlined building and raced for Ops. Even while he ran he was aware that another plane was roaring down the runway in a take-off surge, a plane that had started its take-off after the fatally stricken B-24; before Tower could order it back.

"A B-Twenty-five." Bick recognized the loud roar of the twin-engines.

Off the tarmac, the Mitchell bomber surged. Up and up, in the light thrown by the raging fire of the B-24, it climbed. The pilot toiled around in a turn, started to straighten. Then the power cut off abruptly and the plane staggered flatly a half-mile before it stalled and, after a sickening half-roll, plunged earthward on its back.

The siren moaned higher and higher, and foam trucks and other fire-fighting apparatus and ambulances tore by in the half-light, followed by official cars.

In front of Ops, Bick was brought up short by a shouted command.

"You! Hey, you! Cannon! Come here!"

It was Major Stahl. With him stood a slight girl, her face an agony of suffering. Close behind him was Captain Vantyne. Bick went over, fighting to control his spent breathing.

"Yes, sir?" He saluted. "Can I help?"

"Stay here with Doranne," Stahl ordered him gruffly. "Better yet, see her to her

quarters. Use my car. She'll show you." He looked at Bick. "Then get out here quick as you can. I need an Accident Investigating Officer. Until we can appoint another."

Captain Vantyne spoke up.

"Need me?"

"You can come, too, Vantyne," Stahl said.

Bick looked his surprise. "But I never did any of this sort of thing before, Major. Think I'm qualified?"

Stahl looked at him grimly. "You'll do as well as the two we did have. One of them on each of those planes. Get going. Report to the B-Twenty-four wreck within the hour. It'll take that long to get the flames under control. All other planes are grounded, for the time being. Hurry it, now!"

In the Ops car, Bick waited until Doranne Harden had regained control of her emotions.

"That's better," he said. "How about some coffee?"

The girl nodded, her face pale in the light of a passing car.

"Better come over to the Medic's Mess," she said in a low voice. "I don't want anyone to see how upset I am."

Bick nodded and followed her directions. "Who were the pilots?" he asked, after a moment. "Someone you—knew? Well?"

"One of them," Doranne answered soberly. "Joe Comigg. He used to drive for North Airlines. He married one of our stewardesses. He was piloting the B-Twenty-four."

"What about the Mitchell?"

"A man named Hargisson."

Bick groaned. "Great Day! Ducky Hargisson! One of my best friends when I was flying out of the Detroit Group. Poor Ducky!"

They went into the deserted mess hall and Bick dug up a G. I. who got them some coffee.

When Doranne had drunk her first cup and was working on the second, she smiled at him wanly.

"So you remembered us? From Eastville?"

Bick nodded. "Never forget you. I—I mean the trip," he added hurriedly. "Vantyne was right. I have a good memory, especially where flying is concerned." He looked at her. "For some reason Maglone thinks my memory is too good."

The girl looked at him. "The name of the passenger who got off at Eastville was Mullens. Trent Mullens."

Bick stared. "Well! How do you know?"

The girl colored slightly. "I keep a scrapbook," she said, her eyes on her coffee. "Of unusual things. Eastville was one of the unusual things. You know, grounded two days, like that?"

Bick didn't waver in his study of the girl. "So?"

THE girl shrugged. "So. I kept a copy of our trip log," she explained. "Last night I got to thinking of your identifying Maglone as the passenger who had left the trip at Eastville. I dug my scrapbook out and saw the name of the man who quit the trip was Mullens. Trent Mullens. He had got on at Washington." She smiled at him suddenly.

"What?" Bick asked.

"Army life seems to have agreed with you, all right!"

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, the trip log shows your weight to have been one hundred and sixty-five, then. You look heavier, bigger, now."

Bick nodded. "Twenty pounds more." He was thoughtful for a long moment. "You were going to fly to-day?"

The girl nodded. "I was getting my plane ready for the wounded passengers. They'll stay in the hospital now, until we are ungrounded."

Bick rose to his feet. "Then I'll see you later." But he paused, still troubled. "I still can't get that Maglone man out of my mind. I know I have a good memory. It doesn't trick me. There's something odd about that man."

"Don't let Major Stahl get you angry, Bick," the girl said. "He might crack down on you. Maybe he doesn't like you."

"I get what you mean," Bick said.

At the wreck of the Liberator, Bick found that the flames were out, but the wreckage was still too hot to approach for closer inspection. Near by, the Medics were moving some blanket-covered stretchers to the ambulances.

"Three of the crewmen were thrown clear," Stahl explained to Bick. "But they're dead."

Vantyne came over from his inspection of the tail surfaces, some distance away. "Apparently they shed their control surfaces. Too bad no one saw it more clearly. I mean, just when it happened. Tower was watching another plane, that B-Twenty-five. We were inside, briefing and clearing those other crews."

"I saw it," Bick said slowly. "All of it. The plane was blasted apart. Just as its wheels were lifting in, there was a muffled explosion. It was followed by a louder one. The whole left side fired up, and blew. And how it blew! Those poor fellows must have been killed inside the plane, by the concussion."

Stahl turned and stared at Bick. "Oh, so you're one of the I-Saw-It boys, as well as an I-Remember-When operator?"

Bick choked back the retort that sprang to his lips. Instead, "Well, someone has to be on the job with his eyes open," he said.

Vantyne grinned swiftly. Stahl stood with his legs wide-spread and glowered. Bick dug his hands into his pockets and walked a few

steps away.

In a little while, wearing fire-proofed gloves and jumpers, they were able to mull over the wreckage. Stahl stooped low and stared at some wing fragments.

"Looks as if Cannon made a good guess," he growled. "This is the left wing. There appears to have been a fuel explosion behind Number Two nacelle. Probably in the left inboard tank."

Bick followed the man's index finger. "Isn't that a lot of twisted metal for just a gas explosion, sir?"

"Five hundred-and-fifty gallons can make a pretty fair explosion, Cannon. Anyway, the heat of the fire would twist it up, too."

The Medics climbed back into the wreckage and dug in. Presently Bick was averting his eyes from the shattered remains of the other crewmen. Charred bodies aren't especially pretty to look at.

"Let's go back to Ops and confront the Thundering Herds," Stahl growled. "Got my car, Cannon?"

"This way," Bick pointed, "sir. What do you mean, Thundering Herds?"

"You'll see," Stahl promised grimly.

Bick saw.

AT Operations, more than a hundred air-crewmen stood watching the activities around the wreckage. They eyed Major Stahl and Bick and Vantyne. The big Operations Officer glared at them.

"What are you all hanging around for? Didn't you ever see an accident before? Your planes are grounded."

It was Mickey Luce who spoke up. "For how long?"

"Er—until the wreckage is cleared."

"Yeah?" Mickey laughed harshly. "Is that all? You mean to say your Tech Inspectors aren't combing our planes to see just how this sabotage is being worked?"

"Watch that!" Stahl snapped. "You can be Court Martialed for that sort of subversive talk."

"The Court Martial can't kill me," Mickey countered. "But someone or something around here at Station Five sure as blazes can. If I'm nuts enough to try and take off."

"You'll take off when you are told to," Stahl said. He looked at the others. "All of you."

Luce lighted a cigarette. "I'm a cock-eyed rooster if that's so," he said grimly. "I'll take off when and if I think I'm going to be able to deliver my plane and my crew and myself. And that ain't today, Major. Nor again, it ain't tomorrow. And if you think that is subversive, you can start convening your court! Adios!"

It didn't need a long look to see that the others in the huge crowd were of the same mind. Stahl bit his lip and then shrugged.

"See what I mean? Those dirty yellow-bellies!"

"Mickey Luce isn't a yellow-belly, Major," Bick said evenly. "Nor those others."

"Are you?" Stahl barked at him. "Huh?"

"I'll do the same," Bick shrugged off the taunt. "I'll take any ship any place that I think it is fit to go."

"Let's cut the jawing and get to the B-Twenty-five," Stahl snapped.

But Bick knew that the same thing was in the minds of them all.

The Ferrying Division, the most potent delivery weapon in the arsenal of America's armament shuttle to the fighting fronts, was being disrupted by doubt and fear.

The report on the Mitchell was:

"Engines apparently in good working order at time of the crash. Witnesses testify they were cut gradually and the plane put in a normal angle of glide until it nosed up and stalled. Pilot called Tower and announced his intended return to a landing when he observed other crash. Was not excited. Gear was left down. On downwind leg, pilot seemed about to call, but only a choking sound came to tower operator and then ship cut power and crashed. . . . Cause of accident not determined."

Stahl called them in later.

"You, Cannon and Captain Vantyne will be on our new Accident Board. With Maglone."

Bick started. "Captain Maglone, too? But isn't he a ground officer?"

"Engineering officer," Stahl told them both. "He'll consult with you two, and with me. That's all for now. But keep this silly talk of sabotage down. Remember that."

"Yes, sir," Bick answered.

As he spoke he wondered how much chance they had of telling the crewmen it was silly.

CHAPTER IV

The Break-Up

IT WASN'T too apparent to a casual observer, but Bick, working on the inside, saw it—the precautions that were being taken to avert other "cause-unknown" accidents.

The native soldier-guards were redoubled. Orders were given to shoot any person, in whatever uniform, who was seen about the parking areas at night without authorization.

G. I. guards were sent with the fueling and radio and servicing crews, to watch every move these men made.

Tech Inspectors combed the planes prior to giving the "Fly Off Field" signal to Ops. More than this was done, too.

"Cannon?" Stahl addressed the young pilot on the evening of the day following

the two new accidents. "You and Vantyne will ride each plane okayed by us, prior to its departure. That is something we had hit on last week, but we lost our Accident Investigation men in those planes, as you know. You'll be doing a lot of flying, but then—" the big florid blond smiled grimly,— "a hot pilot like yourself shouldn't mind that."

Bick twisted his head to see how Vantyne took the news, but the older pilot's aplomb wasn't shaken. He smiled, winked at Bick, and left the room with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

Bick joined him outside.

"Some job," Bick murmured. "Boy, am I going to check those planes before I fly them."

"Me, too." Vantyne was grinning. "Do you suppose Maglone is going to ride along?"

Bick didn't know. "But what I do know is that Maglone's not on the up-and-up," Bick told Vantyne. "He jumped like he'd been shot when I made a crack about a Gestapo in the plane, on the way here from Station Four. And I could swear that he is the man who got off that plane at Eastville."

"I should think Stahl would remember," Vantyne mused.

"The man who got off that plane called himself Trent Mullens," Bick said. "Doranne Harden told me that. She knows. So I must have been mistaken."

Vantyne moved suddenly back toward Ops. "Let's find out what planes are F. O. F., so we can get at it and start things rolling."

Bick was about to say something when he looked at Vantyne. The older man's face was suddenly lined and haggard, and his eyes were tragic.

His hands were shaking when he lighted a cigarette.

"It isn't going to be too bad. I hope," Bick said.

VANTYNE laughed, but there wasn't any mirth in it.

"Say Bick, let's ride these planes together. Most of 'em? I mean, two of us on watch would do better than one. Right? Will you back me up on that, when I suggest it to Stahl?"

Bick did. He had to.

"Major, if we are going to be your Accident Officers, we'll have to have some say in this thing," he told Stahl. "Either we ride together on these check hops, or you'd better find yourself two other pilots."

"Okay," Stahl growled. "But that'll show up the work. So let's quit the jawing and get busy."

"Let's-quit-the-jawing Stahl!" Bick repeated bitterly to himself, as the two went out under guard to the parking area. "That's his motto!"

They started with a B-25, Bick covering

the exterior of the plane while Vantyne made the interior check. It was Bick who gunned the plane down the runway and tooled it up in a smooth take-off.

Tensely the young pilot watched the engine instruments as he made the power reductions. He climbed to 2,500 feet before he attempted a turn. He put the plane through its paces, with Vantyne taking notes on the instrument readings.

After thirty minutes, Bick grinned.

"Well, this is one plane that will see the Front before the week is out," he said. He clicked his throat-mike alive with the button on the wheel. "Tower from One-eight-a-fiva . . . On downwind leg, at two-five hundred . . . Landing instructions."

Back at Ops, Stahl nodded his satisfaction with the report. "Okay. Turn out Captain Firman's crew and get them off. You, Vantyne and Cannon, get going again, and keep 'em rolling!"

Bick nodded. But his mind was on some-things else. "Where is Captain Maglone?" he asked. "I thought we'd see him, too."

Stahl bit his cigar. "He's got a day or two off, to get his affairs in order. After all, he isn't flight personnel. We don't need him. Yet. Now, let's cut the gab and get rolling."

IN SUCCESSION, two more Mitchells, a Liberator, three C-46's and two A-26's were checked. On the A-26 rides, Vantyne sat the saddle-seat while Bick piloted.

Turning downwind on his second A-26 check, Bick reached over and swung the Fuel Selector Valves to Auxiliary Tanks, tried the Cross-feed on both sides, and then back to Mains. Then he reached back and swung the Ferry Tank and the Bomb bay tank control to On.

The right engine burped, took hold, burped again.

"Put 'em on Mains, Bick," Vantyne yelled. "Don't fool around!"

But Bick merely shook his head, flicked the fuel boosters to High, and watched the instruments until the engines died with a popping of backfiring and the Oil Pressure and Manifold Pressure gauges shoved their needles for the Zero mark. Then Bick went into action.

Back to Mains he flipped the selectors, as the plane lost altitude sickeningly. Reaching overhead, he primed the engines with the primer-toggles desperately, slamming the Mixture Control selectors to Full Rich. Swiftly he cracked the hatch off with the emergency release, yanked the throttles back to quarter-open, and flicked the mike-button on.

"Mayday! Mayday!" he voiced the S. O. S. of the air. . . "Mayday! To Tower . . . Seven-two-ninah."

Vantyne was jerking Bick's arm. "Bail

out you blasted fool!" he yelled. "Hit the air. I'm going."

Bick slammed the man's hand aside.

"I've got to let them know, on the ground, what happened, in case we don't get to live," he snapped. "You bail out, if you want. I'm sticking until I get the message across."

Out of the corner of his eye, he had a picture of Vantyne holding desperately to the now open cockpit fighting to hang on while he got a leg out, bracing it against the entering edge of the right wing. Even as he made his report to Tower, Bick knew that the elderly pilot had figured the only sure way to get out of the A-26 by parachute without hitting the radio antenna, or the tail surfaces. Vantyne dropped over, falling head foremost toward the ground far below as the A-26 went over in a steep bank.

The propeller of the A-26 engine is feet forward from the entering edge of the high wing, so it didn't have to be feathered, although feathering would have been safer.

Vantyne was gone. Bick started pulling his safety belt loose to follow.

Then, with a heartening roar, the engines were taking hold again, scant hundreds of feet above the sandy wastes outlining the field.

Bick settled back in his seat, shoved the throttles full on and the r.p.m. to full low pitch, and prayed. And his prayers were answered.

He braked it at the runway's end and turned back. But even as he did, he saw something, someone, that brought a frown to his forehead. Or did he? So quickly had the man disappeared behind the wrecking truck still working on the B-24, that Bick couldn't swear to it.

"But if that man wasn't Maglone, who is supposed to be in town, then I'm dotty," Bick muttered. "I'd know that barrel build anywhere."

An hour later, Stahl called him into his conference room. There, tight-lipped, and hard-eyed, sat the base C.O., a Naval Intelligence officer from the nearby U. S. Naval Station, and two civilians whose hard eyes and fighting jaws marked them as "undercover." F. B. I. undercover.

"You and Vantyne are lucky to be alive," Stahl opened up without any preliminaries. "We checked your plane and fifteen other A-26's. Twelve of them had water in the Ferry tanks!"

Bick nodded, his eyes wide. "So it is sabotage?"

The Base C. O., a "retired" Colonel, nodded. "Among ourselves in this room, yes. But this is not to be discussed outside."

"Roger, sir," Bick murmured. "And wasn't Vantyne injured?"

"Hurt an ankle," Stahl said. He heard Bick's story of the elderly pilot's clever es-

cape from the dangerous plane. "Smart thinking. On his part! You should have been with him."

Bick shrugged. "Don't think I didn't want to be. I just felt I ought to stay until Tower heard the symptoms so you could check back, in case we didn't make it."

"Amateur heroics," Stahl barked. "Lime-light hunting."

"Oh, sure," Bick said, flushing. "I'm a yellow-belly, too. Like the rest of the Ferry Commandos, according to you!"

THE Colonel looked sharply at Stahl, but said nothing.

"Well, that explains how some of the A-26's have gone," the Ops officer said, after a moment. "It also explains a few other wrecks that occurred just about the time the planes would be swinging to Bomb bay fuel. But about the blowing up and the heeling over in turns, we don't know."

"It calls for organization," one of the civilians said. "We are working on that end of it, outside. In town."

"There has been submarine activity here of late, something we haven't had in many months," the Naval Intelligence man said. "Also, our radio monitors have picked up transmission of messages from the mainland to the U-boats. But the enemy radio has kept moving. By automobile, or plane, even. Our monitors haven't been able to track them down yet."

Bick came to his feet. "Sir?" he addressed himself to the Colonel. "I'd like to check a few more planes. I want to fly again before this thing gets me down."

"Glad to see someone wants to fly," Stahl growled. "Fifteen crews, this very day, have refused to take the air. This is the break-up for the Ferrying Division."

The Colonel nodded. "Right! It means disruption of a fine gang of men. That is, unless we can track down the organization in back of all this."

"It's them or us. You're right, Colonel. The service is threatened with disaster."

Bick saluted and started for the door. But the Colonel stopped him.

"You and Vantyne have done a fine job to-day, Cannon. We'll remember that. Happy landings, lieutenant."

After leaving Headquarters, Bick went to work on his last B-25. He checked and rechecked everything on the ground. Oxygen tanks, masks, all flight gear and equipment came in for inspection. The regular crew went along for the ride, as well, when the trim Mitchell bomber taxied out for the test take-off.

Bick took the left-hand seat and the regular pilot acted as co-driver.

The plane's ferry pilot looked briefly at Bick, then away again.

"I'm that yellow-belly, Captain Firman,"

he said harshly. "Remember? I was supposed to take off hours ago."

Bick looked at him in surprise. "I thought I'd seen this plane before. It was all set to go."

"Uh-huh. But I had a hunch, and wouldn't take it. So I got called a yellow-belly by that big Hun inside Ops."

Bick sobered. Stahl. S-t-a-h-l. That was a German name, right enough. He recalled Stahl's apparent softening in his attitude toward the Ferry Commandos in the conference room with the Colonel present. And the F. B. I. men.

"Could be that Stahl is a man to be watched," he thought. But he also knew, "Everybody is to be watched, in this deal. Everybody!"

The plane roared down the runway, took the air with a surge of speed, and everything was just as it should have been. Firman took over and put the plane through its paces. He went into a steep turn to the left, then kicked it hard over to the right. Bick's oxygen mask, which had been hanging on the wheel, unused, slid off, and the young pilot reached down to the deck to retrieve it. As he was coming up with it, Firman pulled up in a chandelle and kicked the right rudder over hard, reducing power, to turn it into a hammerhead stall.

"You're feeling fine, okay, okay!" Bick laughed. "I—"

He broke off. A loud clicking had come to his ears. He looked around the cockpit, mystified, and then he swung forward again, his eyes widening in horror.

A heavy pall of smoke was creeping back from the bombardier's compartment, up forward.

"Fire!" Bick snapped to the stunned crewmen. "Grab the C-O-two bottle and get up there!"

But the crewmen were choking. Acrid, yellow flames that were lacing back, were billowing up to blind them in the cockpit!

CHAPTER V

Riot in Town

DESPERATELY Bick struggled with the hatch, to get it open, then went for his oxygen mask. He couldn't see anything in the cockpit now, not even the instrument panel. He snapped the mask in place and, guiding the plane with his right hand on the wheel, jerked the hatch open.

The suction tore huge gouts of the yellow, billowing smoke out of the opened hatch.

Bick, breathing comfortably but flying entirely by sound and feel, groped to find the ferry captain.

The man was choking, leaned forward in the seat. Bick groped further, found the man's mask, jammed it over his face until the

all but unconscious pilot realized what it was. In another minute, he was sitting straight and yanking open his own hatch.

The smoke was dying, so Bick shoved Firman's hands to the control wheel, and started back. He cleared a crewman from where he lay gasping in the Navigator's well, and pulled the drop-handle to create further draught. Then he reached back to his own side of the pit and yanked the bomb doors open.

Back over the top he crawled, snaking over the Bomb bay tanks, and opened the rear hatches. In another three minutes, the plane was cleared of the acrid smoke, and the crewmen were coming to, dazed and fighting for air.

Bick resumed his seat and called tower for landing instructions. After that he again turned the plane over to the co-driver and made his way forward to see where the smoke had come from. He found out quickly.

The shattered remnants of a smoke bomb were directly behind the instrument panel. Hooked up to a toggle, all of it cleverly hidden from casual checkers of the plane, was a taut cable connected to the rudder controls. Bick crawled back in time for the landing.

"You are under orders to keep your mouths shut about this," he cautioned the crew. "You'd better come to Major Stahl's office with me. He'll probably want you under security guard until this thing is thrashed out. But I don't get it! The plane was in perfect shape this morning."

"Did you kick the crate around, hard, the way I did?" Firman asked.

Bick shook his head. "No. But, thinking over that hook-up, it would work best when airstream-pressure was on the controls. I think you could boot it hard on the ground without even getting a peep out of it. But in the air the bomb would go off."

Later Stahl agreed with Bick. "Lucky you had your masks and oxygen hook-ups handy, or you'd have dived right in, the way the others did. Well we're finding out how its done, but not who. You crewmen temporarily will be kept under close observation, for our and your protection."

"Yes, sir," Bick said.

"Cannon?" The big blond officer rubbed his chin and beheaded another cigar with his strong teeth. "I think we can give you a rest

for the day." He fired the cigar. "Good work," he added grudgingly. "I take it back. You aren't a yellow-belly. You are just dumb and lucky. Twelve other planes were fixed that way."

Bick looked at the man steadily. "Can I get a pass to town?"

"No. Why?"

"Want to relax a bit."

"Okay. Until the twelve-thirty bus. Zero-zero-thirty hours, as the Army has it. But be on the job early to-morrow."

"Yes," Bick said, "sir."

"And keep your mouth shut, your eyes and ears open, and don't say 'Yes—sir,' in that nasty way."

"Yes," said Bick, "sir." And saluted.

Bick called Doranne on the telephone. She said she could go to town, too.

"Your pal, Vantyne, has the leaping meemies," she told him, once they were in the bus.

"His ankle is a bit swollen, too. We have him hospitalized, but outside of being jittery, he's all right."

They had already eaten in the Consolidated Mess, since all restaurants were "Out of Bounds" to G. I.'s. They found a table on the Grande Hotel porch and sipped at some wine while they watched the crowds increase until the sidewalks were thronged.

Slowly the evening dusk thickened. Suddenly Bick sat straight.

"Hey!" he murmured. "There is Maglone. See him? With a couple of civilians and some native soldiers? I wonder what is up?"

"Native M. P.'s," Doranne corrected him. "Gosh, Bick! He looks funny. As if he had been drinking too much. Notice? I bet he got messed up with maybe a storekeeper, or someone who put a too-high price on something. They're taking him in."

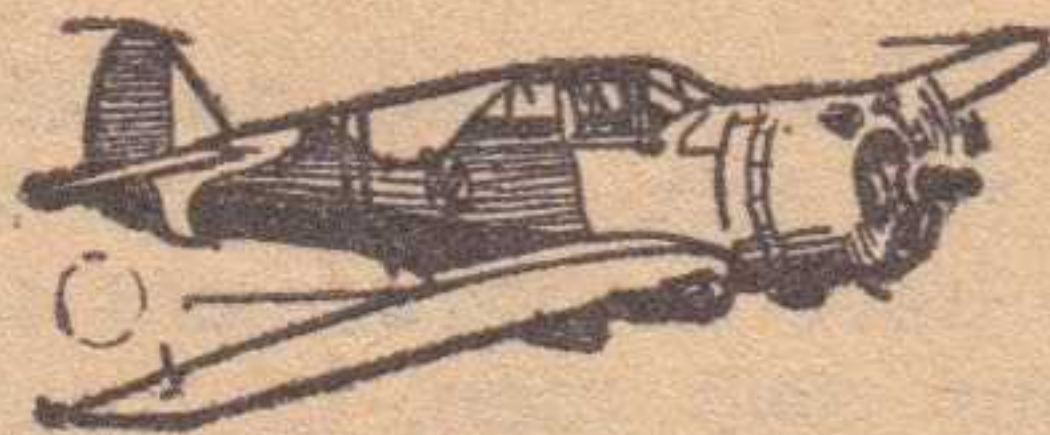
BICK stood up to gaze. He saw Maglone's head was wobbly. He noticed other things, too.

"Boy, is he plastered! He's got his Air Corps wings and propeller insignia on upside down. But why didn't they turn him over to our M. P.'s?"

The group had come to a halt, gesticulating and jabbering.

"I still say that chap named Mullens and Maglone are one and the same," Bick said

[Turn page]



THE EXCITING LAST DAYS OF SKY COMBAT during the war against Japan are pictured with dramatic intensity in THE KAMIKAZE KID, a novelet by Robert Sidney Bowen that packs a real punch — featured in our next issue!

to Doranne. "The one who got off at Eastville, that day."

Doranne shook her head. "Maglone said he hadn't been to Washington in years. Mullens got on there. Maglone said he'd never been to Eastville. Mullens got off there. Anyway, this Mullens was a Government clerk, or something. My log in the scrap-book had the notation, 'No Refund. Government Purchased Ticket'."

Bick's eyes were suddenly alive, and his hand was gripping the girl's arm. The word "Gestapo," and its effect on Maglone, the man's mysterious comings and goings, with apparent sanction at Station Five! His being put on the plane at Station Four by a high-ranking officer! All that went through Bick's mind. He looked swiftly at the group that was just beginning to break up, and then swiftly at Doranne.

"Would your log show the weight of this Mullens?" he asked. "Would it?"

"Why, yes, Bick. Of course. Is it important to you?"

"Very! And fast! Can you telephone someone, another nurse, maybe, to look it up for you?"

"Yes, Bick. I can."

"Make it fast. I'll be out here with Maglone and his pals. Make it as fast as you can." Doranne departed hastily. Bick went down the steps and began to argue with the group of men.

"But, amigos, this man is a friend," he was saying ten minutes later. "See? If he were not unconscious, he could tell you. Take him to the American Military Police, no?"

"No!" he was told by one of the civilians in good English.

Several times Bick had to step in front of the group as they started to take the collapsed Maglone away. More civilians were beginning to gather and Bick knew only too well what side of the argument they would take after seeing their own soldiers with a gringo. They didn't like being interfered with. It would work out the same way in any country.

"Just a minute," Bick kept saying. "Please?"

The group was shoving him aside, when Doranne burst out of the hotel door, came running down the steps.

"Bick, the scrapbook is gone," she said excitedly. "Disappeared since this afternoon. Major Stahl had asked about it, and I promised to leave it where I'd have it handy for him. But I just talked with him and he claims he doesn't know anything about it!"

"He claims!" Bick shouted. "Doranne! Do you remember anything concerning Mullen's weight? Anything?"

The group was pushing past, was going on. Doranne was thinking.

He—he was heavier than you, I re-

member. Much. It seems to me he must have weighed over fifty pounds more than you, thinking of it now. Maybe you were one sixty-five? Maybe two-fifteen."

"About Maglone's own weight now. Quick, Doranne! Run and get some Yank soldiers. M.P.'s Anything in Yank uniform. See the point? And make it speedy, because I'm following this gang."

"But, Bick—why?"

"I'm beginning to see a light. Maglone isn't the drunken type. Not ever. He's too cagey and sly to let himself go like that. His wings and propellor insignia is upside-down. Maybe I'm imagining things, Doranne, but that means 'Distress' when it is a flag. A desperate 'S.O.S.' from a man who knows he has run out his string. I think that's it."

"Roger!" Doranne said crisply, her eyes trying to believe Bick, but not quite succeeding. "Bick, you sure you didn't bump your head hard today?"

"Honey, please do what I'm asking you," Bick begged, his eyes eloquent. "I think you've got this set-up figured. The disappearance of your scrap-book with important information in it just about clinches everything. Now will you get going?"

For answer, Doranne darted away down the street.

Bick turned, saw the group of soldiers and the two civilians and the staggering Maglone turn a corner into a darkened alley.

PPROMPTLY Bick turned the corner after them. At that moment he saw three Yank soldiers about to cross the street from his own side. Two of them were smoking cigars. Swiftly, Bick crossed over to them. They were aircrewmembers from the base.

"Mayday!" he said to them sharply. "Follow me!"

"Lieutenant, sir," a big sergeant protested, his eyes owlsh. "Are you sure you ain't maybe been drinkin' a spot too much of this here African gin?"

"Follow me, or send some men with spunk after me!" Bick barked. "That's a direct order!" And he was gone around the corner.

But not alone. The three Yanks were following him, faces grim in the half-light. One of them saw the group ahead.

"Hey, Looey," he warned. "Them's native soldier M. P.'s! Them fellers don't play nice."

"Are they?" Bick retorted, quickening his pace to close the gap. "Can you swear to it? Don't we have an agreement that they are to turn our own men, in trouble over to our own patrols?"

"Roger Dodger," the big sergeant said. "So what do we do?"

"I've sent for help," Bick said, as the four of them went swiftly in the wake of the hurrying group which was taking Maglone along. "If they try to run for it, or harm that captain, we tackle them!"

"Then what are we waiting for?" another of the G. I.'s yelled as the men ahead broke into a run. "Let's get 'em, boys."

Three of them, led by Bick, bore in on the fast-trotting gang, while the fourth stopped and cupped his hands to his lips.

"Yank G. I.'s this way!" he howled. "Yank G. I.'s this way! Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!"

Then he, too, joined the milling gang.

The action was fast and full of sound. One of the two civilians cursed and went for his hip pocket, but Bick's zooming fist dropped him. A knife flashed. The big sergeant kicked at a fist which held the knife. The knife went spinning away.

The native "M. P.'s" soon had enough. Dropping their burden in the alley they ran for it. The civilian with his fractured knife-hand started to curse fluently in German and tried to break free.

At this moment, from around the alley's mouth at the far end, came a knot of Yank G. I.'s, their ears still full of the rousing call of Mayday!

Shades flew up and doors banged open. Light flooded the alley as curious natives thrust their heads out to see what all the noise was about. Soon the natives started to come out themselves. Tension mounted as G. I.'s at the mouth of the alley caught up with the uniformed runaways and, with a yelp of joy, started slugging. Residents from the houses joined in.

In a few moments screams of a siren rose above the tumult of the riot. A car broke cover and its headlights limned the scene. Next a portable loudspeaker began to magnify an official native voice trying to calm the natives. After a time the effort was successful.

Bick saw Doranne step down from the car. She was followed by the Naval Intelligence Officer Bick had seen with the Colonel and Stahl. Soon bonafide native police took over, whacking the skulls of the would-be runaways.

Maglone now was standing straight and hard-eyed, staring at Bick.

