

THE ALL BRITISH MAGAZINE

AIR STORIES

7^D

FLYING THRILLS AND AERIAL ADVENTURES



BRING 'EM BACK ALIVE

BY WILFRID TREMELLEN

CRASH CRATER

BY RUSSELL MALLINSON

WINGED WARRIORS

BY J. E. GURDON

APRIL

Also Stories by JOHN. E. DOYLE-A.H. PRITCHARD-EDWARD GREEN



AIR STORIES

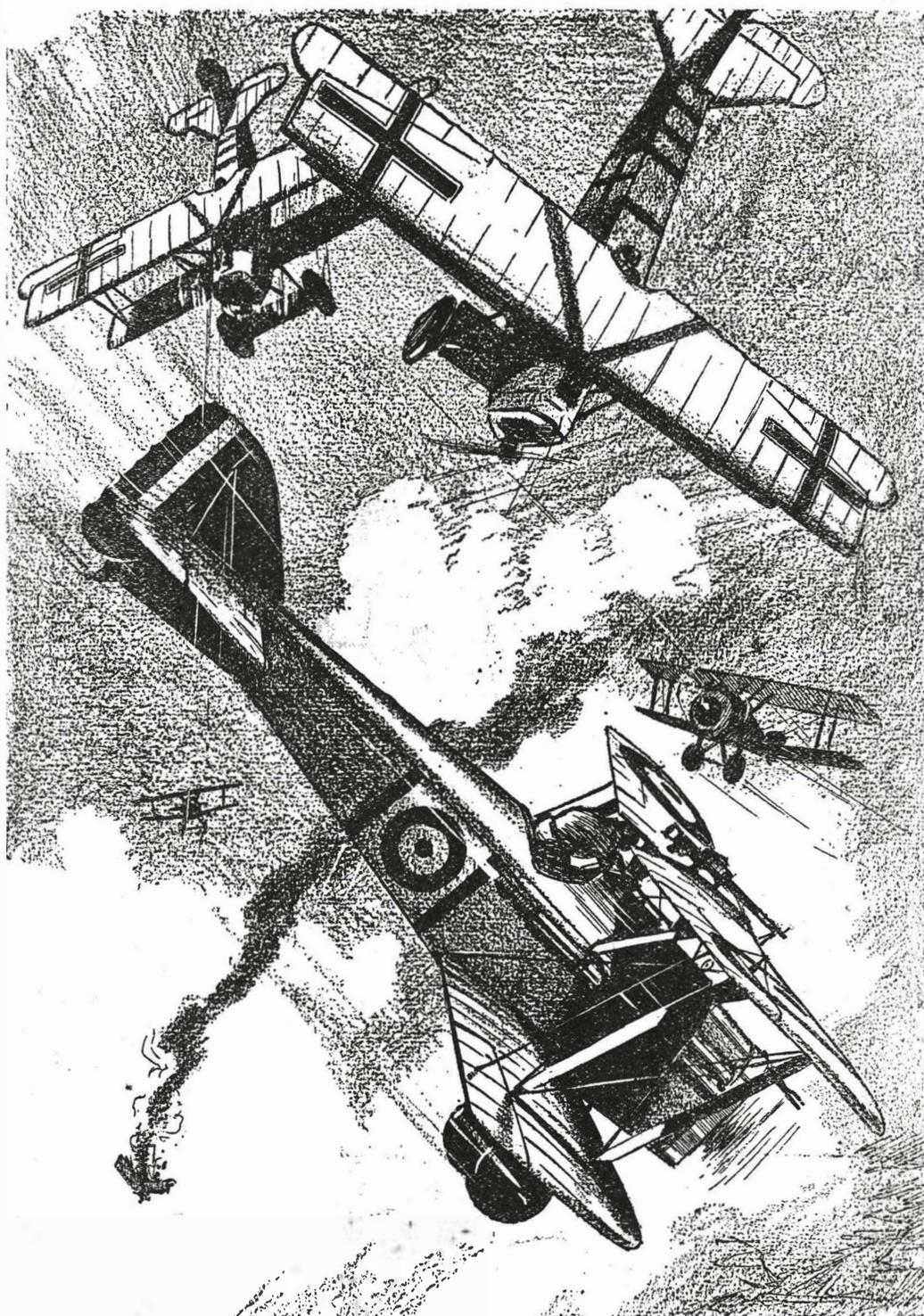
FLYING THRILLS AND
AERIAL ADVENTURE

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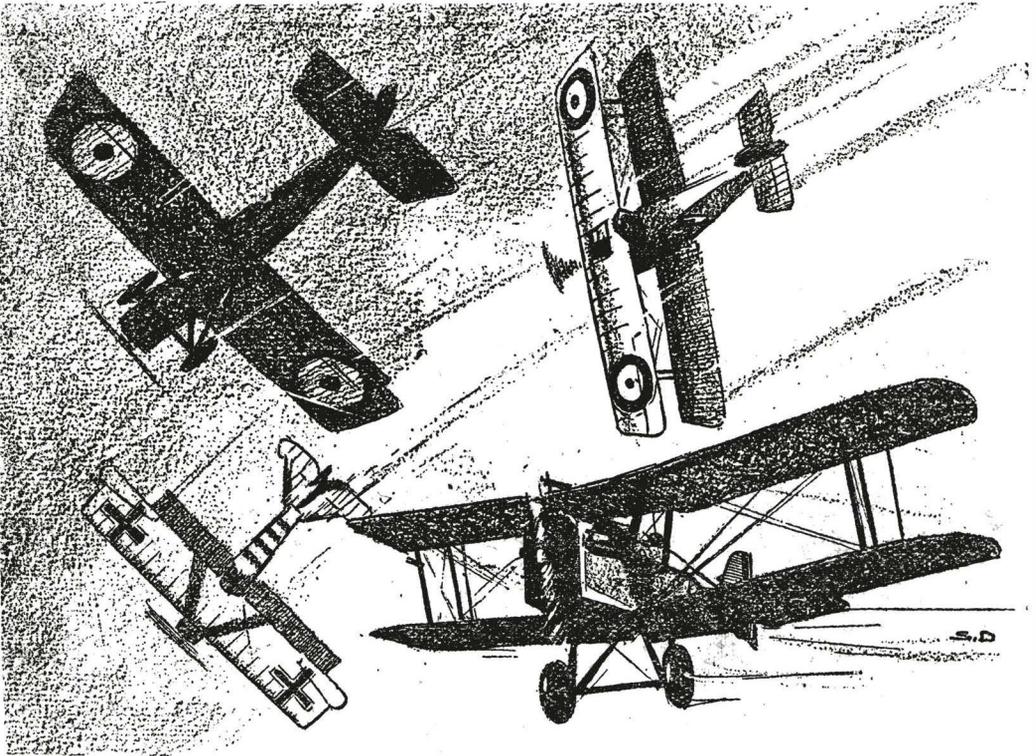
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An S.E.5. flashed past with the pilot half-standing in the cockpit, striving desperately to remedy a defect in his gun.



BRING 'EM BACK ALIVE!

When Sergeant Westringham introduced the "Funk-Hole" System to the R.F.C. it was Generally Agreed to be the Neatest and most Efficient Method ever Devised for the Destruction of Enemy Aircraft. And not the least Remarkable Features of this Amazing System were that it Rendered Guns Superfluous and Inflicted no Greater Hurt on its Victims than a Severe Shaking-up and Chronic Loss of Temper

By **WILFRID TREMELLEN**

Lieutenant, R.A.F. (retired)

CHAPTER I

The Funk-Hole System

THE "Funk-Hole" System was the neatest method for the destruction of Hun aircraft that had so far been devised. That, at all events, was what we thought in our squadron. And other squadrons must have been of similar opinion, or they would never have sent their representatives to listen, take notes, pinch a free lunch off us, and return home to copy the idea for

themselves. For the fame of the system had spread; before it had been in use with us for a fortnight nine Huns, destroyed by the Funk-Hole method alone, had been added to the squadron "game-book."

A peculiar aspect of the system was that the "dudder" the pilot who made use of it, the more successful he seemed to be. Before long there was not a camp-bed in the squadron whose rough brown army blankets were not hidden from sight during the daytime by a

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bed-spread composed of the Iron Cross strip torn from a German top plane.

It was even recorded that a youngster who had never yet crossed the line returned to the aerodrome one bright morning in an A.S.C. lorry (having taken-off an hour previously in a perfectly good S.E. 5) with a broad grin on his face. He had wiped off the undercarriage of the S.E., but, by way of compensation, he was leading by the hand a big blonde Prussian pilot—the most indignant prisoner that ever called “Kamerad.”

That was another unique feature of the system—and one which recommended it strongly to humanitarians: the fact that the German victims, generally speaking, suffered no greater hurt than a severe shaking-up and chronic loss of temper. Only one death was recorded, and that was when the vanquished pilot pulled an automatic. In the struggle that ensued, the only brains that were blown out were his own.

You can see for yourself, then, that the Funk-Hole System was no ordinary system.

“And it’s so simple, my dears!” exclaimed “Woggy” Wane (our duddest pilot but two) in his famous imitation of his elderly Aunt Jane. “No more dust! No more dirt! No more tiresome scrubbing—I mean, shooting—with a machine-gun! Victory just falls into your lap! Oh, I *am* grateful to Sergeant Westringham! *Such* a clever young man!”

Yes, the Funk-Hole System was unique. And it all originated one morning in September—in no very pleasant manner.

I DON’T know what had gone before. I heard no word spoken. But when I put my head round the door of the Intelligence Hut the two of them were standing there facing each other like a couple of statues. Moldred, his big puffy face pale with rage, seemed to have forgotten that he was supposed to be an officer and had drawn back his fist as though to strike. I swear it was only the freezing contempt in Sergeant Westringham’s eyes that kept him back.

Mind you, they didn’t say a word in

my presence—either of them. It was just their attitudes—Moldred, the officer, out of all control of himself; Westringham, the N.C.O., standing stiffly to attention. “Bah!” Moldred’s eyes seemed to snarl. “Call yourself an aristocrat, do you? You’ll be a sergeant for the duration if I have anything to do with it!” And Westringham’s eyes made answer in the same unspoken language. I have never seen a man express such contempt—just with his eyes.

It was a queer state of affairs to burst in on unexpectedly, because Stephen Moldred was senior subaltern in our squadron, and Westringham, the N.C.O. pilot, was—if you had time to give him his full name and lineage—Sergeant The Honourable Charles Edward Albemarle Delmar-Westringham, second son of Major-General the Earl of Marsden and Frore. All that.

Well, an officer senior to me quarrelling with an N.C.O. was no affair for me to interfere with—even though that N.C.O. was my friend. So I quietly withdrew my head and shut the door. I had only gone into the hut for a quiet smoke anyhow.

But that glimpse I had had certainly came as a shock. Moldred was a coarse, red-faced lout I had never cared for; he was too boastful and noisy for my tastes. But Westringham I liked very much. It had taken me a long time to get to know him, partly because he was in the Sergeants’ Mess, of course, and partly because of his habit of burying himself away in the repair hangar. Always inventing new gadgets, that fellow.

I smoked my cigarette outside, sauntering as far as the armoury and back. Then, seeing Moldred come crashing out of the door and go striding off towards the hangars, I strolled back to the hut.

It was a bit of an institution, the Intelligence Hut, and was shared by the three squadrons on our ‘drome. Major Tignell-Wingate, our C.O. (“Tiggy-Wiggy” when out of earshot), liked his flying officers to spend a certain amount of time there, so we had to humour him.

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But, instead of poring over the maps of the sector that covered the walls (we already knew our own slice of the front like the cockpits of our own S.E.'s) we just stood about smoking and yarning for the most part, and dropping cigarette-ash on the latest photographs to come in. That Intelligence Hut had developed into a kind of club-room for junior officers and N.C.O. pilots.

CHAPTER II

"Follow-my-Leader"

WESTRINGHAM was standing with his hands in his pockets when I went in, staring thoughtfully at a wall-map that showed in thick blue pencil the latest position of the line. He was slim in build, even in his rough sergeant's uniform, and had dark eyes and a well-bred, thin, intellectual sort of face. His hands were as delicate as a girl's, on the rare occasions when they were free from oil-stains. I believe he kept them oily to avoid attracting remarks.

I made no mention of what I had seen—I knew he wouldn't want me to—but just sat myself on the edge of the table, swinging my legs and watching him, but saying nothing at all. When you are really friends with a fellow you can do that. Sympathy is taken for granted.

He turned round after a bit and hoisted himself up beside me, accepting a gasper in silence.

"You know, Trevelyan," he said, grinning as he sucked in flame from the match I held to him, "I believe you think I have a hell of a rotten time in this squadron. You do, don't you?"

"Do I, Charles Edward?" I asked non-committally.

"Well, anyway, you're wrong, and I just hate to see you worrying about me as you do." He swung his legs for a moment in silence. "I don't really mind about it at all, you know—I mean about being an N.C.O. It's rather fun really. Sergeant-Major's a decent old stick and gives me any amount of time off to work at my gadgets. And that's all I want!"

I grinned. Westringham's gadgets

were a byword in the squadron; his cockpit looked more like the corner of an ironmonger's shop than anything else. Most ingenious chap I ever saw.

"Now, if I were in your mess," he went on, "I shouldn't have a minute to call my own. I know the way you fellows live. Every other night seems to be a guest-night, and on wash-out days either you go in a band to smash up the Camel Squadron's camp-beds, or else they arrive in a band to smash up yours. If you like that sort of thing it's all right, I suppose. But I've no time for it myself."

"You're a serious-minded sort of bloke, you know, Charles Edward," I told him. "I agree with you about camp-beds, though. I haven't had a comfortable night since two of those thugs from across the way took a flying leap on mine. But tell me, what was it that dished you for your pip? * You were at the School of Aerial Combat up at Flodden, weren't you?"

"Oh, that affair? Well, it's not a long story. Ever hear of 'The Cockroach'? No, you wouldn't, of course; you were at Marske. Well, old Colonel Roach was the holy terror that the Air Board took away from his rightful job, which was the governorship of some military prison, and appointed to command the Air Combat School at Flodden. He was a non-flying man himself, of course; discipline was what he was there for—with a capital 'D'—and, by Jumbo! if ever there was a martinet, it was old man Roach. Every one of us flight-cadets was in fear and trembling of losing his chance of a commission and being sent out here as an N.C.O.

"The Chief Instructor had nothing to do but attend to the flying side. It was easy for him; when he said 'mustn't,' the Colonel saw to it that we 'didn't.'"

"Now one of the things the C.I. said a very emphatic 'mustn't' about was stunting near the ground—very sensibly, too, because we had had several fatalities. But it happened that the craze-of-the-

* Second-Lieutenant's star.

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moment at the school was that perilous game known as 'Follow-my-Leader'—you know, the first pilot of a string carries out some stunt, the more hair-raising the better, and all the rest have to imitate him in turn, or else drop out and go and play with someone else. So the C.I.'s veto on stunting near the ground wasn't very popular.

"It was simply ignored at first. The lads just used to fly off somewhere out of sight and carry on with the game. So the Colonel, getting wind of this, put the under-officers* on to the job of playing spy. You can imagine what happened; the under-officers didn't like the prefect system any more than we did. They either took care not to be around when the rule was being broken, or else, when they did see us playing the fool, pretended they hadn't. They were all sportsmen—except one.

"Well, one morning a crowd of half a dozen of us on S.E. 5's foregathered for a friendly game—the usual—over a village some fifteen miles from the aerodrome. We were all of us near the end of our training and expected to get our pips and be sent out here to a service squadron within a fortnight.

"The fellow who happened to be 'leader' that morning—I forget his name—was leading us the very deuce of a dance—splitairing about all over the place and doing the most crazy things with his 'bus. Several had dropped out, unable to follow suit, and there were now only two of us still following the leader. I was last in the line.

"I didn't see the stranger 'bus approaching from the left. Nor did the leader, or he wouldn't have attempted the stunt he next pulled off.

"There was a long white road ahead of us, and what he actually did was to put down his nose and dive down towards it at full throttle. The angle of dive was forty-five degrees, I should say. On the further side of the road the telegraph wires ran parallel, and this fellow, just when I thought he was going to bury his prop. in the ditch, yanks the stick

back into his chest and zooms upwards, having actually passed under the telegraph wires.

"Well, this was a bit too hair-raising for the fellow ahead of me, and, after making a feeble sort of throttled-down dive, he pulls up his nose when a hundred yards or so away from the road and clears off to make room for me.

"I didn't like the look of that stunt a bit, and the closer to the ground my power-dive brought me, the more windy I got. You know what it feels like when your bones seem to have turned to plasticine—horrid. By the time I had decided I would pull out of it, though, it was too late. I shot down under those wires and pulled in the stick just in time. I could have sworn my wheels brushed the grass.

"Up at a safe height again, I felt like a dog with three tails—you always do after pulling off those damn-silly 'coffin-for-one' stunts—and when the stranger 'bus ranged himself alongside me I just waved him a cheerio. I was feeling proud of myself and hoped he'd seen me. He had. I saw him give a sickly kind of grin and make a note of the number of my 'bus—very ostentatiously. It wasn't a cheering sight. 'Still,' I thought, 'I shan't be the only one on the mat'. That's where I was wrong."

"NEXT morning," Westringham continued, "there was only one of us up before the Cockroach, and that one was me. The old devil gave me both barrels. 'A cadet incapable of obeying orders forfeits the right to give them to others. I deem you, young man, unworthy of holding the King's Commission!'—and so on."

"The under-officer had a grudge against you," I suggested.

The Hon. Charles Edward nodded. "He most certainly had. Well, now you know, Trevelyan," he added with a rueful grin, "why I'm wearing these"—he touched his sergeant's stripes and then nodded at my pips—"instead of those."

* In some R.F.C. cadet wings, under-officers were chosen from senior cadets.

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"But couldn't your governor pull some wires or something?" I asked—and immediately wished I hadn't.

"My father! Why, he won't even recognise me until I can appear in a Sam Browne. D'you know that when I go home on leave I have to stay with my sis——?"

At that moment the door was thrust open to admit the corpulent form of "Woggy" Wane propelled by the remainder of our flight. Captain Langrish brought up the rear. Poor old Skipper Langrish! He had gone six months now without leave and was as thin and nervy and irritable as a drug addict.

"Come right inside, my dears!" "Woggy" Wane invited in his famous imitation of his elderly Aunt Jane. "And pray do not forget to wipe your goloshes." The flight crowded in. Langrish looked round the hut and his eyes fell on Charles Edward and me.

"Here are two more. Now, where's Moldred? Sergeant Benn, slip out and find me Mr. Moldred, please."

"What's up, 'Woggy'?" I asked above the buzz of conversation.

"Woggy" shrugged his plump shoulders. "Flight conference, my dear. 'S'all I know. Hallo! Here comes Moldie!"

Langrish cleared his throat. "Now the point is this, you fellows," he began, accepting a cigarette from someone with a none-too-steady hand. "I've just come from a pow-wow at Squadron Office, and the C.O. has been talking to the flight-commanders about strategy in air scrapping. He insists that all you youngsters open fire at your opponent a great deal too soon—waste your ammunition before you've worked in close enough to put in an effective burst. Now I agree with him there. Some of you fellows think that just because you've got a full belt it doesn't matter how many bursts you throw away. I've seen you myself. Directly a Hun comes within reasonable distance you start spraying your tracer at him just like—just like——"

"Just like a gardener squirting his hose on the lawn next door but one, my

dears," amplified "Woggy" Wane. "So silly!"

"The point to remember," Langrish went on, ignoring the interruption, "is that a burst that doesn't reach its mark is worse than useless; it's so much extra weight you have brought with you only to throw away—when a few minutes later those extra rounds might be the means of saving your life. Do you get me? Anyway, this is to be your maxim in future; don't open fire at a Hun until you are right up close. When you have a seventy-five per cent. chance of hitting him, then let loose. Not before. Well, that's all I was asked to tell you."

"Here, but I say!" Moldred's heavy red face was puckered with condemnation. "Absolute tripe that seems to me! If we are supposed to go into a scrap bearing in mind that every round we use is going to cost the taxpayer a penny-farthing or whatever it is, how the devil does the C.O. think——?"

Langrish tapped his finger-nail impatiently on the table. "That's not the C.O.'s point at all—anyone but a fool would know that," he said testily. "What he wants to do is to teach you fellows to make your attack crisp and effective instead of woolly and haphazard."