"Well, Buttinski, you stuck to it long enough finally to do me some good," Maglone snapped. "You and your elephant memory! I was cracking the undercover part of this thing wide open when these Nazi civilians and their phony police got wise to me. There's a passel of phony guards at the field also. So I played drunk after I succeeded in turning my insignia upside down. I figured they'd kill me if I made a break for it and this way I had a chance to slow them up. Thanks for the

interference. And now I've got work to do at Station Five before that real Gestapo man can escape."

"We're sticking right with you," Bick snapped, grabbing Doranne and pushing her back into the official car. "We've got things to tell you. We've got the sabotage all figured out as to what causes the wrecks—all but the planes that explode. Yes, we have things to tell you."

"Let's go," snapped the "ground" captain.

"Yes sir, Mister Mullens." Bick grinned tightly, as he loaded into the car. "Mr. Mullens, of the F. B. I."

The car screamed down the street with siren blaring and headed for the road to Station Five.

CHAPTER VI

Desperate Chance

MULLENS alias Maglone, listened grimly to what the two had to tell him. But he was more interested in the Naval Intelligence Operative who sat up in front, his ears covered by a head-set.

"This is a monitor car," he told Doranne and Bick swiftly. "Navy Intelligence has picked up some U-boat messages, to the mainland. More are coming in now."

The Navy man, as if to confirm the F. B. I. man's words, turned his head swiftly. "They're on again," he said. "A rendezvous is being arranged to pick up someone at sea. From a plane. My men at the Naval Station are listening, too, and will have the area covered. But they must be desperate to come into the open this way, uncoded."

Bick thought fast. "What frequency are they on?"

"On five hundred. The distress frequency."

The young pilot nodded. "Sure. A frequency that any plane with a Command set can tune in and talk to."

"Hold it!" the Navy spy barked. "Someone is answering now, is giving instructions to stand by for a B-Twenty-five. To be belly-landed alongside the sub!"

"Driver, clamp your flat foot down on that accelerator, and get your red blinking-lights working," Maglone called out. "We're not even going to stop at the gate for identification. Straight for Ops. That German, who has been posing as an American pilot for many years is probably already climbing into his B-Twenty-five. We've got to stop him."

Through the gate the car roared, slithered on two wheels in a turn before the astounded guards could even shout a challenge, and bored hard for the line and Ops.

Bick and Maglone were out and running when the car was still clocking speed.

Into Ops they raced, and because Bick was younger and had his wind still with him,

it was he who shouted to the startled Ops noncom.

"Is a B-25 taking off? Quick, man! Is it?"

"Major Stahl and Captain Vantyne are testing one, sir," the Ops clerk answered. "They are taxiing out now, sir."

Maglone shoved Bick aside and grabbed the Tower telephone.

"Stop that B-Twenty-five," he yelled. "Don't let him take off."

Bick didn't wait, but plunged out the door, yelling for the Airdrome Officer of the Day. The surprised guard officer appeared almost at once.

"Send a detail with orders to fire!" Bick shouted. "Stop that B-Twenty-five. I'm headed for an A-Twenty-six to get that plane if he does manage to take off."

With two Security Guards to okay him, Bick raced in a jeep for the line, swarmed up into one of the tested A-26's, and in another moment was firing up the engines and releasing the parking brakes.

"Tower from Cannon, Number Two-seven-seven! Tower from Cannon! I'm intercepting that B-25! Warn him I'll be in his way on the runway!"

"The B-25 is turning onto the runway now," Tower came back fast. "He is broadcasting over a frequency of five hundred kilocycles in German. I can't stop his take-off."

Bick heard the roar of the Mitchell's engines even before he saw the lights of the racing jeep with the A.O.D. losing the race to head off the Nazi spy. With a muttered curse, the young pilot swung his plane hard, gunned the throttles and took off downwind and along the wide taxi-strip.

At the same time, he twisted the coffee-grinder on the Command set to 500 kcs. He was thinking, "Maybe I can still save that other poor lug. Maybe he's listening, too, a gun in his ribs. Perhaps I can get through to him. If he thought it was a test hop, he'd have had his chute with him. There's a chance he can get away!"

Into the throat-mike, and through the rapid, guttural German that was flowing into the night air, Bick yelled instructions.

"Bail out!" he shouted. "He's busy with the throttles and the mike and his gear! Wait until he is climbing and slide out of your seat and bail out through the Navigator's well. It's your only chance."

Again and again he repeated the message. Then he pulled his plane up in a chandelle and tuned his radio compass in on 500 kcs. He cracked his radio jackbox to Compass position, picked up the German voice, and watched the radio-compass needle swing to a point and stop. It swung again, this time seaward, and stopped.

"The smart rat," Bick growled. "He knows I'm trying to home on him because he's run-

ning without position or navigating or landing lights. And I can't see him. So he's tuned off and now I'm getting the sub's position."

GRIMLY, he called back to Station Five on command, and then turned seaward, following the compass needle. Station Five knew his plan! Now it was up to him alone. He had watched the needle swing and point down, and knew he was over the waiting sub, so he swung in a wide turn, his eyes watchful. And then in came Station Five again.

"Station Five radio, to Two-seven-seven. Somebody bailed out of that B-Twenty-five while it was climbing. Our searchlights got the chute when it opened, maybe a hundred feet up. It was a close one. We're looking for the man now."

"Roger," Bick answered. "That leaves me to crash the spy if I can without taking a good Yank along if I don't handle it just right. I'm over the sub now but see no sign of the B-Twenty-five. Hold it! The sub's searchlights have picked me up and the B-Twenty-five too. He's right under me."

"Stay clear, Two-seven seven!" a cool, new voice cut in. "This is Navy Station cutting in. Our dive-bombers are ranging for the target now. Stay clear."

Bick cut off a groan of despair but he obeyed orders. He cut a wide turn, dropping for the dark water below, his eyes sharp on the sub's running lights. Suddenly fire and tracer balls showed on the sub's deck, and Bick knew the Navy was overhead somewhere, ranging to drop depth charges.

Below him he saw the B-25 drop into the glare of the sub's lights for the first time. He was startled to observe the Mitchell's gear still lowered. Only now raising into the wells.

"Wonder why he didn't raise them before?" Bick was puzzled. "He is getting them up now to make a decent belly-landing. Probably he was too busy before to bother with it."

Now he could see the B-25 settling, closer and closer, to the sub. The U-boat guns were ablaze, standing off the Navy bombers for a last, desperate minute, hoping to rescue their super-spy and get him safely aboard and away. He'd be useful for new destruction, somewhere.

The Mitchell paused alongside the under-sea boat. Bick wondered, because there was no sign of a splash visible. All at once the Mitchell appeared to widen, to spread, to mushroom into B-24 size, then to B-29 size. It spurted white flames.

"Explosion!" Bick roared into his mike. "The B-Twenty-five blew up just as its wheels were settling into the well. It's blown up and it is falling on the U-Boat deck and crew. The show's all over."

In the glare of the lights that had followed his landing a while later, Bick blinked again and stared at the F. B. I. man.

"Huh? You mean you found out how they were exploding on take-off?"

Maglone, ex-Mullens, grinned tightly. "You told us out there at the scene. Remember? The wheels were coming up? Just like they were when we had our other explosions that we thought were caused by fumes? Well, brother, I got there first this time. It clicked. So we checked some wheel wells, and there was the answer."

"What answer?"

"A little-bitty gadget, painted just like the plane, with a plunger, all but invisible. The gadget was actuated by the tire meeting the plunger and shoving it into the small amount of explosive. The explosion took place inside the five-hundred and fifty gallons of the left inboard tank on the B-Twenty-four, and right into the mains on the B-Twenty-five's."

"Why don't you cut out the gab and get your uniform ready for all those medals?" a gruff voice broke in.

Major Stahl, the parachute pack still on him, and Doranne, weak, smiling and big-eyed at his side came out of the darkness.

Bick stared at the big airline pilot and grinned. "Must have been a nice ride, with that spy in his loaded B-Twenty-five." He looked at Maglone again. "When did you first suspect Vantyne? At Eastville?"

THE F. B. I. man shook his head. "No. I was just looking, then. It was before the war, but convoys of goods were being tipped off. So I rode the airliners and watched for likely spots. I was curious about Vantyne's souped-up planes, with complete radio and instruments. But he kidded me by giving them to the Government when war broke out. Then you tipped me off to him, here."

"Cord Vantyne!" Bick shook his head.

"Well, I didn't know he was the guilty man until tonight, in town. After Doranne missed her scrapbook I got to figuring it out. I knew it had to be Vantyne. There in the hospital and all."

"Until then, you had me or Stahl marked down, huh?" the F.B.I. operative asked. "Blasted white of you. But it almost cost you your life to let Vantyne know you suspected me."

"Why?"

"By pinning me down, through your unauthorized snooping and your elephant memory. After you discovered I was F.B.I., Vantyne soon would have been under suspicion. So he tried to bump you off."

"But he flew in those planes with me when I tested them," Bick protested.

"Sure," Stahl growled. "Sure, he did.

After going into them and putting the ship into order so she wouldn't hurt him. When you crossed him up by running water into the engines that time he bailed out quick without you. Didn't it strike you as strange that time he bailed out quick without you. Didn't it strike you as strange that he had the sure way figured out to bail out and save his own skin on the spur of the moment? I bet he didn't tell you how to do it."

Maglone took it up. "I had his number, and his background, finally, after five years. Originally he was Curt von Stein, master organizer. How long had you known him, Bick?"

"Only a few years. He was wealthy. Came from Virginia."

"So you thought. The man was clever and talented. But when he saw the danger of your suspicions turning me up as an F. B. I. man, which I couldn't be to anyone here but Stahl and the C. O. and Navy Intelligence, until I rounded up the entire gang—he went after you. When he missed you he tried to get his boys downtown to take care of me. He almost succeeded. But it's all over now."

Stahl broke in. "So it's Onward Ferry Command. But let's cut the gab and do something." He looked at Doranne. "Why don't you take our Junior Snooper up the line and pour some coffee into him, while you both cry over losing that scrapbook that had his precious name in it?"

Bick's eyes widened, and he stared at Doranne. The girl blushed.

"Major, why don't you shut your big mouth?" she said, very unmilitary-like. "Bick isn't as smart a detective as you two give him credit for."

"Well, slap me down and call me kee-wee!" Stahl breathed.

"Hey, Bick, are you really that dumb? Then cut out the gab and get going. With the gal. You've got things to hear and learn. Heck, a blind man could see what was going on with you two, clear back at Eastville. Hang it all, I was top man until then."

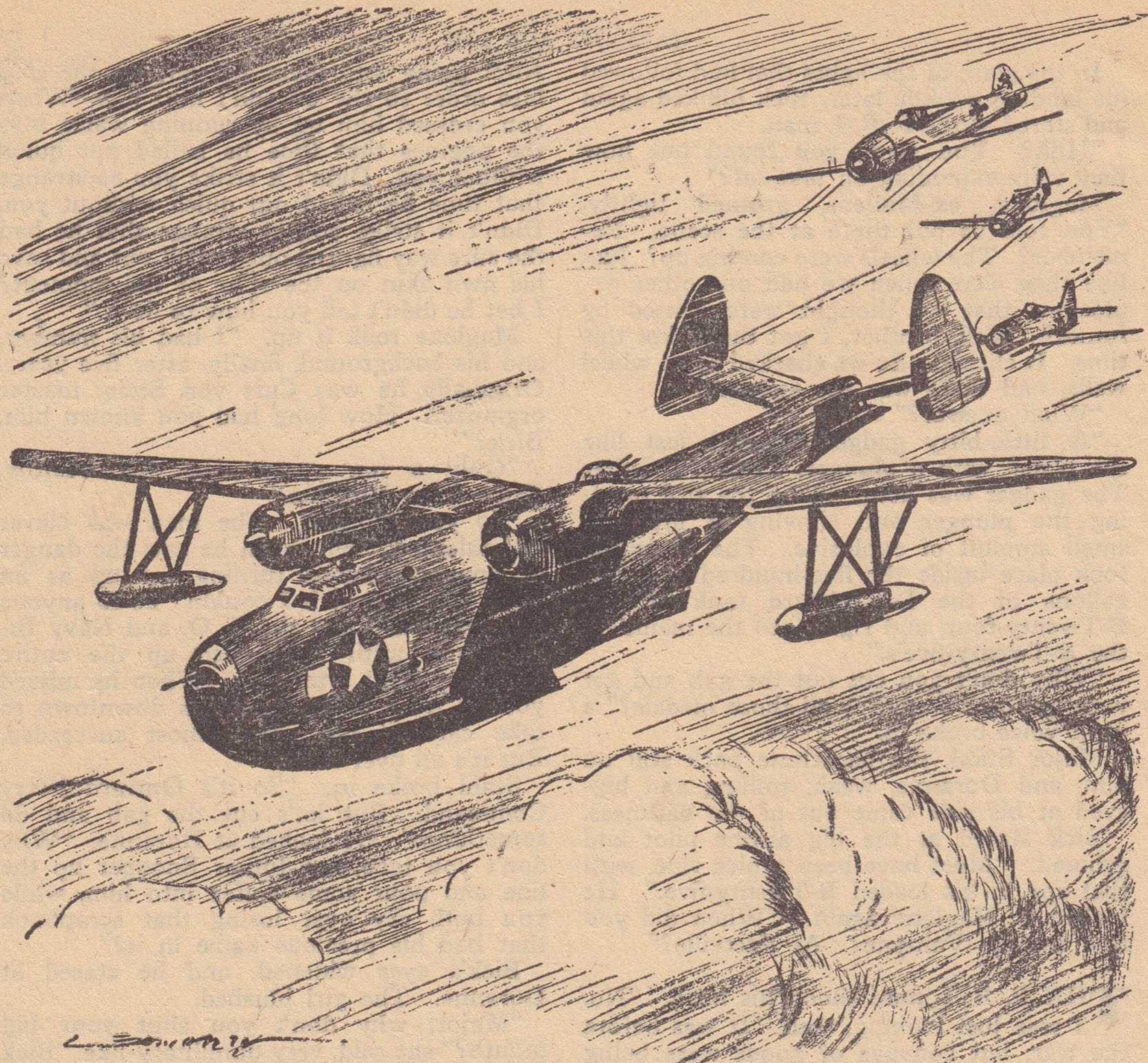
Bick grinned suddenly. "Oh! So you do remember."

Stahl grinned and shoved Bick toward Doranne.

"Let's cut the gab and do something," he growled. "Come on, Maglone-Mullens!"

Bick stared out at the planes, planes that would now fly the ocean and the jungle and the desert in safety, planes that would be delivered to win the war in a much shorter time than either of them could then surmise.

A big moon was breaking through clouds above the waters where the U-boat had gone down. Bick took Doranne's arm and walked her slowly along the palm-fringed lane.



The Focke-Wulf 190's came down, their exhausts trailing white vapor

BOMB VOYAGE!

By **ROBERT S. FENTON**

Foghorn Fuddy and Showboat Torkle find that the mention of Brooklyn is a password to roaring adventure in the air!

TWO husky gentlemen of nautical persuasion stood outside a tavern not far from Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn. They were next to a latticed window and through it they could see two trim dolls sitting in a booth enjoying beers. They could hear the talk passing, too, and the taller of the two sailors had sharp ears.

"They are expecting a couple of gentlemen friends," "Showboat" Torkle said, and laid a 20-20 eye against one of the lattice's diamondshaped port-holes again. He swung away from the window and poked a finger as

big as a banana into "Foghorn" Fuddy's ribs. "Look, Foghorn, we could get there first."

Showboat got his name honestly enough. He once skipped a three-piece stringed ensemble on a Lake Michigan pleasure boat. Now he wore an aerial gunner's mate's insignia. He was a tall, beefy person with a disarming egg-shaped face. With his eyebrows so high above his mild blue eyes, he always seemed surprised at something.

"You think we'll start a brawl?" Foghorn asked, and Showboat had to shush him because First Class Aviation Ordnanceman

Fuddy had a deep mournful voice, but loud.

"Now, look," Showboat said, and shoved his chowder cap farther back. "Here is what I get from what I heard. These babes don't know the men they are waitin' for. One of the babes got a letter from a friend who arranged the blind dates. They are expecting men named Hamby and O'Toole."

"O'Toole," Foghorn gulped. "Then I want none of this business, Showboat. Irishers are tough and never forget. Let's go over to Coney Island and get our own broads."

"Aw-w-w-w-w, you are just yeller."

"I guess I am," Foghorn sneered. "I just spent eleven days on a raft, and et a seagull, and that has made me cautious. Awright, and so we go in."

"I'll be Hamby," Showboat said. "You're O'Toole. It'll be fun. After all, we only got three days left before we go aboard that packet."

HE LED the way. They passed a long bar, zigzagged through a maze of tables and finally reached the booth.

There was a blonde and a brunette. The blonde had enough red lead on her mouth, Foghorn thought, to supply a mine sweeper for two years. Her eyes were big and round and did not look too bright.

The brunette seemed to be the smart one. She eyed their approach in the manner of a lookout getting a flash of a sub's periscope.

"I'm Hamby," Showboat said.

"Yeah, and I'm O'Toole," Foghorn moaned.

"You're in a snug harbor, Big Boy," said the blonde. "My girl frien' here is Lulu Botoski. My frien's call me Kittens."

"Just a sec," Lulu said, and knitted her stenciled brows. "You ain't a chief. Sadie said you was a chief, Hamby."

"I got broke since I saw Sadie last," Showboat Torkle answered. "I shot at the skipper's gig in Panama, as it was foggy and I thought it was a sub. Of course, I had one beer too many."

The dolls laughed, and Showboat and Foghorn berthed alongside them. After two beers and some shifty conversation, Showboat suggested they go where it was more lively. Foghorn caught on. He slid a glance toward the entrance to see if there was any sign yet of a chief's white visored cap, or a face that looked like Killarney.

Then he glanced back at a little snapshot he had in his hand. It was Kittens in a bathing suit that would have been too small even for a grasshopper.

"Whew-w-w-w-w!" Foghorn said. "Some-thin' to remember you by, baby. I will keep it."

"Tee-hee," Kittens laughed. "You're swell."

Showboat was just beginning to get better

acquainted with the brunette when she cast a gander at the door, let out a scream, and grabbed her handbag.

"Kittens, it's Mike!" she yelped. "I got to get out of here."

"Wait," Showboat said. "If he wants to get tough—"

"He's a cop, you lug," Lulu said. "I am engaged to him. Oh, come on, Kittens, before he sees us."

"You ain't kiddin'," the blonde said. "He'll tell Red I was with you. Out to the powder room, but fast, Lulu. Spinach to these sailors. Get out of my way, O'Toole."

A long, spiked heel ground Foghorn's in-step, and he let out a horrible roar. Lulu pushed Showboat out of the way, and he crashed into a waiter loaded with beers.

It was at that moment that a big husky citizen in a C.P.O.'s uniform loomed up. Behind the chief was the face Foghorn had been worrying about.

"Who was with those dames that just beat it?" Chief Gunner's Mate Hamby roared.

"Them two gobs," the waiter said. "I heard the dames call them by name, too. Hamby and—"

Showboat Torkle was thankful there was so much smoke in the place, and he was more thankful that Hamby's eyes were not too soberly clear. Showboat poked the C.P.O. in the chin, and Foghorn belted the Irishman.

Showboat Torkle and Foghorn Fuddy went out through the kitchen. They ran eighteen blocks before they hid behind some garbage cans in an alley.

"Well, they don't know our real names," Foghorn said, between great gulps for air. "An' those two hombres didn't get too good a look at us. What two-timers, them babes!"

"I hope the powder magazine they went to blowed up," Showboat said. "It's been fun, though."

THE two gobs set sail for home. Showboat Torkle's uncle and aunt lived in Flatbush, and Showboat and Foghorn walked up three flights of stairs when they reached that Flatbush apartment building. They dropped anchor in a room filled with souvenirs—a baseball autographed by Camilli, a glove Showboat had swiped off Pete Reiser, and one of Durocher's neckties which Showboat had lifted when Brooklyn fans had once mobbed homecoming Dodgers in Grand Central. Showboat's bass viol stood in a corner.

"The navy wouldn't let me take it aboard," Showboat said. "A fine thing."

"You should have learned the harmonica," Foghorn said, and took off his shoes. "Boys, if that Hamby ever finds out!"

"He will never know who hit him," Showboat said. "Let's bunk, Foghorn. Say, I

been wonderin' what it was we been assigned to take off in next. Oh, I know. It's one of those big cargo planes, but they never told us what it carried or what we was supposed to do. All I know, the gol'striper walked up and ast for six brave men to step forward. It was a dangerous mission to see that the war effort was not in vain or somethin'."

"And you was half boiled at the time," Foghorn said. "But wasn't we landed somewheres in Hawaii, instead of in Brooklyn? I was all set for where them hula skirts wave in the breeze."

"Well, all berths are alike to me," Showboat said, "as long as they're on planes."

"I got a hunch we'll need a lot of luck this time out," Foghorn put in. "You know what I think we went and did? Got ourselves one of those big Mars type crates that won't get fighter cover. It is another twenty days on a raft, if we don't get knocked off first thing. And maybe there won't be no sea-gulls around this time. I wish we had a mascot."

"If every plane had to be convoyed," Showboat said, as he crawled into the comfortable bed, "there wouldn't be Navy Air Force enough to go around. Well, we ast for it, Foghorn."

It was the next night that they were briefed by a big marine at the Floyd Bennett Field gate. Walking through mealy darkness, Foghorn stepped on something, and it let out a yell. Only a cat could yell like that. Foghorn stalked a little dark shape that was trying to give first aid to an injured appendage.

The cat meowed when Foghorn picked it up. It felt plump in his big fists, and he stroked its black fur with the palm of a hand as big as a Swift's premium.

"It knows I didn't mean it, Showboat," Foghorn said, and he took off his pea-jacket and wrapped the cat in it.

Then they continued on to a pier that ran out into Jamaica Bay. The pier wound up against the side of a Martin Mars seventy-ton sky freighter, and winches and derricks made eerie groaning and creaking noises in the hot stillness of the night. Showboat wondered what was in the large crate that was being hoisted aboard.

"I bet it ain't macaroni," Foghorn said, as he went up the gangplank. "This tub is pretty low in the drink right now, Showboat. Imagine us comin' to a rusty super-Dumbo like this, Showboat. Look! There is a C.P.O. near that gun . . . Oops, Hortense, stop wigglin' out, or you will lose your new home."

"You should toss that cat overside," Showboat said. "What a cargo, Foghorn. Look!"

From the ladder to the bridge, along the main deck and as far as the poop, the Pluto was loaded with cargo. Carpenters had

built a sort of catwalk over it, so that the crew could go about their work if they bent double. A hefty flying seaman bumped against Foghorn and nearly lost his footing.

"Well, sweetheart," he said, "you must be one of them gunners we're takin' along, huh? You better duck or that crate swingin' this way will squish you like you was a cockroach. It ain't got marshmallers in it. Look, that petty officer is waitin' for you new hands aft. He will make you a speech about what you should do."

"Come on," Showboat said.

GOING aft, they reported to the chief. Showboat ran his fingers over the ends of the twin, tail machine-guns. They packed a fifty-caliber double sting.

"Aerial Gunner's Mate Herkimer Torkle," Showboat said.

"Aviation Ordnanceman, First Class, Franklin Fuddy," Foghorn said, and banged down his sea-bag.

There were two other gobs standing near the chief.

"Ordnanceman?" the C.P.O. yelled. "The navy was supposed to get up a gun crew for the nose and topside turrets and the machineguns up there on each side." He groaned, but heavy. "An ordnanceman!"

"Look," Foghorn said. "I was to get a change of ratin' after what I did against the Nazis last trip. But the schools are full everywhere. I am an ordnanceman, but I can fire them guns. I took over on that old Mariner and shot me a Focke-Wulf. You heard me on the radio, maybe?"

"No," the chief said. "Well, you're a gunner, Fuddy." He bent forward and peered into Foghorn's face. "Ain't we met somewhere before?"

"I don't think I was ever there," Foghorn choked out, and nudged Showboat.

This gent was Hamby all right. Chief Gunner's Mate Hamby. It was a crazy war.

Two more sailors came aboard the big plane and reported. Hamby got his gunners all together and told them all he knew.

"We got a detail here that is not a cream puff," the gunner with six hashmarks growled. "There is sealed orders in the skipper's safe. We will be out eighteen hours and, tonight, we black out. The ports are painted and there's canvas over all the doorways.

"You sleep at your posts and will get issued some steel helmets and some Balaclavas and flying suits. I get the orders from the skipper of this tub. You take them from me. I don't have to tell you the Navy expects you to—"

"Meow!"

"Who said that?"

The Crew Chief of the Pluto stepped forward and saw the pea-jacket Foghorn was

carrying move. Foghorn tried to hold Hortense, but the black cat leaped to the deck, onto the machine-guns and meowed again.

"A cat!" the burly seaman howled, and lunged for it.

He tripped over the cartridge belts that were spread out in a semi-circle behind the gun, slid along the deck to a steel box loaded with more bullets.

Chief Petty Officer Hamby took up where the Crew Chief had left off.

"A cat!" he roared. "That means we catch trouble sure. Get that—"

Hortense leaped off the guns and disappeared somewhere behind the tightly-stretched cargo. Sailors combed the Pluto for almost an hour, but could not locate the feline.

"Already, you cause trouble," Hamby fired at Foghorn. "We start off on the wrong foot. Bringin' a black cat aboard so's a Heinie won't miss us. I got a good mind to ask the skipper is there some paint for you to scrape or some swabbin' up to do. Get forward, you homely imitation of a sailor! If that Crew Chief fractured his skull when he fell, I'll kick you in the harbor."

"She was a swell cat," Foghorn said as he dragged his sea-bag after him. "They ain't bad luck. Aw, I don't like this tub."

"Look at the machine-guns" Showboat pointed up to the gun-turrets. "They look like twenty millimeter Oerlikens, Foghorn. They are what you fired last. I bet this will be a cruise."

"Hamby," Foghorn said. "If that gent ever finds out who we are, Showboat."

"Not unless one of us tells him, he won't," Showboat sniffed.

"He finds out, we will get put off on a raft like we was Captain Blighs, Showboat. Of all the chiefs in the navy, he would have to be the one gets on this elephant plane."

NO BARGAIN were the jammed-up quarters eked out for the crew. They were a glory hole with two bunks and a small table. A picture of Lana Turner hung on one wall as a homey touch. A ditty box with the letters I. C. Hamby stenciled on it suggested the macabre. Foghorn and Showboat hung up their sea-bags and sat on one of the bunks.

"We got nothin' to do now but sleep and eat and wait for Nazis," Foghorn said.

"An' take gun practice," Showboat cut in.

The Pluto took off before dawn, her immense streamlined hull low in the bleak gray water of the bay before it lifted under the prodding of its four mighty engines. When daylight broke, the big plane was far out over the Atlantic. After chow, the chief got his gunners together and took them up on the bridge.

The commander of the Pluto was a rugged old ex-crop-duster with a head the shape of a butcher's block. He had a scar over one flinty eye, and the pipe jutting out above an underslung chin gave off a smell like burning cordite.

Commander Lige Bullock had been around planes for only twenty-eight years, and it was said that he had spent twenty-seven years and eleven months in the air. He surveyed the men Hamby produced with a sour expression.

"Maybe they're gunners, Chief!" he bellowed. "You said they was. But all I hope is we have a quiet flight."

"Go over to those machine-guns," Hamby took up after Bullock, "and see if you can see how they are shot off. The rest of you mugs come with me, as we got to see what you can do. I still say I've seen you someplace, Fuddy."

"It might've been at Coney Island," Foghorn said. "Or maybe I look like somebody else, Chief."

"That couldn't happen," the chief said, and took a gun crew aft.

Foghorn squeezed into the bow turret and looked the armament over. The grips of the guns felt good in his hands as he fired a few test rounds.

The Pluto arrived in the danger zone and the sea was calm, too calm. Fleecy clouds, flat on the bottom, skidded across the sky below them at eight thousand.

"Nazi interceptors like this kind of day," Showboat said as he leaned against a bulkhead. "You know what, Foghorn, I heard we was carryin' TNT and torps."

"Did you have to tell me now, you fool!" Foghorn Fuddy gulped. "Whyn't you wait until we docked in Livorno?"

"Because we won't dock there. We are heading close to Jugoslavia accordin' to Hamby. We have been lucky, now that we got rid of that cat, Foghorn. Oh, I almost wish we could spot a Nazi. Three hours today, we practice handlin' that tail turret. Sweat and blood and toil and tears. He is a tough baby, that Hamby."

Steadily the huge plane nibbled away the longitude. Tension built up and even Commander Bullock paced the chart room and chewed hard rubber off the stem of his pipe.

They were so near port, yet so far. The Luftwaffe still lurked above these waters, and Nazi planes were not far away. Fighters were supposed to meet them, but they saw no sign of them. Then an hour before dusk, the navigator roared.

"Planes! Three Jerries at two o'clock!"

"There they are!" Chief Hamby bellowed, almost shattering the inter-com.

The Pluto's complement leaped to life. Grim-jawed gunners manned their weapons. Commander Bullock ordered all speed pos-

sible and began evasive action.

"See you later, Showboat," Foghorn called as he fired a few trial bursts. In the bow turret, he donned his steel helmet and crouched behind the twin Brownings.

THE Focke-Wulf 190's came down, their exhausts trailing white vapor. Long range and deadly fighters, the Focke-Wulfs. Foghorn had met them before.

He pumped steel-jacketed slugs into the sky and the bright smoke of his tracer slid between two of the angling Nazi raiders. A cannon shell exploded close behind him in the Pluto and the big plane shuddered. So did Foghorn, thinking of that cargo of high explosive.

Tiny splinters of flying duralumin stung his cheeks, and anger made him forget the peril of being blown to bits. His helmet interfered with his shooting. He threw it off and started popping at a Focke-Wulf right in front of him. He got a chunk of wing. Then he shivered as he saw enemy machine-gun bullets tattooing the plexiglas above his head and moving back and up toward the bridge. Something exploded up there and made a terrible mess. Splinters flew everywhere, and the Pluto skittered.

Foghorn wondered how Showboat was doing. Looking back, he saw that the partition behind him was now a great jagged hole. Through it, he could see Commander Bullock still on the job, his pipe still in his mouth.

Smoke poured through the hole in the bulkhead, and flames licked through it with questing yellow tongues. Then the automatic fire-extinguishers came on, and all Foghorn could see was hissing chemical smoke.

"TNT and torps!" Foghorn Fuddy gulped, and got back on the job of spraying bullets at the foe.

A Jerry swooped in close again, and he let it have a full burst. The raider wobbled and gave out with a plume of oily smoke. The plume reddened and Foghorn ducked instinctively as the Focke-Wulf seemed about to crash the already-damaged bridge. He was positive he could have reached out and touched the tail of the 190 when it went over.

A cannon shell hit somewhere aft, and metal flew through the air again. A chunk of debris floored Foghorn and he was out for a few seconds. When he got up, Hamby was with him and firing the twin machine-guns.

"You lame-brained ape!" the chief howled at him. "What you think them helmets was for?"

"I'm okay," Foghorn said, and reached out and steadied himself.

"Let go of me, Fuddy!" Hamby trumpeted above the din. "I will smack you."

The Pluto was a mess. Great holes had been torn in her flanks, and crewmen wearing oxygen masks were working behind the bulkhead, clearing the wreckage.

"How's Torkle?" Foghorn said when he took over the Oerlikon again.

"Okay," Hamby answered. "You don't think he is tryin' to pop them babies with an air-gun? You put on that helmet, Fuddy! Get that raidin' son—"

"I thought I fixed that Nazi's wagon before," Foghorn said.

But the raider was coming in and the swastikas on its wings loomed bigger and bigger. Foghorn let the Brownings go at it.

The raider wavered and piqued off, came back again and fired his guns so close to the Pluto that the huge air freighter had to stand on one wing to avoid the fire. Two propellers were not turning. It was a half dead ship now.

"We're dead pigeons," Foghorn yiped, and then he was knocked off the gunner's perch.

He landed on a tarpaulin covering something that was not quite hard enough to break his neck. He bounced off and hit the floor and landed on a man who gave out with a mighty grunt. It was Hamby, and the chief shook Foghorn off and cursed a blue streak.

"You ag'in!" Hamby thundered. "Always in my hair, Fuddy. Why'd you jump?"

"I saw a mouse," Foghorn said. "What you think? I got me a Focke-Wulf."

"The other two are still kickin' the day-lights out of us. Get back to that turret, Fuddy!"

FOGHORN staggered past a fireman to his all but shattered post. A Focke-Wulf coming on from aft sheered off and dropped a motor. Flame belched out, and the big raider kissed the sea with a wing-tip and ripped the wing off as clean as a hungry cotton picker ripping a flipper off a plump chicken.

Two gone. The third raider was up and firing, and maneuvering to score.

Foghorn wiped smoke and blood and powder smudges from his face and wondered why the deck came up to smack him. Then he saw. It was on account of a shell that struck and shook the Pluto from nose to tail. She heeled over and nearly swept the surviving crewmen onto her side.

Funny what a gent thinks about at such a time. Foghorn wondered if that bartender in Seattle ever recovered from that conk on the noggin he got during a rhubarb with the army. If so, Foghorn would still have to pay up eleven bucks he owed the man.

"Meow!"

Foghorn saw Hortense sitting on the deck over by the port wall next to the life-raft. She had something in her mouth. Foghorn reached for her, but the cat ducked out of

sight, the end of her black tail seeming to wag defiance at him.

"Oh, jeeppers," Foghorn said, and fought his way across a deck that was slanting at a forty-degree angle.

He tripped over a cable and nearly went down. He grabbed at the nearest man and nearly pulled him along with him. It was Hamby the C.P.O. again, and he was operating the machine-gun on the port side amidships.

"If these bombs don't kill you, I will," Hamby roared. "Get to your position, you punk, or I'll bust you all the way back to tarnation and gone!"

"It ain't there," Foghorn choked out.

"Get back there with Torkle!"

Foghorn climbed up to the catwalk to go aft. Through a hole in the deck he caught a glimpse of Commander Lige Bullock propped up in his chair and if Bullock's words had been one-pounders, he would have made the whole sky unsafe for a hundred Focke-Wulfs.

"The blasted Nazis! They got us, have they? We'll get in there with this plane if we have to swim, all of us, holding a piece of it in our teeth. What you standin' there for, sailor. Get to some gun and shoot it!"

There wasn't much support under Showboat Torkle and the tail turret. It swayed and creaked and crackled as he shot at the Focke-Wulf.

"I've hit it twenty times, but it won't flop over, Foghorn!" Showboat moaned. "It's like shootin' at a decoy duck. Here, take over for a minute. Somethin' is in my eye. This tub of ours should of crashed ten minutes ago."

Foghorn took over. The remaining Jerry attacked, and Foghorn poured in salvo after salvo. A shell bit a chunk out of the port side of the Pluto and Foghorn was sure it hit right where the life-raft was. The Focke-Wulf seemed to come straight at the fin of the threshing cargo plane and Foghorn could see the Nazi's tracers feeling him out.

They laced a pattern in the plexiglas as Foghorn replied with burst for burst. The Pluto heeled over, righted itself with creaking, rasping sounds and then the Oerlikon seemed to come apart and spray Foghorn with its parts. Sinking down and down, he was sure that fiery streak just below the big air freighter was no skyrocket. That last salvo, he knew, had smeared the Nazi.

A man with an oxygen mask was bent over Foghorn when he opened his eyes. Chemicals sprayed against Foghorn's face, and he heard the hiss as the spray came out of the hoses. Smoke seeped into his stomach and into his lungs. The Pluto was in a steep glide now and Foghorn was pretty sure everything was going to come apart.

His head felt as if a mule had kicked him while it wore its shoes with winter caulks.

His eyes filmed again just as he heard Showboat.

"On a raft ag'in," Foghorn mumbled. "They should put outboards on 'em." The TNT, he knew, would go off any second. Foghorn felt himself losing consciousness again. "Kittens," he said. "Kittens—"

Chief Petty Officer Hamby bent over Foghorn and shook him.

"Kittens," Foghorn mumbled, and passed out.

"I knew it," Hamby said. "I knew I'd seen that fathead. Last words, huh? He'll wisht they was. Hey, drag this sailor over with the rest of them wounded."

Hamby started across the deck, lifting his legs like a man in an obstacle race.

"Destroyers!" the lookout yelled. "L class! I can just figure them out, sir."

Showboat Torkle lowered himself to the deck, shouldered his way past some twisted stanchions. He saw Foghorn, and reached for one of his legs. The Pluto hit the water and Showboat slid toward the escape hatch, carrying the unconscious Foghorn Fuddy with him. A crewman grabbed at them.

"You tryin' to pull him over and drown him?" Hamby howled at Showboat. "Maybe it is a good thing. But leave go!"

LIGE BULLOCK got the plane patched up and they headed for Zara, wobbling like a New Year's lush. It was dark now, and there was no light of any kind on the cargo deck. That was where Chief Petty Officer Hamby found Showboat Torkle.

"Evenin', sailor," Hamby said. "Nice trip, wa'n't it? You and him both got a Focke-Wulf. You will maybe get decorated, won't you?"

"You think so?" Torkle grinned. "We showed them Nazis, didn't we, Chief?"

"How do you feel, gunner?"

"Swell," Showboat said. "I could fight all over again."

"Get set for a punch in the nose then, you big lug!" Hamby said. "Seein' as how your shipmate can't stand a good sock, you will take it for him. Just before he passed out from that wallop from part of the Oerlikon, he was callin' to a dame. 'Kittens,' Foghorn said. He called for Kittens. That is my blonde, Torkle, and now I can prove it was you two that was in that tavern in Brooklyn."

"Now there is a mistake somewheres," Showboat gulped. "That is no proof. Did that fathead say that?"

"Sure," Hamby said. "Just to make sure I was not going to assault an innocent shipmate, I dug into his pocket and found Kitty's pitcher. In that bathin' suit."

"It's a pip, huh?" Showboat said, without thinking. "I mean—Look, if Foghorn stole—oh, that dizzy lug. Tellin' you—"

Chief Petty Officer Hamby poked Mr.

Torkle right on the prow and Showboat staggered sternward and nearly fell overboard. He sat down and felt of his forepeak and called Foghorn Fuddy a stool pigeon.

"I'll talk to Fuddy when he is in shape," Hamby said, and walked forward.

* * * *

Showboat Torkle and Foghorn Fuddy strolled along a Zara street in search of a nice pub. Foghorn wondered why Showboat was giving him the silent treatment.

"What is eatin' you, sailor?" Foghorn said. "We should be as happy as anything. Maybe you got a cold ag'in, as your nose—"

"You doublecrosser!" Showboat yelled. "You—sea lawyer. You squealer!"

"Huh?"

"Chief Hamby belted me on the nose," Torkle said. "You told him who it was stole them dames in Brooklyn. You told him right out. And because you was in sick bay and couldn't take it, he give it to me to give to you. Which is what I am

goin' to do, Foghorn Fuddy."

"Don't you hit me!" Foghorn yelled. "I am still on the sick list—technically. I didn't tell him nothin'."

Showboat bopped Foghorn in the nose.

"There! You kept callin' to Kittens when you thought we was goin' to sink. We are even, Mr. Fuddy."

"Kittens?" Foghorn howled. "Sure, Showboat. Hortense in the life-raft. I guess I was thinkin' of her, as cats don't swim. There she was durin' the battle, sittin' on the life-raft with a kitten in her mouth. I never even thought of that blonde, Showboat. I was tryin' to tell somebody to save them—"

"Oh, jeeppers!" Showboat said, and helped Foghorn up. "The breaks we get! I'm sorry, shipmate."

"It's okay," Foghorn groaned. "The sins we do find us out, don't they, Showboat?"

"E Pluribus Unum," Gunner's Mate Torkle said, and led Foghorn into a pub to give him a stimulant.

Next Issue

THE KAMIKAZE KID

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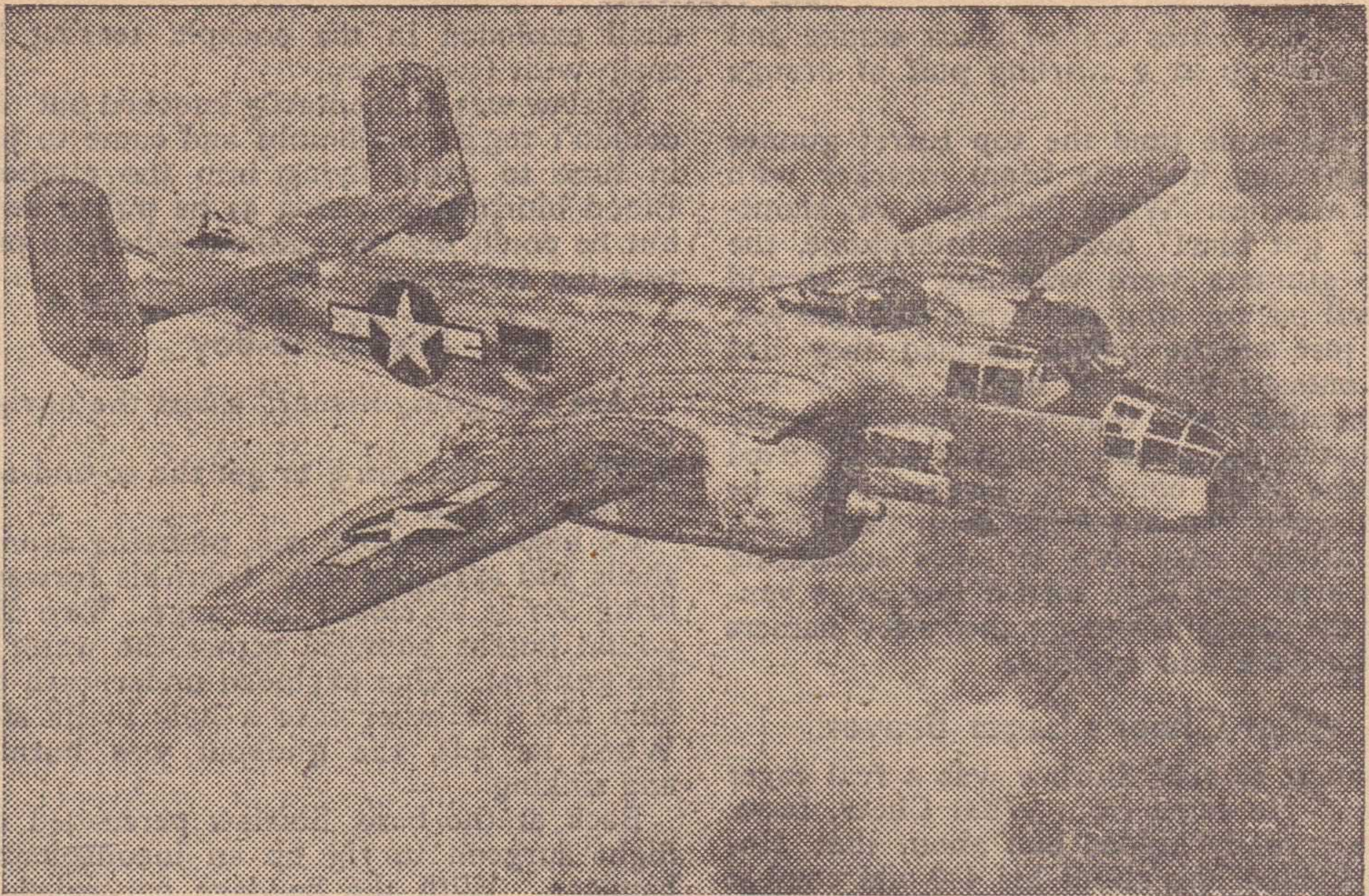
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The B-25J Mitchell bomber, one of the Army Air Forces' most versatile airplanes

STRAFING THE JAPS

By MAJOR ROBERT B. HOTZ

14th Air Force China

Low-flying attacks were tough on the boys who manned the planes, but they were tougher on the Japs below!

HERE are some tales of the bomber boys in China who had what it takes to fight and fly. The bomber boys have no monopoly on these qualities, and you can find them just as readily in the icy altitudes over Germany or above a Pacific atoll as over the rice paddies and black mountains of China. But it is with the bomber boys that I have flown and lived and they are the ones I know best.

Perhaps the best quality of a fighting airman is the instantaneous flash reaction to the incredibly rapid changes of air combat. Making the right decisions in those flashes is what brings you back to collect flight pay.

Take Lieutenant Bob Pettingell of Washington, D. C., for example. He has 56 combat missions under his belt without a scratch. Off Hainan Island last spring he demonstrated one of the reasons why. Pettingell and his wingman had flown through the South China night to reach Hainan Island just at dawn. Their target was shipping off the great ore-loading ports.

The two B-25s were buzzing along just above the water with the rocky bulk of

Hainan Island silhouetted by the rising sun when they were jumped by a patrol of 10 Tojos. There was no room for the Mitchells to maneuver—the stubby, black fighters were above and the water below. Two of the Japs peeled off on Pettingell's plane in a well coordinated attack.

One came in high from the side in a beam attack. The other made a pass from just a little to the left of the nose, just out of the line of fire from the Mitchell's fixed forward guns. These tactics were designed to split the defensive firepower and make the B-25 easy meat.

Split-Second Judgment

Pettingell diagnosed the tactics in less time than it takes to tell about it. Calling to his turret gunner to take the beam attacker, he racked his Mitchell around like a fighter and went into a curve of pursuit against the Jap coming on from ahead.

He punched his trigger button on the wheel and slugs from six fifties lashed across the Jap's flight path. Pettingell flattened out his bank and incendiaries showered around the Tojo like sparks off flint and

steel. The fighter trailed black smoke and then blew up in a swirling puff of orange flame.

At the same time the top turret gunner was chewing into the beam attacker with his twin fifties. While Pettingell was shouting "I got him!" over the interphone, the other gunners were watching the second Jap fall off smoking and crash into the sea. The rest of the patrol decided they had seen enough and went home.

A combat crew that isn't eager is hardly worth the gas it burns on the half-hearted missions it is bound to perform. To be eager when you are fresh from the States, is relatively easy, but it takes something extra after you have seen a few slugs ventilate the plexiglas and watched a few flammers hit the deck and explode.

What Cheer's Eager Beaver

Captain Ronald Shirlaw was a real eager beaver. He came from What Cheer, Iowa, and everybody kidded him about that. Nobody kidded him about his 400-odd combat hours, or the time he fought his way for 15 minutes through Zeros and flak to dump his frag bombs on Kiungshan airdrome.

Shirlaw was leading the second of two flights scheduled to attack the airdrome at low level. Approaching the target, he saw Jap fighters attacking the first flight and more coming up off the field. He had plenty of time to turn and out-distance the fighters. Instead, he called his formation to tighten up and plowed on to the target.

The B-25s fought their way in and found plenty of Jap aircraft still on the ground to absorb their frags. There wasn't a plane in his flight that wasn't riddled by fighter fire and flak but they all got home after wrecking more than a dozen Jap bombers and fighters on the field.

You have to talk to his navigator-bombardier to get the details of the week when Shirlaw was shot down on the first mission, wounded on the second and then flew two more before the end of the week. On his first mission, Jap fighters intercepted the pair of Mitchells while they were skip-bombing the ore docks at Bakli Bay. His wingman broke off and headed for home.

Shirlaw bored in to drop his bombs and then went after a flak position that had bothered his squadron for weeks, pumping 75 mm shells from his cannon into the gun pits. Slugs from a fighter punched holes in his wing tanks and he barely made it back to friendly territory for a crash landing.

He was back on the combat schedule the next day and led a flight on a sea sweep around Hainan Island. He sighted two freighters convoyed by a gunboat. Calling on his wingmen to hit the freighters, Shirlaw went after the flak-stacked gunboat. On his first run at mast height a 20 mm

shell exploded in the cockpit, tearing his scalp with fragments.

Shirlaw was momentarily knocked out. He couldn't toggle his bombs and came to just in time to avoid flying into the gunboat. Blood blurred his vision as he pulled away but he could see the gunboat wheel to protect the freighters.

No Home-Boy

"Are you going home?" asked the navigator.

"Hell no, I'm going to get the so-and-so," Shirlaw replied.

He made his second run, pumping cannon shells and spraying slugs from his forward-firing 50s as he closed the range. Two 500-pound bombs bounced across the water at the gunboat. One exploded underneath the ship and the other tore a hole in its side. When he left, the gunboat was burning and sinking.

Back at the base, Shirlaw persuaded the flight surgeon to rig up an inconspicuous bandage. With the bandage concealed by his battered flight cap, Shirlaw bearded the operations officer to get on the next day's schedule. He would still be flying if the group commander hadn't come across his record and ordered him home.

When your skin is at stake, it pays to try anything once. When the cannon-carrying 25s arrived in China there was a lot of bar-room engineering as to whether they would fly on one engine. The slide rule boys figured that the extra guns and ammunition in the new model made it too heavy for single-engine performance. Nobody was anxious to give them a practical demonstration that they were wrong.

Lieutenant Ken Martindale of Syracuse, New York, was a trouble-shooter on New York state power lines before he joined the Army Air Forces. But he had never found as much trouble in upper New York as he did one summer afternoon on the upper Yangtze River. As pilot of a cannon-carrying Mitchell, he attacked a 300-foot transport deep in enemy territory.

He made one run, putting cannon shells and a 500-pound bomb into the transport. As he made his second run to finish it off, he suddenly caught a burst of flak that knocked out the fuel and oil lines in one engine. He had to feather the prop in a flash to prevent the engine from burning up. With less than 100 feet between him and the Yangtze, Martindale began a practical demonstration of single-engine performance with the heavy plane.

Wrong Fighter Escort

To complicate his problem, he suddenly picked up an escort of eager Oscars. The Jap fighters had dived on the five Mus-

tangs that were escorting Martindale and a merry fight ensued.

The Mustangs shot down five of the 20 Oscars without loss to themselves, but four of the Japs were attracted by Martindale's feathered prop—a billboard urging attack. One pair of Japs were intent on shooting out the other B-25 engine when a Mustang shot them down. The other two Oscars withdrew.

"Head for the clouds, I'll cover your engine," the Mustang pilot called to Martindale.

The silvery gray cloud bank was 1,500 feet above the altitude where Martindale was nursing his crippled Mitchell. There was also a 4,500-foot mountain range to hurdle on course to the nearest American base. Flying on one engine was one thing—climbing 5,000 feet was something else.

Martindale called to the crew to heave out everything they could to lighten the plane. Out went the machine-guns, ammunition, radios, life raft and everything loose in the fuselage. Martindale began to ease the plane upward. The airspeed fluttered down, the heavy ship began to stagger and shake, but Martindale kept coaxing it up.

He got into the clouds and the Mustang headed for home. The crew called to Martindale and offered to bail out to lighten the load further, even though they were still over enemy territory. Martindale told them to buckle on their chutes and stand by.

The minutes dragged as the tedious race between the altimeter and the clock was run. For three and a half hours Martindale fought, nursed and cursed the weary Mitchell up, up, until the altimeter needle swung around to 5,000 feet. He held his leaden-winged bomber at that altitude over the ridge and then let down through the overcast to make a perfect landing at his base.

It is always hard to play on a losing team, but when your life is at stake it takes something more than guts to play a lost game to the finish. There were two of the bomber boys who played what looked like a losing game to the end. One lost, the other finally triumphed, but neither let down for an instant when the going was at its worst.

Flamer

Lieutenant Robert Rymer, a bombardier from Asheville, North Carolina, had seen his share of flak and flame-winged fighters from the nose of a Mitchell. As his bomber swept in at tree-top height toward a big Jap airdrome on Hainan Island, he could see enemy planes in the revetments and others taxiing to take off. Flak was blazing from all around the field. His plane was hit in the left wing and engine. Flames licked around the cowling.

Rymer had a chance to get out if he

jumped immediately. He knew what the odds were but he stuck with his plane. He dropped his frag bombs and took up his flexible nose gun to strafe. Men in nearby planes saw his bombs explode among parked planes on the field.

A flight of Jap fighters headed toward the flaming bomber eager to get a share in the kill. Pilot and copilot of the wing plane saw incendiaries streak from Rymer's gun as the enemy fighters attacked in a head-on pass. Flames swept along the Mitchell's fuselage and cockpit as it headed out to sea. Rymer got a Jap fighter with a burst in the engine.

His squadron mates saw the Jap hit the sea and explode just before the 25 plunged into the water. Out of the mass of flames as the Mitchell went down they could still see the glowing tracers spraying from Rymer's gun.

Full of Holes

Fate dealt Lieutenant Jesse Weber of Bradford, Pennsylvania, what looked like a losing hand over Indo-China. His B-25 was plastered with explosive and armor-piercing shells while bombing a railroad bridge over the Red River. Weber was hit at the start of his bomb run and knocked unconscious by an explosive shell that tore up the cockpit and inflicted severe head wounds.

Yet he completed his bomb run, dropped his bombs, closed the bomb bay doors and turned off the target, all by sheer guts and instinctive reaction to long and thorough training. One of the gunners managed to fly the plane while the navigator patched up Weber.

But the fates were not through with Jesse Weber that day. The Mitchell ran into severe turbulence and zero visibility. Some of the instruments had been shot away and others that were damaged began to malfunction making it impossible for the gunner to continue flying. Bloody and torn, Weber climbed back into the cockpit and began his fight to bring his plane and crew home.

The weather was getting worse. The top of the cockpit was shot away and the icy blasts at 14,000 feet roared through the compartment. Weber was severely wounded in his back, neck, right arm and leg in addition to his head injuries. With only one arm and leg serviceable and only his basic flight instruments left, he fought the crippled plane through the darkening clouds. The oxygen supply gave out.

Then the plane plunged into a thunderstorm. Icy rain, then hail and snow poured into the cockpit. Weber was suffering intensely from loss of blood, shock, lack of oxygen and cold. The radio compass went out. The buffeting of the storm grew worse and the Mitchell bounced up and down 4,000

feet in single swoops.

Weber refused to give up. He fought the plane, the storm and his pain-fogged brain and eventually broke out of the clouds near his base to make a safe landing.

It's Courage That Counts

There is a quality that must rank even higher than quick, cool combat sense, raw courage and unflagging guts. Among the men who fight and fly, it rates above them all. It is the deliberate risk of your own life in trying to save your buddies. It is one thing to fight your way out of a desperate situation into which circumstances have forced you, but it is another matter to throw yourself deliberately into such a situation for the sake of somebody else.

Captain Eugene Pawloski of Donora, Pa., is an excellent example of how this quality crops out in combat. Pawloski had his wing tanks hold during a low-level attack on a freighter. He sank the ship, but the gas streaming out through the flak holes made it impossible for him to make it back to his base.

Gauging his rapidly diminishing fuel supply, Pawloski ordered the crew to bail out just before he estimated the tanks would run dry. One by one, they popped out until only Captain Robert Guma of New York City, lead bombardier of the squadron, was left.

As he was climbing out of his post in the nose, the ripcord of Guma's chute had caught on a projection and partially opened the

chute. About that time, both engines sputtered and quit.

Pawloski had been flying on top of a cloud bank. He knew that the territory from the coast to his base was a solid mass of jagged mountains with only an occasional paddy-filled valley. He knew the long odds against finding a valley below him. And he knew that with both engines dead he could make only one pass at a landing.

Pawloski could have ordered Guma to jump with his half-opened chute or he could have bailed out himself and left Guma to make his decision. No one would have reproached him.

But Pawloski stuck with the ship and headed down through the clouds. Guma came up to the cockpit and they sweated out the descent together. The altimeter needle whirled downward as the air-speed indicator picked up. Down and down they went.

Suddenly they broke out of the clouds. The peaks of the black mountains were behind them stretching up into the overcast. Ahead lay a valley marked by the pattern of rice paddies and dotted with small villages. They had missed the mountains by only a few hundred yards. Pawloski set the Mitchell down in a muddy rice paddy for a perfect crash landing and crawled out with only a few cuts and bruises. Guma was uninjured. They walked to the nearest village, hired a ricksha and rode back to their base.

(Courtesy AIR FORCE, official service journal of the AAF.)

Hiding the secret of his gangster heritage from the crew of the Liberator, gunner Tony Vaccaro faces a cruel test in

TOP TURRET HELLION

By JOE ARCHIBALD

NEXT ISSUE

Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

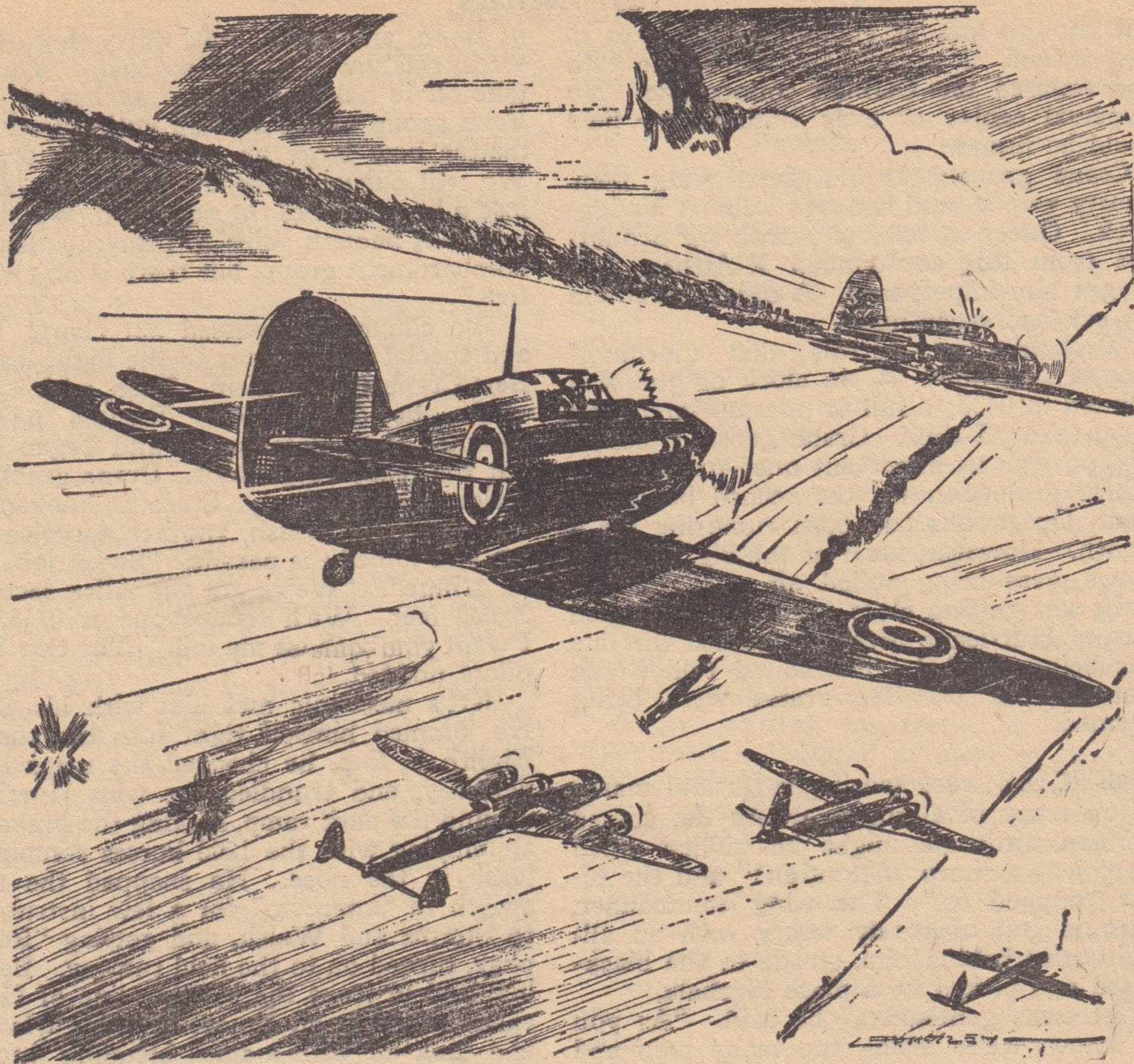
The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)



Crane got another German in his sights long enough for two bursts with all eight guns

MISSION TO HELL

By **ROBERT LATIMER**

Alone and on foot deep in enemy territory, Yankee pilot Bert Crane of the R.A.F. meets peril at a secret airbase!

FLYING Officer Shorty Sterms swung his chute heavily into a ragged overstuffed sofa and plunked himself down with a sleepy grin. After him came a dozen more jacketed pilots, clearing their eyes sleepily as they piled into the 44th Fighter Squadron stage house.

"What's the show this morning, Bert?" asked Sterms.

Bert Crane shook his head. "Lord only knows, Shorty. Chances are we're meeting a late bomber string, or maybe dig for that pesky 'X' Airbase. But where the deuce is the commander?"

"Hope it's a search job," Sterms came

back. "We better locate X-Airbase pretty soon, or there won't be anybody left to look for anything."

Thirty-three pilots—several Americans like himself—were congregating expectantly around a blackboard. There were eight empty spaces on the flight roster hanging on the wall. Tomorrow there would be more—if this Hurricane squadron or another didn't get hep to this X-Airbase.

X-Airbase was the name given a hidden German field from which twin-engine Schmitties and JU's were sailing up suddenly to catch Spit and Hurricane patrols homeward bound—usually when there was

not enough gas, or enough ammunition to slug it out. For two weeks now the 44th had scoured the German countryside. No dispersal center or even rudimentary field could be found.

Crane grinned at his short wing man. Shorty was 21, and had two kills on his log-book. Once, on routine patrol, six Schmitties from this confounded X-Airbase had caught him unprepared. A quick jump and the silk had saved him.

"Probably no patrols this morning," Sterms said now. A tin clock on the wall pointed to 0430; a full 45 minutes later than usual take off time. Crane guessed today's mission was an important one—maybe even fighter protection for the record bombardment. Operations had been rumoring for a month. However, most of the big bombing shows were being pulled off at night, and dawn was getting close. Outside a mingled roar of Hurricane Merlins signified the line was being readied. The sound told Crane that all the first-line crates were being warmed.