"That seems sound politics to me, dears," "Woggy" Wane threw in pacifically.

"To me, too," I supported.

"There's another point, too, sir," said a quiet voice, and all eyes turned to the Hon. Charles Edward. "When you open fire at a Hun too soon, it's probably because you're feeling a bit nervous and, well, probably the Hun comes to that same conclusion."

At the word "nervous" there was a snort of derision from Moldred.

"Glad you agree with me, Sergeant," Langrish said, determined to ignore Moldred's existence. He moved towards the door as a sign that we could disperse.

"I THINK it's all a damned farce," Moldred said loudly as soon as the door closed. "Next thing is they'll be

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sending us up to bring down Huns with nothing but a pop-gun ! ”

“ Why not, sir ? It’s quite possible. ”

There must have been a very devil of mischief in the Hon. Charles Edward that morning. All heads turned in his direction. This outspokenness was something quite unusual in him. He stood staring with level eyes across the table at Moldred, a faint smile playing round his lips.

Moldred gulped, utterly taken aback, then : “ Do I understand you to say, Sergeant Westringham, ” he said thickly, “ that a Hun could be brought down with nothing but a pop-gun ? ”

“ That is what I said, sir. ”

“ Would you undertake to do it yourself ? ” sneered Moldred.

“ Certainly, sir. ”

“ With nothing but a pop-gun ? ”

“ I shouldn’t even need the pop-gun. ”

Moldred took a step towards the table and leaned forward, resting his hands on it. A look of greed crept into his eyes. He knew that the Hon. Charles Edward was well endowed with this world’s wealth. Himself, he was generally in debt.

“ Would you care to take a bet on this, Sergeant Westringham ? ” he asked, almost eagerly.

“ If you like, sir. ”

Moldred’s big coarse face showed a flicker of hesitation. He was not going to be caught. “ You undertake to bring the Hun down without using bullets ? ”

“ No bullets. ”

“ Or bombs ? ”

“ No bombs. ”

“ Or aerial darts or Verey lights ? ”

“ I shan’t need them, either. ”

There was a hush in the room as when a play is about to begin. Everyone’s eyes were fixed on Charles Edward’s calm face.

Moldred was running the tip of his tongue slowly backwards and forwards between his thick lips, a picture of greed and caution.

“ I tell you what, Sergeant Westringham, ” he said. “ Will you bet me a level thousand francs on this ? ”

The Hon. Charles Edward nodded.

“ If you like, sir, ” he said. “ Only the bet need not be level. If you win, I will give you a cheque for a thousand francs, and if I win you can give me a tin of fifty cigarettes. ”

A leer spread over Moldred’s face. “ Done ! ” he said.

I WAS walking over to the hangars to get into flying kit for second patrol, when Charles Edward caught up with me.

“ Trevelyan, I wonder if you would use your influence to get me the loan of a motor-bike and sidecar this evening ? ”

“ Not unless you tell me how the blazes you are going to win that tin of gaspers, ” I told him.

“ Then there’s nothing doing, ” he grinned. “ Pity ! I shall have to ask—— ”

“ All right, I’ll do it, ” I put in hastily. “ But what’s the idea ? If you’ve got no one to go on this trip with you—— ”

“ But I have. Père Rameau is coming with me. ”

Père Rameau was a well-to-do farmer of the district, an energetic old man who had fought in the war of *soixante-dix*. All three of his sons were with the colours.

“ Why Père Rameau, for goodness’ sake ? ”

“ Because he possesses the longest ladder in Northern France, ” was the unsatisfactory answer.

CHAPTER III

Westringham Claims a Bet

WHOOF !
The crashing cough of an “ Archie ” shell exploding somewhere not nearly far enough below my right wing warned me to change my height and direction. A blob of intense black smoke appeared against the panorama of the war-scarred earth nine thousand feet below and, mushrooming out until it had thinned to a dirty grey, drifted back to join similar bursts behind me. The line “ Archie ” was very active that morning. I looked at my watch. In a minute or two I should be relieved

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and could skate off home. Not only could, but would have to, the petrol capacity of my S.E. being what it was. Well, it had been an uneventful patrol. But for those wicked black bursts I should have been yawning.

I banked round to the south-west and, thinking I saw movement through the arc of my propeller, manœuvred for a clearer view. Yes, there was Charles Edward toiling up to my height to relieve me. Good! I put down my nose and headed for home. Good old Charles Edward!

It was while I was wondering whether he would get an opportunity that morning of winning his tin of fifty cigarettes that a blue-and-white chequered Pfalz scout, emerging from a straggling layer of fleecy cloud, dived joyously and batted itself on to the tail of the unsuspecting S.E. I fired off a short burst with my Vickers to warn the victim, but might have known I was too far off. The jickering of the Hun's Spandaus must have been Westringham's first intimation of the attack. I saw him flick over into a vertical bank and whirl round in a complete circle in an effort to get the Pfalz in his sights. But at the moment when he might have fired no burst came from his gun. Instead, I saw him lean forward, straining against his safety-belt to thump at the lock of his Vickers. A jam—at a moment like that!*

There was no time to clear it. I watched his machine rear its nose up to the sky, heel over, and go streaking earthward, spinning like a sycamore seed. The Pfalz ceased firing then. Up went his tail and down he shot in pursuit, engine thundering all out.

To keep them in sight I dived my machine too and, almost cricking my neck over the side of the cockpit in my anxiety for poor Charles Edward, watched for the outcome. I would have given a great deal for a full tank and the opportunity of sandwiching that Hun.

Trailing wisps of cloud obscured the

view for a moment or so, but when I next saw the pair they had reached the floor. Charles Edward was not finished yet, but seemed very near it. He hadn't a chance that I could see. Both pursuer and pursued were tearing across the countryside at chimney-pot height, hopping over farmhouses and haystacks like steeplechasers. Charles Edward, zig-zagging crazily right and left to keep the other's bullets from his back, must have been working his rudder-bar like bicycle-pedals.

For the present the Boche was wasting no bullets in frightfulness, and when they disappeared from my sight into the mist he was just biding his time—waiting for a close-up burst that wouldn't require to be repeated. Poor old Charles Edward! I glided in over our hangars with a heavy heart. With his gun jammed what could he do? Then a sudden thought occurred to me; perhaps it wasn't jammed! Perhaps—! The mental picture of a round tin of fifty rose up before me. Perhaps that crazy loon—!

Within two hours I knew the truth. "Woggy" Wane, Haltrick, Moldred and a few others of us were standing outside "C" Flight hangar when an S.E. sideslipped into the aerodrome with a gentle moaning of wires, executed a faultless three-pointer and came taxying with intermittent bursts of engine-power towards us.

"It's him!" I yelled. "It's Westringham!" and doubled forward.

THE Hon. Charles Edward dropped to the ground with a delighted grin and came towards me. There was a small bundle under his arm, wrapped up in some kind of cloth.

Still grinning, he went straight up to Moldred.

"You owe me a tin of fifty, sir," he said, and undid his bundle. The wrapping of this turned out to be a strip of fabric marked with a large Maltese cross in black and had evidently been ripped from the tail-plane of a Pfalz. The victor held up the contents: two locks taken from Spandau guns and a bloodied

* Most S.E.'s carried a Lewis gun (mounted on the top plane), in addition to a Vickers. In Trevelyan's squadron the Lewis was dispensed with, the resulting saving in weight giving the S.E.'s a higher "ceiling."—AUTHOR'S NOTE.

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flying-helmet bearing the name Helmuth Franz v. Feldström.

All eyes turned on Moldred. First he gaped, then he glared, his red face turning a dark crimson. But in a moment he had recovered himself. He began to bluster.

"Yes, that's all very well, but I want to see the German 'bus—with no bullet-holes in it."

"You can, if you like, sir. But meanwhile have a look at the cartridge-belt of my Vickers—with no empty spaces in it."

Moldred strode across and, returning with a scowl on his face, tossed a couple of coins to the Hon. Charles Edward. They fell on the grass.

"The wager was for cigarettes, not money," Charles Edward reminded him coldly, as the other turned on his heel.

The coins were left lying there.

"How the devil did you manage it?" I asked him while he was pulling off his Sidcot. "Last time I saw you, you hadn't a kipper's chance in a cat's home! How *did* you do it, man?"

But there are times when Charles Edward can be no more communicative than the average oyster.

THAT night I was dining alone in a little restaurant I knew in Amiens; there were times when I liked to creep away by myself and forget all about the war and life in the squadron and noisy people generally.

It was while I was sipping my *Nuits St. Georges*, engrossed in that most peaceful of books, "The Compleat Angler," that I felt a sharp rap on the head and looked up to find that a grinning idiot had smitten me with a yard of French bread. It was Teddy McFane of the Camel Squadron on our aerodrome. It might have been worse; Teddy is a rowdy fellow certainly, but usually all right if you get him alone.

"Sit down, Teddy," I groaned, shutting up the immortal Izaak. "Yes, have your food brought over here if you must."

We talked for an hour or more, chiefly about mutual acquaintances, and knowing that Teddy had passed through the Com-

bat School at Flodden, I naturally asked if he had known the Hon. Charles Edward.

"Westringham? Westringham? Dark, slightly built young chappie, always thinking up brainy ideas, wasn't he? Yes, I know him. 'Course I do. He's the fellow they made an N.C.O. He got the dirtiest deal a cadet school ever dished out to anybody."

"Oh," said I, without too much show of interest. "How was that?" and got the whole story out of him by degrees.

"It was a frame-up, a dirty frame-up," Teddy averred, signing to the *patron* for another bottle of burgundy. "This rotten bounder of an under-officer—er—Mulford, his name was—should have reported the whole gang of them if he reported any. He just picked on Westringham because he had a grudge against him."

"D'you know why he had a grudge against him?"

Teddy held his first glass from the new bottle up to the light. "I can tell you that too, though it's a long story that begins before the war. I had it straight from a chappie who comes from Westringham's part of the world. Do you want it?"

"Fire away."

"Well, once upon a time a grand old landowner was driving through his hometown in his whopping big Rolls-Royce. It was the Earl of Something and Something-Else to be precise."

"That's not very precise. Marsden and Frore, I expect you mean."

"So I do. Well, this old bloke was just driving through some of the back streets that were his property, smoking his cigar and thinking how nice of him it was to install bathrooms and h. & c. in all the houses, when a door opens and out pops an old lady waving a rolling-pin and shouting, 'Mingy old skinflint!'

"Well, the old boy doesn't like his tenants calling him a 'mingy old skinflint' just when he's paid out a large cheque to have that h. & c. installed. So he ups and outs of his fine motor and asks her, 'Whad'you-mean?'

"She shows him her rent-book. The

BRING 'EM BACK ALIVE!

CHAPTER IV

A Saxon is Surprised

old boy, being a Field Marshal or something by trade, has never seen one before, 'cause he's always left the management of details to someone else, but he blinks a bit, turns over the pages, and gathers that somebody has just shoved the old lady's rent up two and sixpence. Half the street has gathered round by now and they all have the same grouse. 'It's since the new agent came' they tell him.

"The old earl pricks up his ears at this. 'I ordered no rents to be raised!' he says. He gets back into his fine motor car and orders the chauffeur to drive straight to the agent's office. 'Whad you-mean?' he says sternly to the agent, waving in his face as many rent-books as he can conveniently handle. 'You are dismissed from my service, sir—for ever!' And he drops all the rent-books and points to the door.

"And that was the end of a lucrative career for a certain old twister named Mulford. Now this fellow Mulford had a son——"

"—— who rose to the rank of under-officer at the School of Combat at Flodden," I finished for him. "I see. And Mulford's son would have no cause to love the offspring of the old boy who had sacked his father. Yes, I see. But are you sure the name was Mulford, Teddy?"

"Mulford, or Metford, or Mitford, or something."

"Do you think, Teddy, it might have been 'Moldred'?"

"Moldred? Moldred? Yes, so it was, now I come to think of it. Why? D'you know him yourself?"

"He's a fellow I've met somewhere," I said casually.

I left Teddy soon after that, and, walking through the streets to the place where the Crossley tender would be waiting, I thought a lot about Charles Edward, and in going over in my mind that astounding victory of his that morning, I had a sudden brilliant idea. I stopped dead in my tracks and stared up at the new moon. "Jove! I've got it!" I exclaimed to the night at large, "Charles Edward! Your patent method of Hun destruction is no longer a secret; I've guessed it!"

NEXT morning, meeting Westringham outside the Armoury, I told him so.

"Oh," said Charles Edward, grinning.

"And what is it?"

Other pilots were calling at the Armoury for this thing or that for their Vickers, so I lowered my voice and said what I had in mind in a whisper.

"That's the right idea, anyway," he agreed. "Care to come and see the system work? I've got a photography job assigned to me. Bound to flush some Huns on the way back. Come along."

"There's only one thing," he added as we made our way over to the hangars.

"And I want you to promise me."

"What's that?"

"If you see me apparently a goner, spinning down out of a fight with my gun jammed, *don't* shoot the Hun off my tail."

"Why the deuce not?"

"'Cause that's where I want him. See?"

THAT expedition of ours over the line proved to be the very devil of a show. I soon forgot all about Charles Edward's patent ideas. So did he, probably. The difficulty was to bring ourselves back alive.

The point is that in returning after carrying out the photography job we ran into a dog-fight, four Camels defending an R.E.8 "art-obs." machine against the murderous intentions of seven Fokkers and a Pfalz scout. In the air-war no fight is a private fight, and we had straightaway changed our course.

From a distance the affair looked like a cloud of mosquitoes doing their summer evening exercises beneath the trees. Only the continuous crackle of machine-gun fire indicated that Death was stalking the skies.

Streaking forward at full throttle we saw a green-striped Fokker thread itself on to a punishing stream of fire from the gun of the sportsman in the back seat of the R.E.8 and go down streaming a dark

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plume—first blood ! Then we were in the thick of it ourselves.

For the next five minutes or so the thirteen scouts and the two-seater were whirling round and round in endless pursuit of each other like autumn leaves caught up in a violent eddy of wind. I went mad. We all went mad. Machines and parts of machines flashed across our telescopic sights in lightning succession and, generally before we could crisp fingers over firing-lever, the lens had flicked clear blue again. The racket of all those engines and machine-guns must have been heard as far as the Channel.

But now the Pfalz scout had broken up in the air and we were seven machines against six. Suddenly an S.E. flashed past me with the pilot half-standing in the cockpit, reaching forward to remedy a defect in his gun. It was the Hon. Charles Edward. I saw two Fokkers in search of easy meat swerve inwards and, battenning on to his tail, simultaneously begin to pour in their deadly streams of lead. I watched the nose of the S.E. rear vertically up into the air to escape them, and then, heeling over, go screaming down in a spin. Up went the tails of the two jackals and down they went after it in a howling head-long power-dive.

Now I had promised Charles Edward to do nothing about one Hun on his tail, but I'd said nothing about two. I pushed forward my stick and went yowling down full-pelt in the wake of his attackers.

One of them was a little behind the other. He must have been the kind of fellow that expects his friend to do all the look-out work. Not until my prop. boss was almost level with his tail-plane did he even think of possible danger from behind. Then through the lens of my Aldis I saw his goggled head half turned in a ghastly kind of premonition, and at that moment I pressed the Bowden lever for a short burst. His body sagged forward against the safety-belt and the Fokker suddenly took on a steeper angle of dive that passed the vertical. As a burst, it was the closest close-up that I have ever put into any Hun, but the victory was not one that I am particularly proud of.

I eased back the stick then, and glanced back and up at the major conflict. Two more Fokkers were gone, and the remainder were beating it for home. Good enough. I turned my attention to my friend.

Far below, the Hon. Charles Edward was repeating his tactics of the day before. He had come out of his spin and now, at a height of only fifty feet or so, he was streaking across the landscape, frantically ruddering right and left.

The Fokker pilot, determined that sooner or later the elusive Englishman should come into the centre of his sights, was following every change of direction with a precision that, seen from above, was quite comic.

But in his whirligig progress I saw that, even though Charles Edward was screaming along with his wheels within an ace of brushing cow-sheds and hedgerows, there was method in his madness. He was keeping some kind of general direction, making for some definite objective. Knowing what he had up his sleeve, I looked ahead. But in front of him there was only one of those long arrow-straight French roads, flanked on one side by the tall poplars of Picardy. I was mystified. What the deuce was he making for ? He had agreed that my surmise was correct, but—there were no telegraph poles about that I could see.

AT that moment Charles Edward, careering along with the Fokker's nose almost level with the blue smoke that streaked from the S.E.'s exhaust, was approaching the long white road that crossed his track at right angles. I expected him to pull in the stick to clear the trees, but instead he nosed down even lower still and, taking advantage of a gap in the line of tall trunks, shot through it and across the road.

The Hun, flying a yard or so higher, naturally attempted to follow, and in acting on that natural impulse sealed his own doom.

I saw the two tall trees on either side of the gap quiver slightly as the Fokker swept through. At the same moment its

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propeller flew suddenly into splinters, and the machine itself, which must have been doing 100 miles per hour at the very least, shot upwards as the pilot instinctively pulled on the stick. Then it flattened out again, glided some distance, and flopped down to a pancake-landing in the field beyond.

WHEN I landed my machine beside the Hon. Charles Edward's, he was standing talking soothingly in execrable German to the pilot of the Fokker. I had seen some astonished faces in my two years of war, but never had I seen one so comically bewildered as the face of that tall Saxon. He looked at his own machine and then at the S.E.5, and simply couldn't believe it. Less than a minute ago he had been a victorious hunter chasing a disabled prey. Now——!

He was still shaking his head in a puzzled way when we stopped a lorry full of Tommies that was passing and bundled him up in charge of the N.C.O.

"Now look here, Charles Edward," I began as we shared the flame of a match for our cigarettes. "You told me——"

"I didn't tell you anything, if you remember; it was you who did all the telling. But come and see the trap. Hallo! Here comes Père Rameau! *Bonjour, Père Rameau! C'est épatant, ça, pas vrai?*"

PÈRE RAMEAU'S movements were hampered by the large coil of wire he was carrying across one shoulder, but he waved his cap in great excitement and a grin spread across his rubicund countenance from ear to ear. "*Magnifique, monsieur!*" he bawled, staggering along as fast as his ancient legs could carry him. "*Merveilleux!*"

"Père Rameau is my assistant," Charles Edward explained.

"I had been expecting something to do with telegraph wires!" I exclaimed. "I thought——"

"You were thinking of that incident at Flodden, I expect. Yes, that's what gave me the idea. But this is a development. See the gap between these two poplars? It's wired across at a height of

sixteen feet above the ground—or, rather, it was, before the Fokker arrived. When it's repaired again it will be all ready for another Boche, see? All I have to do in the next scrap up aloft is to pretend that my gun's jammed, spin down out of the fight and make my way, by hedge-hopping, along to this spot. The Hun thinks I'm easy meat and hangs on to my tail-skid like a leech. When I've got him as far as this, I just slip through the gap. Knowing the wires are there, I hug the ground, of course. But Fritz knows nothing about 'em, poor feller. Flying a foot or to higher than me, he barges straight through, runs his prop. against the wires, and splinters it to bits. '*Allemand fini!*' as Père Rameau would say. Not quite, though, because the ends of the wires are tied with light string that breaks easily. So that, though the prop. gets smashed, there's little damage done to the machine and pilot." *

Charles Edward flung his arm affectionately round the shoulders of the old Frenchman. "We prefer to catch 'em alive, *n'est-ce pas, mon père?*"

CHAPTER V

"No Metal touches the Skin"

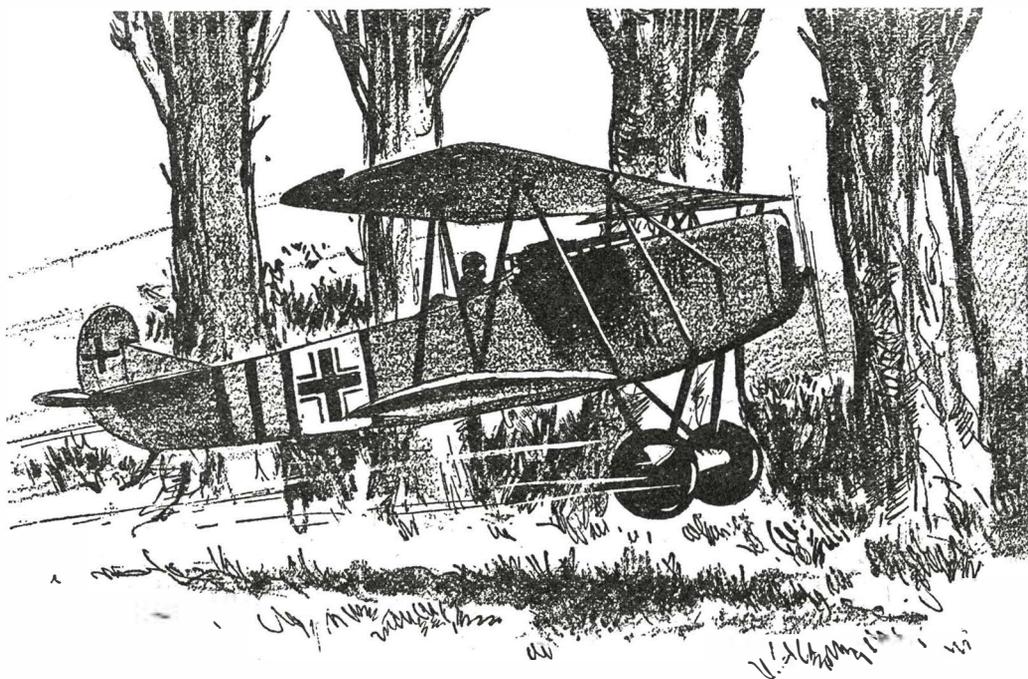
AFTER that there was no keeping the idea a secret. As soon as we got back to the squadron, Charles Edward bearing the usual trophies, we were surrounded, and in the course of the morning enthusiasm rose to fever-pitch. The new scheme had the simplicity of genius and appealed to all imaginations.

That afternoon "Tiggy-Wiggy," returning from a trip with the three flight-commanders to inspect the already famous trap, leaped from the squadron car and, beaming with delight, seized the Hon. Charles Edward by the arm.

"Brilliant idea! You're a smart young fellow! Come along to the Squadron Office. Come along; we must talk this thing over. Wholesale's the word! Wholesale!"

* A wooden propeller revolving at high speed is capable of being damaged even by an object offering as little resistance as a fluttering handkerchief.—AUTHOR'S NOTE.

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The Hun, flying a yard or so higher, attempted to follow the S.E.5 . . .

A dozen traps were planned for a start, and Charles Edward and I were sent out in a side-car combination to scour the countryside for suitable sites. "Funk-holes for all!" was the order of the day.

Within a week we had four successes, four blonde young German pilots standing dazedly in the ante-room, holding an unfamiliar drink in their hands and wondering why in Heaven's name their propellers had suddenly leapt into splinters when they were screaming along so close on the tails of the *verdammte Engländer*.

Soon it became an accepted maxim amongst our crowd that when you were getting the worst of a duel with a Hun, or even if you weren't, you just fiddled with your gun, pretending a jam, heeled over in a spin, and hedge-hopped to the nearest funk-hole.

By the end of the fortnight we had secured five more. "None must return!" was the cry, and since no enemy pilot ever got back to spread the tale of the new peril, it looked as though the trap system would go on "catching 'em alive" for the duration.

The fame of the new idea spread. Whenever any of our gang barged into

the local estaminet, grins would spread from face to face and from table to table.

"Hallo, fellows! How's traps? Been on the rounds yet?"

"Here come the Young Fur-Traders!"

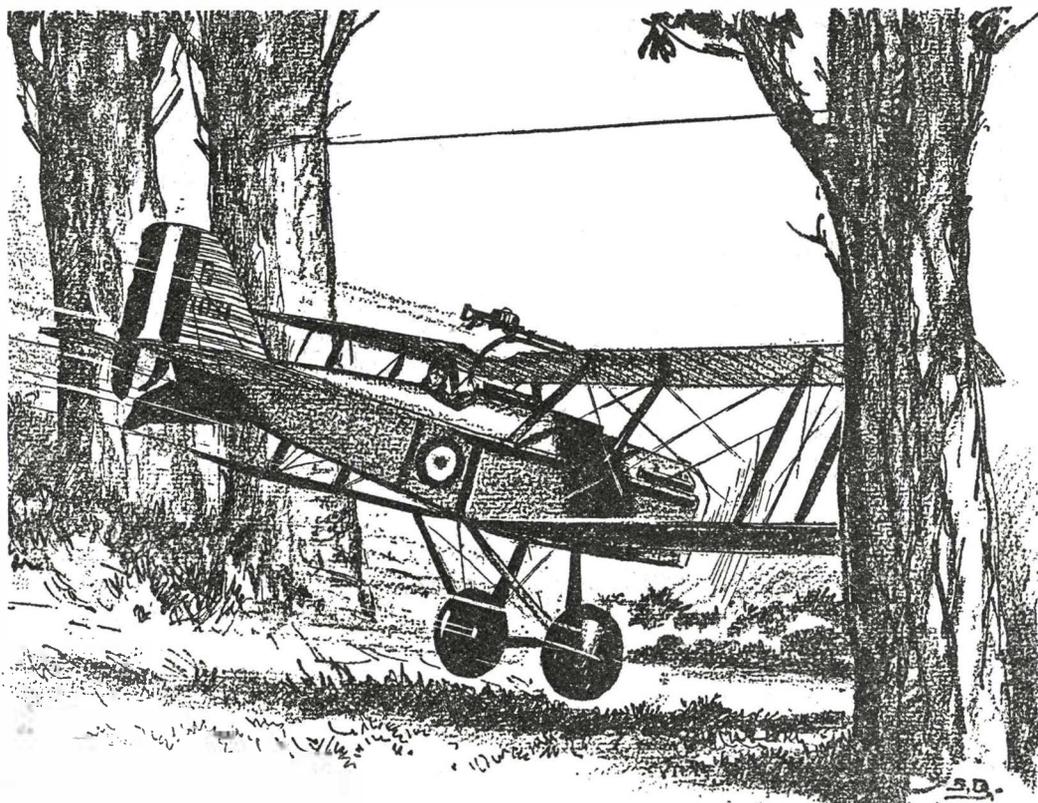
"I say! I'm looking for a nice overcoat for my girl. If you could get me a nice hairy Bavarian, I'd pay anything up to two francs fifty for a pelt in prime condition!"

The tenth victory secured by the Funk-Hole System was celebrated at a restaurant in Amiens, the three N.C.O. pilots being invited as guests of the junior officers.

"Woggy" Wane—more than a little tight when the time came—gave the toast. The peace-loving "Woggy" rose to heights that were almost lyrical.

"It's a revolution, this system, my dears! War without bullets! War without blood! (Cheers.) 'Member the slogan of the Johnny who invented the new idea for gents' suspenders? It ought to be on the crest of our squadron: 'No metal touches the skin!' (Prolonged cheers.) Gentlemen, we drink to Sergeant

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... which had nosed down even lower to shoot through a gap in the trees.

Westringham, the bloke who took the Grr! out of 'la Guerre'!"

But soon afterwards there came a sudden set-back to our triumph. No one knew why, or how, but from a certain date the dozen or so traps we had set up became utterly useless. There was not a Hun in the sky who could be induced, in certain areas, to come lower than a height of fifty feet. In some strange way the truth had leaked out on the other side of the line that hedge-hopping in the vicinity of certain pin-points on the map spelt disaster.

"It's a rotten shame, my dears!" "Woggy" Wane, who had never been front-page stuff as a fighting pilot, and who had more than once kept the bullets from his plump person by dodging into a friendly funk-hole, waxed indignant. "There's been dirty work somewhere, my dears! The Boche have got the pin-points of all our traps and are steering clear of 'em. That's what."

"Tiggy Wiggy," the C.O., was of the same opinion.

"Change the locations," he ordered. It was done.

But there was a general feeling of dissatisfaction. How could the enemy have discovered the exact position of each trap of that first series? A dozen traps, and they knew the pin-point of each! It was a three-day mystery.

BR-R-RRMP! Brr-r-rmp! One by one the little S.E.5's taxied from the vicinity of the hangars and, with intermittent bursts of engine, trundled to the leeward end of the aerodrome, their tail-skids bouncing up and down over the uneven turf.

Captain Langrish was about to lead a reconnaissance expedition in force to take stock of the new "mystery" German aerodrome that had sprung up many miles further back from the line than H.Q. considered natural. To reach

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it we had to pass over that long-established hornets' nest at Valmy-le-Bois ; hence the "in force." Five machines took part ; the Skipper himself, Moldred, "Woggy," the Hon. Charles Edward and myself. In case of trouble, five machines of "A" Flight were to ride the sky a couple of miles to our rear.

It was the queerest formation-flight I have ever taken part in. To begin with, Moldred and Charles Edward started scrapping—as far as a subaltern and an N.C.O. can scrap—as to which of them should fly rear man. Langrish had allotted the position to Westringham, but when the Hon. C. E. came taxying up to take his place, Moldred was already in possession.

There followed, above the drone of the five engines ticking over, a shouting match that did nothing to add to anybody's dignity, and the confusion was made worse by the racket of "A" Flight's five machines getting into position across the way. In the end poor old Langrish countermanded his own order and made Charles Edward yield place.

We had expected a great deal of rough stuff to come our way on this flight, but, to our surprise, we took our photographs with only a minimum of objection from the Huns ; the two formations of S.E.'s were evidently too big a nut to crack for anything but a young circus. But the show was by no means without excitement.

It was over the German aerodrome at Valmy-le-Bois that the extraordinary thing happened.

Charles Edward, who had, I noticed, been flying most of the time with his head screwed round over his right shoulder, suddenly left the formation.

His position had been on my left, abreast of me, so that when I saw his right wing suddenly tip upward and his machine begin to sideslip away from the formation, I naturally turned my head. In amazement I watched him swirl away to the left and then drop his nose and dive.

Langrish, who had seen nothing amiss, was blithely leading the formation straight

back to the lines, but when I fired a hasty couple of rounds from my gun to attract his attention, he glanced back and followed the direction of my pointing finger.

And there was Charles Edward, with no enemy in sight, gone suddenly quite crazy, chasing round after his own tail, as though something special in the way of Fokkers had glued itself on to his tail-skid and were shooting him up with triple-guns. What the devil—?

At a sign from the bewildered Langrish the formation banked left and we watched the antics of the Hon. Charles Edward with growing astonishment. What on earth did the man think he was doing? Now he was whirling round and round in the tightest circle he could manage, losing height at every second.

But now he had apparently succeeded in his extraordinary object, whatever it was, because he suddenly flattened out again and began climbing to regain the formation.

It was then that I saw a flutter of white and green at the leading edge of his top plane. Langrish had throttled back to let him catch up, and as he came nearer I saw that it was a rag of some sort caught on his projecting pitot-tube.*

I didn't feel called upon to fire any more alarm-shots over a detail like that, and soon forgot about it. Tranquilly, we went roaring our way back to the line.

WE had been flying so for about three minutes, when a sudden burst of machine-gun fire behind me made me almost leap out of my skin. Instinctively I threw on rudder and bank and whirled round to see how many Huns were on our tails. But there were no Huns in the sky.

Instead, there was a further mystery. Charles Edward and Moldred were *both* gone from the formation. And they had not only taken their leave of us, but were locked tight in a circle of combat and were dosing each other with

* A tube projecting forward from an interplane strut and connected with the air-speed indicator.

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deadly streams of tracer as often as they came into each other's sights. I gave it up ; had everyone gone crazy ?

The remaining three of us, Langrish, "Woggy" and I, looked on in helpless bewilderment. What could one do in a case like this? A regular duel had begun, and while the two went whirling round on each other's tails, giving burst for burst, the German anti-aircraft batteries far below, who must have been no less astonished than ourselves, planted little black balls of smoke round the combatants with strict impartiality. Whatever the immediate cause of quarrel between those two, I felt instinctively, from the very ferocity of their attacks, that only one of them was going to come out of it alive. Of all the extraordinary things to happen on a reconnaissance flight !

The two had broken circle now, and Moldred was hot on the tail of his enemy, his gun spurting tracer in a deadly stream. To escape him, the Hon. Charles went howling over in a wide loop. Upon which Moldred pulled up his nose, hung from his prop., and sat waiting directly in his path. Then he pressed the firing-lever for a long burst as the other, sliding over from his back, came yowling down full-pelt at him. I held my breath ; a collision seemed inevitable. But the diving S.E. and the climbing S.E. flashed past each other harmlessly and for a moment lost contact.

And then there came an interruption. A shrill wail of wires made me turn my head sharply, and there, leading his formation of S.E.'s in a headlong dive on the duellists, came Captain McCrail of "A" Flight. Of different calibre from Langrish, he was not the kind of fellow to see two British pilots settling personal quarrels in German skies and do nothing about it.

Tacca - tacca - tacca - tacca ! A staccato rattle of fire burst from the guns of his five machines as the formation swept down on the duellists. But that was a warning only.

The next moment his men had broken formation and, using dog-fight tactics, caused such confusion to the two com-

batants that they were forced to stop fighting.

Then, while McCrail and two of his trusties literally hustled Moldred in one direction, the other pair from "A" Flight shepherded Charles Edward in the other. Never was there such an anti-climax to a death duel.

I looked round for the rest of my own flight then, and, catching sight of Langrish, flew over and fell in at his side. Together we scanned the sky for signs of "Woggy" Wane, but could see nothing of him. Evidently the peace-loving "Woggy" had run home by himself in sheer disgust.

All the way home my head was buzzing with a hundred theories that might account for the amazing happenings that I had recently witnessed. One thing was certain : Moldred had tried to murder Charles Edward in cold blood. (I thought it was certain then ; it did not occur to me that nobody had actually seen who fired the first burst.) I was to find, when we landed, that, so far from Moldred being accused of attempted murder, the boot was on the other leg.

CHAPTER VI

"Woggy" Wane Takes a Bow

THE witnesses being two complete flights, the squadron office was crowded almost to capacity. The atmosphere was tense with drama. At his desk sat Major Tignell-Wingate, the C.O., looking more serious than I had ever seen him. The Adjutant and the three flight-commanders were ranged behind him.

Moldred finished his accusation and stepped back. He was red and indignant, as befitted a virtuous gentleman who, while flying on the King's business, had been treacherously attacked by a subordinate. His beefy face oozed indignation at every pore.

Langrish, questioned next, confessed that he had seen nothing of the beginning of the quarrel. The C.O. frowned. He turned to me. "What about you, Trevelyan ?"

AIR STORIES

I was forced to make a similar admission. "But I am morally certain, sir," I added earnestly, "that it was Moldred who fired the first burst."

The C.O.'s frown deepened. "To be 'morally certain,' Trevelyan, is not enough. Either you saw who fired the first shot or you did not. Well?"

"I did not, sir."

The C.O. glanced round. "Can anyone else give any information?" No one could. The Major turned his eyes gravely on the Hon. Charles Edward. "Now, Sergeant Westringham, you have heard this charge of attempted murder that Lieutenant Moldred brings against you. What have you to say? Did you, or did you not, launch this dastardly attack on him?"

All eyes turned to the calm face of the Hon. Charles Edward, who had stepped forward and was now standing at attention before the desk.

"Emphatically I did not, sir," he answered in a clear voice. "When I opened fire on Lieutenant Moldred, it was solely in self-preservation. Had I not replied to his burst and joined combat with him, I should not be standing here now. I am aware that I cannot prove that he was the first to attack, and I am aware that I am equally unable to prove the further accusations that I am now going to make. None the less, I intend to make them."

THE audience strained forward: "further accusations!" What was this? They were agog to know what was coming. But the C.O.'s pencil tapped impatiently on the desk. "It will do you no good, Sergeant Westringham, to bring forward irrelevant complaints at a time like this."

"I think you will find, sir, that everything I am going to say is relevant to the charge against me."

"Carry on, then."

"Some days ago," began the Hon. Charles Edward in a low but clear voice, "the enemy in some mysterious manner became informed of the locations of our first set of wire-traps. It seemed

clear to me that someone from this squadron had imparted to them that information. I suspected Lieutenant Moldred and——"

"You suspected——!" The gasp of astonishment that went up almost drowned the C.O.'s exclamation. All eyes swivelled to Moldred, but, apart from a snort of amused contempt, the latter made no protest. The accusation was not worth refuting, his bearing seemed to imply.

"I suspected Lieutenant Moldred," Charles Edward repeated firmly. "When the locations of the traps were changed, I decided to keep a sharp look-out in case he should repeat his treachery. This afternoon he did so. Flying rear machine in our formation, he threw out of his cockpit a parachute bearing, I have no doubt, a message giving away the locations of our second series of traps.

"Seeing that parachute floating down towards the German aerodrome at Valmy-le-Bois," the Hon. Charles went on in a silence in which you could have heard a pin drop "I left the formation and spiralled down after it. I succeeded in hooking it on my pitot tube——"

At this there came a loud laugh from Moldred. "This is really too ridiculous, sir," he protested to the C.O. "I certainly did loose a parachute over the German aerodrome, but its message contained nothing more treacherous than a request for information about poor Raynes, who was taken prisoner eight days ago. The sergeant's imagination——!"

"Knowing that I now had conclusive evidence against him," went on the relentless voice of Charles Edward, "Lieutenant Moldred, who was flying rear machine, waited till I had regained my position in the formation, and then fired a burst at me, with intent to kill. A fight then took place between us, and the only regret I have in this connection is that, during that fight, the parachute became detached from my pitot tube and was lost—which means that the only evidence I have to prove my words is no longer available."

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THE Hon. Charles Edward ceased speaking, and for nearly half a minute there was silence in the room, broken only by the tap-tap of the C.O.'s pencil against the desk. More accustomed to aerial combat than courts of justice, Major Tignell-Wingate was evidently at a loss.

When he spoke, he spoke slowly, choosing his words carefully. "In the absence of any evidence, Sergeant Westringham, this counter-accusation falls to the ground. It can no more be proved than Lieutenant Moldred's own accusation of attempted murder against you. His explanation of the parachute is perfectly reasonable, and since you yourself can have no knowledge of the nature of the message it bore, you have no right whatever to accuse him of treachery to the squadron." There was a pause, and then the C.O. raised his voice slightly, and there was more than a touch of sadness in his tone.

"Gentlemen, I feel that this extremely unsavoury matter is beyond my—and our—powers of investigation, and that a General Court Martial would be more capable of sifting——"

Suddenly there was a sound of footsteps outside. The door was pushed open a few inches, and a plump face appeared in the crack. "Is 'Tiggy-Wiggy' at home, my dears?" came the cheerful inquiry in a penetrating stage-whisper.

At the sight of the assembled conclave and the Major's grave face, "Woggy" Wane flushed a deep crimson. But he was holding that in his hand which served as a passport through the press. Pushed and pulled by a dozen hands, he arrived in front of the C.O.'s desk.

"I saw this drop when those two were scrapping above Valmy aerodrome, sir, and I went down after it. I think it explains a lot."

Slowly the C.O. took the parachute from his hand and unfolded the paper attached. There was a tense hush as he ran his eye over the message. Then, in a stone-cold voice, he read it aloud:

"For the information of German Flying Officers:—

A second series of wire traps has been erected in the following positions:

K23b 54.62.

L11c 75.01.

K18a 48.39.

R42b 19.22."

Major Tignell-Wingate laid aside the incriminating paper and turned his stern gaze on the ashen Moldred.

"Moldred, you will answer for this before a court martial."

WAR is a great separator of friends. Shortly after that memorable afternoon it separated Charles Edward and me.

On receiving his commission (he was also awarded the A.F.C. in recognition of his "pioneer work in connection with the destruction of enemy aircraft," as the Gazette guardedly phrased it), Westringham was posted to another squadron, and I lost touch with him.

The next time I saw him was in London a few weeks after the Armistice. "Just been enlisting the old Governor's help in pulling wires," he told me, "for poor old Moldred. We managed to get three years knocked off his sentence. 'Tisn't as though he was a regular spy, and seven years is a long stretch to do just for a bit of spite."