PENCILS were scoring rings and marks on maps of Germany where the cussed German airdrome might be hidden when there was a sharp "Attention!" and the pilots "popped to." The wing commander, brusque and obviously weary with an all-night stint behind him, strode to the blackboard and picked up a piece of chalk.

"At ease, gentlemen," he said. "As you all know, we're losing too many men and planes on returning from patrol. Obviously the Jerries have developed a system for catching us low on ammunition and petrol by sending up interceptors near us as possible. The number of Germans in our present area has increased entirely out of proportion with their known ground facilities."

He tapped an indicated flight track over The Reich. "Although we'd like to send every bomber over a route too far from the secret X-Airbase to guard it from surprise," he continued, "the number of ships concerned has become too big to keep all of them out."

He cleared his throat impressively. "I may as well tell you, gentlemen, that the giant raid you've been discussing as only a rumor is now a fact. The whole army of bombers has been routed back over our area, Germans or no Germans. Someone has made a mistake, I'm sure—but it's going to be our job to scatter over the whole territory by 0545 this morning to protect the bomber fleet enroute back to their bases."

The pilots whistled and slapped each other on the back. Bert Crane goggled at the wing commander.

"I needn't tell you," the commander broke in again, "that this is a difficult mission. The bombardment track will cover forty miles

or more, and we've only thirty-three fighters in this group to protect them. You will take off in half an hour in batches of three. Each group will patrol an entire sector, no matter how large an enemy force attacks. We will expect to be outnumbered, and to lose a large part of the squadron. We simply have not enough ships to protect so large a bombardment group, but there is no alternative."

The commander passed out charts, maps and special instructions to the flight leaders, Bert Crane among them. Then, with a brisk salute, he disappeared. Excited pilots clutched their data books and began filing out the ready room door. Crane grabbed a serious-faced Shorty Sterms, hooked his thumb at Bill Walsh, another American pilot, and joined the parade. "Sweet job, eh?" he grinned. "We've got the Alice sector at 20,000 feet. We'll rendezvous at 0545, and I want you both on my tail." The two Yank pilots nodded.

Bert's mechanic met him with his chute. He jammed himself tight into the cockpit. Eighth in line, he checked the mags thunderously, and trundled the trim Hurricane around the dark ramp, kicking the brake and shimmying with the 1200 horses romping at leash in the nose. He snapped the radio switch to "intercom" for a few instructions to Sterms and Walsh, and getting "Roger" okay, turned on to the field runway. Behind him and in front the blasting line of Hurricanes nosed at an almost invisible wind tee and took off with a snarl blending into the thunder of thirty-three Merlins.

The ship trembled, eager to be off. Ten years of flying hadn't killed the screaming joy of the take-off for Bert. He eased the throttle forward, and with the swelling bite of the blades, socked it all the way in. Grass and bumps wobbled under his wheels. Then the Hurricane swung gently up and skyrocketed over the hangars. Behind, and slightly above, Sterms and Bill Walsh collaborated in smooth precision. Their gear went up almost simultaneously.

At 6,500 feet, Bert Crane brought the nose level with the murky horizon, trimmed ship and eased back on the throttle. In mass formation the squadrons droned along. In the east daylight was creeping up. A nice day for flying or tangling with the Jerries hidden somewhere below. The American kept constantly sweeping the horizon. These X-Airbase Schmitties were always there before anyone knew it, and it took only seconds for the twin engine 109's to change from distant dots to lead-slinging death on the tail.

There were wisps of clouds at this altitude, and the air was surprisingly bumpy. Crane's practiced fingers unconsciously applied pressure to stick and rudders, relaxed and twitched an aileron now and then. He

scanned the sky momentarily, then picking up the intercom, crackled a message to Sterms and Walsh.

"Green Flight peel off at Mary, 20,000," he snapped. Shorty Sterms wagged his wings by way of answer. Through his headset he heard Red Flight, Auntie Flight and others relaying instructions.

WHEN the chronograph clock on the panel showed 0458 two-thirds of the squadron had zoomed off to patrol their sectors. Crane shoved the throttle forward, dropped his flaps 30 degrees and started up-stairs. The thousands piled up on the altimeter rapidly, while the American checked manifold and fuel pressure, adjusted flaps for maximum climb.

At 11,000 he went on oxygen and increased the throttle to full climb until 20,000 feet wavered on the dial. Once leveled off and seeing that Bill Walsh and Shorty Sterms were glued in place on his tail, he swung to the right and again to the left, searching the sky to the east. This was the appointed rendezvous with the huge bomber armada, which he was anxious to spot.

Suddenly there they were! A score of unearthly gray shapes grew larger as he banked smoothly above them. Crane hit his switch "Cover for Alice" which he sent to Sterms and Walsh. Three darting shapes separated, zooming over the thicker silhouettes below.

There were hundreds of them, he saw, sleek, gaunt Wellingtons, heavy Manchester, lumbering Lancasters and Stirlings churning westward. The canary-cage Lancasters were everywhere, their stiff high tails marking them prominently among Avros, Blenheims, Handleys, even a few slow Hampdens, he noted.

Slipstream from the forest of propellers was making the air shudder even hundreds of feet above the topmost flights. Kiting in the wash, Crane zoomed higher, made two tight climbing turns and stood on one wing to scan the huge field of bombers beneath. Their alternately murky and glistening topsides showed for miles back, preparing to break off for hundreds of British fields which had supplied them. Crane squirmed as he contemplated the destruction this majestic concentration must have wreaked on the enemy.

He found the frequency of a command bomber, and was informed all pukka so far. Then his headphone shrieked, "Enemy fighters at four o'clock." He pitched the Hurricane around a rapid 360, until at the rear of the tremendous column he saw a flurry of sleek black shapes.

Messerschmitts!

Again the Krauts had come from nowhere! Crane groaned as he saw how many there were, swarms of them picking at the

bombers below. Not all the Jerries could have come from X-Airbase, he decided, snapping full throttle toward them. There were too many. Patently the enraged Germans had ordered every long-range fighter group into the air. The sky was alive with the febrile smoke trails of tracer bullets and the looping sound of revved engines. Crane saw the fat silhouette of a lend-lease Hudson arch up, turn on its side and spin gently down out of sight. Flames burst from an Avro, then another as Crane's Hurricane skidded into the melee.

He grabbed the first 109 he saw, slammed the nose down behind it, and came screaming in. His fingers threw the gun switches to "Fire" an instant before his thumb closed on the button. A crashing vortex of lead smacked into the Jerry's cockpit. He saw a sheet of plastic rend up and rip off in the slipstream. The swastika tail flourished in a half circle, and the German falteringly started for the ground in a flaming dive.

Angry, gritting his teeth, he saw that there were a hundred or more of the Germans. His Hurricane groaned and his head swam momentarily as he dragged the ship out of a dive and chandelled around into the bomber track. Fleeting shapes and another Lancaster, this one smoking as it fell earthward. Crane swooped over another Hurricane stabbing at a pencil-thin 109, half rolled, and got another German in his sights long enough for two bursts with all eight guns.

Not so lucky this time, the ME kept going and was out of sight under the bobbing bombers. Stray slugs smashed across his cockpit.

The American got a glimpse of two more black forms closing down on a stubby Wellington almost stalled in midair. Crane Immelmanned and rolled smoothly out at 45 degrees under the nearest 109's belly, led the ship three rings, and kept the Vickers guns hammering a full five seconds.

The German flew into the hail of death and flew apart. Two Hurricanes flashed across his line of vision. Crane slammed the stick around and shot after another ME ripping into a clumsy Stirling very much in trouble.

"Here's a kiss for Adolf!" he yelled happily, and squeezed the button as the German zoomed over its huge victim. His slugs caught the tail, ripping dots across the white swastika lines, and the German plane jumped as if smashing into a brick wall.

The next burst caught the fluttering ME along the slender fairing of the nose, and flame burst out momentarily, then receded, as the pilot flattened it out and attempted to come around. Bert saw his gloved hand jerk open the cockpit enclosure. Then the slim German fighter fell off on its shattered tail and spun swiftly toward the ground.

Crane now skidded dangerously close to a

four-engined shape laboring over him, slammed the stick forward, and aileroned around to come out diving after the falling Jerry. The latter seemed ready to pull out. His spin had already broken, and Crane saw him fighting for control.

EAGER and deadly, the American was suddenly careless. Heedlessly he plummeted on down behind the struggling German, now bringing the coughing Messerschmitt into a smooth dive. Crane babied the Hurricane gently over the black shape, trying to bring the cockpit squarely into ringsights for a dead kill.

Crane pressed the button now, at the same instant a row of neat holes tore the glass shield. His instrument panel flew to bits. The Hurricane shuddered and bucked as a sheet of solid flame burst from the engine cowling and licked back with blow torch intensity. Another burst went plunging through the cockpit, numbing Crane's shoulder and tearing through the floor plate.

The Yankee flight leader cursed at the flame singeing his face and struggled numbly with the catch over his head. In a moment he jerked the enclosure forward and with a last jerk on the stick, stalled the Hurricane straight up long enough to make a twisting jump back and over the tail.

The trim ship, pluming smoke in a double column, shot away as his hand found the ripcord and hung there while he fell headfirst out of danger. Crane then caught a whirling glimpse of a long line of bombers stretched across the sky. He counted slowly to 20, then with a gasp jerked the ring.

The chute snapped out and with a dull report bellied out umbrella-like. He was far enough below the gyrating fighters to keep the Jerry from gunning him on the way down.

Crane peered below. There were a series of rolling hills, a small forest patch, a river and flat plains. Quite a few inside Naziland, Crane told himself angrily. At 1500 feet above the ground he began pulling at the shrouds. The wind proved friendly, and the chute floated calmly in over a stretch of rough open ground studded with small bushes.

Crane's torn shoulder ached as he strained on the chute cords, attempting to navigate over a looming stand of bushes. It was no use, however, and he sank rapidly into them, striking well into the top of a ten foot clump. Branches snapped and crackled, scratching his face, before he came to a stop. The chute draped over the next bush while Bert struggled to free himself. His shoulder hurt frightfully. In a moment he freed himself, dropping out of the chute straps to the ground.

High overhead the drone of hundreds of engines was dying away, punctuated by snarling, staccato bursts of machine-gun fire. He could see a pack of Messerschmitts—fifty

of them at least—ripping into the flank of the tail bomber column. Two fell while he watched. In a matter of seconds the gigantic show was out of sight.

Bert Crane struggled laboriously out of his blood-soaked jacket. Raw flesh greeted his eyes where a .30 slug had ripped through, nicked the bone.

With his right hand he dug out a first-aid kit, poured all of a tiny bottle of antiseptic into the wound, and bound the jagged hole. In his pockets he found a small map, two bars of chocolates, a cigarette lighter. There was a little money, his wallet, and nothing else. He was inside enemy territory. He expected to be hunted down any minute. The wreckage of at least ten bombers and fighter planes lay within a couple of miles—naturally the Germans would come for the scrap.

It took Crane almost an hour to extricate the white silk from the bush, fold it up and push it far under a copse of smaller bushes. With it went his helmet, leather jacket, flying boots and identifying papers. He kept merely his silver wings. They might help to get him through tight spots he had no idea how. Then he lay resting his aching shoulder until nightfall.

Bert Crane awoke with a start. It was night, and some 200 yards away a light moved through patches of bushes and over open ground. He crouched under his bush and watched. Guttural voices came faintly, and there was a bang of metal. Then came the roar of a truck. The light drew away slowly.

High time to move. Walking was a relief after lying on the cold ground. He threaded his way through bushes higher than his head, moving west, and keeping a close watch for lights. He walked for three hours uneventfully, conscious of hunger and a burning thirst.

He hadn't eaten since 0200 the previous morning. The chocolate took an edge off the hunger but made his thirst mount all the higher. Overhead a flight of radial-powered planes roared by—heading west. He wondered whether Shorty Sterms and Bill Walsh had pulled out of the day's show.

After what seemed four or five miles of walking, he struck a road, merely ruts through the hills. He pushed his way into the brush fifty feet away from the road, and followed it. It led in a westerly direction, and indicated the way to food—perhaps in a Heinie camp.

BERT CRANE saw his first German at a little bridge crossing a ten-foot stream. Crane didn't bother with the single Jerry sentry, choosing instead to move silently upstream and drink avidly of the cool water. Thirst quenched, he stepped into the chilly water and waded across up to his waist.

Once he passed a little farmhouse, standing in the lee of a long hogback sheltering the

road. Even in the dim moonlight he could see a butter churn on the back porch. A cow stood silently outside a small shed in the rear.

He had no idea of where he was. His wet pants clung to his calves, and he was still groggy from pain and loss of blood. Eventually he sank to the ground in a grassy knoll between a couple of hillocks to rest.

Crane thought angrily of fiction he'd read and of forced-down pilots donning German peasant rags and glibly passing themselves off as Krauts to get back to their own lines. He couldn't speak German. Fat chance he'd have of doing anything like that. After a while he got up and trudged on, wishing for a cigarette.

It was almost dawn when the American's ears caught the drone of airplane engines. Many of them were apparently warming up on the ground. The Yankee pilot dropped immediately to the ground and scanned the sky. He had gradually descended into lower country, he knew, since contour of ridges he crossed were lower.

A sudden wild thought struck him. Could this be X-Airbase? It would be in just such hilly, bare country that the RAF would ignore in search for the pestilential hidden field. Caution warned him to take to the deeper shadows. "If blind luck has led me to X-Airbase, I'm sure I'm going to get back with the dope," he told himself. He knew it was whistling in the graveyard.

Despite the imminence of daylight, he eagerly crept forward. To the northwest there was a deep-throated snarl of a many-cylindered radial engine. Focke-Wulf! Nothing outside of American ships snarled like that. Suddenly exulting in his luck, Crane increased his pace. Then he hit the ground as the roar leaped to top pitch.

A pinpoint of blue flame loomed on the horizon, grew larger, then coruscated directly overhead as a black shape thundered by. In the dark Crane couldn't recognize it, but something about the thick shape told him it was a JU.

"Thanks, pal," he waved after the ship. "Thanks for the bearings!" In a moment the first plane's roar was repeated and a second climbed over him. Calculating the wind and velocity from the low-climbing enemy planes, Crane judged the field to be northeast, and less than two miles away. "Just about perfect for hitting our patrols on the way home from anywhere," he judged. "But how the deuce are they landing in country like this?"

He inched through a clump of saplings, eyes alert for the ack-ack guns sure to be ringing the field. In a matter of minutes his eyes picked out a suspiciously regular ring of trees, and a slanting dark shape in the center. Bofors gun he knew. Getting closer along a shallow ditch he saw a ring of sandbags and heard German voices. About 500

feet away there was another symmetrical stand of trees and another gun. Tensely, Bert Crane punched his way equidistantly between them, following the breeze, which was his only guide.

"Halte!"

The single word, snapped him upright. Fifteen feet in front of him a German sentry gaped, then, recognizing the American's dress, struggled with a Mauser rifle draped over his shoulder. Frozen with surprise, Crane galvanized into desperate action.

He lunged on flying feet full-on into the German, cocking his fist on the fly. Then, evading the rifle barrel swinging up from the ground, he packed all his power into a crushing drive to the other's jaw. He felt teeth snap under the knuckles and a dart of pain. Then he was on top of the struggling Jerry and scrambling for his throat. His fingers touched and closed on a chunk of rock.

Crane smashed the rock to the side of the German's cloth service cap, and felt his breath whistle as he struggled violently again. Then the sentry relaxed soundlessly and lay limp.

Swiftly, cursing himself for carelessness and the noise of the fight, Crane grabbed the rifle from the limp hands, and knelt with a quick glance around. A voice called clearly from back in the direction of the ack-ack emplacement, "Ist Anden guten, Hans?" He managed a grunt, wondering what the question was, and was rewarded with a low laugh. Two minutes went by with no further sound.

Filled with exultation over such fortune, Crane dragged the limp form of the German into a dark hollow, and reminding himself that it meant the difference between a concentration camp and a firing squad, dressed himself hurriedly in the Kraut's uniform. The fit was terrible, and the pants ripped when he jerked them on. However, if they got him near the enemy ships, it was more than worthwhile.

THE ground continued to rise as he turned into the dark to the northeast. Crane was puzzled by this—unless the Jerry airdrome was built on the side of a hill, he must be going the wrong way. Then his hands, tearing apart brush which was occasionally shoulder high, tightened on a branch. Something alien was telegraphed along his arm.

He shifted the heavy rifle, and examined the twig closely. Paper! The ground beneath, too, as he discovered by stooping, was simply raw dirt, no vegetation, no dead leaves.

Suddenly there was a startling roar almost directly under his feet, the sound swelling up to a scream crescendo, wavering and dying away. There was another and another, the last muffled as though far away. Bert stiffened with an illuminating burst of comprehension. The engines were buzzing under his feet!

No wonder the ground was raw dirt with fake vegetation and sloping smoothly uphill. He was on the roof of a giant underground hangar, some sort of a gigantic camouflage job, apparently scooped out of the side of the rolling hill.

The vibrating buzz of the planes was loudest to the right. Crane crept that way, pushing the phony foliage about him gingerly out of the way. He crawled through a hundred feet of this ingenious camouflage before he struck a firm surface, evidently timbers buried in a few inches of soil. Ahead of the timbers stretched a fifty foot surface of heavy netting covered with branches. Below was a murky well out of which swelled the sound of two or three German planes.

Crane sidled back, jerked one of the paper trees roughly out of the ground, and holding it over his back, retraced his way to the edge of the timbers. It was dark enough yet that he couldn't pierce the gloomy cavern beneath the netting. Down there were German planes; the American itched to see.

A smashing roar from one of the ships jerked his head back as one of them disgorged itself from the blackness within and spitting fire lumbered underneath him and out through the netting, shaking the ersatz ground above tremulously. It was followed by another, a lighter burst of sound.

Evidently the rats kept more than one type ship in their den, Crane saw. Both rolled shakily under the netting, and he saw the exhausts pull up parallel some two hundred feet in front, while below another engine sang its lustful song and emerged. Though the night kept him from identifying any of them, he recognized the activity—the German planes were being rolled out on the line to get off before daylight.

Twice he heard voices raised above the drone welling out of the underground hangar, while more starters shrilled and their motors coughed and roared.

Any moment daylight would hit. Moving as fast as the stiffness of his shoulder would allow, he wormed his way along the timbered overhang. Noise made no difference. The roar of engines in the idling ships in front would conceal a machine-gun's chatter.

For 150 feet the hangar entrance stretched, tapering gently down to merge with a natural hillock at either end. Netting extended all the way under umbrellas of paper leaves. The Yank felt his way through, and on his feet, walked as confidently as a hammering pulse would allow toward the flight line.

"Hoch," a dim figure greeted him. "Hoch," he replied. The rifle, cocked, was loose in his hands.

Past slim 109's quivering to be off, heavy Dorniers and even Henschel observation ships he strode. Mechanics swarming over the planes wore black coveralls, paid no attention to him. Crane saw the squared wings of the Luftwaffe on a pilot's tunic. Evidently

sentries were used on the line.

Germans passed within a yard of him, silently, efficiently going about their business. The yawning cavern of the underground hangar revealed a dim electric light through which Crane saw rows of Henschels and ME's, a machine shop, huge piles of parts.

From this base, he knew now, the Jerries simply checked all RAF patrols or bombardment missions going over, timed their return, and knocked down tired, weary pilots, planes out of ammunition or battle-scarred. Ingenuity was revealed in the cantilever girders supporting the dirt roof, in the huge canvas curtain rolled up to allow the planes through.

"Probably never flew a single plane off in daylight," he thought. "No wonder we couldn't locate this place. Nothing visible at all."

The light was growing stronger. Fifty fighters, he saw, could be easily accommodated here, enough to knock out the strongest RAF patrols and return without a trace. The gray daylight hurried him on.

In five minutes his uniform would fool nobody, and the Luftwaffe squadron was sure to leave almost as soon.

He moved around the side of an idling Dornier scout bomber, past the high, square tail, and squatted quickly under the wing. Throwing a guarded glance at nearby mechanics readying the other ships, he sent his foot solidly against the near chock, jerking away the other on a short rope. Then he was around the wing, fumbling with unfamiliar hands for the cockpit enclosure catch until the structure rolled noisily back.

Crane grabbed the side and vaulted into the narrow seat, seeing a detail of German soldiers running across the field the way he had come. Luftwaffe pilots leaped up, puzzled, fingers tugging at their holsters.

All this Crane caught in a single glance as he dived in, his hand socking the throttle all the way forward simultaneously.

CRANE scanned the murky ground in front, and wheeled the ship to the right, following a narrow runway to where both sides closed in. Even while desperately trying to orient the unfamiliar controls, the fact that the Germans must be experts at cross-wind landings and takeoffs struck him. The Dornier gained speed, veered to the left, and Crane stretched his legs to the limit as he strained to slap his right foot on the right rudder pedal. Tracer bullets chattered astonishingly out of the leading edge of the wing on both sides, and a cross wind tipped the wing perilously as the wheels floated off.

Airman's instinct told Crane he had taken too short a run and that there were probably trees ahead. Both instincts proved correct. Heedless of the stream of tracers spending themselves on the dawning sky and the fusillade of bullets behind him, he grabbed at anything which looked like a flap control.

Now he fought the lumbering bomber over treetops which swished against the wheels twice, then was free and gaining altitude.

Poking the throttle for every sixteenth of an inch it could give, he slammed the plane up into the sky, climbing straight ahead to put as much distance between himself and the field as the powerful engine could put out.

If the Germans were giving pursuit, it hadn't materialized yet. Crane scanned the cockpit feverishly for a radio headset, found it on a hook under the instrument panel and jammed it over his ears.

He flipped half a dozen switches before the phones crackled; and a cascade of gibberish poured through them. Half of the controls and instruments were complete mysteries.

He leveled off at 2000 feet and swung around in a flat turn until the compass needle indicated straight west.

Screaming along at full throttle, Bert Crane grinned joyously. He experimented with controls, mixture, anything to get the last bit of speed out of the sleek plane. Seeking trim tab controls.

Crane felt a sudden jerk as four bombs blossomed out below.

The German radio gabbled his ship's number and instructions ceaselessly. This was evidently information which would cost the Germans a good part of their coastal aerial strength and assuredly the underground hangar. Crane knew the instructions were to get him at any cost. Therefore he kept the ship as low as his airman's skill told him was quite safe, and he thundered full throttle onward.

The first German patrol caught him eight minutes after his takeoff. Three ME's passed by at 5000 feet, and the Yank was congratulating himself that they hadn't seen him when all three skidded into medium banks and came screaming downward.

All of them zoomed over, checking his number, then the ripping crackle of machine-gun slugs tearing at the wing told him he was identified. Skillfully, banking on years of carnival acrobatics, Crane shot the nose for the ground, S-ing from right to left and pulling out less than twenty feet from the ground. He felt the ship burble, socked the nose flat, and looked back to see one of the Messerschmitts disintegrate on the ground, unable to haul out of the precipitous dive.

Suddenly Bert looked up to see the most welcome sight ever to greet his eyes—five graceful low-altitude P-51 Mustangs sailing into the Schmitties. The latter, poised to blast him at long range, kept on their paths recklessly, striving to nail the Dornier. Neither of the Germans had a chance as the surprised RAF pilots easily swung in behind, and sent two spirals of smoke and flame crashing into the earth.

The American saw his chance—the preoc-

cupied P-51 pilots obviously hadn't seen him or understood the reckless dives of the Messerschmitts, and while they climbed for altitude, the Dornier swished out of range.

Hours later and he was over the Channel, easing the roaring Dornier down to twenty feet over the waves. His engine was hot from the headlong pace, and hot oil splashed over the side.

He streaked over a fleet of torpedo boats flying the Union Jack.

Near Signal Point he zoomed up and away from a wallowing cruiser. A blast of black smoke blossomed out ahead of him and the Dornier rocked.

Then he had whipped west again and was out of range of its ack-ack.

When at last, the ghostly Dover cliffs towered out of the water he swung southwest, heading for a fighter base at Lansdowne. Now it was up to his flying skill and luck to get out of the air as soon as possible.

Whang!

The left wing tip of the Dornier shuddered and dipped. Another shell hit midwing, the impact snapping loose great fragments of fabric. Instantly Crane jammed the nose down and twisted away seeking to avoid the darting Spit which had screamed down from a low cloud curtain. The pitch of his pull-out climb hurt his shoulder, and the big Dornier wallowed creakingly against his efforts. He got the nose up, stalled it at a thousand feet, then streaked for the ground as the first Spit, puzzled at such maneuvers, overshot him.

SUCH torture of man and plane couldn't continue. Head clearing, Crane watched the amazed Spit pilots bank around and start for him again. He cut the motor at 500 feet and picked a seemingly level field. Then he started down, agonizingly wishing his RAF buddies had shown a little flair for telepathy. Behind, the sharklike fighters rolled eagerly into his slipstream.

The field—a patchy meadow full of ditches—rose up to meet him. He held the nose grimly down for a belly landing, while the cones of fire from the Spits chopped the empennage to bits, chewed up the wings, yet miraculously parted short of the cockpit. The Dornier wavered as he leveled off, tail dropping, and bounced shatteringly on its belly, rebounded again, and with a sickening lurch slid across the grassy field.

He had made it!

Lying weakly with his head propped against the greenhouse, he heard the Spits roar triumphantly over.

Crane climbed soddenly out of the wreckage when a businesslike voice called "Kamerad—Hands up!" A local contingent of Home Guard farmers with a fat sheriff leveled shotguns at him.

"Howdy, boys," he got out. "My name's Crane, attached to the Forthy-forth Fight-

ers at Olin. I want you to give me some paper and take me into Lansdowne just as fast as you can do it. I'll worry about proving my story later."

The sheriff dug out a notebook and reluctantly tossed it to him. Crane pulled a stub pencil from the book, and hastily reconstructed his complete escape route back to X-Airbase. Underneath he scribbled a terse note with directions, conscious now of growing weakness.

Then he pitched on his face and the blackout which had threatened him for twenty hours closed down.

Crane awoke in the squadron hospital, and the dim goblins dancing around him gradually emerged as Sterms and Walsh, grinning over the foot of his bed. His shoulder, ribs,

back and arm were bound up in a tape strait-jacket.

"Just discussing chances of sending you to a map-making school," Shorty Sterms grinned. "How's it feel to sit a few fights out?"

Bert matched his grin. "How long have I been here. How about the airbase?"

Shorty cut him off. "Everything's roger. We made twenty copies of your map half an hour after Lansdowne flew you down here. You laid 'er out on the nose. If the Jerries want to use any of those ships again, they'll have to blast for 'em. Same with the hangar. Those babies put bushes over the whole thing, jerked down the guns, and tried a little peekaboo—but we found 'em. Commander says it's a DSC for you."



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A VALENTINE from PALAWAN

By
LIEUTENANT ROUL
TUNLEY, USNR



Ensign Hector McDaniel, the valentine himself—the heart he won was purple.

When Ensign McDaniel came marching home after a series of hair-raising escapes in Japanese-held Pacific territory, he certainly picked the day of days to do it!

LAST CHRISTMAS EVE pretty Mary McDaniel sat looking at the twilight from her sister's home in Illinois. She had just put her eleven-weeks-old son to bed. As she watched the winter sun sink behind the low, drab houses, her brown eyes filled with tears. She knew this was going to be the hardest Christmas of her twenty-four years.

For eight weeks she had been a widow. Her husband, a naval flyer, had been killed in the Second Battle of the Philippines. When the telegram had arrived with the news that Ensign Hector McDaniel was "missing in action," her baby was three weeks old. From then on it seemed impossible to regain her strength.

A few weeks later several letters arrived from other officers in the squadron, saying appropriate things about her husband's qualities as a flyer and officer. A little later his wings and a few other effects arrived.

Tonight, as she watched the darkness claim the little mid-western town, she told herself there must be many other women all over the United States just like her. Someone had to pay the price of victory. But the thought didn't help much.

The Timid Ring

And then the incredible happened. The doorbell rang—not a loud, triumphant ring, but rather a timid one, as though Fate had not yet quite made up its mind. Mrs. McDaniel opened the door and was handed a tele-

gram. It said her husband was alive and well.

The message read:

"PLEASED TO INFORM YOU ENSIGN McDANIEL IS SAFE IN NAVY JURISDICTION. EXPECT LETTER SHORTLY."

Stunned as she was, it would have been wrong to say Mrs. McDaniel was unable to believe it. She believed it finally, unreservedly, and passionately from the moment she saw it.

If this had happened in the movies, you might not have believed it. Too good a buildup, you could have said, and not without reason. Pretty young wife, tiny baby, missing flyer, Christmas Eve, snowing—no, it wasn't snowing. But that's the only part of the story that didn't actually happen.

Three months later when Ensign McDaniel was decorated with two Purple Hearts at once at the Naval Air Station in Anacostia, D. C., as well as an Air Medal, the award-careful U. S. Navy started pinning a series of decorations on McDaniel's chest which gave official recognition to as spectacular a series of adventures as ever befell a Hollywood movie hero.

While Mary McDaniel's husband was struggling to come back, Lazarus-like, from among the "missing," he found his limbo included a crash in which his plane broke in two, a Banzai charge from a murder-mad

Jap, an enemy plane that landed at his feet, a hazardous existence on a Jap island with nothing to eat but coconuts.

It included as well a futile swim that all but cost him his life, an uncertain ride by night in a home-made raft of his own construction, a meeting with the Philippine guerrillas and, lastly, a two-weeks patrol under enemy waters on a submarine.

Here Is What Happened

It was October 19, 1944. The Battle for Leyte was in full fury. It was the first day the squadron had flown out of Morotai. McDaniel was acting as co-pilot for the squadron skipper, Commander Justin H. Miller of West Missoula, Montana. Their Liberator was on the way home from a shipping strike when they sighted some enemy ships in the harbor at Puerto Princessa on the island of Palawan in the Philippines.

Skimming over the tiny bay at masthead height, they took the Nips by complete surprise. Before the enemy woke up to what was going on they had sunk four ships and set two warehouses on fire. Then they strafed the Jap air strip. They roared over the runway so low that mud from their own bullets splashed the windshield. Ten of the fifteen enemy planes were strafed.

But on the getaway, the Jap gunners finally found their guns. A twenty-millimeter shell tore through the number four engine setting it on fire. Another shot away the controls. The big plane, now at 400 feet, and over the sea, careened crazily, went into a spin and crashed, breaking into two pieces on the impact.

Close-up of the Enemy

When McDaniel came to, he was in the water. Eight of the crew of eleven, all wounded, had managed to survive. The more seriously hurt were helped onto floating gas tanks and, by night, they made a small island. From it they could see the Jap base. It would only be a matter of time before the Japs came for them.

Exhausted and bleeding, they spent the night on the island. The next day at noon they saw a plane take off from the Jap base. This was it, naturally. The Jap plane circled the Palawan base and headed in their direction. Almost simultaneously they saw another plane. This one had a twin-tail and looked almost like a Liberator.

Yes, it was a Liberator. It seemed to be going for the Jap plane. The latter dove down to the deck, only a few feet off the water, still coming straight for them. The Liberator followed. When the Jap plane, a Sally, was only 200 yards from the men on the beach, the Liberator let go with its fifty-calibers.