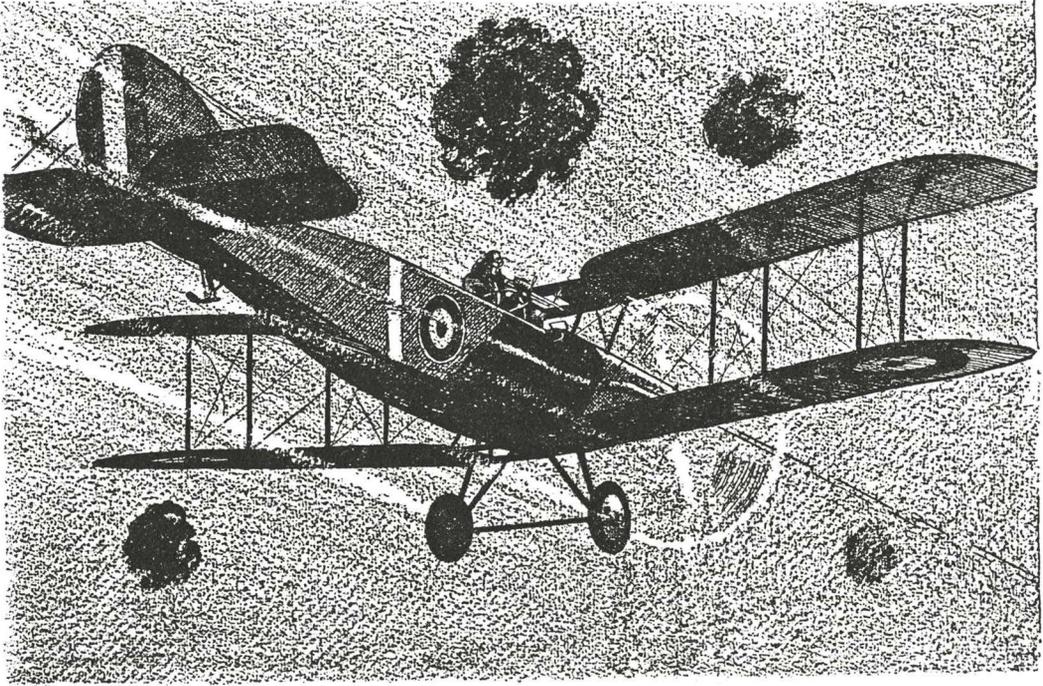
I was glad, not only because of Moldred, but also because it was clear that the Hon. Charles Edward was back again in the paternal good graces.

Another Great Air-War Mystery Story

By Lieutenant WILFRID TREMELLEN, entitled

THE MACARONI CUP

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Taking careful aim, the observer poured round after round into the gas-bag.

WINGED WARRIORS

Here is a True and Faithful Record of Life as it was Lived—and Lost—in a Typical R.F.C. Two-seater Fighter Squadron on Active Service in France. Every Incident Described is known Actually to have Occurred and all the Characters mentioned, though their Names are Disguised, Actually Fought and Flew Above the Western Front

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

Back to the Front

LEAVE was over, and Warton and Lastor stood together on deck as the crowded cross-Channel transport thumped alongside the quay at Boulogne.

The town, vociferous and smelly as ever, with its cobbles and railway trucks running through the streets, made home seem very far away. And Savage, standing in his accustomed attitude, feet wide apart, hands thrust into the pockets of an oily old waterproof, hat over one eye, and a pipe gripped between

his bared teeth, was almost the first man they saw on crossing the gangway. The familiar figure and the familiar background gave the lie to the passage of time. It seemed impossible that they had been on leave, for a whole fourteen days. Surely it was but a few hours ago that they had left the squadron, and this was but the end of a day's expedition into Eoulogne.

Something of Warton's thoughts must have been reflected in his face, for Savage, as he shook hands, remarked: "Enter one perfectly good damned soul into purgatory! All hope abandon ye who enter here! Hallo, Lasts, you're looking pretty chirpy, also! By way of

Concluding the Epic Story of a Pilot's Adventurous Life in a Fighting Squadron on the Western Front

By Capt. J. E. GURDON, D.F.C.

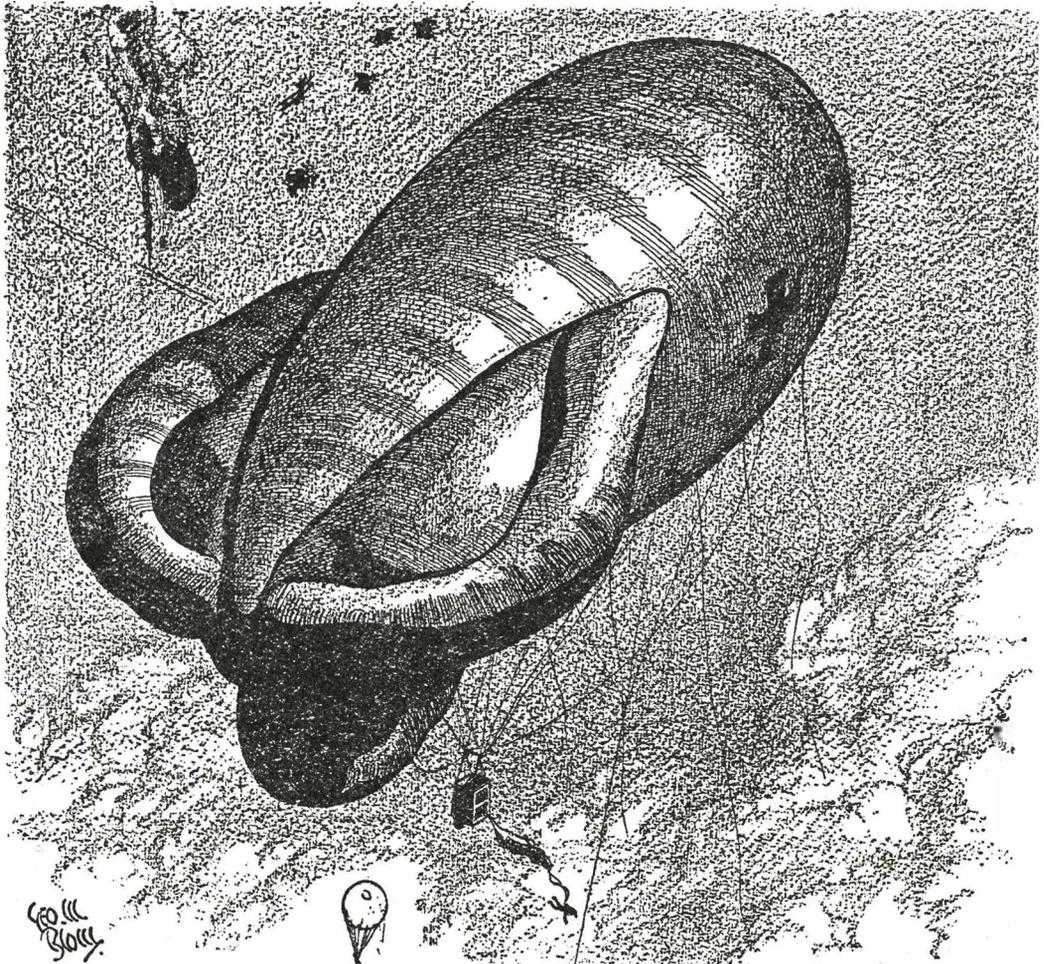
celebrating this auspicious occasion, I have engaged a table at Mony's. We will now have the odd champagne cocktail and so to dinner. The tender's just round the corner. Chuck your bags into it and come along."

As they walked towards the restaurant, Savage made several attempts to get either one or the other of his companions to talk, but, receiving only monosyllables in answer, abandoned the attempt and kept the conversation entirely to himself.

"We've been having no end of a

time since you went," he announced. "Huns simply all over the sky, and very ferocious. We've had to teach them better manners on several occasions. Old Fories has now got a round dozen, and his M.C. to boot. What's more, we haven't lost a single machine. You two will enjoy your little selves!"

When he took off his coat and sat down at the dinner table, Warton and Lastor simultaneously noticed a very new white-and-purple ribbon beneath his wings. Each seized a hand and pumped it vigorously. "Steady on,



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steady on ! ” protested Savage, “ you ’ ll damage my sword arm for life if you go on like that, Warts ! Now, what are we going to drink ? How about some *Veuve Clicquot* ? ”

Although Savage ’ s decoration had pleased them both immensely, the end of their leave still acted as a drag upon their spirits, and silences were frequent.

“ It is my firm conviction, ” Savage announced, nibbling an olive, “ that you have both fallen in love. Oh, my poor young friends. ‘ *Croyez moi j ’ ai passé par là !* ’ The same thing happened to me on leave. Only she wore pins in her waistband, so I left her for ever. Are you both going to have *sole meunière* ? ”

Warton blushed guiltily, and turned the conversation on to flying topics. They left Boulogne shortly after ten, and, on arriving at the aerodrome, went straight to bed without having entered the mess, whence issued the usual sounds of singing and scuffling.

THE next morning they reported to the Major and to Fories, both of whom inquired whether they had had a good leave ; unpacked their kit ; took a machine up and flew round the aerodrome a few times ; then settled down to the old routine of squadron life.

On the evening patrol they crossed the lines by the Forest of Nieppe, and flew towards Lille. The ground below shone gold and green in the sun, and the sea to the north shone blue and green. It was very like the afternoon before they had gone on leave. Warton found himself wondering what the Hun who had attacked them on that occasion was doing, and whether he were still alive. Then he wondered how his observer was feeling, and looked round. Lastor was slowly swinging the gun with his left hand, and screening his eyes with his right to gaze into the sun.

Standing up in his seat for a moment to look over the centre-section, Warton saw some black specks far away in the east. Instinct told him that they were Huns, also that they were approaching. He felt curiously cold and fretful as he

fired an unnecessarily long burst from his gun to warm it up ; then absurdly angry with the Huns for existing at all. As Fories skilfully manœuvred so as to get the sun behind him, Warton found himself swearing under his breath and banging his fist restlessly against his knee. It was clear that the enemy had not seen them, for they came unhesitatingly on in a straggling formation that promised but little chance of defence. So blind and careless did they appear, that Warton scented a trap, and searched every quarter of the sky for a high-flying German escort. To the east there was not another machine to be seen, but some distance behind and below them was a solitary British artillery machine. That explained the Germans ’ preoccupation ; they were too absorbed in stalking their defenceless prey to notice Fories ’ close-packed formation that had at its back the dazzling mist round the sun.

Then the enemy formation split up, two machines remaining behind and climbing steeply, the other six spreading out fanwise to surround the artillery machine and engage the pilot ’ s attention, while the two who had gained height should dive upon him. Warton chuckled when he saw this manœuvre. “ Truly, ” he thought, “ the Lord is delivering them into our hands ! ”

Fories, with the judgment born of long experience, led his companions down to within five hundred feet of the two topmost Huns. Then he dived. One of them burst into flames with a violence akin to that of an explosion. In a flash, the other turned and dived east across the nose of Warton ’ s machine. Warton followed, with his eyes glued to the Aldis sight, his fingers slowly tightening on the gun lever. A little delicate play on the rudder-bar to steady his machine, and the German scout appeared as a stationary silhouette in the centre of the ring. Warton bit his lip as his gun burst into chattering fury, and the stinging smell of oil and cordite filled his nostrils. His fire took immediate effect, for the stricken machine reared up on its tail like a

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frightened horse, then slowly rolled over sideways on to its back. A black object detached itself from the fuselage and dropped away beneath it. From the shape Warton knew that it was a man. Almost unconsciously he glanced at the altimeter, and said to himself : "Seventeen thousand ! He'll be dead before he reaches the bottom."

Meanwhile, Fories and the remainder had turned and attacked the six scouts who were stalking the artillery machine. It was a brief contest, for two went down to the first dive, and the remaining four scattered and fled east, hotly pursued by Savage. Warton, coming up to his assistance, was only in time to see one of the Germans dip his nose down and down till it pointed at the ground ; then fall vertically and vanish. Of the three that were left, he selected one, swung into his favourite position on its tail, and fired about fifty rounds. Desperate to escape, the German swooped upwards in the first part of a loop, but, before reaching the zenith, the fuselage of his machine bent at its thinnest part, the tail twisted itself and broke off, and the whole machine fell to pieces, fluttering and buckling like leaves in a gale.

That ended the fight. After they had landed, Savage walked over to Warton, shouting : "Gad ! But wasn't that a topping scrap ? Six down out of eight ! Yours were jolly good Huns, too ! One bundled out, and the other shot to pieces in the air. Guess they won't trouble us again !"

Warton was silent for a few seconds before replying : "Confound it all, but it was beastly ! You know I hate these melodrama affairs. When I shoot a Hun down I should like him to get only a Blighty one, and go into hospital for a bit. I don't want the poor wretch to fall out."

CHAPTER II

A Triplane Makes a Kill

THE following day was rainy in the morning, so Warton and Lastor visited the mess of some machine-gunners who were billeted in the neigh-

bourhood and borrowed a couple of horses. These they obtained in return for a promise that the creditors should go up for a joy-ride. They spent an hour running races over the flat fields, but the sport was brought to an end by Lastor's horse, which suddenly stopped dead and threw him heavily. Lastor picked himself up laughing, and proceeded to brush the mud from his tunic. As he did so, he gave a sharp exclamation, and fingered his right wrist tenderly. "Damn !" he said. "I've sprained my beastly wrist again. It's as weak as water. You might catch that brute of a horse, will you, Warts, and I'll get it seen to before it swells up."

By the afternoon, however, in spite of the attentions of the medical orderly, his wrist was so painful and stiff that he had to carry his arm in a sling.

It was impossible for him to swing a gun-mounting with one arm, and as Fories declared that he could not spare Warton from the next show, it was arranged that he should take up Coote, a new sergeant-observer who had recently arrived.

Warton sought the sergeant after lunch, to give him instructions, and find out what sort of an observer he might be. He discovered the man sitting in one of the hangars, working on a very crude sketch of the aerodrome. The new observer was a pleasant little man, with a small black moustache. He spoke quickly, and seemed very pleased that he was going to fly with Warton. The latter admired his artistic effort, whereupon Coote produced a large packet from one of his pockets.

"Perhaps you'd like to look through these, sir," he remarked rather self-consciously, "they're some drawings by my little son. Cute little nipper he is, sir. Only a six-year-old."

Warton examined the scrawling reproductions of cows and railway trains with as much appearance of enthusiasm as he could assume, made a few banal remarks, and handed them back.

"Thought you'd think 'em good," said Coote, chuckling with satisfaction. "He's a rare un is my little nipper !"

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Because he was not in the least anxious to meet any Huns that afternoon, Warton felt that it was inevitable that they should do so. In this surmise he was correct, for hardly had the patrol crossed the lines before they encountered a veritable swarm of Fokker triplanes and Pfalz scouts, that seemed to appear from every part of the sky. In the ensuing "dog-fight," Warton was kept busy trying to remedy a chronic double feed in his Vickers gun. The little sergeant, with a piece of half-chewed string hanging from a corner of his mouth, worked feverishly at the back, rattling the magazine on its post, and firing drum after drum at any machine that came near. But his shooting, though enthusiastic, was inaccurate.

WARTON saw very little of the fight. Unconsciously, he used stick and rudder for dive and turn, the while he wrestled with the crank handle of his Vickers gun. Whenever he took a hurried survey of the sky, he received a confused impression of small black-crossed machines darting here and there with Fories or Savage in pursuit. He saw one German scout spin slowly down in flames, and several others dive east to take refuge in the clouds. The number of machines was considerably diminished by the time he had remedied the stoppage, and was testing his gun with a short burst. Coote, at the same time, was leaning over the side pouring tracer into a Hun several thousand feet below. Above the din caused by the two Huns, Warton heard a sharp crackling noise and something burst through the fuselage behind him, ripping splinters from the wicker-work of his seat. Coote abruptly stopped firing and fell back against Warton's head, clutching at the empty air with his upraised hands. Then he crumpled up like a doll and lurched forward on to the floor of his cockpit.

At the instant at which the bullet struck his seat, Warton had kicked hard at the rudder-bar and skidded away to one side. But over his shoulder he saw a Fokker triplane, painted with black

and yellow stripes, that swung round on his tail, almost without ceasing to fire. Warton turned and twisted, trying every expedient he knew to shake off the triplane, but it was all to no avail. The German followed every movement, playing with his two guns upon Warton's machine as with a hose. From below, where they had dived to chase home the stragglers, Fories and Savage watched the duel with anxious eyes, unable to offer any assistance. It was Warton's aim to induce his opponent to overshoot, so as to enable him to use the front gun, but neither loops nor rolls served to lure the German on or to confuse him. At the end of every manœuvre he was still in the same position, not twenty yards from Warton's tail-plane, firing short bursts that frayed the wings and ricocheted from the engine cowling.

Warton had almost forgotten Coote lying motionless in the back seat, so he was the more amazed to see his figure first stir uneasily, then stagger gropingly upright. Coote's jaw hung down and saliva dripped from his open mouth; as he stood up, blood trickled from his face, down the length of his flying-coat on to the floor. Swaying like a drunken man, he pushed up the goggles from his eyes with one hand and felt round the mounting with the other until his fingers closed uncertainly on the spade-grip of the Lewis gun. Slowly, as though shifting an immense weight, he swung the gun round towards the triplane. Then he laid his cheek against it and aligned his sights.

Instinctively Warton steadied his machine for the shot and waited. The Lewis gun clamoured with its irritated laugh for a few seconds while the blazing tracer leapt across at the German. Warton watched for its effect, panting with excitement; then muttered, "Ah, Good man! Good man!" as the triplane swerved aside and hung poised in the air, before it spun slowly and flutteringly down. When he looked again into the observer's cockpit, he saw Coote lying on his stomach across the seat, his knees gathered in close

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beneath him, his arms held limply up by the bracing wires. Warton throttled back his engine and shouted, but received no reply.

When he reached the aerodrome he helped to lift the wounded man out and carry him into the squadron office, where he was laid on a roll of blankets. The little man was still conscious, and whispering feebly for morphia. The doctor cut away his clothes and revealed a round jagged wound in the left side just below the ribs.

"Explosive bullet!" he ejaculated, and stood up. "He won't live five minutes."

Warton, in obedience to a request from the dying man's eyes, knelt down to catch whatever words he could say. "Goo' scrap, sir!" The words came in a strange cracked voice. "I—got 'im—got 'im——"

The last word trailed off into silence, as he slowly drew one hand out of his tunic pocket and handed Warton the packet of drawings which he had displayed that afternoon. A ghostly smile flickered round his lips, and his head fell back as the last breath sighed in his throat.

Very white in the face, Warton rose to his feet and turned to the doctor. "You say it was an explosive bullet?" he asked.

The doctor nodded. "Yes. The dirty swine!" he replied.

In that moment there came to Warton a realisation of the meaning of war, and he thereby became many years older. Without removing his helmet, he sat down in his hut and wrote to Coote's wife, describing the fight, and enclosing the child's drawings.

CHAPTER III

Balloon "Strafing"

FOR a week after that incident he did not fly, for the Major insisted that he should wait until Lastor's wrist permitted him to use a gun again. All the efforts of Lastor and Savage to dispel his depression, and even Ryeward's clumsy sympathy, failed to have any

effect. He sat on his bed, smoking incessantly, and racking his memory for incidents in the fight that might point to carelessness or lack of skill on his part. He came to the conclusion that in no wise was he to blame for Coote's death, and his fury against the German for using explosive bullets was thereby not diminished. Whereas formerly he had regarded fighting in the air rather in the light of a sport than a serious business, and had wished his opponents no worse ill than a slight wound, he now prayed for the death of every Hun he should encounter.

One evening, Savage, who had been watching him thoughtfully, broke the silence by saying: "Yes, Warts, war is a dirty game, isn't it?"

"This war is!" returned Warton emphatically. "Why can't men fight fair? Hang it all, we're supposed to be civilised!"

"Exactly," Savage continued, "and civilisation simply means a refinement in your methods of hurting your neighbour, both in war and peace. Chivalry had as its origin the fact that most men, on being taken prisoner, would sooner lose their money than their life."

THE next occasion on which Warton and Lastor were required to go over the lines was for the purpose of strafing balloons, a job which pleased Warton but little, for he had set his heart upon shooting more machines down in flames. However, he derived some comfort by obtaining permission to carry four Cooper's bombs, with which he hoped to do some damage. They were fortunate, inasmuch as the day of the balloon strafe dawned upon a sky in which floated large cumulus clouds, such as would hide their approach from Archie. Orders had been received that all enemy balloons between two pin-points lying about eight miles apart should be driven down and forced to remain on the ground for the period of an hour.

Fories left the aerodrome with his flight about two hours after dawn, and noted the position of each balloon

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along the line, before he climbed through the clouds. With a strong north wind behind him, he intended to rush the balloons from north to south, forcing each one down in the shortest possible time, and trusting to his tremendous ground speed to invalidate the accuracy of fire from the ground. There were five balloons on the strip of ground allotted to them, each one wagging its head solemnly into the wind at a height of four thousand feet. It seemed almost as though an attack had been expected, for over the line itself, while still above the clouds, the four machines were subjected to very searching Archie fire.

Fories flew straight on, utterly ignoring the black puffs that stained the white floor of mist. On previous occasions Archie had never caused Warton any anxiety, but now he found himself jumping at every burst, and even ducking his head whenever a crack louder than the others accompanied the appearance of a ball of smoke close to his machine. He pulled himself together with an effort, and remembered that he had not been sleeping well recently. Also he resolved that, before going over the lines next time, he would drink a strong whisky and soda.

By the time the patrol had reached the balloon line, the sky behind them was black and pimped by the lingering smoke, and every second brought an explosion closer to one or other of the machines. Warton was suffering from an agony of fear; his knees trembled, and he whimpered like a frightened child at every sound.

THE sight of the first balloon, fat and tantalising, restored a certain measure of his old enthusiasm. He was glad when Fories shut off his engine and fell away in a vertical side-slip to get within diving distance of the gas-bag. He followed suit, then took careful aim and poured round after round at the paunch-like envelope. His fire had not the slightest effect, but the balloon began slowly to descend. Looking down, he saw a crowd of men running about in a field directing what looked like a

large trolley, which moved slowly along its rails, hauling down the balloon as it went. The ground in the vicinity of the trolley sparkled with gun-flashes.

Excited beyond the common, Warton failed to notice that his companions were no longer about him, but were engaging a balloon over a mile away. He followed the sinking balloon down, repeatedly diving to within a few yards, then turning so as to bring Lastor's gun to bear upon it. The two balloonists jumped out and floated down with their parachutes, looking like two jellyfishes in clear water, but Warton never abated the fury of his attack. He was determined to set the balloon on fire, and bitter tears of vexation lay cold upon his cheeks as burst after burst was fired without producing the slightest apparent result. The lower he went the thicker came the storm of bursting shells, that filled the air with an intermittent crackling like the rending of a gigantic canvas. Wicked little red bullets chased each other past his wings, and strings of green stars rose from the ground like the bubbles in a glass of soda-water. At a thousand feet, Warton could see the antlike activity of the men below him, and the progress of the trolley along its rails.

It was then that he remembered the bombs that hung waiting upon his racks. Leaving the balloon, he dived for the ground and raced across the field at a few hundred feet, jerking the release lever as he went. Two of the bombs dropped close to the group of Germans, obscuring them with heavy yellow smoke; the other two fell harmlessly upon a neighbouring wood. More furious than ever was the defensive fire, and the explosions from the gun muzzles mingled with those of the shells with a noise as of the banging of innumerable doors. Many of the bracing wires curled loose from their turnbuckles between the planes; splinters flew from the struts, and a gaping rent appeared in one bottom plane.

Warton was sobbing quietly to himself and twitching with almost every muscle, as he sprayed the boundaries of the

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field with fire from his front gun. Lastor, standing serenely up behind him, was still firing incendiary ammunition at the gas-bag. Unable to bear the strain any longer, and having used every cartridge in the belt, Warton turned west at one thousand feet and zigzagged away. Lastor banged him on the right shoulder, and he was surprised at the sudden acute pain he experienced as he turned round. But the sight that met his eyes made him forget the pain, for instead of the hideous bean-shaped balloon, a cone of scarlet flame, trailing volumes of dense black smoke, was falling to the earth. Warton watched it until it struck the ground and lay smouldering fitfully at the foot of some trees ; then he sighed gently and smiled as his eyes met Lastor's.

WITH the exception of a few random shots, they were not worried on their way back to the lines. Having reached British territory, Warton relaxed the tense watch he had hitherto maintained, and became promptly aware of a numbness that reached from his shoulder-blade upwards. He tried to raise his arm, but was stopped by a stabbing pain that made him catch his breath. The inside of his sleeve, also, was warm and wet, and his vest was clinging to his back, which burned as though it were red hot. He glanced at his watch ; nine o'clock. It occurred to him that his father, at that moment, was just settling down to his morning paper and breakfast. For no reason, the thought appeared particularly funny. He threw back his head with a laugh, but the laugh was turned into a very different ejaculation as the movement stretched the wound in his shoulder. For a few seconds every visible object seemed to swing rapidly round his head, and the sky was scarlet instead of blue. The thought that he was going to faint sobered him considerably, and he stared fixedly ahead at the distant aerodrome, unconsciously singing to himself.

When he had landed and stopped the engine, he clambered hastily out, missed his footing on the plane, and

lurched heavily against the bracing wires, where he stood, swaying and chuckling with merriment. Then he noticed that Lastor was being helped down from his seat by two mechanics.

"Got a bullet in the heel," explained Lastor cheerfully, hopping towards him on one foot. The battered and bullet-riddled Bristol, Lastor's comic movements, the anxious faces of the mechanics, all combined in Warton's eyes to form a picture of inexpressible humour.

"What ! You hit too !" he shouted at Lastor between his bursts of laughter. "So glad !"

Then darkness broke like a surf over his head, and he pitched forward into the arms of his flight-sergeant. It was but a brief fainting spell. He came to, to find himself lying on the blankets in the squadron office, while the Major supported his head and endeavoured to pour some brandy down his throat. Lastor was sitting on a chair in the corner, having his left foot bandaged by the medical orderly.

"How are you feeling, old man !" said the Major. "A bit better, eh ? That's fine ! Now we'll send you and Lastor down to the clearing station, and I expect you'll go home."

"But I don't want to go home !" Warton burst out fretfully. "I want to come back. Can't you arrange for me to come back ?"

"Oh, yes, I expect so," the Major answered soothingly. "Now, don't you worry. It was a jolly good show of yours. Here's your batman. Tell him what things you want to take with you, and dictate your report to Astley here."

So Warton lay back and haltingly gave an account of the morning's events. With a little assistance, he walked to the tender, where he sat grinning rather foolishly at Lastor. Every member of the squadron in turn looked in to say a few words, but it was not until the tender had started to move down the road that Warton remembered that he had not seen Savage.

"Hi, stop ! Stop !" he yelled, banging the driver on the head with his left arm. The Major came running up.

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"What the deuce is up now?" he inquired breathlessly. Warton explained, and for ten minutes the pair sat silently in the tender waiting for Fories and Savage to return. Warton's mind was just beginning to form vague apprehensions, when the two machines appeared and landed, and a few minutes later Savage, with his leather coat flying in the wind and his big boots clattering as he ran, galloped across the aerodrome and scrambled into the tender.

"Right away!" he shouted at the driver, then turned to Warton and said, "Hallo, boy! They've only just told me about you. You are a silly ass, you know. I thought you were dead. Whatever made you go down to the ground like that?"

"I dunno," Warton replied. "I kind of got annoyed."

"Well, anyway, you got the old sausage," continued Savage. "And now how are you feeling? It's only a bit of a cut in the shoulder, isn't it? You, Lasts, too, with a punctured heel! 'Strewth, I could shake the pair of you! Anyway, I'm coming with you to the C.C.S. to make sure you don't start any nonsense on the way. Why, what the devil's that thing coming down the road?"

Warton looked back and saw a small figure hotly pursuing them in a cloud of dust. They stopped the tender and waited. "Well I'm darned, if it isn't old Ryeward!" exclaimed Savage, as the figure approached, and Ryeward, very hot and with his helmet held on top of his head by the elastic of his goggles, leapt at the step of the tender and fell at full length upon the floor.

"Thought I'd come and see how you were," he announced, as soon as he was able to speak; and thereafter sat solemnly staring at Warton, alternately growling and puffing his cheeks in and out.

The Casualty Clearing Station was only a few miles from the aerodrome, so Savage and Ryeward left the wounded pair at the gate, with promises to return on the following day. Warton and Lastor were taken into a large, cool

tent and examined by a brisk little surgeon who was continually dropping his gold-rimmed *pince-nez*.

Lastor's case was soon disposed of. "Nothing much wrong with you, young man," the doctor announced. "A complete rest and a little care will soon put you right." But at the sight of Warton's wound he shook his head. "Hum!" he said. "Well, as you want to stay in France, I'll try not to send you down to the base. But we'll have to open up that wound of yours first, and see just what damage has been done. Now follow the orderly, both of you, and get to bed."

CHAPTER IV

"To Confound the Huns"

WARTON'S wound healed quickly, after the cleaning operation, and on the fifth day after he had been hit he was packed off with Lastor to Wimeraux for convalescence. But the hospital routine soon palled, and at the end of a fortnight they persuaded the doctors that nothing could do them more good than a little flying, and so obtained permission to wire to the squadron for a tender. Instead of a tender, the C.O.'s car arrived with Savage and Ryeward full of enthusiasm and pleasure at the prospect of taking them home. "Cheero, boys!" Savage greeted them. "So you've got tired of leading an idle life, and are going to return to your languishing comrades. As on a previous occasion, I have taken the liberty of engaging a table at Mony's. We will proceed thither forthwith."

Over the soup, Warton noticed three stars, carefully tarnished to make them look old, that ornamented each shoulder of Savage's tunic. "Well I'm darned!" he exclaimed. "Why do you always wait to display your new and shining honours until we're having dinner at this place? First your ribbon, now this! Please explain."

"The explanation is simple enough," answered Savage, trying to speak carelessly, but only partially succeeding. "Fories went home two days ago,

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and they've given me his flight. By the way, he was sorry he couldn't look you up, but he was too busy."

" "So this silly ass is now our flight commander ! " interposed Ryeward, opening his lips for the first time.

The remainder of the dinner was spent discussing the new development, and the possibilities of the flight. "What I first want to do," said Savage, counting the items on his fingers, "is to teach the beggars to fly ; none of them know anything about it at present. Then to fly in formation ; then to learn the country ; then to recognise a Hun when they see one ; and, finally, to shoot him down when they do recognise him. All that will take time, and, meanwhile, I suggest, Warts, that you and I, with the co-operation of our skilful observers, do voluntary two-machine shows for the express purpose of confounding all Huns of every size, shape, manner, and description, that defile the heavens by their presence. No ; I'm speaking seriously now. Is it a bargain ? "

"It is," replied Warton fervently. Then the four leant across the table and put their heads together to discuss ways and means of attack, until the lights went out as a hint that it was time for them to leave the restaurant.

ON their arrival at the camp, which was greeted by much yelling and cheering, a number of excited individuals seized Warton and carried him into the mess, where he was forced to sit in a very dazed condition upon the table. An air-raid was in progress at the time, so the electric light from the workshop lorry had been cut off, and the room was illuminated only by a candle mounted in the neck of an empty bottle. The flame, set flickering by a draught, threw long, dancing shadows and revealed strange expressions on the men's faces. Puzzled to find a meaning in all this uproar, Warton stared smiling at the Major, who was advancing towards him with a great display of solemnity. Still at a loss for a clue, he sat perfectly still while the Major pinned to the lapel

of his tunic an enormous M.C. ribbon, consisting of a strip of blanket with a bar of violet ink running down the centre.

"Telegram from Brigade dated the fifth inst.," intoned the Major, "announces the award of the Military Cross to Lieutenant J. Warton for——"

He was interrupted by Warton, who jumped from the table and bolted through the door, intending to barricade himself in his hut. But he was restrained by Savage and dragged back.

It was late in the night by the time he went to bed. On the first occasion that he saw himself in a mirror, with the decoration sewn beneath his wings, he was obliged to suppress a smile of satisfaction ; but after two days the ribbon appeared no stranger than the wings themselves.

Under the command of Savage, "A" Flight found itself compelled to live more energetically than had ever been necessary while Fories had led them. Being himself a most finished pilot, an excellent shot, and wise beyond his years in his recognition of the importance of work, Savage chased his men up into the sky when they would rather have been playing ping-pong, or led practice formations when the weather was too bad for even a line patrol. At this some grumbled openly, until his sarcasm beat them into silence. But the value of his training was made manifest when, with a formation of six, as against the four that Fories had usually handled, he destroyed nine machines and a balloon on one patrol.

The fact that not one man during that morning's fighting lost his position in formation, or placed himself in a dangerous situation, gave ample testimony to the discipline with which he controlled his flight. "A" Flight was proud of itself, for every pilot in the flight, after being led by Savage for a fortnight, had shot down at least three enemy machines, and, moreover, had an excellent chance of surviving his six months in France. From being dissatisfied with the incessant practice flying, they became enthusiastic, and at every minute of the day some machine

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of "A" Flight might be seen diving on the target, or having its guns tested on the range. The success of his methods was reflected by the mechanics, who took a greater pride than ever in the particular machine for which they were responsible and the number of Huns accounted for by its pilot. It was an almost unheard-of event for an engine in Savage's flight to fail in the execution of its duty.

Whenever he was not flying, Savage worked in the sheds, superintending the rigging of his machines, or making small improvements in the cockpits and gun-mountings. At the end of ten days he knew the family history of each man, and most of their personal ambitions.

Warton, during this period, had done no flying over the lines, as the Major considered that he needed a rest. However, he assisted Savage with the ground work, and with the training of new pilots in the air.

When, eventually, he obtained permission to resume war flying, he fastened the single streamer of a deputy leader to the rudder of his machine, and followed Savage with the enthusiasm of one week's active service combined with the experience of six months.

CHAPTER V Death of a Hero

AFTER a few days' flying, Warton began to understand the secret of Savage's success, and to realise that it was not only knowledge of aerial tactics and the use of sun and clouds upon which he relied, but also upon knowledge of the German pilot. The Huns always seemed to do what Savage wanted them to, while of tricks and ruses he had no end. In the course of three weeks' flying, Savage never made one mistake in leadership, and his flight added another eighteen enemy casualties to its list.

"I haven't made a mistake yet, old son," Savage remarked one day, pensively, "but when I do, it'll be the finish of me."

Instead of moving into the flight commander's hut with Dawson and Colley, who led "B" and "C" Flights respectively, he insisted on remaining in his old hut with Warton and Lastor. This decision received particular approval from Ryeward, who was almost genial throughout an entire evening on account of it.

Because of his excellent work—he already had fifteen confirmed victories to his credit—Savage was recommended for a bar to his M.C. A few days later the bar was awarded to the Wing Equipment Officer, who had the same name, and who had won the Military Cross with the infantry.

Savage affected to be much amused by the error, but his speech became even more bitter and sarcastic from that day. "Decorations, my son," he remarked grandly to Lastor, "form an economical way of paying a man through his pride instead of his pocket. It is more politic to give a widow the cross her husband has won than the amount of money he could have earned as a beggar in the streets."

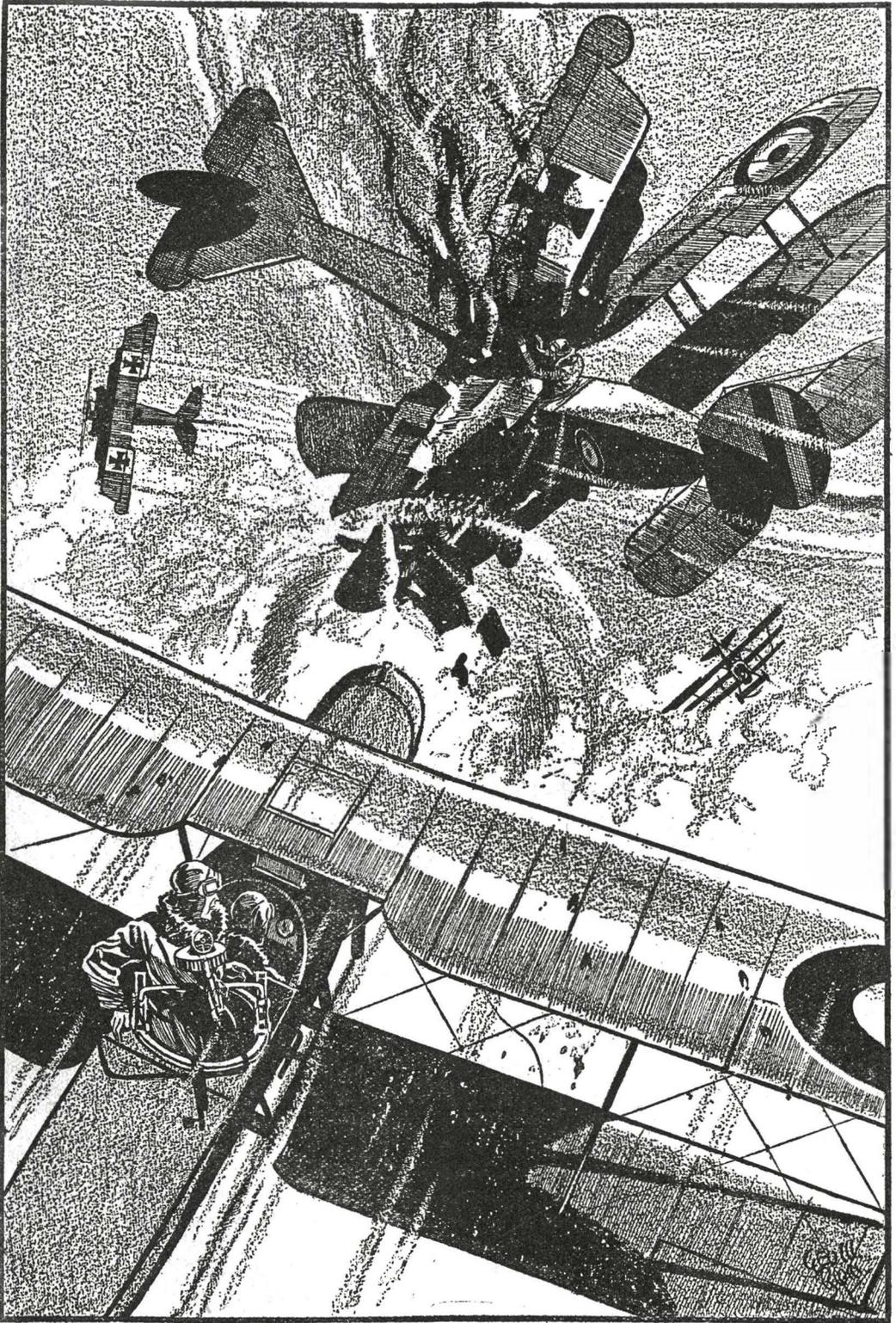
But the strain of his unsparing efforts was already telling on Savage, and, lately, he had formed a habit of starting nervously at every sound. The Major, who had been watching him closely for some time, approached him on the subject of returning to England.

"Not at all necessary, sir," answered Savage. "I am merely practising so that when I go home I may win sympathy from the sentimental by playing the part of a nerve-racked airman."

The Major laughed, and decided to allow him another week before sending in his papers for Home Establishment.

Warton, too, was getting very worried over Savage's condition, and taxed him with overwork. "You know you can't keep it up, old man," he said seriously. "You're averaging about eight hours flying a day with all these practice formations and stuff, and you're making an absolute wreck of yourself. Look here, why not cut out these extra shows you do with me? You'll be going home soon, and neither of us really wants any

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The two machines met, triplane and its attacker, mixed to form one indistinguishable mass of flaming wreckage.

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more Huns. The flight's as good as any in France, so——"

Savage interrupted him by putting an arm round his shoulders. "Say you're afraid I'll make some silly ass mistake and get us both done in, and be done with it!" he remarked.

"Don't be a fool!" Warton replied angrily. "You know I think nothing of the sort."

"Then don't worry about me. I'm going to fly until the hour before I leave France, if I have to sweat blood from fear to do it. And, remember, that if ever I do get you into a mess, I'll see that you get out of it all right."

Warton grumbled further, but abandoned the argument.

FOR six days the routine of squadron life ran on as usual. Then Savage, much against his inclinations, was persuaded to take a day off and join Warton in a bathing expedition to Rue-sur-Plage. The outing made a pleasant change, but the urge for constant action was still upon Savage, and as they returned to the aerodrome in the late afternoon, lolling luxuriously in the Major's car, which he had lent them for the occasion, he suddenly announced, "I'm going to fly this evening," and chanted airily:

*"Wilt fly with me, oh valiant Warts,
And strive to shoot a Hun down?
For, methinks, we really oughts
Kill somebody ere sun down!"*

adding, "Pretty good, that, for an improvisation, what?"

"Don't be a silly ass!" Warton answered. "Hanged if I let you fly to-day! Hallo! There's the Major doing semaphore from the office. We'd better stop and see what's wrong."