Transfixed, hypnotized, as their fate was

enacted before them, the beach party watched the Sally take fire, spatter on the water, nose over, and ricochet up on the beach at their feet. It wounded them all over again. That is, all except the skipper, who luckily was sleeping back in the trees.

Almost immediately, a Banzai-happy Jap tore out of the wrecked fuselage, brandishing a knife in each hand. He ran up to McDaniel who had been knocked unconscious. But Lieutenant Wm. A. Read Jr., gunner although wounded in the leg, was not too far gone to act.

With no weapon of his own, he picked up two coconuts and ran after the Jap. The latter unaccountably turned and ran into the water. When last seen, he was paddling away from the island on one of the empty gas tanks.

The Jap plane burned for seven hours and the Americans counted fourteen dead in the wreckage. Our men did not escape with mere wounds, however. One of the eight survivors from the day before was killed by this new disaster.

Crusoe's Chest

The enemy plane yielded some badly-needed articles—two parachutes for use as bandages and shelter against mosquitos, two guns, several old swords, some rice, candy and canned fish.

McDaniel was the least seriously wounded. At least he could walk. Most of the others were too hampered by their wounds to get around. After several nights, Mac decided to try to swim to another island north of them. After three hours of trying, he found he had just enough strength to get back to the others. He was mighty discouraged.

But the next day he had an idea—one of those flashes of invention for which Americans are noted. Collecting some driftwood on the beach and tying them together with the shrouds from the parachutes, he fashioned a kind of raft. On the fifth night he was ready to trust his life to it. By this time the skipper felt well enough to join him.

Under cover of darkness and with the aid of coconut limbs for oars, they made the island north of them. A few coconuts served for food until the next night when they went to another island still further north. After a few nights of this and with nothing to eat but coconuts they felt they were far enough advanced to risk going over to the mainland of Palawan.

Once on the mainland, they ran smack into two Philippine fishermen, who welcomed them literally with open arms. They were led to a guerrilla village, where the Filipinos, hearing their story, immediately got out their outrigger canoes, or bancas, and went for their friends. By the next morning all seven flyers were united in the village.

Nothing But the Best

Then began a rain of hospitality that all but inundated the Americans. With too little for themselves, the Filipinos brought them food, and clothes and gifts.

"They were fanatic," says McDaniel, "in their love for Americans."

But the biggest gift was a doctor. He had finished his studies at the University of the Philippines, and, on completing his course, had joined the guerillas. He tended their wounds and within a week they were ready to make the journey to guerilla headquarters.

Meanwhile, a carrier strike was taking place and the party of seven was suddenly increased to eleven. Two carrier pilots with their radiomen had been shot down and brought to the village. The journey to guerilla headquarters was like a triumphal procession. Everywhere they were feted.

Such was the efficiency of the guerilla intelligence that they knew exactly where the Japs were at all times and could travel more or less openly by day. Besides the Army planes had just made a telling strike on Palawan and after that there were few Jap planes to bother about.

Underground Nerve Center

At guerilla headquarters they found whole families, many of them professors and cultured professional people, living simply in the hills. They had a powerful radio station manned by U. S. citizens of Philippine origin, who had volunteered to take the equipment in aboard submarines and send daily bulletins to General MacArthur's headquarters on weather, ship movements and other data.

They contacted the American forces and a rendezvous was arranged to pick up the flyers. But the critical battle for Leyte was then at its height. The rendezvous had to be cancelled. Another fared likewise. And then one night, just as the Americans were wondering if they'd ever be rescued, they were told to get into a sailboat. They went

offshore about ten miles and effected a rendezvous with an American submarine.

As they boarded the undersea boat and the hatch was finally closed over their heads, they felt as though they had reached home. Almost, but not quite—the sub still had two weeks of dangerous work to do in enemy waters and it couldn't interrupt its patrol. But after their experiences of the previous few weeks, American bunks, American gadgets, and American voices all made them feel as though they were in their own backyard instead of 10,000 miles from home under leagues of enemy-held waters.

And the final touch was added when McDaniel met Thomas Haskins, a radioman from his own town in Illinois, aboard the submarine. The smallness of the world could have had no more apt testimonial.

Home at Last

After two weeks they reached Saipan and were put aboard planes that took them back to their squadrons.

McDaniel was asked what they did first when they arrived back with the squadron.

"We had one helluva beer party," said Mac. "And then we went on a fifteen-day leave to Sydney. If you're going to crash and be rescued, it's best to have the skipper along."

And so McDaniel, who has a nice instinct for picking appropriate days to have crises in his life, arrived back home in Rockford on St. Valentine's Day. His wife was waiting at the station. His daughter, whom he had never expected to see, was there too.

As the little family returned to the frame house on Jackson Street, there were others waiting too—his mother and sister, and neighbors and many friends. It was a joyous reunion. There was only one slight flaw in the perfection of the moment. To commemorate the occasion, Mrs. McDaniel had baked a huge layer cake.

In her excitement, she had overlooked something which caused her husband a slight wince. The flavor of the cake, of course, was—coconut!

Look Forward to These Grand Air Action Yarns!



SKY ROUTE TO HELL

By HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

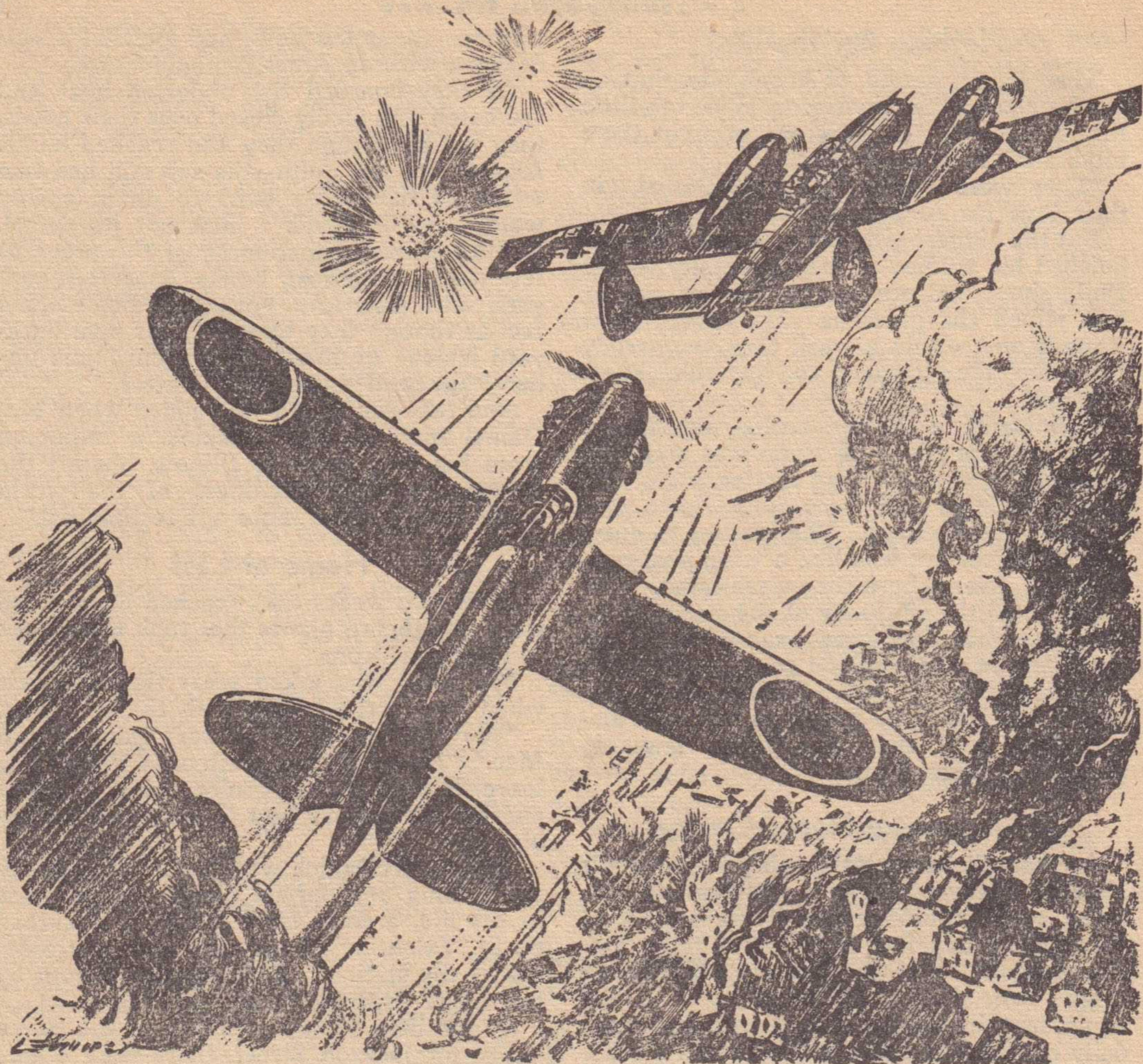
"KILLER"

By JOE GREGG

NO GUNS AT THIRTY THOUSAND

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Featured in Coming Issues



Young Bill went rocketing up to fasten on the tail of an ME

SETTLEMENT IN FULL

By HAROLD F. CRUICKSHANK

*High in Europe's Flaming Skies, Bill Dawson, the Sky Devil,
Roars into a Showdown with a Cruel Vengeance-bent Nazi Pilot!*

IT WAS in the days of England's greatness, when a thin and desperate little band of Spitfires and Hurricanes were holding off the might of the Luftwaffe—Hitler's boasted Luftwaffe, loaded with death and flame for England.

Thirty thousand feet in the thin air over Hell's Corner, Bill Dawson, the Sky Devil, was trying to tear the wings out of a new Mark Nine Spitfire. The squadron of which he was leader flew Hurricanes and this was the first of a new series of Spits which was to boost their already impressive combat record.

Bill Dawson was putting her through more acrobatics than her designers had ever dreamed of. He had to know his ship better than a man knew his wife, for it was better that he crack up now than fail in combat when his Brood might need him.

In the midst of a screaming power dive his radio spluttered into life.

"Ops calling you, S.D. Calling S.D. Bandits over K zone. Your hurryboxes scrambling."

"I have you, Ops. Thanks."

He kicked the Spit around on a dime and gunned the Merlin for K zone at better than

400 per. Pretty good flying for an old man, he thought with a rueful grin.

The Sky Devil's true name was William Dawe, not Dawson. As Dawe he had made a magnificent record in World War I, climaxing his career by shooting down Baron von Hammen, big-shot of the Richthofen Circus. The Air Ministry considered Dawe too old for combat flying in World War II. But by altering his name to Dawson and pulling a few political strings he had managed to get in.

Unexpectedly, he found himself skipper of the 71st Squadron British Fighter Command, which contained his own son, Pilot Officer Dawe.

He hadn't seen much of young Bill. Perhaps he hadn't been a very good father. As a bush pilot in the wilds of the Canadian Northwest, he had believed it better to leave the boy with relatives who had treated him as their own son. Now he found himself in the rather unenviable position of meeting his son for the first time in years on a superior officer basis, which made him lean over backwards at times to satisfy his own conscience that he was not favoring the boy.

That very morning young Bill had gotten back to the field late from leave and tapped at his office door. The Sky Devil had squinted at him.

"Better late than never, I suppose," he said, as brusquely as he could manage it.

"Sorry, Dad—sir! I had a bit of excitement."

"Where?"

"Morely, sir."

YOUNG Bill had a girl at Morely he was always dashing off to see, a pretty, red-headed school teacher from London who had been bombed out and was staying at Morely. The Sky Devil approved of her, but not when it came to overstaying leave.

"I ran into a chap at Morely," young Bill went on. "Said he was in a supporting flight of S. E. Fives when you knocked out von Hammen."

The cold eyes of the Sky Devil lighted as though from a flame within.

"Indeed? How did he come to know you knew me?"

Young Bill squirmed. He'd been warned about talking shop off the station.

"Well, sir, we had a drink or two while waiting for the train and talked. He saw I was doing things with the buzz boxes and he told me he was with Intelligence, thinking I was on the level. Did you know that the man you sent down was von Hammen at the time or did you learn it later?"

"I knew," the Sky Devil said broodingly. "He'd sent me more than one challenge to meet him. I caught him machine-gunning a poor devil of an observer who'd bailed out of one of our kite balloons. Did this friend

of yours give you his name?"

"No, sir. Intelligence, you know. Strictly hush-hush. Uh—going to discipline me for staying over, sir?"

The Sky Devil seemed to rouse as though his attention had been far away.

"What—no, not this time. Watch your step, though, son. Remember you're one of my fighting Brood and I couldn't—if I would—show you any favors. Get in there and bowl—or else. That's all, Dawe."

Some of the mood of that conversation returned to him now as he flashed through the air toward threatened K zone. Who was this talkative member of Intelligence who knew the name of the man the Sky Devil had shot down? For the curious fact was that British Intelligence did not know his identity. The Sky Devil had never revealed it.

The feud between himself and von Hammen had been a bitter deadly thing. And with von Hammen's end, Bill Dawson had wished to see the whole thing die. So he had kept his mouth shut. And now came a man who knew—things!

How? Not the British—

"Nazi Intelligence," the Sky Devil breathed. "An agent, working the flying fields."

He had immediately called Operations and in a moment was talking to his friend Greening, of Intelligence. The time for secrecy was over now that the cat was out of the bag. He gave Greening the dope.

"I might be wrong," he concluded, "but you'd better come down and have a chat with Pilot Officer Dawe. He can give you a description."

So one wheel was set in motion. Meanwhile there was this little rumpus over K zone. Morely was the target, a little market town no more than thirty miles from the station of the 71st Squadron.

By no stretch of the imagination could Morely be said to possess military value, save perhaps that the sons of its older citizens were operating tanks and guns in Tunisia and Burma or flying the skylanes over Cologne, Wilhelmshaven and other key points of Naziland.

They timed their hit and run sorties perfectly for their grim purpose, these henchmen of Hitler, these ghouls of Goering. Before the fast Hurricane fighters of the Sky Devil's Brood could cut in on them, two Dorniers had unloaded their eggs directly on the market square.

The shambles was frightful. The two bombers wheeled off but their fighter escort, knowing that the A.R.P. and other rescuers would be out at once in defiance of more bombs from above, swooped in like vultures, cannon and machine guns wide open.

The vulture comparison was apt, for this

Luftwaffe 114th Bomber Fighter Squadron under Oberst von Hammen was actually named the Vultures. There was nothing which gave its pilots more pleasure than machine gunning the helpless people of an English town.

Pilot Officer Dawe was the first of the Brood to reach Morely. His heart dropped sickeningly as he realized where the Nazis had unloaded their cargo of death.

Flying Officer Hanson, the red-headed American who was the Sky Devil's deputy in absence of the leader, tried to hold him back, but young Bill Dawe went wild.

He caught an ME-110 as it went down for a second swath-cutting along a street where the scant fire brigade was trying to put out a fierce blaze in a bakery.

GUNS of the Nazi squirted death along the street. Her pilot grinned as he zoomed back, but his grin was wiped out as he faced the blazing red eyes of Dawe's wing Brownings.

Bill Dawe, however, had let sentiment grip him too much. His aim was a bit off and the German, although hit, sliced clear and came up like a rocket, both motors wide.

Both formations broke up in a dog fight that spilled out over miles of sky. The speed and dash of the Hurricanes dazed the Luftwaffe and the ferocity of the defenders, who had seen their towns turned into blazing ruins of death, knew no bounds.

But the Germans were cool, experienced flyers, without panic. They spotted young Bill Dawe alone. Fierce anger in his heart, he had gone down almost to house-top level on the tail of a flaming bomber.

Nazis peeled off and hurtled down in a squeeze play to pinch off the lone Hurricane. Up above Hanson swore lurid American oaths into his microphone and dropped like a stone to the rescue. He saw Dawe kick his ship into a half roll and cut a Nazi fighter in half.

"Chip off the old block," Hanson grinned.

Then a Nazi pilot rolled onto the Hurricane's tail and Bill Dawe became cold meat.

"Too late," Hanson groaned, trying to get more speed out of his diving crate.

Then a dark streak shot in from the west—a winged shape traveling like a comet.

"The Spitfire!" Hanson exclaimed.

He cut his dive and zoomed to cover the Sky Devil's tail, craning his neck at the same time to see the ace of aces pull his kid out of the fire.

That distinguishing scar on Bill Dawson's cheek came alive in its dance of death. He had spotted young Bill's number, but he would have gone in just the same way if any other of his Brood had been in the same spot.

He went straight down, not a spark leaving his gun muzzles. Suddenly, with a quick

tap of rudder and a touch of back-stick he came up in a side-winding zoom.

He looped in a small tight arc and swooped into the dive directly over the back of a Hun. His Brownings squirted. The range was too close for cannon fire, he thought, nor was it necessary, for the Nazi pilot's back was directly in the cross hairs of his sight for that deathly second or so.

Bill Dawson never took time to watch his prey go spinning down. He yanked back the hood of his cockpit and waved to young Bill as he slid past the Hurricane.

"Dad!"

The sight of that dark Spitfire brought back young Bill's true fighting form. He fed the petrol to his Merlin and went rocketing up to fasten on the tail of an ME and hammer it to pieces with flaming guns.

The pressure that followed was too much for the Vultures of von Hammen. The remainder of the escort flight turned tail, hotly chased by Hanson, Pierce and Montreith, while the Sky Devil and his son dipped low above the burning shambles of the once peaceful, non-military town of Morely to salute the dead and acclaim the gallant work of the living who struggled among the blazing ruins.

Curiously enough, the first repercussion of the Morely raid came across the Channel at the camouflaged field of the Thirty-Second Staffel of the Luftwaffe.

Oberst von Hammen, leader of the Vultures, was in his field office. At the moment he was squirming uneasily under the mocking stare of a Gestapo officer.

"You call the Morely raid a success, Herr Oberst," the Gestapo man said, "but I would hardly call it that myself, with your squadron cut to pieces by the Sky Devil, the Himmelteufel."

"What—what was that name?" Von Hammen's face turned a mottled red and he put a hand inside his collar as though he were suddenly choking.

"Ja, Herr Oberst. Der Himmelteufel. You claim your father, the Baron von Hammen shot him down in nineteen-eighteen, but we know, beyond doubt that he is alive and is leading the British Seventy-First Staffel. Is it not true, Herr Oberst, that the truth is exactly the reverse? That der Himmelteufel shot down your father?"

"There is some mistake!" von Hammen rapped out.

"Nein. We do not make these kind of mistakes."

"What do you want? Your verdammte espionage makes me sick! Lieber Gott! Do we have to win the war in spite of you instead of with you?"

THE Gestapo man was unruffled.

"We want the same thing you do, Herr Oberst. The destruction of der Himmelteufel. And because you are the most vi-

tally concerned, because he has caused the death of your father and today inflicted damage on your Staffel, the honor of destroying him is delegated to you alone!"

Von Hammen cursed himself hoarse when the Gestapo man was gone. Pressure on him was growing from above. The outnumbered Spitfires and Hurricanes of embattled England were whipping his fighters whenever they met. In spite of official claims of victory in the communiqués, both von Hammen and the General Staff knew the truth as expressed in Luftwaffe casualties.

Normally he would have welcomed the task of avenging his father's and his own honor. But how? How could he find der Himmelteufel—and be sure of getting him when they met? For in the Nazi philosophy the most important thing was to win, no matter how, but win! Von Hammen had no desire to meet the Sky Devil unless he could be sure of winning. The only thing was a plan for decoying that Himmelteufel into personal combat—under such conditions that he could not come out of it alive.

While in England, a few days later, Bill Dawson was getting bad news. Young Bill's girl, the red-haired pretty one, had been killed in the raid on Morely. Machine-gunned and horribly burned as she worked to rescue the buried victims of bombs. Young Bill had gone off somewhere to be alone with his grief. The Sky Devil sat at his desk, staring at nothing.

An officer tapped, came in and saluted.

"Benson, of Intelligence, sir. Major Greening sent me down to give you news of the chap your Pilot Officer Dawe described for us."

The Sky Devil roused himself and his blank eyes awoke again.

"You got him?"

"Yes, sir. Got the bounder on a small moor, signaling to a Heinkel. It got away," he added sadly. "But I have some more news of interest to you. He talked when we got him—was in a bit of a funk you know. May be a lot of bosh. But did you ever know a von Hammen, sir? Last war and all that. A Baron von Hammen."

"Did I?" Dawson said softly. "One of Richthofen's aces. I happened to catch him one afternoon enjoying himself by cutting in half one of our balloon observers who'd bailed out. What about him?"

"Well, sir, if this spy chap is right, the Hun in command of the Thirty-Second Luftwaffe Staffel—the Vultures you beat off at Morely—is none other than the jolly old baron's son—Herr Oberst von Hammen."

"Lay on MacDuff," Dawson murmured, a sudden excitement gripping him. "What else?"

"According to this espionage agent, the Gestapo has broken the news to von Hammen that you are alive. He thinks his father

shot you down, you see. And the present von Hammen is to be given the exclusive pleasure of hunting you down and eliminating you as a menace to der Fuehrer's hitherto invincible Luftwaffe."

"Von Hammen's son," the Sky Devil whispered. "If he's anything like his father he'll be glad to hear I'm in this show—glad for a whack at me."

"Not at you, sir," Benson corrected. "The Gestapo has other ideas. They've decided that the best way of striking at you is to vent their spite on your son. They know young Bill Dawe is your son and they've already relayed the number of his ship to von Hammen by now. Fourteen, is that the number, sir? So the spy's information was correct."

Bill Dawson got up and shook Benson's hand.

"You've done us a great service, Lieutenant," he said, "and a personal one to me. We'll be on the watch for von Hammen. In fact, I think we may have some surprises soon for the Vultures."

What he was not telling—even to the obviously trustworthy Benson—was that a Mosquito raid had already been planned on the Vultures' field.

As soon as Benson was gone, the Sky Devil called Hanson in.

"Where's Dawe?"

"I don't know sir. He's taken that Morely bombing very badly. What are you going to do about him?"

"I can't spare him, Hanson. And I wouldn't if I could. The worst thing would be to go easy on him now—he'd crack up—lose his nerve. He's got to stay in there fighting, rummy as it'll be for us both."

IT WAS two days later before the Sky Devil again saw his son.

"Where've you been?" Dawson demanded.

"Thinking things out. I'm ready now, sir. I want action—action against those filthy Vultures! When do we settle with those butchers? When?"

"When we're ready," the Sky Devil said. "And not a moment before." His voice was like dry ice—one hundred fourteen degrees below zero. "We'll pay them back for every drop of blood they've exacted. You'll have your chance, young Dawe, never fear. Meanwhile—you've been away again without leave. There's some discipline coming to you. Stay in your quarters temporarily while I decide what to do. That'll be all."

The youngster saluted smartly and about faced. Without any show of resentment he strode through the door. The Sky Devil's face softened as he watched him go. He would have given almost anything to break down, to put his hand on the boy's shoulder, to tell him that the same grief and helpless

rage was tearing him apart. But it would soften the kid now, it might make him go to pieces at the wrong time. That girl had died so horribly—her lovely red hair burned from her head. Keep him hard, keep him fighting, that was the only hope for young Bill Dawe.

The Sky Devil was in conference at the Mosquito station when the emergency call from Hanson at the 71st came through.

"Took off in his own plane?" he repeated unbelievably. "No—I—well I didn't exactly ground him but I told him to stay in his quarters pending some disciplinary action. I'll be right there."

He burned up the road to the field. Sergeant Bat Hennedy came out of the Sky Devil's hangar as he roared up in his jeep. A pot of red paint was in the sergeant's hand.

"Craft's top-hole sir—throbbin' on her chocks. She's as neat and trim as a saucy colleen who's just been kissed. Come and see."

The Sky Devil entered the hangar and started as he saw on the side of the new Spitfire's fuselage, a painted replica of his old insignia—the leaping devil with spear rampant.

"Ah, don't touch now, sir," Hennedy cautioned. "Quick dryin' paint, so it is, but not that quick."

"Thanks Bat," the Sky Devil said softly. "A marvelous piece of work. Now tell me about Pilot Officer Dawe. He took his own ship?"

"Fourteen, sir. Shure the kid's been bilin' over so he couldn't stand it I'm thinkin'. It hit us all about the colleen, you know!"

The Sky Devil turned on his heel and hurried out to meet Hanson.

"Stand by to shove off!" he barked. "Phone Mosquito Twenty-First Station. Tell 'em it's short notice but they've got to get up there with us. Emergency!"

"Yes sir!" Hanson said eagerly.

"I'm afraid young Bill's put his foot in it this time, Hanson," the Sky Devil said tensely. "Von Hammen knows his number and if that killer catches Bill alone the kid won't have a chance. You be in there with the Brood as quickly as you can. Watch for the Mosquitoes and work with them. I'll be seeing you."

At a snapped order, his Spitfire was wheeled out. He raced to quarters and got his flying kit. Seconds later his prop was clawing at the air and the Spitfire was slicing the sky like a rocket.

He kicked her toward the Channel at full throttle. Young Bill must have been out of his head. What chance would he have against von Hammen's vulture pack?

Indeed, von Hammen was thinking the same thing as he looked down from a new

Focke-Wulf he was testing to see a Hurricane below carrying the fateful number—14.

"Vierzehn!" the Nazi squadron leader exclaimed. "Der sohn der Himmelteufel! What a piece of luck!"

He shook with emotion and eagerness. The young British fool had indeed, as the Nazi spy had advised, been seriously affected by the bombing and machine-gunning of Morely.

Von Hammen switched on his radio. He called his Unter-offizier below and ordered up a flight of ME-110's. The end of this sohn der Himmelteufel would be spectacular. Von Hammen chuckled as he thought of the young Hurricane pilot's father, the Amerikaner Sky Devil.

MILES behind, the Sky Devil was thinking of him, too. He was worried sick and wondering about young Bill's petrol supply.

"Hope I'm in time," he breathed. "Just let me make it there in time!"

His Spit sheared through a cotton wool cloud formation and broke into the open. He gasped. A thousand feet below, hemmed in by a herding cordon of twin engine ME-110's was the lonely Hurricane of his son!

"S.D.—calling D for Daniel!" he snapped into his mike. "Break out, kid, blast a way through to the south. I'll cover you!"

"D for Daniel!" came the prompt response, shaky but jubilant as the trapped youngster saw help arrive. "Here I go! Sorry to get you in a jam, dad. Good luck. . . ."

Bill Dawson managed a grin though there was little mirth in it. He was protecting his son, yes. But he was also using him as a lure to draw von Hammen and the Vultures south, away from the 71st Staffel where the Mosquitoes would arrive at any moment with their load of bombs. Behind the Mosquitoes would come his brood of Hurricanes with their guns blazing. There would be one lovely shoot-up of that Vulture drome.

Suddenly his ship leaped and shook as lead stuttered on her after parts. Von Hammen, above, had seen the fearsome red devil insignia on the newly arrived ship and had lunged like a cobra to get in the first blow.

The Sky Devil slipped away without fighting back and leveled for a quick scanning look at the sky for sign of young Bill's Hurricane. There it was! The kid had managed to plow his way through. He was in the clear, but still alone and a couple of ME's were racing to converge on his tail. Suddenly the ME's sheered off, and like a bolt from the blue, the Focke-Wulf dived on the Hurricane.

Von Hammen could have thought of no better tactic to turn the Sky Devil into the perfect fighting machine he was. He sliced his Spitfire downward with a speed and recklessness that threatened to tear her

apart and from this terrible skid, in which he momentarily blacked out, he tripped the full force of his forward fire power.

The Nazi was forced to break off and zoom, blood trickling from a bullet slash alongside his right temple.

The Sky Devil called his son.

"S.D. calling. Get out, Dawe! Your gas must be low. This is an order. I'll cover you. Watch bandits off your sta'bud beam. Now get out!"

Young Bill Dawe remained deaf. He whirled his ship about and lashed a furious burst into the belly of a Messer which blew up and disappeared in a rain of white-hot fragments.

But ME's poured down from the sky on the two British fighter ships. They were outnumbered, surrounded and despite the brilliance of their tactics, without hope.

Blood trickled into the Sky Devil's mouth and he spat it from him furiously. The Focke-Wulf flashed into his sights and he jabbed his gun button viciously. Slugs ripped and clawed at the Nazi ship's belly and metal flew in tortured chunks, but von Hammen managed to pull her clear.

Only momentarily, however. For disregarding the pressing ME's, Dawson whipped over and fastened on the Focke-Wulf's tail like grim death. In his rear mirror, von Hammen could see the Spitfire growing bigger, could see the leaping red devil on the fuselage, could see the Sky Devil's face through the wind-screen, lips peeled back from his teeth.

Then there were a lot of winking lights along the edges of the Spitfire's wings and these were the last things von Hammen ever saw. Something struck him in the back with the shock of the sky falling upon him. Then von Hammen, would-be avenger was spinning downward to the Valhalla which is reserved for murderers and human butchers.

"H for hamburger calling S.D." came Hanson's voice. "Nice going skipper and good riddance to a heel. You can relax now, the Brood is in!"

The Sky Devil smiled faintly in relief. Good old Hanson in the nick of time, as usual. In fact, knocking down von Hammen had about shot his bolt. Strain and some loss of blood had taken all the strength out of him.

So it was that two ME's chopping in from different directions happened to catch him off guard.

HANSON, who saw them, could only scream a warning, but a second later his eyes flew open in amazement as he saw one of the Nazi ships lose half a wing and go flopping down, with flames beginning to whip out of the cockpit. He saw a lone Hurricane zoom clear of the wreckage and

spotted the number 14 which identified it as Bill Dawe's.

"H for hamburger calling D for Daniel. Nice work kid. Now scram before you run out of gas!"

"Cutting out now, H for hamburger," Bill Dawe answered. "I've got about eight drops left. Tell Dad—well, tell him I was in there while I lasted!"

It wasn't long after that. Seven Mosquitoes dropped their loads on the Vulture's drome and then leaving the crazy jumble of ruins that had once been a busy Nazi airfield, raced to join the Brood in its clean-up of the Hun fighters still in the air.

Hurryboxes and Mosquitoes continued knocking the ME's out of the air until the Sky Devil called them off. Petrol was running low for all.

"Thank you, Mosquitoes," he called. "Carry on independently. Come on, Brood. Let's go home."

The Hurricanes came in and sat down on the field and Dawson counted them quickly. Pierce was gone and Montieth and—yes, there was no Number 14. What had happened to young Bill? He'd broken off the fight, gotten out clear. Had he been jumped by other Nazi planes on his way home, or just run out of gas.

The answer did not come for two days. Then young Bill limped into the Sky Devil's hut, wearing a bandage around his head and a broad grin.

"No use scolding, Dad," he said. "I got plenty up there. I'm sorry for going A.W.O.L, but—I guess I just went off my trolley. You knew Joy, Dad. She had hair just like Mother's—that red gold—you remember?"

The Sky Devil remembered well enough.

"So if you want to court martial me, why okay," the kid said. "But say something! Aren't you glad to see me? Don't you want to know how I was picked up after running out of petrol?"

"Shut up!" the Sky Devil ordered. "I don't give two hoots in Hades where or how or when you were picked up. I—I'm glad to have you back, you young devil. But if you ever pull a trick like that again I'll break your neck. Cost you a D.F.C., that little stunt and you'd earned it, too. Let that be a lesson to you. Well, that's your discipline. Now get out and see the other boys. Go off on a binge or something. I'd like to be alone."

They shook hands and then young Bill saluted and withdrew. The Sky Devil sat and drummed the desk-top with a pencil. He was thinking of a woman with red-gold hair and of an earlier von Hammen who had gone down to a death he deserved—and of von Hammen's son.

It had been a grand fight, as grand as any that ever clipped the tail of a Nazi.

THRILLS IN THE AIR

BY *Jack Kofoed*

MAJOR WICKER WINS A DUEL WITH NERVE AND EMPTY GUNS

MAJOR SAM WICKER was in a spot. Neither ammunition or gasoline lasts as long as you'd expect in combat. It burns like cotton in a flame. The major's fuel gauge showed he had enough to keep his plane in the air for quite awhile yet, but he had used up all his machine gun cartridges shooting down two Germans.

Three Messerschmitts had ganged up on him, and were blazing away like mad. He cut all kinds of capers to get away from them, but while their marksmanship wasn't good enough to cripple him, Wicker couldn't shake them loose.

With that many bullets criss-crossing through the air, and none to answer with, chances were he would get it sooner or later. The twenty-four-year-old fighter pilot knew no insurance company in the world would write a policy on his life at less than a 100 percent premium.

Then another Messerschmitt came in. Wicker saw his chance. He got on the tail of the Jerry, and rode him straight down in a screaming dive. The Hun couldn't dart away. Maybe he blacked out. No one knew what happened in the cockpit of the dying plane, but it was tragedy for the man in it.

He tried to pull out of the dive, but couldn't. Down he went at six hundred miles an hour. It was only a matter of seconds until he hit the earth with a terrific smash, and blew up. The blast reached high, and shook the Mustang like a leaf in a gale.

Wicker flattened out, and climbed. The smart thing to do was get out of there as fast as possible. Next time he might not be as lucky. Where the three Messerschmitts that had been attacking him only seconds before had gone, Sam Wicker had not the faintest idea.

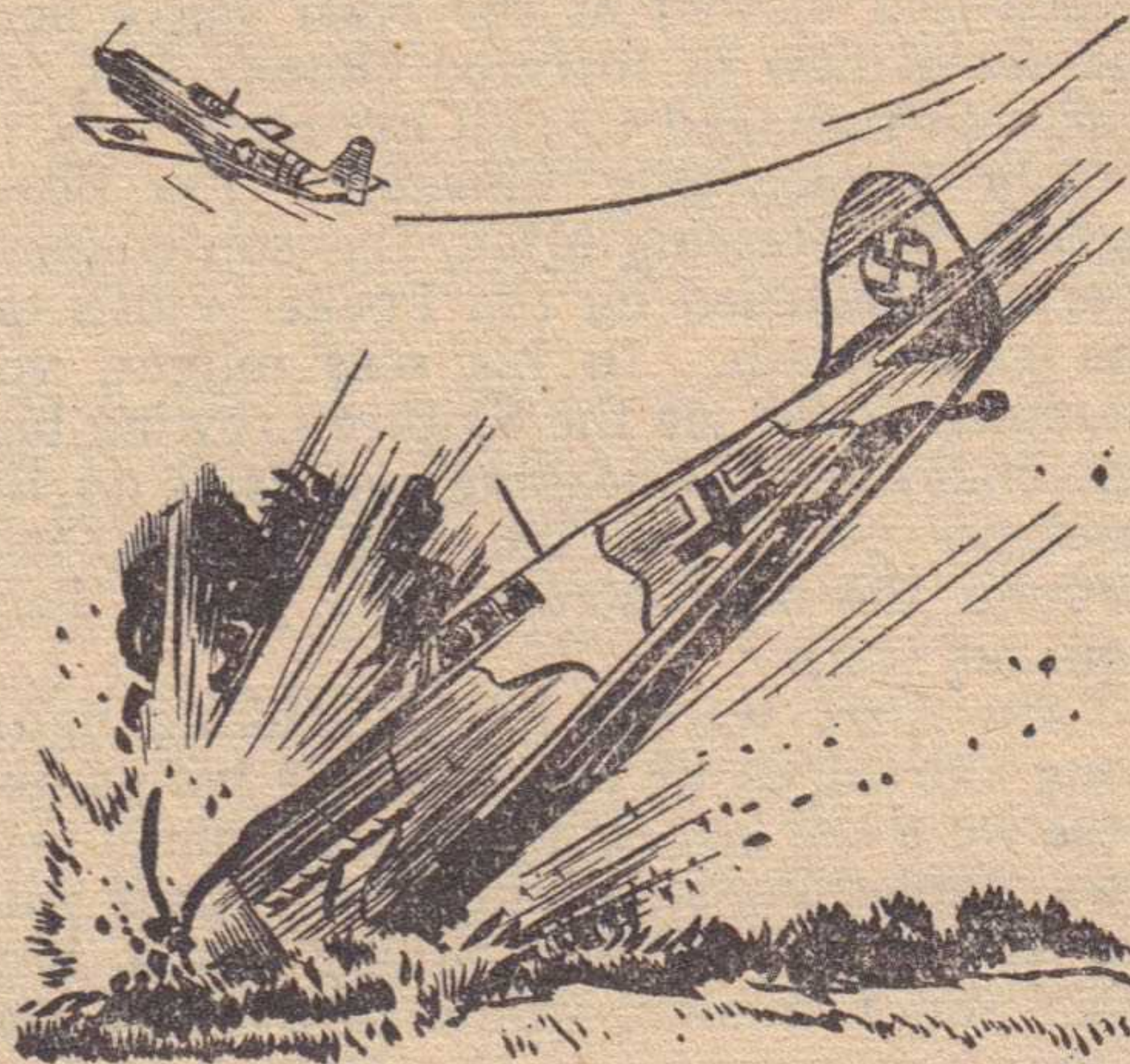
The incredible speed of modern planes makes air war fantastic. You are at grips with the enemy one moment, and a few later he is out of sight.

"Well, there's no use staying around here,"

said Wicker to himself. "One of these Krauts is likely to do something to me because I can't do anything to him."

So, he turned toward home. But home was quite a way off as yet.

Then, out of the overcast came another Messerschmitt. Perhaps he lacked the elan of the others. Maybe he was a youngster, not too



sure of himself and his machine. At any rate, he did not make an immediate motion of attack.

However, he had guns, and chances were he had bullets in those guns. If the major started away he might get on his tail, and shoot him to bits. In a fight there is no time for conscious and progressive thought. A good pilot who lives through many battles does things instinctively. The better he is, the better he does them.

Major Sam Wicker knew he'd have to chase that Jerry away, before he headed for his landing strip. So he went head on at the enemy, as though he had him in his sights, and was

EDITOR'S NOTE: This feature by Lieutenant Colonel Jack Kofoed will bring you in each issue true stories of gallantry and courage, peril and adventure in the war skies—exciting, inspiring episodes that form a deathless saga of combat flyers in action.

As a former officer of the Eighth Air Force in England, Lieutenant Colonel Kofoed is equipped to give you the "inside story" of many stirring events that will make you proud of America's air-men. In civilian life, Jack Kofoed is famous as a radio commentator, newspaper columnist, sports and air writer.

ready to let go a burst that would wipe him out.

Then the most amazing thing the Mustang pilot had ever seen occurred. The German opened his canopy, tilted his crate sidewise, and bailed out!

A little bit below the parachute blossomed out like a big mushroom, and the Nazi drifted toward the earth.

The plane raced on for a little bit, and then went into a dive.

Wicker stared. Then he laughed. Just what had caused the German to act that way, he couldn't figure. Maybe the man was frightened and had lost his head. The least he could have done was fire his guns before jumping, but he hadn't done that. There was a possibility that his own shooting irons were empty, and he did not possess the ability to make a courageous bluff, as the American had done.

For an instant the sky was clear. There

were no enemy planes to threaten. There was enough gas to get Wicker home, but not enough to fool around with. So, he cut away, and took it on the lam.

The film in Wicker's camera showed the destruction of the two planes he had shot to pieces, and the one which he had ridden to death. It also showed the German who had bailed out in the face of empty guns. So, Major Sam Wicker was credited with four kills on that day.

"That's some kind of a record," the grinning fighter ace said. "Plenty of fellows have gotten more than four in one day, but when you get two without a shot that's something for the book. I hope I don't ever have to try it again. It gives you a kind of an empty feeling to look into the muzzles of an enemy's gun, and know you haven't anything to throw back at him. It worked out all right once, but it's pretty good odds it wouldn't the second time."

HEROIC PILOT GETS JERRY SUB AND THEN DIES FOR MATES

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT DAVE HORNELL was a bit fed up. He had been flying coastal patrol with the Royal Canadian Air Force, and nothing much had happened. It was just routine, a necessary routine, but no more than that.

Dave had expected excitement when he signed up. He wasn't getting any. But, excitement comes sooner or later in wartime.

On June 24, 1944, his bomber was cruising along. Hornell's bombardier was half asleep. The pilot was yawning a little at his controls, wishing he could go over Germany. That was what he wanted. This sort of thing would drive him nuts.

Then, he sighted a submarine. That was the stuff. That was what he had trained and worked for. Hornell cut sharply to starboard. The enemy ship was rolling unevenly on the swell. Perhaps it had been forced up to recharge its batteries. Some emergency was indicated, for Nazi U-boats seldom showed themselves in daylight.

These submarines were heavily armed with anti-aircraft guns. The men aboard them were good shots. As the big plane came in, there was a blast of fire. The Jerries threw up a lot of flak. Dave's first bombs drenched the decks, but were too far away to do vital damage.

The sub wanted to get down. That was evident but the gunners kept firing. Some of the flak set the plane's starboard engine on fire.

"The devil with that," Dave said to himself. "No matter what happens to us, we'll get him."

He came around again, hardly able to see through the screen of smoke, and the bombardier let go again. That was the end of the U-boat. It was smashed to smithereens. It left a wide spread of oil slick on the rolling waves.

"Cheers!" said the flight lieutenant over the inter-com. "We got him. But, by the same token, he got us. We'll have to ditch, boys, and it looks awful cold and rough and wet down there. Get set."

He brought the bomber skidding onto the sea. It would sink in from fifteen to thirty seconds, so the crew abandoned ship as fast as people getting out of a burning house. Bad business. There was something wrong with

one of the dingies. It wouldn't inflate. That left one rubber raft capable of supporting four men, and there were eight to be carried.

Hornell was heart-sick at the loss of his ship, but now had more important matters on his mind. All of his men must be saved.

It was pretty obvious eight men could not get onto the life raft. Dave decided there was



only one thing to do—stick it out. They might be rescued quickly, or they might be out there for days. The Air-Sea Rescue was efficient and capable, but there was a lot of sea to cover. All they could do was hold on, and hope for the best.

Four men took turns huddling wet and cold on the raft, while the rest drifted in the icy water, gripping the lines with numbed hands. Hornell spent much less than his allotted time on the comparative safety the raft offered. After all, he was the skipper, and his first thought was for his men.

When he was aboard, Dave took off his warm flying pants that were the only real protection against the cold, and used them to bail.

The men protested. They were all willing to make this an even deal. But Hornell was the commanding officer, and they had to do as he told them.

Hour after horrible hour passed. Two of the men died of exposure. Brief services were said over their bodies, and they were cast into the sea that was seeking to claim all of them.

The pilot was blue with cold. Icy numbness was creeping toward his heart. He didn't know how much longer he could last, but somehow or other, he must last. His men depended on him. Even death could not take him before he had seen them safe.

After twenty-one hours another patrol plane sighted them. It dropped a raft, but it was out

of reach, and everyone was too exhausted to swim after it. The plane radioed for help, and within another hour a ship arrived and picked them up.

The others were taken off first. Flight Lieutenant Hornell couldn't move. He tried to smile with his stiff lips.

"It was a little rough," he said. "We traded a plane for a submarine. That wasn't such a bad deal."

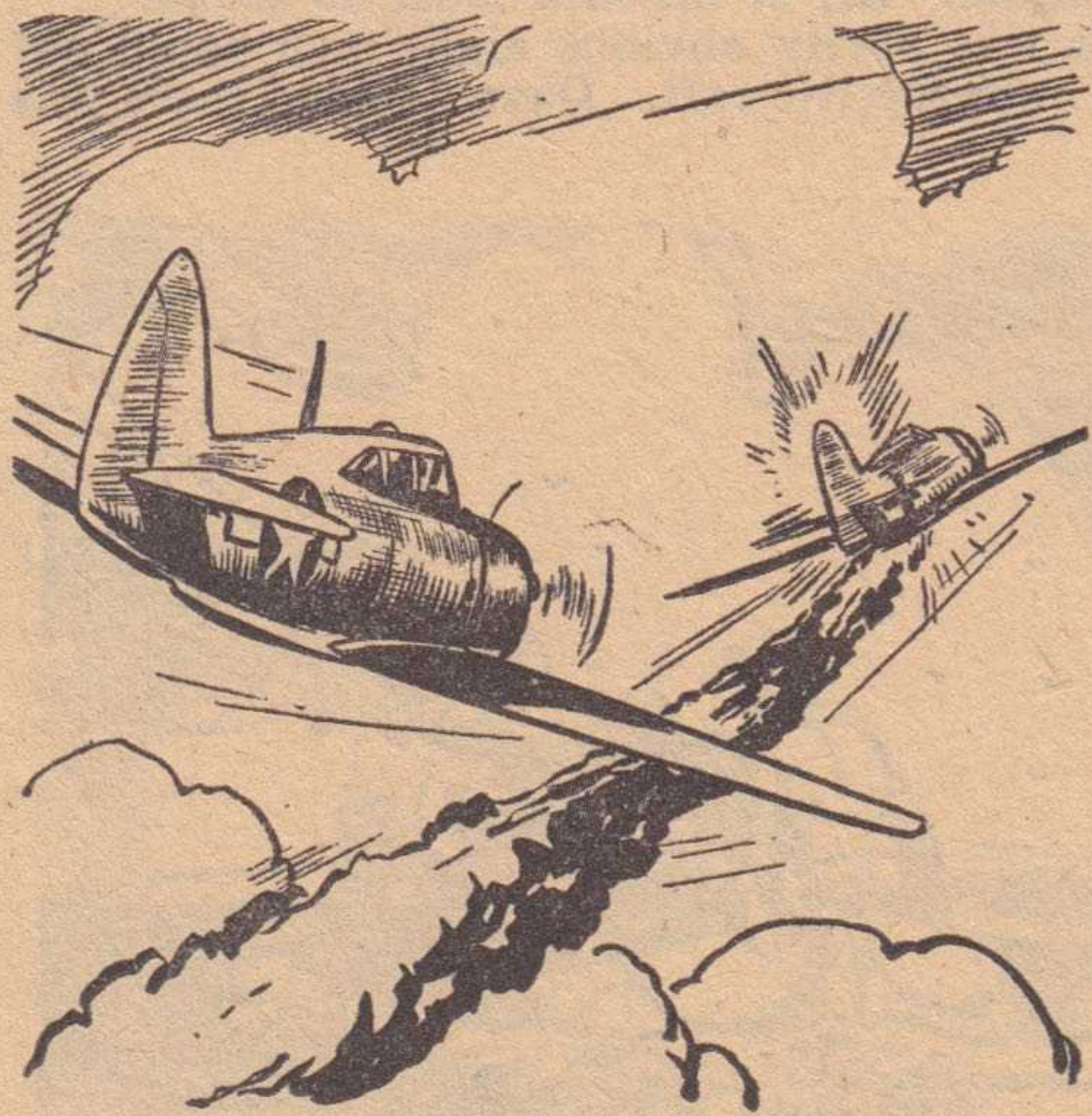
When they carried him to the deck of the rescue ship, he died.

For his leadership and heroism, Dave Hornell was awarded the Victoria Cross—the first man of the Royal Canadian Airforce to gain that honor.

FLYING A STRANGE PLANE, MAJOR ROBERTS HANGS UP RECORD KILL

THAT morning Major Eugene Roberts' Thunderbolt was being repaired. A man gets used to a ship, and all its idiosyncrasies. But, missions won't wait on repairs. When you're told to go, you gotta go, and if it is not in the little darling you're used to, that's your bad luck.

Roberts' squadron was to escort Flying Fortresses on a bombing attack. Sometimes the Germans let them through, and depended on



the ground batteries for defense. On other occasions, when the target was of vital interest to them, they sent the Luftwaffe roaring into action.

This time they had elected to slug it out. Hundreds of enemy fighters came up, and pressed their attack with vigor. In the earlier days of the Eighth Air Force, not very long before, fighters had lacked range enough to accompany the bombers into Germany. The best they could do was give withdrawal support over France.

The Jerries didn't expect American fighters at Kassel, so they concentrated on knocking down as many of the big bombers as they could. One of the Fortresses had been badly hit. Two props were feathered, and she dropped out of formation. Her gunners, though, were pouring out a stream of lead in a gallant effort at defense. However, without

help from the fighters, there was no hope for her.

Five Messerschmitts had ganged up on her tail. Then Roberts' boys appeared. The Jerries broke formation, and ran. Apparently, they had no desire to go to war with the Thunderbolts. No one chased the flying planes. There were plenty of others to tangle with.

The Spokane man saw some Focke-Wulfes queuing up to attack another bomber. They intended to dive in one at a time, and knock the Big Friend off without further ado.

Roberts' wing man, Flight Officer Glen Koontz, spoke over the interphone.

"Go down and get 'em, major," he said. "I'll cover your backside."

Down Gene went. The Germans were so interested in setting up the attack they didn't look behind. That was bad luck for them.

Roberts fell in behind the queue. Everything happens with the speed of light in an air battle, but it seems to move slowly. Gene roared in, and fixed the Focke-Wulfe in his sights. He held it there and pressed the button.

Just one burst. That was all, but it was enough. The German pilot was dead before he knew what hit him. Smoking, the plane went into a slow spin, falling toward an explosive crash on the ground.

The fight moved on through the skies. Directly ahead several more FW's were queuing up on another bomber. The trick had worked once. Why not again? Roberts, with Koontz on his wing, sailed up back of them. It was just as easy as the first time. A blast of .50 caliber bullets, and one of the Jerries burst into flame. The wing man took care of the second. They cheered each other over the interphone.

The bombers moved steadily toward home. Their job was done. It was strictly defensive warfare now. Every one that was saved for other missions was a step toward the end of the war. The sky was a hell of action, weaving planes and blazing guns.

The scrap wasn't over by any matter of means. The Germans were furious because they had been unable to save Kassel from American bombs. They meant to make the visitors pay as high a price as possible for what they had done.

Gene had a double. That thrilled him, even though the going had been easier than he anticipated. But, he wanted more. He hadn't

wasted ammunition. There was plenty in the belts. He cut over to the other side of the bomber formation.

Sure enough, there were other planes queuing up on a Fortress. The Jerries are a very methodical people. When they have an idea, they stick to it.

"I might as well do the same," Roberts said to himself. "Those boys don't look around enough. Maybe I can get me another one."

Again with Koontz riding herd, he came up behind the queue, and beaded on a Messerschmitt 109, whose pilot was getting ready to

knock off a Fortress. The tracers poured into him, and he went down spinning, as the others had done.

Three in one day at that stage of European operations was a perfect score. Major Eugene Roberts was the happiest guy in the world.

By that time the Jerries decided to break off combat. They heeled around, and went tearing back to their bases. The Forts and the Thunderbolts kept on toward England.

To this day Gene Roberts will admit he couldn't have done better, even if he had been in his own plane.

NINETEEN ZEROS BRING VRACIU A TIDY NEST EGG

WHEN Alexander Vraciu went to DePauw University, he was an athlete, but a practical psychologist as well. He was interested in studying the reactions of teachers and fellow students. He wanted to know why they did certain things.

One day he made a test on his professor of psychology. The classroom was on the second floor, and Vraciu walked very calmly to the window, and jumped out. Of course, the professor did not know Alexander had a net to jump into. So, Vraciu discovered what he wanted to know about the learned man's reactions to the unexpected.

This curiosity was of real value when the boy from DePauw went into the Air Force, and was sent to the southwest Pacific to fight the Japanese. It wasn't enough for him that

Vraciu fought it out with a Zero. He poured his tracers into the enemy plane, and it began to burn. Down it plunged, and the lieutenant followed.

He could see the pilot in his seat, with the hot fingers of flame beginning to lick around him. It was obvious the Jap meant to stay with his plane, but at last he couldn't stand it any longer. He jumped. But he did not pull the ripcord of his parachute.

Vraciu could see the tiny body hurtling toward the ocean. He watched until it hit with a splash, and disappeared. He shook his head, and grinned. That was a psychology he couldn't understand. It was a glorification of ego—a feeling that personal failure merited death, even though it cost Japan the services of an experienced flier.

The DePauw man had many opportunities to witness the actions of the Japanese and try to understand why they acted as they did. He discovered they were good enough fliers mechanically, and the Zero was a fast and amazingly maneuverable ship. He also learned that his opponents were lacking in the gift of improvisation. They did things the same way. If an American whipped up a new combat idea, they were puzzled how to meet it.

On one big day Alexander knocked six Nips out of the sky. Doubles were frequent. Many a boy had gained a triple. But six! That was really something to write home about. That night he lay awake thinking about it. It had been a chi chi battle all right. The rest of his squadron had done well, too, but the DePauw man couldn't get over the fact that he had blasted six out of the sky.

Of course, he had been lucky. A guy has to have luck to make a record like that. Many a fighter pilot has flown fifty missions or more, and never had an opportunity to match his .50 caliber guns with the enemy.

When Lieutenant Alexander Vraciu's bag reached nineteen, he was sent back to the States for rest and reassignment. That was all right with him. Even the toughest fighting man dreams of home, and his loved ones. Besides, the war would last awhile yet, and he'd come back to take another crack at the men who called themselves the Sons of Heaven.

The lieutenant went back to see his people in East Chicago, Indiana. There was a big celebration, and Uncle John Tincu was one of those who joined it. Uncle John was a Chicago manufacturer, and very proud of his husky nephew.



veterans could tell him about the enemy. He not only wanted to know what the little men did, but why.

The Japanese have their own code. They are different from the Jerries. Any white pilot, and that is as true of the German as the American, understands that his life is of value to his country. If his plane is shot down, and he can bail out, he'll do it. Manufacturing plants can turn out fighting ships much faster than instructors can train first-class fliers.

The Nipponese have a different idea. Battle is much more personal to them. Defeat is disgrace, and death is preferable to disgrace. One day over the gleaming bosom of the sea,

When the party was over, he took the lieutenant aside.

"I've a present for you," he said. "Not a present, really, but a payment." He took a slip of paper from his pocket, and put it in Vraciu's hand. It was a check for nineteen hundred dollars.

"Wha's this for?" Alexander asked as he looked at the check.

Uncle John looked surprised.

"Why, when you went over, I wrote and told you I'd give one hundred dollars for each Jap you shot down," he said. "You got nine-

teen, didn't you? Well, there's one hundred bucks for each one."

The lieutenant grinned.

"It looks as though the study of psychology, plus a little good shooting, pays off," he answered. "If I had known this, maybe I'd have knocked off a few more. There's nothing like an extra bit of incentive."

Alexander Vraciu was only kidding, of course, for he had given everything he had toward clearing the skies of America's enemies, but you can bet he had a lot of fun with Uncle John's bonus.

DOWNED FLYER RIDES SUB'S BACK OUT OF JAP DEATH TRAP

THE Ensign's name was Don Brandt. He was piloting a plane in a squadron attacking a Japanese installation in the South Pacific.

The Japs didn't like it, and fought back with their ack ack guns, of which there seemed to be a great sufficiency.

The flak raised Cain with Brandt's plane. The fuselage was nicked full of holes, and the engine began to cough and splutter. It was time to hit the silk, and he knew it. So, he bailed out, and landed in the ocean some distance off an island.

As Brandt cleared himself of the parachute, he figured the only thing he could do was swim ashore. Chances were it was infested with Japs, but the Pacific is too big a pond to paddle across, and sooner or later he would have to get dry land under his feet.

As he started in that direction, sentries began firing. Cartridges zipped the water all around him, and the ensign stopped, and trod water, while he tried to figure out what to do. It looked like a choice between being shot, drowned or taken prisoner, and none of these things appealed to him.

Besides, he was brooding a bit about the loss of his plane. Altogether he was a really unhappy lad.

Suddenly he saw the periscope of a submarine coming toward him. Though it was completely submerged except for a foot or two of the 'scope, Brandt figured it had to be American. If it was, he might ride piggy-back away from those dangerous shores. He swam toward it, but the sub was going too fast for him to grab it.

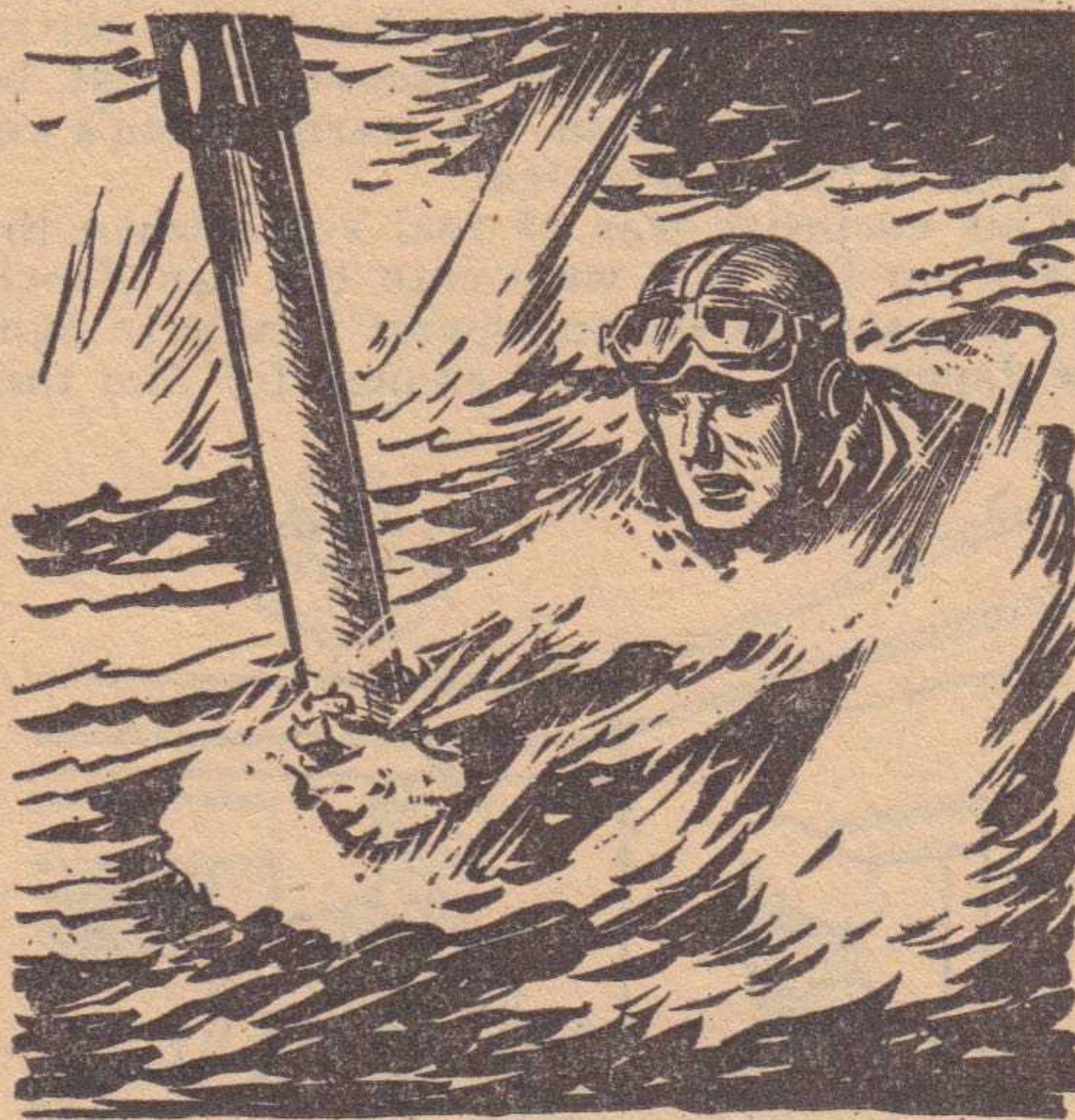
The wash spun him over and over, but he recovered, spewed water out of his mouth, and looked around.

Sure, it was American. Apparently the skipper had seen him, for the sub veered around, and came back. The Japs must have caught the trail of spray raised by the periscope, and they began lobbing shells in its direction.

Fortunately their aim was bad, for if one of those things came close it would be the end not only of Ensign Brandt, but probably of the underwater boat as well.

The sub slowed down. It wouldn't come to the surface with that shellfire whanging about, but it was pretty clear what the commander wanted Brandt to do. The ensign did a fast crawl stroke, and grabbed the periscope with both hands. His arms were almost torn from the sockets, but he held on with a grip of desperation.

Then, the submarine, with rifle bullets and shells ricocheting off the water, headed out to sea. It wasn't a ride Ensign Donald Brandt will ever forget. He almost strangled in the wash. The periscope cut into his hands. But he wouldn't let go, not he. It seemed almost an eternity before the submarine was out of range of the batteries. Then, it slowly came to the surface.



The flier lay on the dripping decks so exhausted he couldn't move. The hatch opened, and the commander thrust his head out, grinning.

"Hello, mister," he said. "I guess this is the first time a bird was rescued by a fish. Come in, and have a drink."

Brandt staggered to the hatch, and went below. It seemed to him that the whole thing was impossible, a sort of hallucination, but it wasn't. It had really happened. A shot down flier had ridden to safety on the back of a submarine!

It was a break for the ensign that he had the submarine's crew to back up his story when they returned him to his base.

If he had not, Donald Brandt would have been branded as the Ananias of the whole Navy air arm.

Japanese on the unnamed island could have testified, too, if any were still alive after the blasting the naval fliers gave them next day. It really happened, though it is the most improbable story in any of the world's air forces.

DEATH DIVE SINKS CARRIER AND WINS POWERS HERO'S LAURELS

PLANES were taking off from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier, Hornet. Motors of SBD3 scout bombers, as they revved up, made a tremendous and continuous clamor. Lieutenant John James Powers, Annapolis '35, pulled on his helmet.

"This is it, boys," he said. "I'm going to get one of those Japanese babies, if I have to go down on the deck to do it."

He meant what he said. Neither he, nor his mates, knew what place this battle of the Coral Sea would fill in American naval history, but he knew he was going to do his part, no matter what the cost.

Powers took off. It seemed as though the sky was full of American planes. The naval air arm was about to strike. It had waited long for the opportunity. Now the moment had come.

The lieutenant experienced a sense of joy and freedom he had never felt before. Thirteen years had passed since he entered before. Thirteen years had passed since he entered Annapolis to learn how to become an American officer. Now he was to put to the test all the things he had learned.