The Major strolled across the road and leant against the door of his car.

"I didn't expect to see you people back so soon," he observed. "However, now you are here, you'll be able to carry out an idea of mine. Savage, your H.E. papers are through, and you'll be going home to-morrow, or at any rate the next day. I propose,

therefore, to have a good dinner and binge to-night, to give you a send-off, and to inaugurate the reign of our new flight commander — Captain Warton. World without end. Amen!"

With a nod and a smile, the Major left them in order to explore the cook-house, and to threaten the cook with field punishment for all eternity if he allowed any caterpillars to be served with the vegetables that night.

Warton defended himself from the physical congratulations that were showered upon him by saying, "Well, that settles your little scheme of going over the lines this evening, Savage."

"It does not!" replied Savage promptly. "I shall leave the ground in a quarter of an hour's time. Are you coming with me, Captain Warton?"

"Don't be a blasted idiot, Savage!" Warton retorted. "You're going home to-morrow."

"Besides," added Lastor, who had joined them, "it's beastly unlucky to fly the day before going on H.E."

But Savage turned all arguments aside with jokes and laughter, while he sent an orderly to his flight-sergeant with instructions that the usual two machines should have their engines started. Very sulkily Warton changed his field-boots for a pair of big fleeced-lined thigh-boots, and wound a long woollen scarf round his neck, while Savage maintained an incessant flow of conversation.

"Cheer up, you two funeral mutes. Where the devil did I put my gloves? One more show, then Blighty and a month's leave! Dinners at the Savoy, Blackie, where you and I will feast like kings on a couple of meat coupons. Theatres, and perhaps a dance or two. Great Cæsar's ghost, why does that fool of a batman always throw my goggles under the bed! Meanwhile, Blackie, we go up for our last show! Buck up, all of you; I'm going over to get the engines run up."

He departed, slamming the door and whistling villainously out of tune.

Once he was in the air, Warton's spirits rose, and he comforted himself

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with the thought that Savage was not likely to cross the lines, or that if he did there was no reason to suppose that he would run into danger. It was part of Warton's flying creed that his leader never made a mistake. He flew very close to Savage, and almost abreast with him, while Lastor and Ryeward signalled to each other with their arms. Along the line there were no signs of activity save for an occasional shell burst. The air was dead calm, and the horizon was encircled by a ring of vivid blue mist. They climbed steadily for an hour, much to Warton's annoyance, for he knew that Savage would never have troubled to climb fifteen thousand feet if it had not been his intention to cross the lines.

At seven o'clock they were well over the lines, dodging "Archie" bursts and working their way gradually south. Evening mists, rising from the ground, shrouded the west with layer after layer of golden gauze, through which canals gleamed or the forests showed sombrely. Windows from the towns in the east glittered like fireflies. On their own level, and flying into the west, Warton saw eight Huns, like white grains of wheat against the horizon. Long shadows thrown by the sinking sun darkened the earth, and he shivered. High above them, in the north, hung a formation of many machines. One glance told Warton that they also were hostile, and he concluded that Savage, under such circumstances, would never dare to attack the approaching eight. It was clear that they must get away north-west at once if they wished to avoid an almost suicidal fight. But Savage turned east and flew to meet the enemy.

Warton, realising that he could not have seen the formation in the north, dived, firing a red light so as to attract his attention. There was no answer from Savage's machine, for both he and Ryeward were concentrated on the approaching combat. Warton was desperate with anxiety and cold with fear. Every second drew them closer

into a situation from which there seemed no hope of escape. He knew that Savage was making a fatal mistake, but possessed no means of warning him. Again he pushed the throttle forward, but this time he did not overtake Savage, for the latter had already started his attack, and was diving into the formation below him.

Warton looked once at the Fokker triplanes, where they hung overhead, circling and waiting, then he turned his back on them and followed Savage. Something fluttered brokenly downwards as Savage rose after his first dive, and wheeled to attack again. Warton was trembling violently, and missed his man. The Fokkers came down boldly enough, for the odds were all in their favour, and the two British machines were soon surrounded by streaks of blue smoke tracer that leapt at them from every angle. Warton settled down to fight and shoot, and his mind became a blank screen upon which alone was registered an impression of flashing wings and machines that climbed, attacked, and fell away. But always he kept close to the tail of his leader's machine, leaving his own to be guarded by Lastor.

From time to time a Hun dropped flaming, or plunged devilishly into space below. The sky darkened, and he heard his ragged planes groan as they were racked by the strain of fighting. Lastor had long since expended all his ammunition, and hurled everything movable at his opponents. He now sat with his arms folded, watching Savage's machine, whence also there came no signs of gunfire. The two machines danced round each other, up and down in spirals and circles, dodging one German scout, only to fly into the sights of another. Bullets did not come so thickly, for some of the Huns had fired every round they had, others were trying to remedy gun stoppages, while the rest were reserving their fire, waiting for a chance to kill. Yet it was only a question of time, as Warton knew, for the fight held them like a spell from which it was impossible to break away.

The movements of flying, the combina-

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tion of eye and muscle, had become so automatic that Warton had little consciousness of the events that were taking place around him. He was only tired, hopeless, and faintly anxious for the whole affair to be over and done with. Then he saw a triplane a few yards in front and above, that was dipping its nose until he could see along the engine-cowling into the muzzles of its guns. The thought flashed through his mind : "He's got me !"

Across from the flank, down on top of the triplane, there rushed another machine. Warton had just realised from the streamers on its tail and a figure that stood up frantically waving in the back seat, that it was Savage, when, with a crash, the sight of which hurt him through every nerve in his body, the two machines met. Triplane and its attacker, mixed to form one indistinguishable mass of wreckage that fell, burning furiously. Heedless of every danger, Warton circled round and round the scene of the collision, watching the spark of fire grow fainter in the mists below, until it was finally extinguished. When he looked up again, he was alone in the sky.

Beyond the western horizon the sun was disappearing behind a bank of scarlet-edged clouds ; and as he flew towards it, Warton's lips were repeating over and over again one phrase : "You silly ass ! You did it on purpose !"

CHAPTER VI

The Squadron Moves Up

FOR a month after this incident Warton led his flight on the usual patrols and escorts without sustaining any casualty, but also without any brilliant success. Savage had trained his men so well in formation flying and the elements of aerial fighting that Warton could find very little to teach them. He knew that under all ordinary circumstances they could be relied upon to look after themselves, and he carefully avoided any conflict which might put too great a strain upon their abilities.

Mechanical as his flying had become, he still took a pleasure in it. The fulfilment of his ground duties was irksome in the extreme, yet he attended to them conscientiously, though with a certain lassitude that was at once remarked by the Major.

"That affair with Savage has knocked all the stuffing out of him," he observed to the Recording Officer. "I'll have to send him home in a week or two, or else he'll crack up completely." Warton's pilots trusted him and admired his leadership. "Old Warts is as safe as houses," they said. "Can't imagine him doing anything rash."

With Lastor, he discussed Savage's death many times and at length. Lastor put the whole thing down to impulsiveness and obstinacy.

"You remember," he said, "that it was just as we came in sight of the aerodrome that Savage said he was going up? That was just a passing impulse ; but when he heard that his H.E. papers were through, he persisted out of sheer obstinacy. As to the fight itself—well, all we can say is that Savage, for the first time in his life, made a bad mistake. He didn't see those Huns above us. When he found out what an awful mess he'd led us into, he fought until all his ammunition was gone ; realised that it was simply a question of time before both of us got shot down ; and then smashed into that Hun to give us a chance of clearing off. He knew that the sight would upset the Huns just as much as it did us, and he calculated on our getting away in consequence. Of course, it meant killing Ryeward as well as himself, but then Ryeward would have been killed in any case, for the Huns would certainly have shot us both down. I'm absolutely certain that Savage thought the whole thing out, and used his brain up to the last second."

"Jove ! But he was a man !" exclaimed Warton softly.

AFTER three weeks, Lastor was awarded the M.C., while Warton received a bar to his, whereat he was not

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a little surprised. He laughed as he pinned the little ornament to his tunic. "Net gain from my visit to this country," he said; "a ribbon, a rosette, and a rotten bad temper!"

With Savage gone, Warton came to rely more and more on Lastor for companionship, conversation, and even for opinions. By degrees, under the influence of Lastor's imperturbable views on life, and carefully concealed energy, Warton came to take a new interest in his work. He reviewed his past achievements and his talents; the destruction of twenty-three German machines, and a happy knack of shooting straight. Anything he might acquire in the future must result from his knowledge of aerial fighting and careful use of a machine-gun. At first vague, but growing steadily in purpose and intensity, came the desire to gain further recognition and win another decoration. The chances seemed all in his favour, for he knew himself to be an expert in the handling of a fighting machine, and, with Lastor as observer, he felt that nothing short of overwhelming odds or inevitable bad luck could defeat him. For a long time he debated in his mind whether to take the risk; but the desire to see D.S.O. written after his name was so strong that the result of that debate was almost settled in his own mind before ever he had started it.

Thereafter he flew with a new enthusiasm, and faced the world with a curious air of suppressed triumph. The Major quickly noticed his change in manner, and was puzzled by it. He discussed the matter, as was his custom, with Astley. "I can't understand that fellow," he said thoughtfully, watching Warton as he strode whistling past the squadron office. "A few weeks ago he was going about looking like Hamlet in flying clothes. Now he's as pleased with life as a cherub possessed of the devil. He doesn't buck himself with drink, does he?" he added anxiously.

Astley handed him a small slip of paper. "No, sir," he said. "Look at his mess bill."

The Major frowned and tapped the

paper with his fingers as though he were disappointed with it. "Hm!" he said at length. "He's a fair whale for lime juice, and that's about the worst one can say about him. Anyway, he seems to have got his nerve back." The Major turned to the consideration of a pile of papers that lay upon his desk, and left the problem of Warton's new behaviour unsolved.

FOR some time past there had been rumours of a move to another aerodrome on the same part of the front, but closer up to the lines. The Major had maintained a discreet silence on this subject, but it was felt that his silence was ominous, and groups of men in the mess whispered darkly of an approaching offensive, of extra shows conducted from a base within shelling distance of the line, of an aerodrome pitted with bomb holes, where they would be required to sleep under canvas and land their machines cross-wind. At length the name of their destination was divulged, and Warton flew over to inspect their new quarters. He discovered that, to a certain extent, the squadron's fears had been well grounded, for the aerodrome, although unmarked by pits, was small and unsuitable, while the prospective site of the officers' quarters consisted of a virgin cornfield swarming with insects. The hangars were new, but there was no transport accommodation, and the nearest water supply was in a village more than a mile distant. With the help of some engineers, the ground was cleared, tents erected, and a rough lorry park constructed. Then the squadron moved in, execrated the wilderness in appropriate terms, and proceeded to make itself as comfortable as possible.

Warton was sharing a tent with Lastor. When their camp beds had been fixed up, and kit unpacked, they set to work digging a trench outside the canvas and spraying the surrounding grass with Pyrene to kill the insects. But at night they discovered that the tent was still infested with them, mostly earwigs, which crawled up the

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sloping walls into the apex, whence they fell in showers whenever the canvas was shaken.

For a week the men laboured erecting wooden huts for the squadron office, the armourers' hut, and the headquarters' workshop. A keen system of honest thieving was instituted, whereby the material for each hut was used for the construction of its neighbour. On the day that the armourers' hut was completed, it was irreparably wrecked by a machine which landed on its roof. The pilot was unhurt, but that fact did not serve to abate the armament officer's fury.

CHAPTER VII

The Last Show

EVERY day when he was over the lines, Warton searched the sky and the earth for an opportunity to distinguish himself, but he was determined that his flight should not participate in the danger. The routine and humorous incidents of life on the ground amused him, yet, at the back of his mind, there remained, strong and persistent, the desire for another decoration.

Instead of the offensive patrols which had formerly been allotted to "Vic" Squadron, they were now required to escort bombing raids, carried out by a large number of machines from a low altitude. The usual objective of these raids was a German aerodrome. Operating in conjunction with the bombers and escort, there was always a large number of single-seaters, which descended to within a few hundred feet of the ground and used their machine-guns to supplement the effect of the bombs. Warton enjoyed these raids, for the Germans always attacked in large formations, and afforded the escort unusual chances for aerial manœuvres. The conclusion of each raid presented the same aspect, a conflicting mass of British and German machines that fought round each other like gnats in a sun-beam, from fourteen thousand feet down to the ground. Warton, with his formation of five machines close behind him,

was master in a mixed fight of this description, able to go where he pleased, and do what he pleased, for the Germans, while flying together in swarms, always fought as individuals.

It was in the course of a raid on Soulée aerodrome, where the Germans kept their big night-fliers, that Warton's opportunity came to him. Dusk was closing in, and the machines were gathering together in their formations for the journey home. In the east, a few persistent Huns were making half-hearted attacks on stragglers, but the majority had already dived away and disappeared. Warton's attention was caught by a white light fired from a small single-seater flying just in front and below him. From the signal of distress, he judged that the scout pilot was having trouble with his engine, and was asking for an escort to protect him from marauders. He gathered his formation about him and crept up to within a few yards of the scout, whose pilot waved a hand at him to signify that it was impossible for him to glide back over the lines.

Then Warton realised that they were twenty-five miles inside enemy territory, and that with only five thousand feet of height there was no alternative for the scout pilot but to land and give himself up as a prisoner of war. Warton looked at the slowly revolving propeller of the distressed machine, at the western horizon, and then at the ground below him. It was good, open country, and apparently suitable for landing. Impulsively he throttled the engine back, and turned to shout at Lastor: "I say! Shall we go down and give this fellow a lift home?"

"Right—e—oh!" returned Lastor, without a trace of excitement.

"Fire a green light, then," Warton continued. "Gibson can take the rest home."

When the report of the pistol rang out, and the green light curved hissing up into the air, Warton knew himself to be committed to the adventure. Unwinkingly he watched the light, as it fell starlike towards the earth; then

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suddenly pulled himself together, realising that he was wasting valuable time. He shut off his engine, and glided down, keeping close to the scout. His five companions flew round in circles over his head, watching. With a new concentration, Warton stared at the ground, studying its every feature, rejected one landing-place on account of its approach, another on account of its surface, a third because of its proximity to a main road.

WARTON leant far out over the side of his machine, turning these different points over in his mind, until he had selected a suitable field, registered the direction of the wind, and mentally prepared every turn of his approach. He tested his engine in order to keep it warm, and dived below the scout so as to gain the lead. In the back seat, Lastor, humming softly to himself, selected a double drum of ammunition for his gun, and swung the mounting, before he settled down to watch Warton negotiate his landing. Not a sign of life could be seen on the earth.

Warton had chosen a big square of yellow stubble where the corn had been cut. Using his engine to bring him in low down over the stream, he flew towards the stubble. He throttled back and played gently with the joy-stick as the ground streamed past close underneath his wings. The shock-absorber on his wheels grunted once; then the machine rolled itself to a standstill.

Warton, who had been holding his breath for thirty seconds past, gave vent to a long sigh of relief. He had landed safely in Hunland, and thus accomplished the first part of his adventure. All that now remained was for the scout to land, its pilot to jump into his machine, and then for all three of them to fly away together. He had taken three up before and had no fear that his engine would fail him.

Immediately after landing, he had taxied his machine into a corner of the square and swung it into the wind, ready to take-off immediately. Less than a thousand feet up now, the scout

was side-slipping away his height and measuring his distance to the open patch. Warton fingered the chin-strap of his helmet, and glanced at the watch—six-thirty. It was barely four minutes ago that he had seen the white signal light, yet he could have sworn it was half an hour. He turned round to mention this fact to Lastor, but discovered him with one hand on the gun staring fixedly at a number of minute figures that were running towards them along the track through the corn.

“Huns!” said Lastor simply, and gave the magazine on his Lewis gun a pat. Warton said nothing, but opened the throttle of his engine a trifle, and anxiously watched the little scout, now only a few feet from the ground, and floating along the stubble towards the corn. “He’s going to overshoot!” shrieked Warton, suddenly jumping up in his seat. “Oh! The fool! The fool! There he goes! Bang into the corn!”

As he spoke, the scout, which had allowed rather too much height for the approach, was caught by the tough stems which wrapped themselves round its wings and undercarriage. The machine stood up on its nose, shattering the propeller, crashed over suddenly on to its back, and burst into flames. At once Warton’s anger was turned to solicitude. He jumped out and ran towards the blazing wreck, calling to Lastor the while; but the rattle of Lastor’s machine-gun was the only answer he received.

The scout pilot was pinned by both legs under the petrol tank. His clothes were burning on his body, and he lay beating the grass with his hands, screaming incoherently. Warton plunged into the mass of burning petrol and strained at the broken wood, whose weight was holding the man down. Little tongues of flame caught at his face, peeling off the skin. Repeatedly he had to stagger back and beat his smouldering leather coat. Large beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, and he gasped for breath. An indescribable stench filled the air. Bit by bit, as the weight was

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raised, the man on the ground pulled himself free, until finally he rolled away and lay motionless and silent. Choked and half-blinded by the smoke, Warton groped his way to the shapeless bundle, one of whose charred flying-boots was still glowing by the wreckage. The heat of the body as he hoisted it on to his shoulder scorched him, and the indescribable smell followed him as he staggered back to his machine. Lastor's face was covered with blood, and one arm hung limp by his side. Several rents gaped in the fabric, and the cowling was bullet-splashed. With infinite relief, Warton noticed that the engine was still running.

"Here, Lasts!" he gasped. "Haul this man up quick and let's get away! Oh, let's get away! For God's sake, let's get away!"

"All right, man! All right!" answered Lastor's calm voice. "Don't get nervy. There; that's right now. I've got his shoulders. Push him up by his feet. Oh! Sorry, old man! I didn't notice. I've been having no end of a scrap with a bunch of Huns who are lying down over there in the corn. I couldn't come and help you, or they'd have nabbed the pair of us. As it is, they daren't poke their heads up. All right; I've got him in now. Nip up into your seat, and we'll show these devils a—— Oh!—Warts!"

The last words accompanied the sound of a rifle shot fired from the neighbouring corn. Lastor, who had been kneeling on the fuselage helping to settle the injured man in his seat, lurched backwards, swaying; then, as another report rang out, crashed headlong from the machine on to the ground.

Unbelieving, Warton knelt down

beside him. Both bullets had got home; the first through the body, the second in the head. Warton lifted the head between his hands, and stared at it, with his lips open. He let it fall again, and rose to his feet with one exclamation: "Explosive bullet!"

Wearily he climbed up to his seat. Bullets flew whining past him, but he never heard them. For a few seconds he sat staring at Lastor's body. Then he pushed the throttle lever forward, and the machine skimmed roaring over the stubble into the air. Twice he circled the field on which lay the charred remains of an aeroplane and a small black speck. Then he flew into the darkening west, unheeding the passage of time until a rocket, trembling and twinkling through the mist below, drew him down on to his home aerodrome.

When they lifted the scout pilot from the back seat of his machine the body was already stiff and cold.

SIX nights later, the Major gave a dinner to celebrate the award of a second bar to Warton's M.C., and the occasion of his return to England on the following day. When the men had finished singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow," Warton was no longer in the mess. He crossed the road to the hangars, and crept into the one where his machine stood. The canvas flapped and the ropes creaked. Through an opening near the roof shone a clear, starlit sky, in whose light the propeller and wings of the aeroplane glowed faintly. For a long time Warton stood staring at the powerful, eager shape. Then, slowly, he turned his back on it, and stumbled through the darkness to his tent.