They weren't long in finding the Japanese fleet, with its gunboats and cruisers, transports, airplane carriers and battleships. The fleet was the heart and blood of Japan. Before the island empire could be conquered, its warships must be wiped from the seas.

Powers' squadron went in to the attack. He was quite cool and steady. He knew every step that must be made. It was as though the battle were a checkerboard laid out before him, with every move planned.

The first target was a gunboat. It was blown up in a mess of debris and bodies. Then came a transport. This was a big one, a fine and juicy thing to hit. They rocked and blasted it with bombs until it was aflame from stem to stern, and lurching badly.

That was swell. Powers grinned broadly. Everything was going according to plan.

Then, a Japanese airplane carrier loomed before him, squat and flat on the smooth sea. A carrier is the greatest prize a bomber can find. Powers squinted at it. He had said, "I'm going to get one of those Japanese babies if I have to go down on the deck to do it."

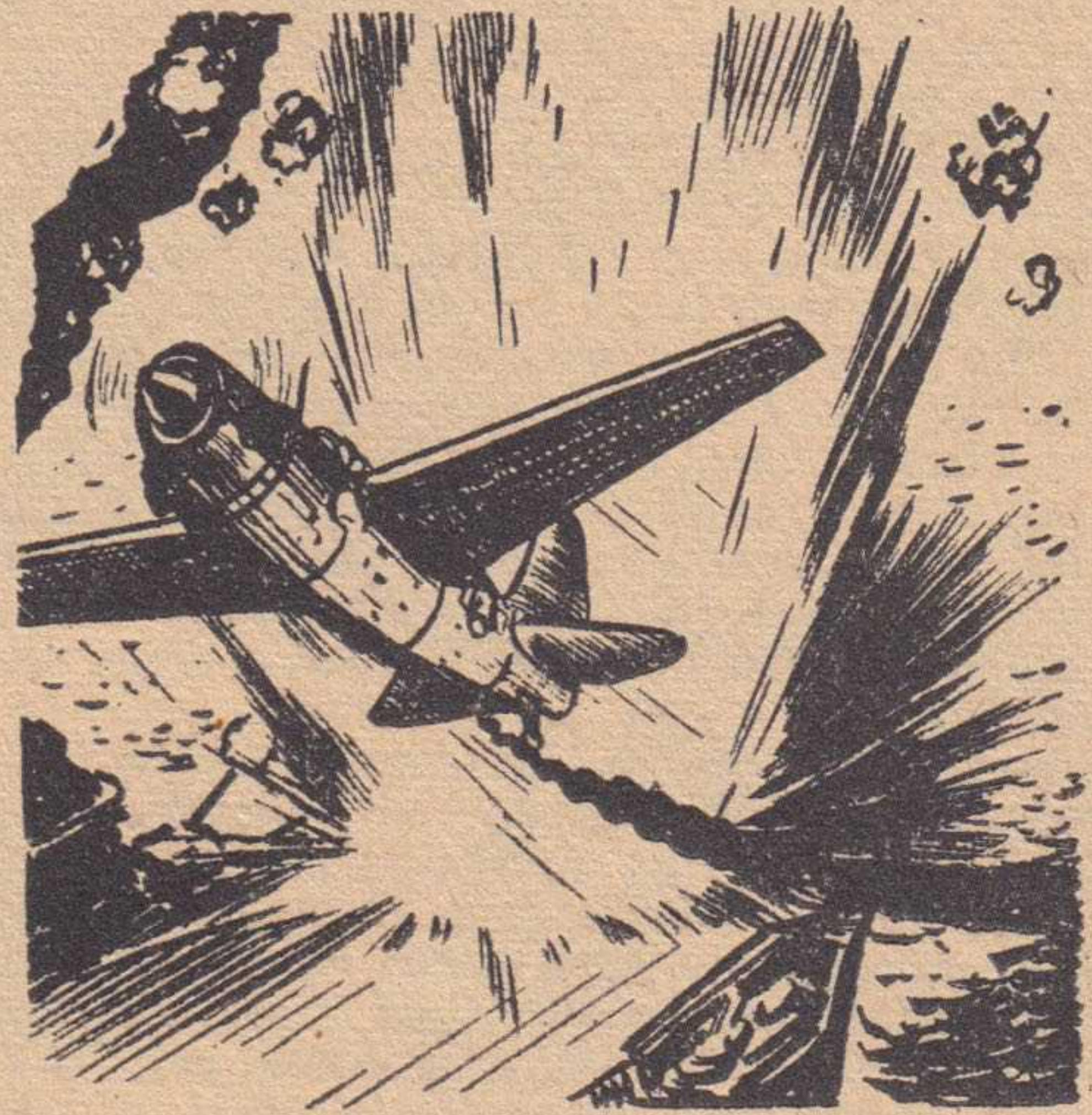
That's what he meant to do. If he was up too high, he'd take a chance on missing, and he didn't mean to miss. Sure, it was going to be dangerous riding straight into the ack ack, but there's always danger.

The lieutenant shifted in his seat, and gripped the control a little tighter. His heart beat fast. He sucked in a breath through his teeth. "All right. Here we go. Express elevator. No stops until the ground floor."

He got the carrier lined in his sights, and went screaming toward it in a furious dive.

The gunners down there were doing their best. Powers' world was filled with puff-balls

of smoke, roaring noise, the sensation of falling through the bottom of space. He was going to hit that deck with his bombs if he never did anything else in his life. It was coming toward him at a million miles a minute. He could imagine the furiously working gunners, and the other members of the crew, watching with their mouths open, a little trickle of saliva drooling from the corners.



Those Japs weren't any more supermen than the Germans. They could be killed just as well, and their ships were no harder to sink.

Down, down! When he was within two hundred feet of the carrier, Powers pulled the bomb release. That was practically suicide. At two hundred feet you can't zoom up fast enough from the blast. There isn't time. The lieutenant knew it, but he did it because he wasn't taking any chance of missing.

The bomb hit, and the blast came. It was terrific. The air filled with steel and wood and men's bodies. It was a typhoon that picked up the SBD3 and threw it around like a chip in a whirlpool. Through it ripped the shells of those anti-aircraft gunners, who still stuck to their weapons.

The scout bomber didn't last long. No ship that flew the skies could have lived through it. Lieutenant John James Powers died at that moment. He died in the flash and flame, but he took an airplane carrier and hundreds of Japanese into death with him.

His was one of the superlatively heroic acts of the war. For it he was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Powers knew, when he attacked, that he had only a scant chance to hold onto life, but it did not give him pause for a moment. It is because of such men as he that such tremendous success has been gained by Americans on the Pacific.

YANKEE PILOT LURES JAP TORPEDO PLANES TO WATERY GRAVES

THE pilot sat at the controls of his fighter plane. He was relaxed and easy in mind. His mission for the day was over. The

Navy had struck another telling blow against the Japanese in the Pacific. Now, night was closing in. Miles ahead, on the course he was

following, a task force steamed along. A fighting lady, his carrier, was part of that force.

The lieutenant was tired, and hungry. He thought of the fine mess, the steaming hot food that waited for him. He thought of his bunk into which he would crawl, and stretch his weary frame. There were some things about this war that weren't so bad.

At times like this his thoughts winged home, too. He was young, and had great plans for the future. The war wouldn't last forever. Well, those days were a long way in the future, but they were worth thinking about.

The westering sun sank beneath the rim of the ocean. Today had been good. Tomorrow was another day. That would be good, too. Nobody could stop the Navy. Not those slant-eyed little men from Japan, anyway.

The pilot kept a weather eye open for trouble. It wasn't that he expected any, but a man can't be too careful. Then, far behind him, he noticed a flight of planes. They kept far behind, well beyond range of his machine guns. But they were following. No doubt of that. Japanese torpedo planes. That's what they were.

It didn't take the lieutenant long to figure out what the Nipponese had in mind. They were using him as a homing pigeon to lead them to the task force. Then, they would come roaring in, and their torpedos would wreck damage among the American fleet. Ships would be hit and men killed, even if the pursuing squadron was shot to bits.

The Navy man looked at his fuel gauge. He had been in the air a long while, and his tanks were almost empty. He didn't have more than ten or fifteen minutes flying time left. Those would have been plenty to bring him down on the flight deck of the carrier. If those damned Japs hadn't shown up, fifteen minutes from now he'd be stripping off his gear, and drinking coffee while he talked with the intelligence officer.

But, they had shown up, and now the story was different. Though he was not conscious of any particular train of thought, the flier knew instantly what he had to do. There was no other choice for a man who held the safety of his ship far above himself.

He radioed the carrier, gave his position, and told about the Jap torpedo planes.

"I've got enough gas left to lead them on a bit of a wild goose chase," he went on quietly. "They won't find you if I can help it. Goodby, and happy landings."

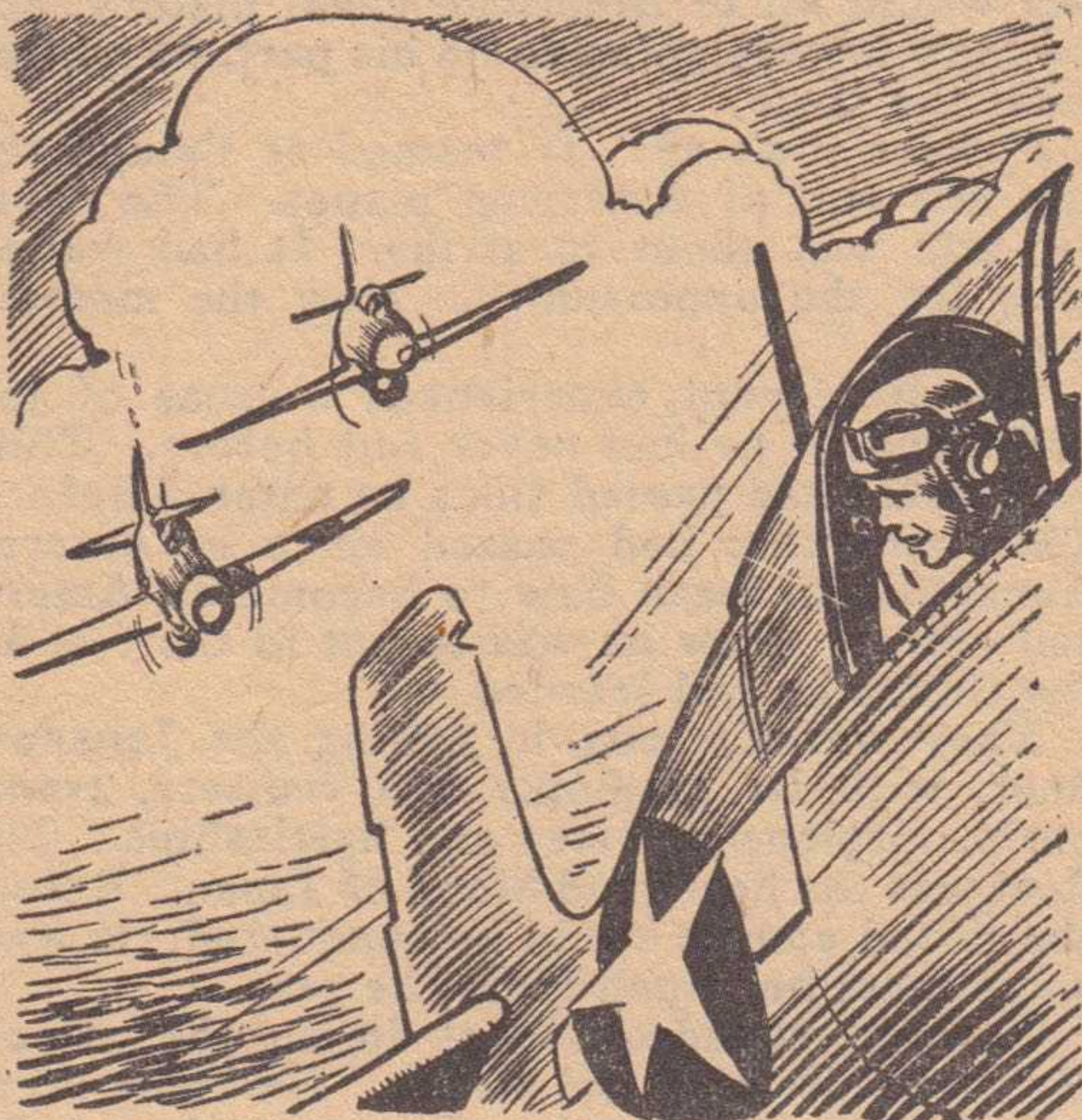
The officer at the other end of the line knew what that meant. He knew this boy meant to go to his death to save the task force. One man's life and one plane was not to be balanced against the safety of ships that were carrying war into the heart of the Japanese empire.

"Goodby," the officer said. There was nothing more to add, for it was goodby, final and irrevocable.

The fighter pilot took off his ear-phones.

He looked back at the torpedo planes that were still behind him. Then he turned sharply off course. The Japanese followed like sheep after an old bell-wether.

What happened then can only be imagined. The young man sat at his controls, flying steadily toward death in the sea. He must have watched the fuel gauge with fascinated eyes. Every time he lowered it meant he was just that much closer to dying. He could tell almost to the minute when the engine would splutter and the prop feather. Then, seconds afterward, his plane would go crashing into



the Pacific—and that would be the end of him and all his fine dreams.

There is a fierce and biting thrill in aerial combat. There is none in riding toward death you know is only minutes away. It may be that there was a moment when the boy had to fight off a panicky desire to turn back to his course, and make the carrier while there was still time. Life is sweet and burns fiercely in the veins of the young.

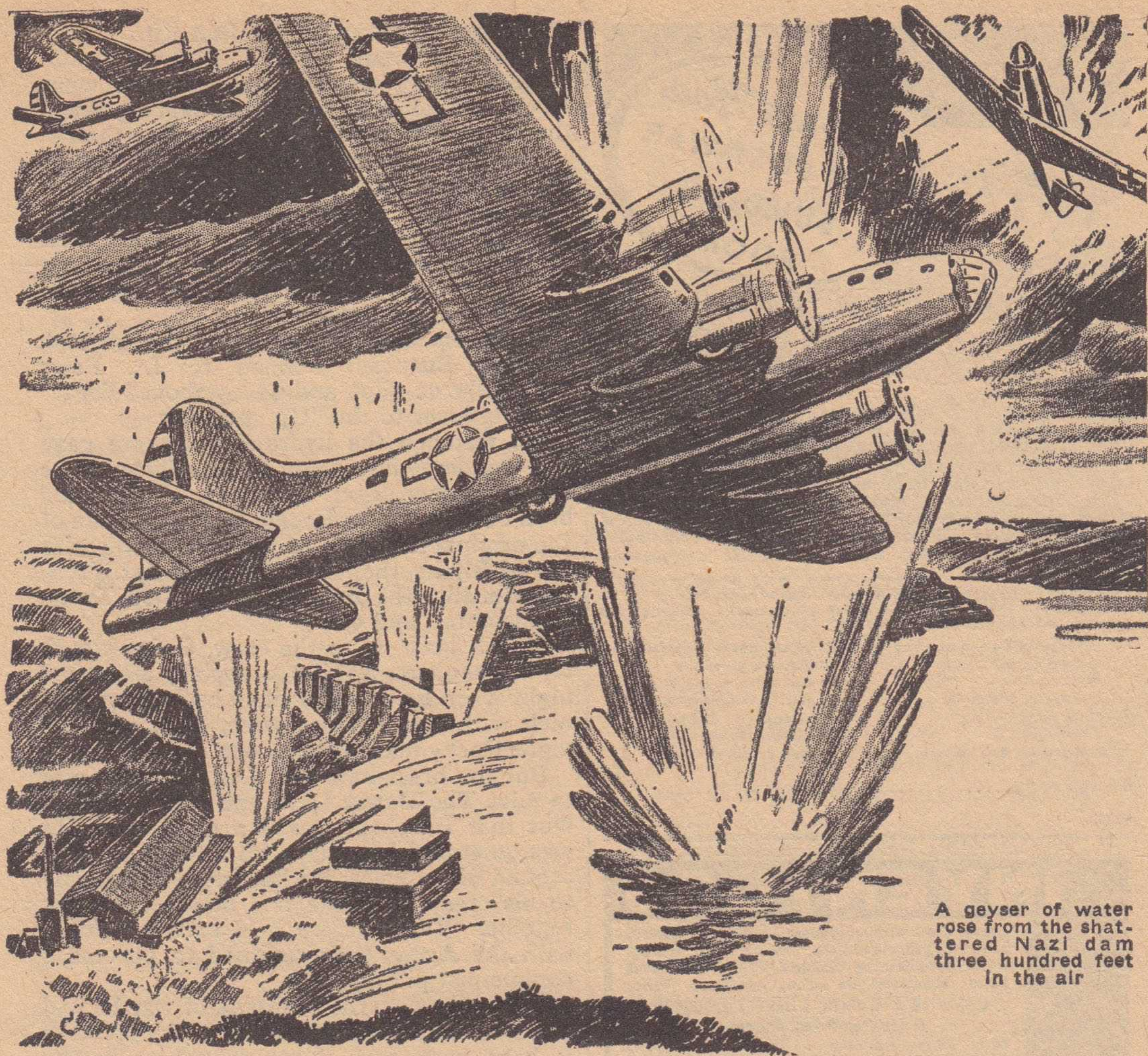
But, he fought down his momentary panic and desire. He couldn't turn back. He must keep on. Then, when the gauge showed that, no matter what he might do, he would die, anyway, it may be that a certain peace and acceptance of the inevitable came upon him. It often does to brave men who know they must die.

So, the minutes passed. They sped away in the noise of the motor and darkness that was creeping across the slowly heaving bosom of the Pacific. They went fast as last moments always do.

At last the plunge came, with the lieutenant bracing himself, lips tight, eyes staring, hands tight on the controls. There was only a drift of wreckage to show where he had gone down so gallantly.

The Japanese never did find the task force, and that magnificent sacrifice was well worth while.

More THRILLS IN THE AIR *Next Issue*



A geyser of water rose from the shattered Nazi dam three hundred feet in the air

TRIAL AT 200

By HAROLD ROGERS

When a young bomber crew gets a cagey vet pilot, things can get out of step—unless the pilot proves his mettle!

FROM the aerial engineer's station directly behind the office, Technical Sergeant Gil Farrell watched Pilot Lee Burcham slide a handful of throttles forward. Then as the beat of the four radials melted into a full throated roar, the wheels of The Dancing Lass started to roll.

An hour before he had preflighted the big Fortress and everything was all right. Still there was always that tense moment while the pilot was first giving her the guns.

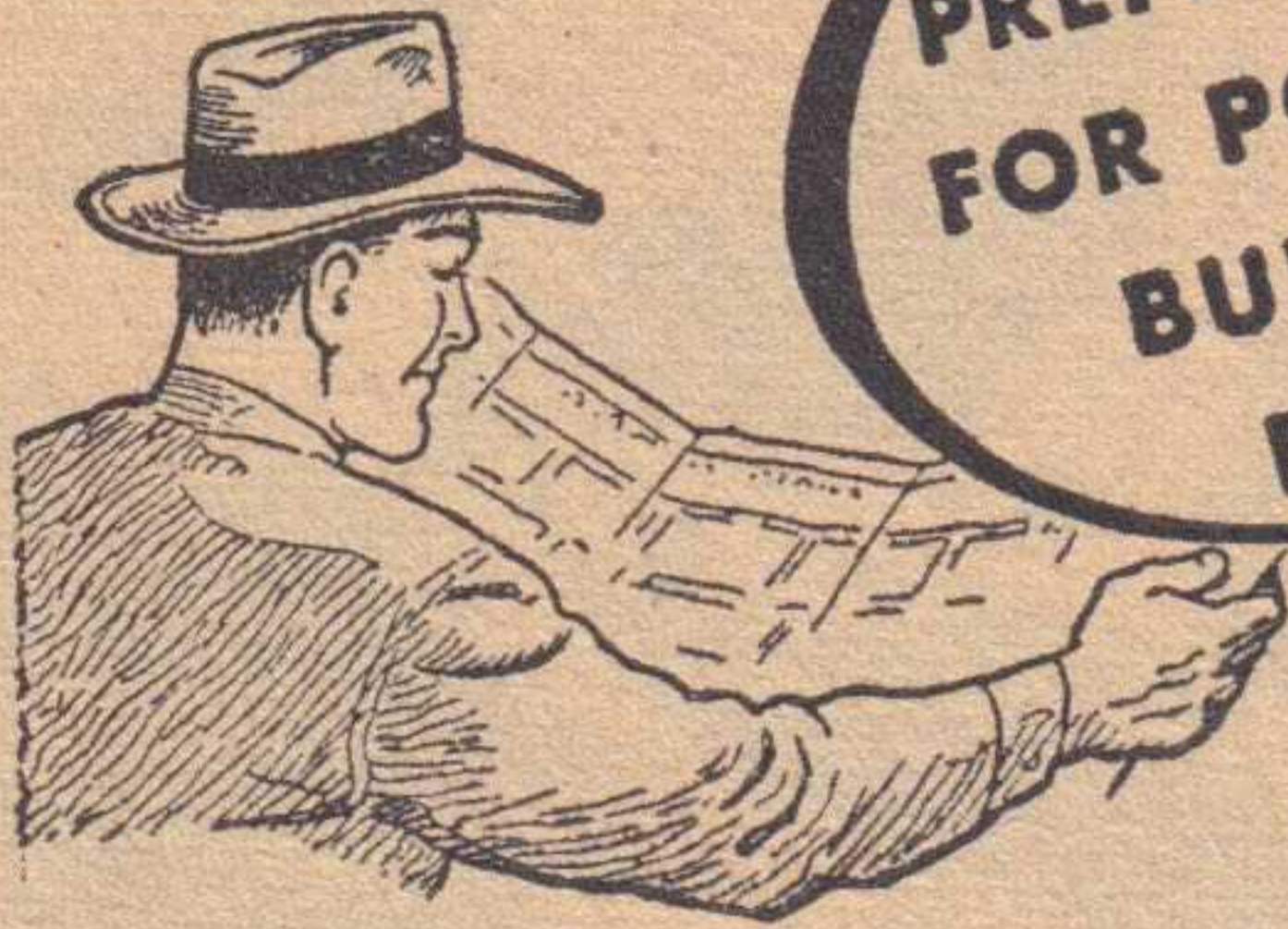
The heavy bomber gathered momentum as the four props chewed into the evening breeze, and the concrete runway unwrapped

itself in a mottled blur beneath the bomber's squat belly. Gil glanced at the airspeed indicator. The hand nodded at 110, circled past. He braced himself for the take-off.

Then he remembered that Rocky Gordon was no longer at the controls of The Dancing Lass. Rocky Gordon was dead and Captain Lee Burcham was the new pilot.

The Dancy Lass tilted as the nose wheel came up off the runway. Captain Burcham kept the main landing gear on the concrete until the ship fairly flew herself into the air. That was the way he always made a takeoff—as if he had a load of paying passengers who

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would get airsick with the first lift.

It was different from a Rocky Gordon takeoff. With the throttles cracked wide, Rocky would send the plane roaring down the runway, then fairly fling her into the air.

They said Rocky Gordon could lift a fully loaded bomber up to ten thousand feet faster than any pilot in the AAF. They said a lot of other things about Rocky, and his crew verified them all if they were complimentary. If they weren't, the speaker usually regretted that he had unbuttoned his lip.

With the ship fifty feet off the ground, Captain Burcham nodded to Lt. Peter Cadey, the co-pilot, and Cadey shoved the retracting lever to the "Up" position.

Gil watched the hydraulic pressure gage and wondered how it felt to Pete Cadey to be taking orders from Burcham. Cadey had been co-pilot under Rocky. Cadey was one of the original members of the crew along with Lt. Al Blythe, the navigator, Staff Sgt. Freddie Henzlik, the radioman, Sgt. Leo Tutty, the armorer, and Gil.

Had it been up to the crew, Cadey would have taken over as pilot, especially after that night when he brought them back from Munich with two engines gone. That was the night Rocky made his last trip.

But the brass hats said Lee Burcham was to pilot The Dancy Lass, and that was that. Not that Burcham wasn't a good man. He was quiet and friendly, with a touch of gray around his temples. He had more flying time to his credit than the rest of the crew put together. Years before he'd served a hitch with the Army, then resigned to become a commercial pilot.

Naturally with the outbreak of war he had come back into the service. But why couldn't it have been at a flying school or in the Ferry Command instead of as a bomber pilot?

AT EIGHT THOUSAND, they leveled off. The Lass had been the first plane off the ground—now others were coming up. It was going to be a big night.

For the last ten days they had been isolated along with the other crews who were making the raid. They were trying something new and the higher ups were seeing to it that there weren't any leaks.

Gil looked back at the delayed action mines that hung in the racks where they usually carried block busters. Slap a few of those babies up against one of Adolf's few remaining river dams and they'd flood half of Bavaria.

Captain Burcham's voice came through the interphone.

"Pilot to crew, report."

If Rocky had been speaking there would have been a variety of answers like "Peek-a-boo, Skipper" and "What a gruff voice you have, Grandma."

Now Lt. Cadey simply said, "Lt. Cadey, co-pilot. Roger."

It went that way clear back to "Injun Charlie" in the stinger.

"Charlie Beaverman, tail gunner, Roger, sir," he said.

Beaverman, a full blooded Sioux, was one of the newer members of the crew, but he was a good man to have in the stinger. He had applied his forefathers' skill with the bow and arrow to a pair of fifty calibers.

It was Rocky who had christened him Injun Charlie. They'd been over Germany one day.

"Me-one-o-nine coming at you, Charlie!" Rocky had hollered into the intercom.

There was a short br-r-r from the tail guns and Charlie's guttural voice, "Got-'um!"

"You're a good Injun, Charlie," Rocky had said and the name had stuck.

Burcham looked around at Gil, whose hazel eyes were still boring at the instruments and controls. "You can relax now, Sergeant. You have everything in fine shape," he said.

"Thank you, sir."

Gil started back along the walkway. Already Joe Alt, the assistant engineer and Perry Ratzloff, the assistant radio man, were stretched out with their parachutes for pillows. He wished he could be that way, but lately he'd been like a cat when they were in the air.

He went back to the windows in the waist and peered out. It was a warm summer night. In another hour or so the moon would be out, but now there were only the stars above and a dim shadow that was Earth below.

He wondered vaguely if the Jerries would have a hot reception committee waiting for them, let it go. Another six hours and the thing would be over. Then he was going on a binge that would make the others look like a tea party. After being caged up for ten days he had a lot of yowling to do.

He wandered into the top turret. From there he could look out across the broad flat back of the bomber, then by swinging the turret he could watch the twin rudders moving slightly in the slipstream.

Again Burcham's voice came over the interphone.

"Pilot to crew. Battle stations."

Gil swung the turret through its orbit and tilted the guns. For a job like tonight's, he wished Pete Cadey were at the controls.

HE REMEMBERED Burcham's first trip with them, the night they were returning from Dresden. They had taken a banging around, and the number two engine was running rough. Afterwards they found that it was because the prop had tangled with a chunk of flak, but they were still maintaining flying speed. Pete Cadey was

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doing the piloting when Lt. Donahue, the bombardier, had reported.

"Three Messerschmitts at two o'clock."

Pete hadn't waited for more, had swung the bomber in their direction. There wasn't much chance that the Jerries would stay and do battle, but there was always the possibility that one of the gunners on the Lass might get in a lucky burst.

Burcham changed things in a hurry.

"We'll stay on our course," he had ordered.

There was a moment while the big ship seemed to hang there with indecision and Gil was quite certain that he heard Cadey swear. After that they went home in stiffened silence.

It was the smart thing to do under the circumstances, Gil knew, once they were on the ground and he got a look at the damaged prop. Yet Rocky or Pete would have chased those Jerries right down Hitler's chimney to give a gunner a shot at one.

It wasn't just that Captain Burcham was cautious. There were other things. Like the night they were all having a few beers and singing to Lt. Blythe's off-key accompaniment on a battered piano. Burcham had come into the place alone and they had invited him to join them.

Gil almost choked when he remembered the rest. Burcham had ordered a glass of milk. Then very soon, and yet not soon enough he had excused himself and left. Still you couldn't exactly blame him. He had a wife and two youngsters back in Memphis.

The throb of the engines slackened. Burcham was pulling back on the throttles, getting ready to go into a glide that would take them right down on their target. Gil glanced at his watch. They had been in the air over two hours.

They passed over the blackened shadow of a small town and picked up a winding silver thread that was the river. Somewhere other bombers were following them, but they were strung out at long intervals instead of flying in formation as they usually did.

The river widened and became a lake. They were down so low they could see the surface waves. It was too low for comfort. Gil remembered that they were to go in at two hundred feet and the palms of his hands started to sweat.

"This is it, Captain," Jack Donahue said. "Hold her as she is."

Gil tensed, waiting for the signal. "Mines away." Once they were in the water the idea was that the mines would drift with the current up against the dam, and then—well, if the show went right, there would be a series of tremendous explosions and the dam, already under pressure from the head of water would collapse, flooding factories and farms, disrupting traffic and communications.

Then it came up at them, like a Fourth of

July celebration exploding in their faces. The outline of the dam, the shore, the very lake itself became a solid sheet of flame.

Burcham held the big ship as true as a plumb line, and they went on down into the shell bursts. The sound from the guns on the ground beat against the metal sides of the ship like a giant riveter's hammer. Still they continued to go down—down.

THEN from his place in the turret, Gil saw the planes coming at them, jet-propelled interceptor jobs. They were coming fast and from above.

Gil followed the lead plane with his guns, keeping it in the sights until it came within range, then hammering with his guns. The German plane roared right into his slugs, kept coming until it literally burst apart in mid-air.

Other guns in the Lass were banging now, speaking their own language of death, while the enemy answered back in similar coin. Gil saw tracers coming at his throat, but they went over the bomber and not into it. He swung the turret again seeking another target.

"Steady as she is now," Donahue said.

The bomb bay doors were open. Gil saw the dam almost dead ahead. He could imagine the months, even years that had gone into its construction, and in a few minutes—

The Dancing Lass lurched slightly and metal spinged. Gil felt his insides shrink. There was a jagged hole the size of a twelve-quart pail in the right wingtip.

"Mines away!"

Gil couldn't see if they hit their mark or not, but Injun Charlie's whoop put his mind at rest.

"Smacko, smacko, and smack!"

He tensed, waiting for the explosion, but when it didn't come he remembered they were delayed action mines. The Lass would be streaking for home when the first earth-shaking upheaval came.

He braced himself, expecting momentarily that Captain Burcham would claw for altitude, but instead the Captain circled and came weaving and dipping the plane directly over the very top of the dam.

Gil caught his breath. He'd thought it was going to be every plane for itself. Now he sensed the desperate role their plane had been elected to play.

Their mines were gone, but other planes were beginning to come in on the target with their eggs still in the basket. They were going to attempt to draw the fire of the anti-aircraft guns so that the other bombers could dump their loads. The orders had simply said the dam was to be destroyed.

At the most it didn't take more than a minute to cross the dam, but that minute became

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a lifetime, a lifetime tossed and twisted in the grip of a mighty earthquake.

The plane was buffeted like a dead leaf in a gale. At times the lake itself seemed to be rushing up at them, but always Burcham righted the plane and brought it back up.

It was their third trip across when a geyser of water half the width of the dam shot three hundred feet into the air. The Lass, a hundred yards from the explosion, fell off on one wing, but instead of trying to bring it back on an even keel, Burcham took advantage of their position and held her in a steep bank and pulled away before other mines could explode.

From the turret Gil had just a glimpse of great chunks of the dam crumbling out and down ahead of the racing plume of unleashed water. By that time the last of the bombers had delivered their packages.

They pulled away from the shore batteries while the gunners were still wiping the water out of their eyes, but they didn't pull away from the fighter planes that were swarming around them.

A STREAM of tracers rattled through the fuselage. Others struck the heavy metal stringers and ricocheted around inside like popcorn in a popper. Gil worked his own guns furiously.

Planes came into his sights and moved right on past them, though not always scot free. Long hours spent on the skeet range at gunner's school were paying dividends now. He saw the entire vertical stabilizer come off a Messerschmitt.

Then Captain Burcham's voice over the interphone interrupted his shooting.

"Can you help me a minute here, Farrell. Lt. Cadey has been hit."

Gil slid down, blinking his eyes. Burcham's voice had been as calm as if it were a milk run.

When Gil got there, Pete Cadey was slumped down in his seat with one arm still draped across the control column. His head rolled with the sway of the ship.

"I think it's just a bad scalp wound." Burcham pointed to a red furrow across the side of the co-pilot's head, then to a hole in the canopy. "Take him back and do what you can with the first-aid kit."

It wasn't easy for Gil to unloosen Cadey's belt, then drag his one hundred eighty pounds of dead weight back to the flight deck.

Inching his way along in the cramped quarters, Gil managed to kick a loose parachute into position for a pillow, then stretched Cadey at full length on the floor. He broke open a first-aid kit and put a compress on the co-pilot's head, then climbed back into the turret.

The Jerries were really making it hot for

them, and Donahue called over the inter-
phone.

"They got Al."

In a minute or two they came back and Donahue was supporting the navigator. Gil saw that Blythe had stopped a slug with his stomach. Blood was coming out through the front of his shirt.

He wanted to leave the turret to help, but with the nose guns gone he had a double job to do. Already their enemies had discovered that the nose guns were silent and were shifting their attack to that sector of the plane.

Burcham let them come in, then kicked the big wagon around as if she were a P-40, bringing Gil's turret guns into range with Joe Alt back in the waist to pick up where he left off.

The maneuver caught the German pilots by surprise and Gil nailed one of their fighter planes. A sheet of orange flame burst out around the cowling and the plane plummeted downward, but the victory wasn't without cost. Joe Alt's gun went dead.

"Joe never knew what hit him," Leo Tutty, the armor gunner was screaming. "A dirty Hun poured a solid stream of lead in through the window. Just give me a shot at them, pilot, give me a shot."

"Steady, lad, steady." It was Lee Burcham speaking. "I'll give you all the openings I can."

Gil's own guns were hot, and still dark, ugly shadows kept diving in at them. With-

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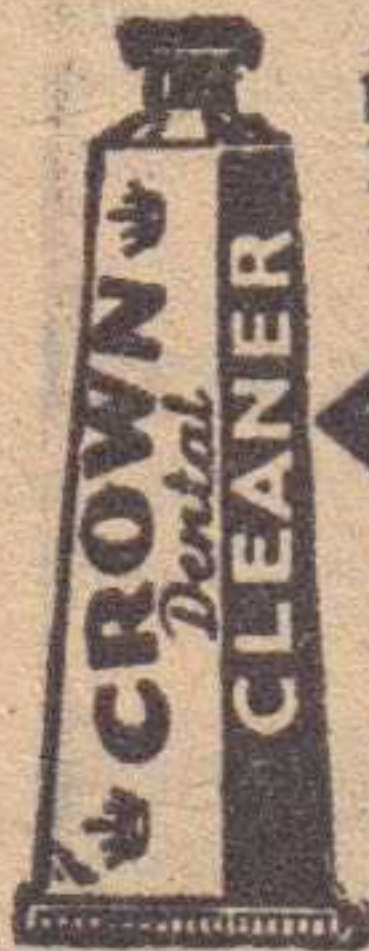


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out warning, the number three engine conked out.

A plane slashed out of the darkness, raking them. Gil lashed out with his guns, and missed. But from the stinger, Injun Charlie picked up the rhythm.

The entire left wing came off the attacker, and the air was quiet except for the drone of their own engines. The enemy had left them as quickly as they had come.

There was another ten minutes while they stayed on the alert, then Captain Burcham called over the interphone.

"Will you check the ship, Farrell, then come up here with me?"

Gil slid down out of the turret. A foot from where he had been, one side of the fuselage was riddled with bullet holes. Further along he could see where a twenty millimeter shell had plowed through. No single part of the ship seemed to have escaped the fury of the battle.

With a critical eye, Gil examined the interior of the ship, searching for broken lines and wires. At the same time he made a survey of the crew. Cadey was just as he had left him, and Blythe was unconscious now.

"How is he?" Gil asked Donahue.

WITHOUT taking his eyes from the wounded navigator, Donahue shook his head and continued to work, trying desperately to staunch the flow of blood.

"Unless we get there in a hurry it's going to be too late."

Gil stumbled back through the rest of the plane. Ratzloff and Henzlick were trying to put bandages on each other's arms. Both of them grinned at him and asked how the other three engines were doing.

"Swell," Gil replied and hoped that he was right.

He didn't have to look at Joe Alt to know there was nothing that could be done for him. Joe had been unlucky.

Then he came to Injun Charlie and Leo Tutty. Tutty was putting a tourniquet on the tail gunner's left leg up close to his hip. He'd already cut Charlie's pants leg away exposing a jagged tear in the flesh, but the Injun was calmly smoking a cigarette.

Gil went back and climbed into the co-pilot's seat. For the first time since they had come aboard, he looked at Burcham's face. It was the face of a snow man with lumps of jet black coal for eyes. Burcham was flying with his left hand only. His right arm hung limp. Blood dripped from the fingers to form a little dark pool on the floor.

"I guess you'll have to help me, Gil. Bringing this wagon in takes more than one hand."

Gil started. It was the first time he had ever heard Burcham address one of the crew by his given name.

"I'm afraid we're going to have trouble

getting the wheels down," Burcham continued calmly. "The hydraulic pressure is gone. Of course we can drop them and hope they lock."

"Certainly, sir," Gil assured him, but his mind whirled. Supposing they couldn't get the wheels down? And Burcham only had one arm. If only Cadey would snap out of it long enough to help them land—Gil dismissed the thought as it flashed through his mind. He knew what to do well enough. He'd pre-flighted the plane and even taxied it.

Burcham spoke into the interphone.

"Pilot to radio. Pilot to radio. We'll be there soon. Ask for an ambulance and tell them to have a fire truck stand by. We may have to make a crash landing."

They flew the next quarter of an hour in silence. From time to time, Gil glanced at Burcham. Great beads of perspiration were standing out on the pilot's forehead, but never for a second did his eyes waver from the instruments. With one engine gone and a second running rough it was a big job for any man to fly the bomber, but a man with only one arm—

"Will you pull the throttles back now, Gil? Just take it down to where we can try lowering the wheels."

Gil gripped the throttles, started easing them back. On the ground he'd opened and closed them hundreds of times, but in the air it seemed different. The tach needle held his gaze like a magnet does a pin. Then ever so slowly the R.P.M.'s began to drop

"Very good," Burcham told him. "Now try lowering the wheels."

GIL flipped the switch and leaned forward to peer at the indicator. The wheels were still up. Burcham rocked the plane. If the wheels weren't jammed they would fall into position and lock from their own weight. Still they didn't go down.

"I'll try the hand pump," Gil said, but even before he started working the lever he had a feeling that it was useless. On the first trip over the dam there had been a solid smack square on the belly of the ship. He hadn't thought much about it at the time. Now he knew.

Without hesitation Burcham spoke over the interphone.

"Pilot to crew. Prepare for a crash landing."

He turned to Gil.

"We'll keep as much speed as we can and try skidding her along, but the second you feel her scrape the ground, cut all switches."

"Yes, sir," Gil replied and hoped that his fingers wouldn't be all thumbs. His eyes ached from watching instruments. His mouth was dry.

A light loomed up, then another.

[Turn page]

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"Here we go," Burcham said. He eased forward on the wheel putting the plane into a smooth glide.

They were losing altitude fast and could pick out the details of the runways. Gil had a glimpse of a fire truck and an ambulance trying to keep pace with them.

There was a long interval when he scarcely breathed and the plane seemed to hang only inches above the ground.

"Now!"

Gil cut the switches as Burcham spoke, and they scraped the ground with scarcely a jar. They were playing in luck. Then before his fingers could reach the fuel cock levers, The Dancing Lass bounced into the air and came down with a deafening crash. There was the sharp rending of metal and the plane shot down on one wing tip, but somehow Burcham fought her back to an even keel.

Would the slide never end? Was it going to smash them to pieces? Would the tanks explode? Those thoughts flashed through Gil's mind. Then in spite of his safety belt, Gil was flung violently forward and something hard banged against his forehead. Everything faded out.

It was a week later when they let Gil out of the hospital, and he lost no time in heading for the refreshments he had been promising himself. Rightfully the entire crew should go out and celebrate, but as long as they couldn't Gil intended to do it for them in spite of an eye ringed with purple and a six-inch strip of adhesive tape extending from his nose to his forehead.

Burcham, his right arm still in a sling, fell into step beside him.

"You act as if you are in a hurry," the pilot said.

"Yes, sir, I am," Gil replied. "I'm just a week late."

"Mind if I go along?"

Gil swallowed twice, then looked up at Captain Lee Burcham. For the first time he was seeing the man. He was seeing a pilot who might take-off as if he were carrying a cargo of eggs—yet one who could fly through the very gates of hell then make a one-handed crash landing without seriously injuring either plane or crew.

"I'd be glad to have you, sir. I was just going after a—a glass of milk," he lied.

He didn't see the amused glint in Burcham's eyes nor hear too much of what the Captain was saying about Distinguished Service Crosses. He was too busy right then thinking that if Lee Burcham said the word, the crew would chip in and buy a cow and he, Gil Farrell, would personally pass the hat.

Read **SKY FIGHTERS** Every Issue!

TARMAC TALK

(Continued from page 8)

leashing were undeterminable for days thanks to the dust and smoke created by its terrific explosion. When the Nips could see the ruin, they got out of the war in a hurry.

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Test results in New Mexico were so tremendous that it was decided to withhold this terrible lightweight with the appalling ability to reduce all within its range to dust and save the world from its consequences. But when the Japs refused to heed our ultimatum from Potsdam, the wraps were taken off.

LETTERS FROM READERS

RABBITNOSE, you may bring on the atomic bombs prepared for this poor peep by his fond (?) readers. First out of the sack comes from Dick Tonder of 4934 Erskine Street, Omaha 4, Nebraska. Says Dick,

Dear Fizzle Face: I just finished reading the Fall issue of SKY FIGHTERS and the aspirin are going fast. The only thing I got out of it was a pen pal (I hope). Oh, I will admit that TOUGH MEAT was pretty good. At least it was something different.

Why in the heck don't you get some World War One stories? I thought that after so many requests you could at least put in one. After all, there was an Air Force back in '17.

How about brightening up your little yarns with the feminine touch? A guy likes a little romance once in a while (huba-huba!). Before I close I might add that I'm looking for letters. How about it?

So you like *Tough Meat*, my unfonder Tonder? That, I suppose, is something, especially since it was a darned good story. As to World War One stories, give us a chance. Ye Fall ish was the first in many a moon to be unadorned with the hilarious doings of Ambrose Hobley as related by his worst friend and severest critic, Muley Spink.

But Joe Archibald, World War One air-veteran and creator of Hooley and Muley has gone overseas for the American Red Cross, and since his style is at least unique, ye Skipper decided to let well enough alone until Joe either returns or files a story from overseas.

Meanwhile, if any good yarns come in about World War One, we'll run 'em—and the same goes for that huba huba business.

Next? Well, well, here is flattery from one who should know. Lieutenant William D. Hall of the First Air Division Scouting Force writes in as follows:

Dear Skipper: I have reached the conclusion that your prime interest is better stories, more concise events and good presentation. I realize that you cannot say all you wish because of censorship restrictions, and many things are necessarily distorted to prevent the enemy's use of practical information.

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[Turn page]



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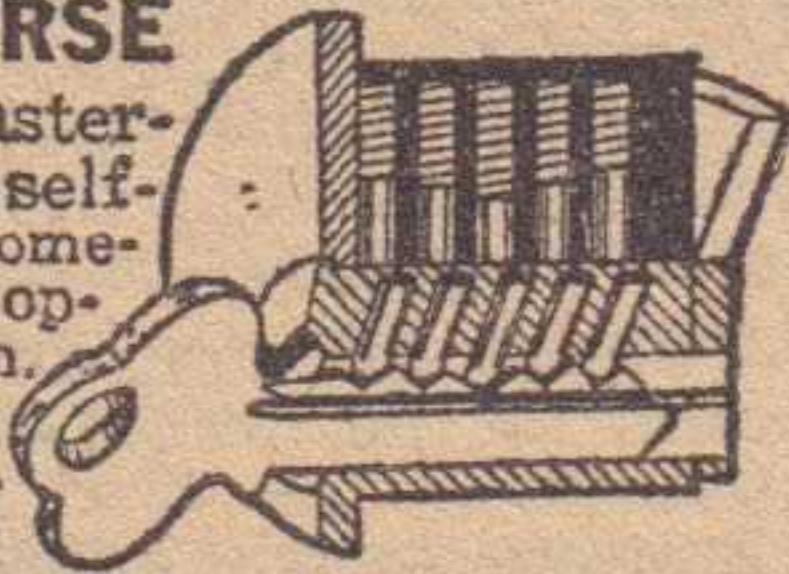
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with the possible exception of the ocean, so it provides excellent material for a myriad of exciting stories. To illustrate—four days ago I was in a compressibility dive in which one wing of my P-51 came off.

I flew through the plexiglas of the canopy. Soon after they remove the stitches in my head, I will again be able to fly. I hope to God I never again have occasion to hit the silk. I am making application for membership in the Caterpillar Club as soon as I obtain all the necessary info.

My statement to the effect that 70 Forts never go out together was very misleading. Very often over 1,000 bombers go to a single target. Necessarily this requires much precision planning. Timing is an important factor. The planes form into groups, the groups into wing columns and so on. A formation of 70 Forts might prove to be too unwieldy for efficiency, so the groups go in in predetermined order, dropping their loads in a predetermined manner.

Usually even the groups don't bomb as such. Often they are broken up into squadrons. Thus you may have 1,000 bombers on a target in formations of six to six times six, depending upon target, weather et cetera.

Thank you for interesting reading and your kindness in writing me. Truth is strange over here. Five of six of us who have checked on emblems for our outfit (in London) have bailed out or gone down. The five of us have all been roommates of a certain fellow who made his captaincy the day I bailed out—the day our President died.

A fine letter, Lieutenant. Here's hoping you are never called upon to add a spun-silk cluster to your Caterpillar Club emblem. One such experience is plenty in any man's life.

Next on the letter assembly line comes from Puerto Rico, is written on U.S. Coast Guard stationery and is authored by one Hector Lavergne. Says hectoring Hector:

Dear Kidneyfeet: This is the first time I have written to SKY FIGHTERS and I am doing it because I think your magazine is wonderful and needs some morale boosting. I always read TARMAC TALK and I notice a lot of the letters are from guys complaining about your mag. If they don't like it, why do they read it?

I live quite near the Naval Air Station in town (Sonturce, P.R.) and I see quite a lot of planes fly by. They even have Superforts here. I have just finished your Summer issue, so I went to get the Fall issue and what I found was that of Winter, 1945. Why don't you mail 'em down faster?

We do the best we can, Hector, and thanks for the boost. Now let's look at the letter of Keith Woodcock, who writes from 207 Glen-gary Block, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada as below:

Dear Skipper: I have just finished reading your Summer issue of SKY FIGHTERS. I think the best stories were "Flight to Enbetu" and "Cruiser Pilot." Although Ambrose Hooley stories are usually preposterous (I paid two bits for that one) they are good.

How about a few stories of the RCAF with Mosquitoes and Typhoons? The mag could use a few good old World War One stories too. There could be a few improvements made in your mag, but on the whole it's tops.

Thanks, brother Woodcock, despite the occasional snidities. Now for a defence of ye Skipper from Fred Garris, of 212 West Vance Street, Wilson, North Carolina, who says:

Hi, Skipper: I have been reading your mag for about three years now, but this is the first time I have written because other readers have expressed my thoughts both good and bad. M. "Brittlebones" Berne made me mad however and now I am sticking my two cents in.

Old "Brittlebones" stated that your stories were impossible. He should read true ones and see how

impossible they are. He also said something about children in their early teens. Well, those children will very soon be out fighting to save his worthless hide. About the book being dangerous literature, well, servicemen find it good reading.

So in conclusion, if he doesn't like the book, why doesn't he shut up and read something else?

I have only two gripes now. Why not have more World War One stories and why do you print such trash written by the likes of old Brittlebones Berne?

Thanks for the defense, peegot, but if we didn't let the hammer artists like Br'er Berne have his say, how would we know who our real friends are? And as for the World War One business, well, I'm not going to repeat it again. Instead, we'll look at word from Bob Wyatt of 84 Cadorna Avenue, Toronto 6, Canada, who writes thusly:

Dear Skipper: After reading the Summer issue of SKY FIGHTERS, I want to give praise to Tracy Mason for his slick story "Cruiser Pilot." The other stories are ranked as follows:

- "Flight to Enbetu"—good
- "Forever Ambrose"—good
- "Heroes Are That Way"—good
- "Death on the Underground"—fair
- "Squadron Leader's Job"—fair
- The best feature was "Wings of War."

After reading the stories, I began "Tarmac Talk." Say, who does that jerk Aaron J. Berne think he is? He sure has got a lot of nerve saying, and I quote, "I regard your book as dangerous literature as it may emotionally upset your young readers." I think he is a little upset in his upper story. P.S.—How about more World War One stories?

Eeeeh-yah! The Skipper is going to bail out himself over that World War One business! Please, Joe Archibald, fix these peegot up! Now for John Spalding of 709 Oakes Boulevard, San Leandro, California. John speaks as follows:

Dear Skipper: After reading the Summer issue of SKY FIGHTERS I find that it is one of the best in a long time. I hereby apologize to Joe Archibald. Personally I thought that the Ambrose Hooley story in the Spring issue was terrible, but Mr. Archibald has redeemed himself. His "Forever Ambrose" was very good.

You asked if I thought the Rover Boys at Pulse Normal would be good? Well at least it would be a change from some of the stuff that has been in SKY FIGHTERS. But a better way to break the

[Turn page]

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monotony would be to print one or two (or more) WW One stories.

Your stories are getting better all the time and with the exception of "Squadron Leader's Job" by Oscar J. Friend, which was a little behind the times, were all swell. I especially liked the article "The Man Who's Killer Kane."

Thanks, John, except for that WW One stories plea. Joe, the situation is growing desperate. But here's a query from Kenneth Hilborn of Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada:

Dear Skipper: I think SKY FIGHTERS is a very good magazine, but there were some part of it that did not sound right. In "Flight to Enbetu," you talked of a B-25 Mitchell bomber as if it were a huge fighter aircraft. Why couldn't the B-25s sent to destroy Nip railroads, roads, radio and telephone communications bomb them from the air and blow them to bits. Also, when Turk's B-25 did land, mines would not destroy telephone lines without being struck. Time bombs would have been the proper weapon.

As far as time bombs are concerned and the probability of mines being effective in this case, you'll have to check with a bombardment officer.

But B-25s, armed with fourteen forward-firing 50-calibre machine-guns or ten of same and a seventy-five millimeter cannon, depending upon the exigencies of the mission, have been used repeatedly for just such strafing operations against the Japanese in the Pacific.

Such flying machine-gun and cannon nests have it all over bombers for such missions because of the wider variety of targets they can smash without running out of ammunition. And now, of course, rockets have added to their punch.

Roy Blackmer of Athol Road, North Orange, Massachusetts, is back on the WW One beam again in the following:

Dear Skipper: The Summer issue of SKY FIGHTERS is the first one I have read, but from now on I will positively NOT miss an issue. All of the stories were good, but the one I liked best was "Forever Ambrose." Your magazine would be very poor in my opinion if it didn't have at least one WW One story in it.

Oh, Joe, come back. All is forgiven. And here is Hyman Jaspens of 270 East 4th Street, New York 9, New York:

Dear Skipper: Just finished the Summer issue of SKY FIGHTERS and it's swell. Here's the way I rate the ish—450 mph, a high-speed job—400 mph good—350 mph so-so—below 300 mph tsk, tsk.

"Cruiser Pilot" 450 mph
"Forever Ambrose" 275 mph
"Flight to Enbetu" 400 mph
"Heroes Are That Way" 400 mph
"Death on the Underground" 350 mph
"Squadron Leader's Job" 350 mph
"Tarmac Talk" faster than sound!

Your mag is swell, but how about stories of the P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bomber in action with the Ninth Tactical Air Force?

Trying to keep abreast of atomic bombs in the Pacific doesn't leave us much room for the Ninth Tactical in Europe. But as General Giles' statement at the beginning of Tarmac Talk explains clearly, your favorite planes were going into action against the Nips from Okinawa when Japan gave up. We'll try to score them for you as the tallies come in.

Now for Robert L. Phelan of 379 Bullocks Point Avenue, Riverside 15, Rhode Island:

Dear Skipper: I have just finished reading the Summer issue of SKY FIGHTERS and I think it's a swell mag. In the past I've been wondering if I'm the only fellow in R.I. that reads your mag, but in this issue's TARMAC TALK I noticed that someone else does, namely Eddie Leeves of Providence. I liked all the stories in the mag except "Forever Ambrose." Personally I can do without him. I certainly do not agree with Mr. Berne, and if he feels that way why does he read the mag? I agree with some of the other readers for having more WW One stories though.

First they blow us up, then they stab us with the nearest ice pick. Oh, well, the editor's is always an uneasy chair. And here's a missive from Seaman, first class, Lawrence D. Peters, from the U.S. Naval Hospital at Portsmouth, Virginia, from Ward 2 to be exact:

Dear Rabbitnose: Maybe you remember me, and more likely you don't. It's been a year since I wrote you last. In that time I've been pretty busy, but have now got another chance to add my two cents' worth again on your mag as follows:

You let the best features of your mag go, meaning "Red Eagle and the Three Mosquitoes." When you let Tracy Mason's stories stop, I stop reading your mag along with many others who think him tops. Keep up the TARMAC TALK—it's the best "letter box" in any fiction magazine today because of the broadmindedness shown by the editor. Your mag is still the best in air fiction today for my money, so keep pluggin'.

Sure the Skipper remembers you, Seaman Peters. Hope the hospital address doesn't mean anything too rugged. But in any case, buck up. And maybe the gal from Jamaica will drop you a line at Portsmouth. As for Tracy Mason, he too has long been in the U.S. Army as an M.P. sergeant, believe it or not—which doesn't make our job the easier.

And from Callejon Carrocero No. 17 in Guatemala City, Guatemala, writes Arias T. Humberto as follows:

Hello Joe: I have finished reading your Winter 1945 issue. I am a new-comer in your section and first of all I'll tell you that your mag is tops. I like your novelets, but why don't you give us some World War One stories?

I have heard of a new plane, the B-32 Dominator. Could you give me some information. Almost forgot this one. Which plane is faster, the P-51 or the Mosquito Mark XVIII? According to my latest information the Mustang has a speed of 450 mph and the Mosquito of 430. Am I wrong?

You could be, but the Lockheed P-80 Shooting Star could coast away from either of them. Actually, comparative speeds for planes used for such different purposes are almost impossible to determine when they are so close, as speed of either may depend upon load, altitude, et cetera. As for the Dominator, see above.

Final contribution for TARMAC TALK comes from Frank Hupfl of 538 Sperry Boulevard, New Hyde Park, Long Island. Says Frank:

Dear Skipper: I have just gotten your Summer issue of SKY FIGHTERS and think it is swell. In the story "Cruiser Pilot" though, there are some corrections I'd like to make.

1—On page 17 the enemy was Japanese. On page 18 they were Italians. Which is which?

2—On the cover that Kingcobra will be hit by the B-25's wing.

[Turn page]

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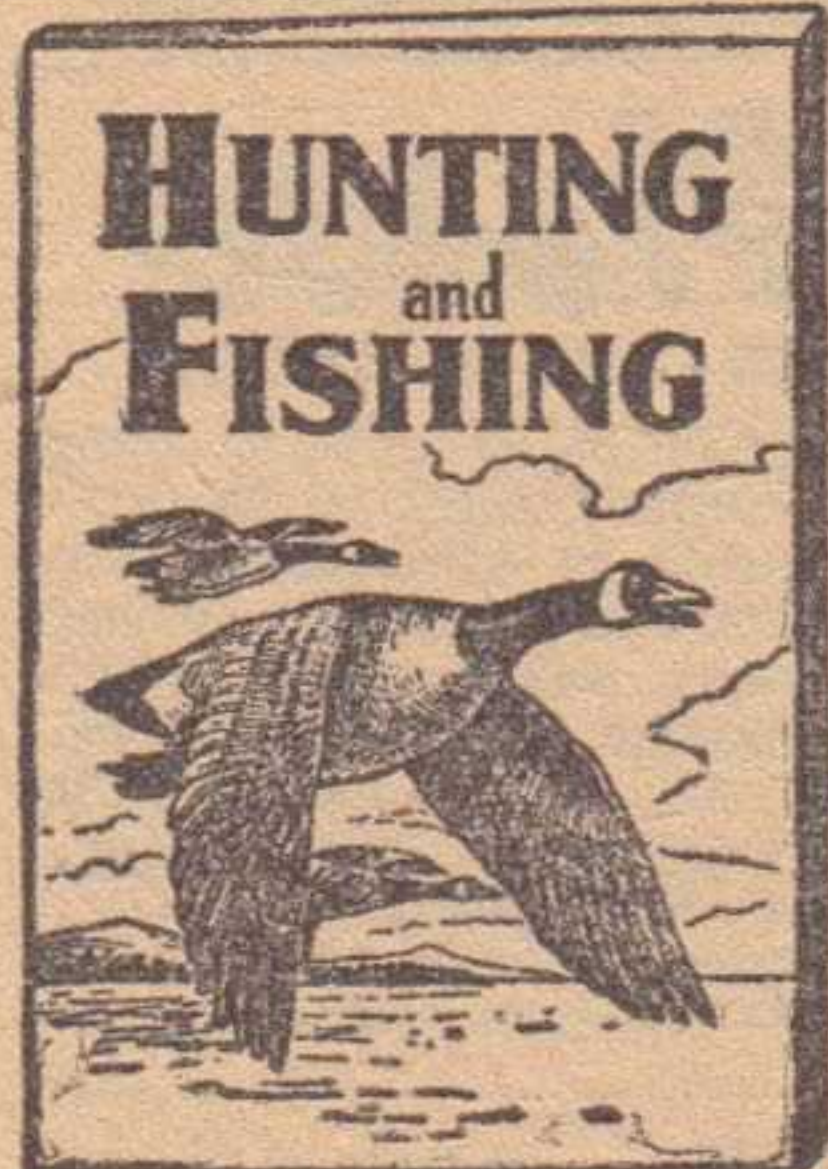
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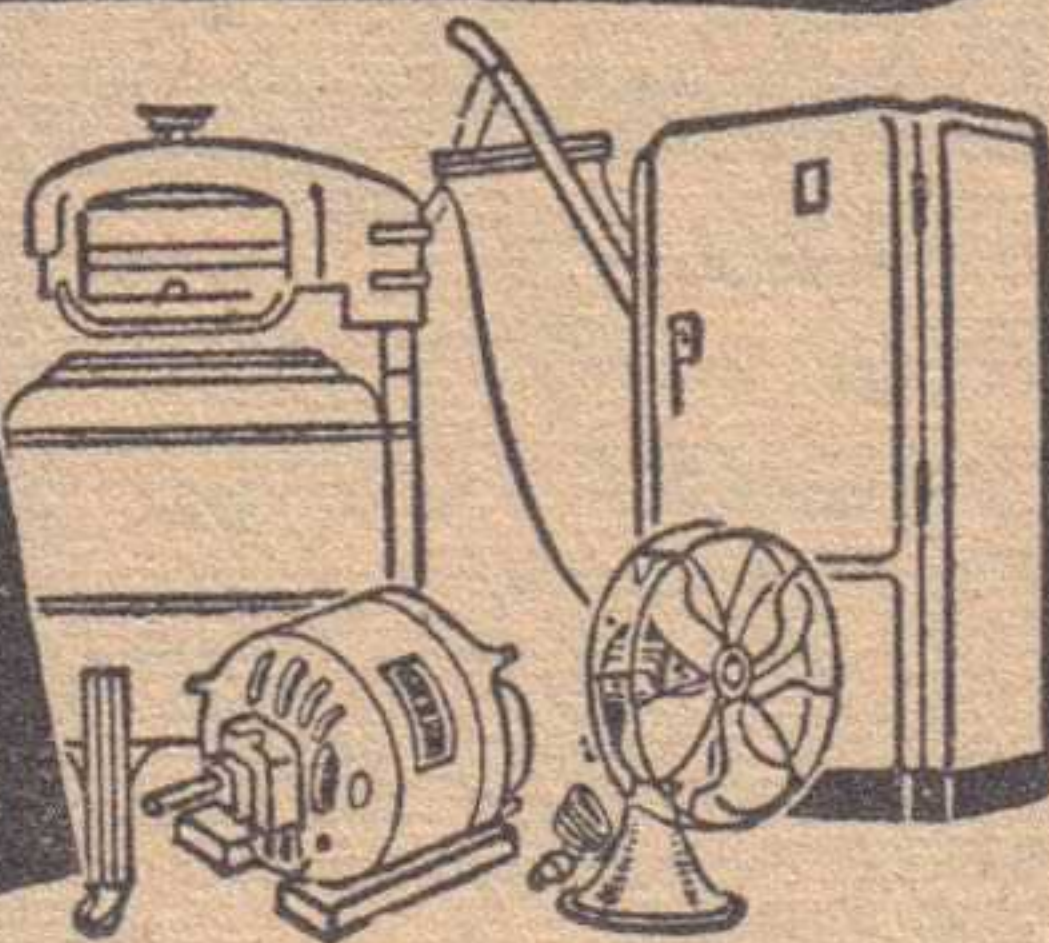
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I like your mag more than any other and hope you keep up the good work. I would like someone to write me also. By the way I think Mr. Berne should tend to his work instead of reading air mags. Hmmp.

Last but not least, eh, Frank? Okay, Rabbit-nose, police up the place while we try to make sensible response to this final peegot. The error on page 18 of the Summer issue was a typographical mistake.

As for the Kingcobra and its fate, why not let the plane in question's pilot do the worrying? At that, perhaps you caught the perspective wrong—the fighter may be well back of the Marauder. Which about wraps us up for this session. Happy peacetime flying.

—THE SKIPPER.

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