— THE END —

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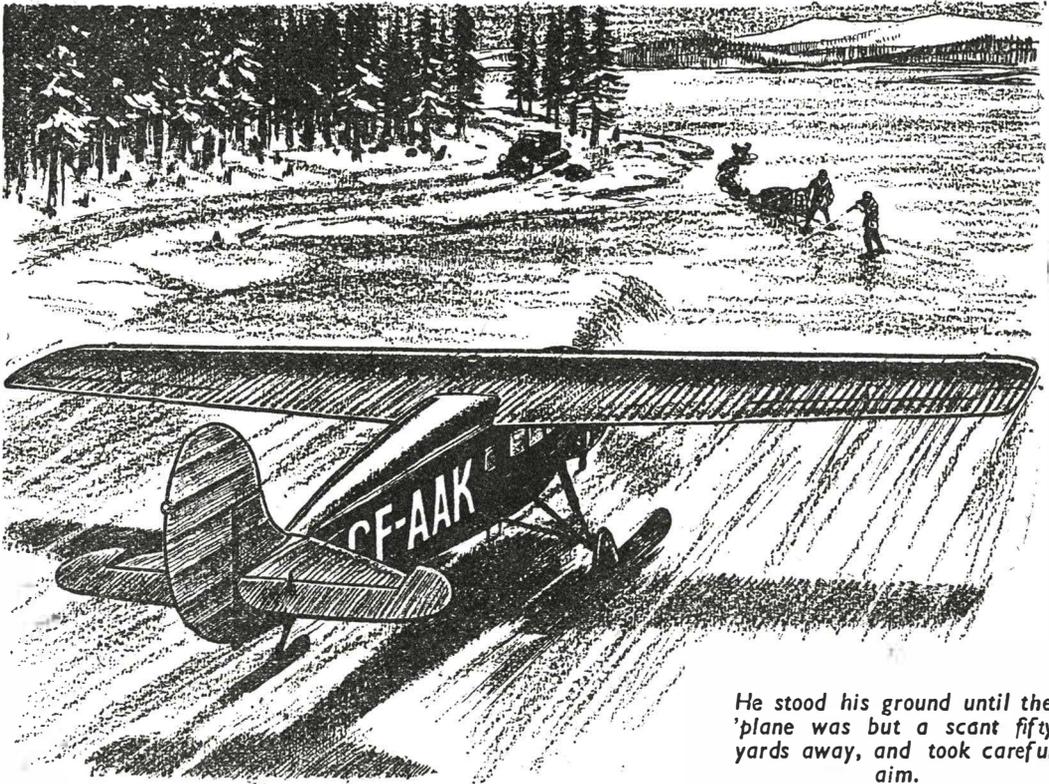
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He stood his ground until the plane was but a scant fifty yards away, and took careful aim.

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CHAPTER I

The "Cat" takes a Contract

DON CARSON, independent pilot, general manager, and chief engineer of his one-machine airline, brought his Fokker-Super in for a fast landing on the frozen surface of Pelican Lake. His keen glance took in the scattered mine buildings, a small group of people standing on the ice, and a pack of milling dogs.

"Looks as if I might pick up some business to-day," he mused. "And I need it. If it wasn't for the gold ship-

ments out of here I wouldn't do any too well in this area."

He was right. The bi-weekly gold shipment from the Pelican Lake Mine paid handsome dividends to the enterprising pilot. They formed the nucleus of big shipments to come.

As he taxied up to the dock and cut his engine, a small, dark-featured man detached himself from the group and spoke to him.

"Can you take my partner and me with our dogs? We want to go to Moosehorn Lake."

Don eyed the man a moment before

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replying, wondering why he had never seen him at Pelican Lake before. He might have come into the country by other means, of course ; there were plenty of them.

"Trapper ?" he ventured.

"Yes."

"How many dogs ?"

"Fourteen."

"Much of an outfit ?"

"About five hundred pounds."

"Trap this country before ?"

"No, I'm from northern Ontario, near Red Lake."

"O.K. Get your outfit ready, and I'll load you when I come from the mine office."

On the way to the office, Don calculated his flight from Pelican Lake to Moosehorn Lake. It would be right on his route to the "steel" * where the little town of Fraser struggled for recognition—and lost the unequal fight. It would take him along the "cat" trail, where the huge caterpillar tractors hauled their ponderous loads of mining supplies into the mining districts from the railroad. Queer, he mused, why anyone should choose to trap that part of the country. It was only thirty miles from Fraser, and well settled by Indians. They never brought out any large fur catches. How did this newcomer hope to get along ?

Still musing, he entered the tarpaper-covered shack that did duty as a mine office. Mike Dawson, the mine manager, glanced up as he opened the door.

"Oh, hello, Don. How's the 'windmill jockey' to-day ?"

The pilot smiled and drew off his thick gauntlets. It always amused him to hear Mike term pilots "windmill jockeys." He spread his hands towards the big box-stove.

"Not bad, not bad. What's new, and how many bricks to-day ?"

Dawson stroked his chin. He looked downcast ; like a man who had a distasteful duty to perform, and didn't relish it.

"Well, Don," he began, "I hate to tell you this, but I guess I'll have to."

The pilot looked up. He had heard a rumour or two, but hadn't believed them. It didn't seem possible that—

"You see, Don," Mike went on, "when you started flying for yourself we kinda hoped you'd cut the freight rates on gold brick shipments. Your charges are the same as the Northern Air Lines, and they're too high. The directors have told me to notify you that our gold won't be shipped out by 'plane any longer."

Carson looked at the manager. A spot of red appeared on Mike's rosy cheeks. It glowed deeper than the ruddy hue surrounding it.

"Don't blame me," he put in. "I can't help it. I'd far rather see the stuff go out by 'plane."

"How are you going to send it out ?" Don snapped.

"By cat-train," † Mike replied. "Tommy will take it with him."

"Have you forgotten the cat that went through the ice on Lone Man River and took the skinner and gold bricks with it? They never found either. They were lost in forty feet of muskeg."

Mike shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't help it, Don. I have to take orders, and I've done what I was told to do."

"Does anybody know you're shipping stuff out by cat ?"

"I couldn't say," Dawson answered. "I've had the order for two weeks, so it's likely everybody knows."

ON the way back to the dock Don tried to think why the directors should choose to send their gold out by cat-train. The time element alone was sufficient to condemn that method. The cat-trains took at least eight days to reach the "steel" from the mine. He could put that gold shipment on the train two hours after leaving Pelican Lake. The seven days' interest

* "Steel," the Northerner's name for the railroad.—Author's Note.

† The "cat," or caterpillar tractor, is extensively used in the Canadian North-West for hauling large loads over snow trails between the railroads and the mines. They haul up to 60 tons on a single "swing" (as a train is called), and the driver of the "cat" is called a "cat skinner"—and many other things at times!—Author's Note.

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on the gold value would more than pay the freight charges.

The fact that he had lost the gold-carrying job piqued Don. It had meant much to him. It was almost as important as the mail contract he held. Besides, it gave his 'plane preference on any freights going into Pelican Lake Mine. He kicked savagely at a piece of ice.

"I'll get that contract back yet," he muttered grimly. "Something'll be sure to turn up, and they'll be glad to have me carry their gold."

The dark-featured man approached him as he went out on the ice.

"Ready now?" he inquired.

"Yes," Don barked. "Get your outfit aboard, and be sure your dogs are tied tightly."

"Oh, I'll watch that."

Don fancied he caught a sinister glance in the gimlet-like eyes of his prospective passenger. Instinctively he disliked the fellow, but couldn't give a specific reason.

While checking his fuel and oil supplies, Don thought about the loss of revenue from bullion freight-rates.

"Funny," he muttered, "why a company should kick against high charges for so valuable a cargo. They usually want their stuff out in the fastest possible time. And I wonder who the hell this trapper is? His partner doesn't talk much."

He turned in time to note the little man swing down from the cabin door.

"We're all set here; you'd better take a look and see we've got our stuff stowed right."

Don glanced into the cabin, and rearranged a pile of dunnage near the door. He inspected the dogs tethered to ring-bolts set in the cabin walls. Great savage brutes they were, part Samoyed and part Malamute. A nasty, treacherous cross-breed, unlike the true Eskimo dog, and rather a mongrel mixture having all the bad points of the two strains and none of their good ones. Still, they were big, strong dogs; not one of them weighing less than eighty pounds apiece.

"O.K.," he called after his inspec-

tion. He slammed the cabin door, tried the handle, and then climbed into the cockpit.

Three shots on the primer and he pushed a button on the instrument board. The high-pitched whine of the inertia starter rose to a shrill scream. He pulled back on the button. The starter clutch engaged with a whinnying squeal, and the prop. turned slowly, wavered on compression, and then revolved swiftly as the first charge "caught." A moment later the engine was idling contentedly.

Swinging into the wind, Don slapped the throttle wide open. The big 550-h.p. Wasp burst into a challenging roar, hurtled the 'plane across the ice and into the clear, crisp air.

CHAPTER II

Madness in Mid-Air

AS Pelican Lake fell rapidly astern, Don consulted his map. Moosehorn Lake lay a hundred and thirty miles ahead. He could reach it in one hour.

Far below, he noted a man plodding along a winding creek. The twisted course of the creek had caused the man to walk almost ten miles in order to get two miles nearer his ultimate destination. No wonder the trappers now used aeroplanes to get to their trapping grounds. Journeys that used to take months of hard toil were now accomplished in two or three hours. True, it cost more, but on the other hand, the cost was more than made up by the larger catches.

Suddenly the Fokker reeled. Bedlam broke out in the cabin behind. The 'plane rocked perilously, and Don snapped his stick about quickly to correct the sudden violent movements. A high-pitched snarl penetrated the thin bulkhead between the pilot's compartment and the cabin. The machine yawed, skidded off on one wing, and then plunged like a fish well hooked.

Despite his skill, Don could not regain control of his machine. First it would

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start a mad plunge towards the earth, and then the tail would suddenly drop, pointing the nose skywards. In desperation he throttled back the engine, and the full fury of the noise behind him broke upon his ears. It sounded as if all hell had been let loose in that cabin. Savage growls and snarling yaps, punctuated by sickening thuds, told him the story. The dogs were loose and attacking their masters.

He was right. In the confines of the cabin a surly mongrel had cast a canine insult at a big lead dog. The big fellow resented the slur and broke his lashings. The little one had more spunk than discretion. He, too, broke his fastenings and hurled himself at the other's throat. Instantly the cabin was in a turmoil. The remaining dogs, loath to be out of a fight, heaved and tore their lashings loose.

During the mad free-for-all, with three thousand feet of thin cold air between them and the frozen earth, the men uncoiled their cariboo-hide whips and sought to quieten their charges. They had no room in which to swing the curling lashes. The dogs sensed this. With one accord they abandoned the fight between themselves and sprang for the throats of the hated "man god."

Slavering jaws opened wide and disclosed white, even rows of razor-like teeth. Their long fangs, lance sharp, ripped and slashed the tough hide of the men's parkas. Smaller dogs sneaked in and sank their fangs through sealskin mukluks into the men's legs.

The two battled for their life. They fought frenziedly, but knew they could never hope to beat back that savage attack. The dogs knew they had their masters at their mercy. They would even scores once and for all.

In the front cockpit Don was trying every trick at his command in his frantic efforts to keep the machine on an even keel. Slowly but surely he was being forced down. It would require all his skill to save the 'plane. He dare not open the small door at the back of his seat to look into the cabin. The

dogs might stream through, and if that happened, the machine and all aboard it would inevitably be lost. He had no alternative but to fly on until he could land on a lake.

At that instant a revolver shot rang out. Four more followed in quick succession. The air was filled with savage howls and horrible screams. Five more shots ripped out, and there were sounds of heavy weights falling. The din ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Don saw a lake ahead. Straight-way he nosed down and landed.

AS soon as the skis stopped sliding, he pushed the cockpit windscreen open and leaped to the ice. In two steps he was at the door of the cabin. Tearing it open, he peered inside. The cabin looked like a slaughter-house. Blood poured from the bodies of six dogs, and dripped through the space around the door. The two men were crouched in a corner, their faces white with terror, stark and livid. Their thick clothing hung in shreds.

In one flashing glance, Don noted that their revolvers were extremely heavy-calibred. Trappers did not usually carry guns of that size. They were too heavy to take on the trap-lines. Once again there came to Don a vivid foreboding that these men were not what they seemed.

"What happened here?" he asked.

The little man spoke. His lips trembled.

"The dogs, they started to fight. We had to shoot them."

"All right," Don replied grimly, "give me that whip and pass those dogs out one by one."

The little man retrieved a cariboo-hide whip from the floor. His hands shook as he handed it to Don.

One by one the dogs were handed out. As each canine battler reached the door, Don spoke to him in words not found in the dictionary. He emphasised his lecture with cutting effect. The whip-lash sang as it curled about the crest-fallen dogs. They had had enough. There was no fight left in them.

"Now, throw those dead ones out

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here and give the wolves a feed. Hurry up, we haven't all day to wait."

A few minutes later the remaining dogs were securely tied, and the Fokker was once again in the air. As he flew, Don's mind worked fast. The vague premonition still possessed him. He couldn't define it. What were these men doing aboard his 'plane? True, they said they were trappers, but he knew better. They carried weapons that no real trapper would own. They had shown they couldn't handle dogs. Their outfits were worn, but evidently they didn't know how to pack properly. Besides, no real trapper would take fourteen dogs into a district so well settled as Moosehorn Lake. Dog-feed was too scarce.

He was still seeking answers to these questions when Moosehorn Lake appeared below. The air was keen and sharp as he nosed down for a landing. Just beneath his port wing he could see the winding ribbon of the cat-trail. Why had these men paid the high aeroplane fares when they could have travelled on the cat-train from Pelican Lake? They hadn't paid yet, but Don mentally assured himself they would—and pay highly.

CHAPTER III

On the Trail of the Cat

DON brought his machine down and taxied to the shore of the lake. He stood by as he watched the men unload their dogs and outfit.

"Well, you're here," he said quietly.

The little man looked at him for a moment.

"Yeah, we're here all right. What's the fare?"

Don mentioned a sum larger than usual.

"Fair enough," the little man laughed nervously, and reached for his pocket.

He withdrew a huge roll of currency. Peeling off the notes, he started to laugh again.

"I'm getting to be funny," he chuckled. "What's the fare, I asks,

and then says, fair enough. I'm real funny, I am."

"Yes, you are," Don agreed, and added under his breath, "you're damned funny—but I can't see the joke yet."

Thirty minutes later Don set the Fokker down at Fraser, the tiny town on the bleak flats alongside the Hudson's Bay Railway.

Fraser was like any other "jumping-off" place in the north. A scattered collection of shacks, blatant in their newness, squatted alongside the thin lines of steel that connected them with the "outside world." Miners and trappers mingled with geologists and financiers. Indians and whites rubbed elbows in the camaraderie of semi-civilisation. Dogs, some idle and others resting, probed among the refuse heaps or played around the cat tractors and aeroplanes down at the lake. Once each week the train came in from Le Pas, and that was an event of some importance.

For three days Don made short runs out of Fraser, and then returned to await the arrival of the weekly train. Try as he might, he had been unable to get the two trappers out of his mind. They didn't appear genuine to him, and when a man pretends to be something he isn't in the north, there is usually a strong reason for it. Don wanted to know that reason. He wouldn't rest content until he did, for if ever two men warranted the strongest suspicion, that pair on Moosehorn Lake did.

An idea suddenly struck him. He raced to the radio-shack of the Northern Air Lines, where "Bugs" Barton held sway.

"Say, 'Bugs'," he burst out, "send this message right away, and tell them I want an answer—at once. Get that?"

"Bugs" glanced at the slip of paper.

"Phew! To the big-wigs of the Pelican Lake Mine, eh?"

"Yes, the big-wigs, and make it fast, the Muskeg Special'll soon be in."

"Bugs" swung around in his chair and adjusted his "cans." A moment later he was sending his call letters sizzling and snapping through the ether

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to the city five hundred miles to the south.

"You'll have to wait a few minutes for an answer," he said. "Say, did you hear Tommy's bringing the bricks out on the Snowmobile?"*

Don stiffened.

"The Snowmobile—when did he leave?"

"This morning, before daylight. He should be near here now."

Don thought quickly. If Tommy had left at that hour he would now be about fifty miles out from Fraser. He leaned across and whispered to "Bugs."

"I'm going over to that train, 'Bugs'! I'll have to make a dash for Pelican Lake as soon as the mail's in. If the answer to that wire's what I think it'll be, have the Mounties follow the cat-trail. Have them come out in the Puss Moth. The R.C.A.F.† will bring them out."

Leaving the mystified "Bugs" staring after him, he raced from the shack.

DON watched the rear of the "Muskeg Special" vanish into the distance. An Indian boy was taking the mail-bags to his Fokker that stood with clouds of steam issuing from the canvas hood over the engine. As soon as the Indian boy got the mail-bags aboard, he would hop off for Pelican Lake Mines. He wished he had received an answer to his wire. He was about to wish something else when a voice cut in on his thoughts.

"Pardon me, are you Donald Carson?"

The pilot turned and inspected the owner of the voice. He was greatly surprised to see a presentable young girl. Without knowing why, he noted her hair was curly. It escaped from beneath a close-fitting beret. He also saw her eyes were dark. A quizzical smile played around the corners of her ridiculously small mouth.

"Well, yes, I'm Don Carson."

"And I'm Kitty Dawson. My father

told me to come in with you. I'm paying him a surprise visit. He doesn't know I'm coming; neither does Tommy. You know Tommy, don't you?"

Don admitted he did know Tommy, and, picking up the girl's suitcase, bade her follow him to the 'plane.

So this was Mike's daughter. The mine manager had mentioned her often enough, but Don was agreeably surprised on seeing her for the first time. He assisted her to a seat of honour in the cockpit beside him.

The engine cover was whisked off, and the inertia starter sang its plaintive song. The squeal rose to a shrill crescendo as the clutch engaged, and the engine burst into a full-throated roar.

The Fokker-Super lifted off the lake in a smother of snow. A steady flow of heat rolled from the exhaust heater into the cockpit and cabin. It was needed, too. The wing thermometer registered 76 degrees of frost.

Don stole cautious glances at the girl beside him. She came of a fighting breed—that much was evident. He wondered why such a girl was leaving the comforts of the city to come to this barren place. He could see her eyes were fastened on the winding cat-trail. It dawned upon him that she had a greater interest in the cat-trail than anything else. Why should she watch it so intently?

Far ahead, the flat surface of Moosehorn Lake appeared off the port wing. There were no signs of life on its barren surface. Where were the two trappers? Had they gone farther afield, or were they camped in the thick spruce along the shore? He felt a touch on his arm. He looked about. The girl was pointing.

He saw a black dot on the cat-trail. It must be the Snowmobile, driven by Tommy. Perhaps Mike had changed his mind about the heavy cat. Of course he had. The Snowmobile was the logical means to use. It travelled fast, almost twenty-five miles an hour on good trails. Don nosed down.

Suddenly a tingling shock ran through him. Two men were racing behind a

* An ordinary Ford car with a traction tread on the rear wheels and a steerable sleigh device on the front wheels.—Author's Note.
† R.C.A.F.: Royal Canadian Air Force.

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dog team from the shelter of the spruce on the lake shore. Though he couldn't recognise them, Don felt sure they were the two alleged trappers he had taken in a few days ago.

His alert hand snapped the throttle shut. The big Fokker nosed down steeply.

"Look!" the girl yelled.

The two men had taken up positions near a clump of brush. One of them was unslinging a rifle. Their dog team stood ready. The Snowmobile, its driver unsuspecting, drew nearer to the ambush.

Don flung his machine down fast. The man with the rifle heard the 'plane, and as the Fokker came in to land, the Snowmobile appeared around a bend in the trail.

Quick as a panther, the man with the rifle leaped out on to the trail. He ordered his partner to make the dog team ready. Tommy, seeing the man ahead, stopped his engine. He opened the door and was about to step out of the car, when the man raised his rifle.

Don saw the upraised weapon. He was too far away to help. Taxying under full throttle, he raced madly towards the bandits. The man with the rifle aimed deliberately at Tommy. Don saw a puff of smoke, and Tommy plunged face down in the snow.

As the cat-driver fell, the girl in the cockpit screamed.

"Tommy, Tommy, oh, my God!"

Like a flash it came to Don that Kitty Dawson was not, as he had first suspected, in league with the bandits, but was in love with Tommy. That was why she had been interested in the cat-trail. He glanced at her now. She was pulling a pistol from her handbag.

"Hurry, hurry!" she beseeched him. "They're taking something from the car."

The two men were lifting a heavy box, amply studded with brilliant red seals, from the front seat of the Snowmobile. They flung the box into the cariole, and the man with the rifle picked up his weapon again and faced the onrushing 'plane.

He had nerve, plenty of it. He stood his ground until the 'plane was but a

scant fifty yards from him, and took careful aim. His rifle cracked spitefully. The engine of the 'plane slowed down quickly. Don cut the throttle, grasped the small pistol from the girl's hand and leaped to the snow.

A bullet snapped viciously past his head. He fired two shots from the pistol, but they flew wild, and the bandit with the rifle raced to the cariole. His partner curled his lash about the dogs, and with an outbreak of yapping snarls, they swept down the trail.

Don stopped his running. There was little use in attempting to catch the dog team. They could pull those two men and the slight load with the greatest of ease over the smooth trail. In four hours they would be in Fraser, where they could charter a 'plane from the Northern Air Lines, and be out of the country before anyone was even aware a robbery had been committed. There was nothing to stop them. The engine of the 'plane had been damaged by the single shot; Don didn't know how badly, but it had been enough to make him close the throttle in order to prevent further damage. There were no other means of speedy transportation available. Don regretted he had not equipped his 'plane with radio apparatus. He could have—

"Can you start the Snowmobile?"

Kitty's voice cut in on his thoughts. He turned and went back to where Tommy lay on the trail.

Kneeling beside the stricken man, he saw a spark of life still lingered. There was a ragged wound along the left temple. It bled profusely. Don was about to go to his 'plane for a first-aid kit when Kitty spoke. There was authority in her voice.

"Get that Snowmobile going. I'll look after Tommy. Get going and catch those thieves."

CHAPTER IV

The "Mounties" Get their Man

DON sprang to the driving-seat of the Snowmobile. He reached for the switch. The switch-key was missing.

"Damn," he muttered whole-

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heartedly, and jumped from the seat to lift the hood. If the switch-key was missing he could "short" the circuit and start the engine.

One glance under the hood and his heart sank. There was not the remotest chance of ever starting that engine for some time. A rifle slug had smashed the ignition coil to pieces. Another one had broken the inlet manifold. The bandits had worked fast.

Don's blood boiled when he looked down at the pale, wan face of Tommy. The girl was sponging the blood away from the wound. She looked up.

"Get your Arctic from the plane and some wood for a fire. I can handle this. I've been a nurse."

The pilot quickly pulled his thick eiderdown sleeping-bag from the equipment compartment and brought it to where the wounded man lay. In a few minutes he had some dry spruce, and soon the flames were crackling through a well-laid firestack.

"Now," Kitty ordered, "take a look at your engine, and see if it can be repaired. If it can, get those men; I'll look after Tommy here."

Don cast an admiring glance at the girl. He looked straight into a pair of grey eyes, clear and determined.

"You'll do," he said, and turned to examine his engine.

"What a girl, what a girl!" he murmured as he inspected the engine. "If I had somebody like her to depend on, I'd get along."

A dull splash of lead on a rocker-arm showed him where the slug had struck. It was a disastrous hit. The rocker-arm was fractured and bent almost double by the terrific impact of the bullet. It was definitely out of action.

Without that rocker-arm, the valve assembly on one cylinder was useless. It would be possible to keep going in the air with one cylinder missing, but he could never hope to get off in that thin air with an engine that didn't function perfectly.

Don's agile mind worked like lightning. He remembered the many times he had been out on long searches.

Disaster had dogged the searchers from the start. Broken struts had been repaired with frying-pan handles. Complete landing-gear had been made on one occasion from a wireless mast. In another instance raw native copper had been used to patch a leaking cylinder. With experience such as this behind him, surely he could mend a fractured rocker-arm. He simply had to. So much depended on it.

HE considered and rejected a dozen plans. Every minute that passed placed a greater distance between him and the murdering thieves. He could not bend the rocker-arm straight and then lash it with wire. The metal would most likely break when it was subjected to the strain of the straightening process. He couldn't solder it. He had no welding outfit. What could he do?

Like a flash it came to him. He had found a solution. He could, with a reasonable amount of luck, braze the break, but he had no brass spelter.

This fact didn't stop him. Hastily pulling the equipment-compartment door open, he withdrew one of the firepots used for engine heating. As soon as it was lighted, he searched his engine repair kit and found a brass bushing. Using a file, he filed the bushing, carefully catching the filings as they fell.

When the bushing had been filed away he had a fair amount of good quality brass. He now required some borax. His medical kit yielded a small amount of this. It was used for snow blindness.

Five minutes later he had the rocker-arm set on a piece of thin metal. He placed this over the blue flame of the firepot and watched it glow red.

When the first cherry hue spread about the fracture, Don sprinkled the break with borax. He then tried a small amount of spelter. It ran perfectly.

Jubilant, he whisked the rocker-arm off the fire and tapped it straight with a hammer. He then replaced it, and as soon as it was sufficiently heated, he sprinkled his spelter on, thinly but steadily.

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Using a pair of pliers, he kept turning the broken member until the crack was thoroughly impregnated with molten brass. He turned his firepot down a trifle and added more spelter. Soon the crack was filled, and he built the break up with his remaining material. When the repair cooled, he had obtained an excellent brazing job.

Working swiftly, he wondered if the valve springs would be too strong for the temporary repair. Taking no chances, he filed one coil from the valve spring. This would have to suffice. Time was fleeting, and he must catch up on the fugitives.

WITH the rocker-arm in place, Don breathed a silent prayer, tossed his equipment back into the 'plane and climbed into the cockpit. The inertia starter squealed its doleful song, and the engine sputtered a moment and then burst into a roar.

Don's jaw set in a grim line. The hour of reckoning was at hand. The matter had now become a personal one. Those devils had deliberately sought to ruin his beloved engine. They had shot down a youngster without giving him a chance to defend himself; besides, they had given him the fright of his life by letting their dogs get loose while in the air.

Don looked through a smother of snow towards the temporary camp where Kitty was administering to the wounded man. She waved an arm encouragingly as he swung down wind ready for the take-off.

The big 550-h.p. Wasp blasted snow and ice particles astern in savage fury as she lifted the Fokker into the air. Hell-bent on an avenging mission, the faithful engine roared a challenging song.

Don, his blue eyes frosted, held his 'plane low. He had not the slightest idea of what he would do when he sighted the bandits. He had no rifle; it had been left behind in Fraser. He had nothing but the small pistol, and that was of little use. The cat-trail was protected by spruce trees most

of the way into town. He couldn't swoop down and panic the dogs. He decided to trust to the gods to supply the answer to his problem.

A few moments later he spotted the men he was pursuing. They were lashing and urging the dogs to greater speed. They cast anxious glances upwards at the 'plane that was roaring down on them like red Nemesis.

Don was in a dilemma. If he landed near them, the rifleman could shoot him down without mercy. If he went on to Fraser they might turn off the trail and be hard to locate. The Mounties would get them, but Don didn't want that. He wanted to get them himself. Then he would have a convincing argument as to why he should carry the gold shipments in future. It was even possible these men might turn off the trail and head in another direction. If they did this they had only to set out three trees on a lake surface, and that would be a signal for the Northern Air Lines' 'planes to land. No, he couldn't take any chances; he must get them while the getting was good.

He relied on the supposition that they didn't know the trail ahead. They could follow it easy enough, but they didn't know the terrain. Just ahead was a small lake, and they must cross this lake. He decided to land there and await their arrival.

Don cut his engine and glided down on to the frozen surface of Wolf Lake. He felt for the girl's pistol. It was in his pocket. He swung down from the cockpit and hurried towards a clump of brush near the edge of the trail.

He was not a moment too soon. The crunching creak of cariole runners on the frost-laden snow was already audible. The wild yapping of the dogs drowned the sound of his movement, as he tensed ready for a jump, the pistol firmly gripped in his hand.

THE running figure of a man came around the sharp bend in the trail. It was the dark-featured man. He carried a rifle at the ready, and his ferret eyes were taking in every detail

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of the path ahead. He evidently expected an ambush.

Don leaped from the cover of the bush. His pistol jerked up.

"Get those hands up—and keep them up!" he gritted.

The little man stopped in his tracks. His beady eyes glittered, and his face twisted into a sneer. The muzzle of his rifle swept towards the pilot.

Don didn't hesitate. He pressed the trigger. The little weapon spat. The slug struck the barrel of the rifle and whined off into the spruce.

Flinging the useless weapon aside, Don leaped. Red rage fired his blood. He swung his fist in a wicked, savage punch. It crashed into the face of the bandit. Bone and flesh subsided into a bloody mess. The man staggered back, holding his hands up to his battered face. Don's big fist, hard as iron, connected solidly with the unprotected jaw. The man sank to the snow with a moan.

His partner, however, whipped out a heavy-calibre gun. Through a red mist, Don saw the hammer of the weapon rise under the trigger pull. A cold fury gripped him. He bore down on the second bandit.

Just as the hammer was about to fall, Don slipped aside. Before the man had another chance to pull the trigger he felt himself hurled backwards as though by a giant hammer-blow. Like the strike of an otter, Don had leaped and hit out with all his might.

But the blow, though it knocked the man down, did not knock him out, and an instant later he had picked himself up and swung his gun again. He pressed the trigger even as Don jumped for him.

The pilot felt the searing blast of the discharge on his cheek. One hand shot out and gripped the bandit's throat, and the fist of the other described a vicious arc and landed high on the bandit's cheekbone. Furiously he smashed the bandit's head against the stump of a tree, and with a sobbing wail the insensible man sank to the ground.

Don's fury cooled as quickly as it had

arisen. He ran to the cariole and threw back the buffalo robe. Beneath a dunnage sack he saw a flash of red. Tossing the sack to the ground, he lifted the heavy box of gold bricks. Without wasting a glance on the fallen bandits, he walked to his 'plane.

"There," he said, "that's that. I'll still take the gold out to the 'steel.' I wonder whether 'Bugs' got any answer to my message yet."

Even as he spoke he heard the drone of an aeroplane, and, looking up, saw a Puss Moth with the red, white, and blue targets of the R.C.A.F. on its wings sliding in for a landing on Wolf Lake.

"Humph," he grunted. "This is a hell of a time to arrive; still, it's just as well."

AMOUNTIE climbed out of the 'plane and came towards him. His quick glance took in the pilot and the two bandits lying in the snow.

"Aha, you got 'em, I see. Nice work. Your wire did the trick. This pair sent those instructions to Mike Dawson themselves. They came into the country through Norway House* and had this affair all planned. They knew Mike wouldn't check on a radio message of that nature. They relied on his sending at least one shipment out by cat before he discovered the instructions were faked. They were a slick pair. I say were, because they won't be any longer. I know a nice place where they'll spend a few years."

"That's why they had all those dogs, eh?" Don put in.

"Yeh, they reckoned two dog teams could take them out to Fraser in a hurry. They also imagined that no one would suspect them if they had dogs."

"Well, I did," Don smiled. "They knew nothing about dogs, and that put me on to them from the start."

"Is that why you sent the radio asking the directors if they authorised the gold shipments to go out by cat?"

"Yes, and I'm going to send them another, but there'll be a nice freight charge on it."

* An historic Hudson's Bay trading-post.—Author's Note.

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"They'll pay it, too," the Mountie laughed. "By the way, where is the cat-train?"

"You'd never find it," Don replied. "I'll get over there right away and pick up Tommy. I'll bring him in as soon as I can. You take these fellows. Tie up the dogs, and I'll pick them up later."

DON smacked his Fokker down hard and taxied up to where Kitty Dawson sat beside a fire with Tommy's wounded head in her lap.

"Did you get the gold?" Kitty asked anxiously.

"Yes, I've got it. I'm going to take it the rest of the way and bring a doctor back."

Tommy, his head heavily bandaged, and looking pale, struggled up from the Arctic.

"Doctor, hell," he wheezed. "Bring a priest, a ring, and all the makings for a first-class wedding. What do you think Kitty came out here for? You can go now, and take all the time you like in getting back."

"There's gratitude!" laughed Don. "Still, here's congratulations, and I suppose you'll be back on the gold run when they patch that thick skull of yours and the honeymoon is over."

"Gold, nothing," Kitty put in, her eyes aglow. "That's your job from now on. After what you've done for the mine to-day, Dad will give you a life contract if you ask him. But you'll have to hurry to catch the 'Muskeg Special,' won't you?"

Don took the hint, and was promptly forgotten by the couple by the fire before even the Fokker's feathery outlines had faded into the distance.

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

"THE RED KNIGHT OF GERMANY"

SIR,—In the article, "The Red Knight of Germany," which appeared in a recent issue of "Air Stories," Mr. A. H. Pritchard has made some rather vindictive observations which I venture to dispute.

He questions the accuracy of Richthofen's popular title, "The Red Knight of Germany," for, he writes, "surely knighthood implies chivalry as well as bravery, and no one could have called Richthofen chivalrous."

Is not a man of honour, courage, and courtesy, and one who is willing to help the weak and oppressed chivalrous? Richthofen was all that.

Richthofen came of an old military line, and it is not surprising that he should welcome the war. He did not fight with the hatred that one of England's foremost airmen did, but for the glory and honour of which he was so fond. Richthofen showed little mercy in his combats, for it was his duty to destroy, and duty must come before all else.

However, when he was successful in capturing an airman without inflicting any wound, it afforded him great pleasure to entertain him in the mess as a friend and comrade of the air, before sending him to a prison camp.

Though some might question my statement that Germany was the weak and oppressed, yet such was the case in early 1917, when Richthofen first joined the air force, for the Allies were supreme in the air, and were the constant dread of the infantry. The Germans were forced to take the defensive in the air, and their airmen were ordered never to venture over the enemy lines unless on special duty. The tactical advantage of this decision, in view of the favourable prevailing wind, is obvious.

Richthofen often is accused of attacking the slower observation 'planes, and it has been sug-

gested that he did not have the courage to engage single-seaters equal in performance to his own. Such is not the case, for we know Richthofen's bravery to be of a high order. He even liked his combats to be stiff ones, for it gave him a greater feeling of superiority when his enemy was destroyed.

The reason for Richthofen's many two-seater victories is well stated by "Vigilant," who, in his book, "German War Birds," p. 53, states that the major portion of an airman's job was:

"(1) To supply accurate information to one set of brawlers about the other's movements.

"(2) To prevent the airmen belonging to the other set of brawlers equalising matters by obtaining information of his own side's movements."

Obviously Richthofen belonged to the latter class, and did his work well.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not consider Richthofen the greatest German ace, nor do I consider him free from faults, but if his defects are to fall under the constant criticism of authors, why should not some of the British airmen be criticised? Surely they were not perfect, but, better still, why criticise any at all, for each served his country to his best ability, and in many cases gave his life for his cause.

The epitaph on the famous Zeppelin commander, Strasser's, tombstone should be remembered by all the critics:

"Who art thou that judgeth another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth."

Yours, etc.,

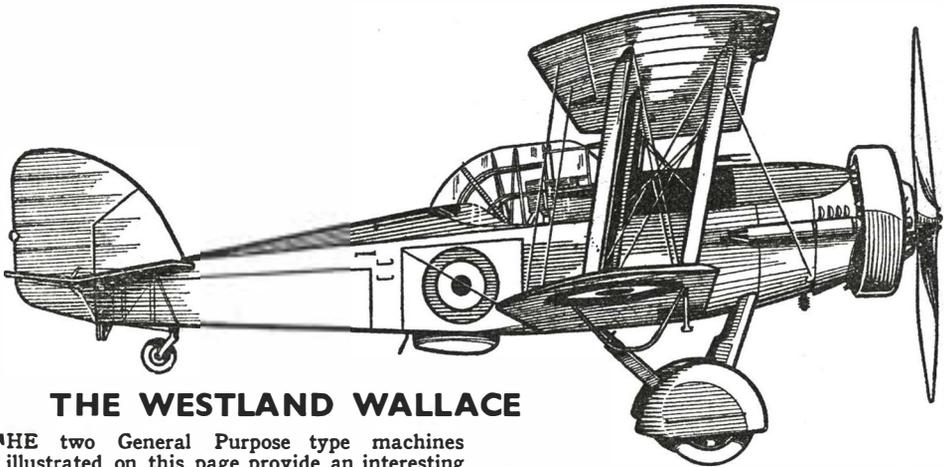
G. L. WARD.

Kensington Park,
South Australia.

It is difficult to reconcile Mr. Ward's picture of a chivalrous Richthofen, eager only for his country's good, with the man who kept a Berlin jeweller busy making silver cups to serve as personal trophies of his victims. But of Richthofen's high courage, patriotism and skill there can never be the least doubt and full tribute to those qualities was paid by Mr. Pritchard in his article.—EDITOR.

MODERN TYPES OF

Examples of the Latest Practice in British



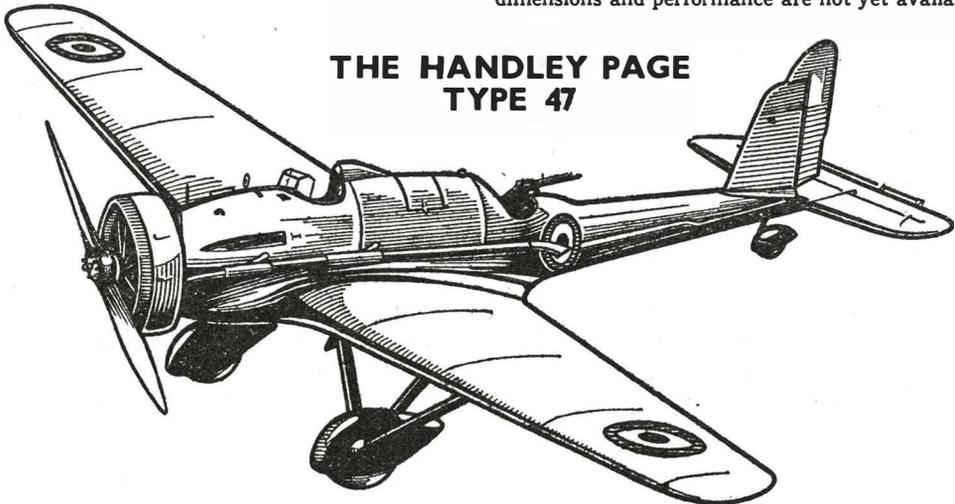
THE WESTLAND WALLACE

THE two General Purpose type machines illustrated on this page provide an interesting contrast, both having been designed for a variety of uses, including bombing, reconnaissance, photography and army co-operation work. The Westland Wallace is a standard G.P. machine of the R.A.F. and, in its latest form, is noteworthy for the complete enclosure of the pilot's and gunner's cockpits. The hood over the gunner's cockpit consists of a number of segmental windows of transparent material, which can be folded back to give a free field of gun-fire. The pilot's coupé-top can be instantly parted at the centre

joint in case of emergency. These cockpit covers are not bullet-proof, but make the crew less prominent targets and afford them protection against bad weather and extreme cold. With a 570-h.p. Bristol Pegasus engine, the Wallace has a top speed of 158 m.p.h. at 5,000 ft., a ceiling of 24,100 ft. and a maximum range, with special long-distance tanks, of 1,120 miles. Armament comprises a Vickers and a twin Lewis gun and 580-lb. bomb load. Dimensions are : span, 46 ft. 5 in. ; length, 34 ft. 2 in. ; height, 11 ft. 6 in.

ALOW-WING monoplane of all-metal construction, the Handley Page Type 47 General Purpose aeroplane incorporates a number of novel features in its design. The sloping, cut-away back of the rear cockpit affords the gunner excellent protection against draught, whilst the marked narrowing-in of the fuselage between the rear cockpit and the tail ensures an unusually wide field of fire in a downward and rearward direction.

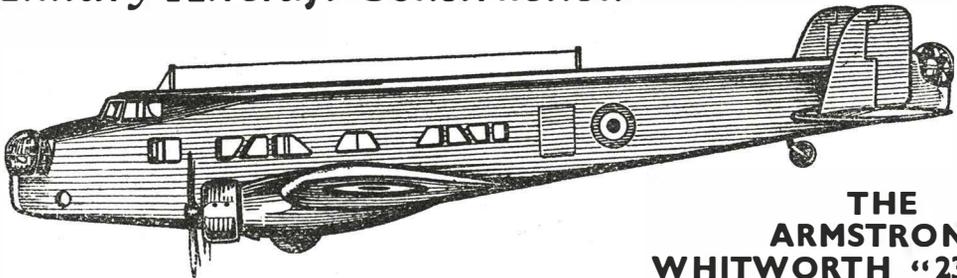
Other unusual features of the design are the extensive use of wing-slots and flaps to improve control and reduce landing-speed, and the location of the fin and rudder ahead of the tail-plane, instead of centrally above it. The engine is a Bristol Pegasus nine-cylinder radial of 700 h.p., and armament comprises a forward-firing Vickers—the barrel of which may be seen in a louvre on the left-hand side of the nose—and a Lewis gun. Details of dimensions and performance are not yet available.



THE HANDLEY PAGE TYPE 47

BRITISH WARPLANES

Military Aircraft Construction



**THE
ARMSTRONG
WHITWORTH "23"**

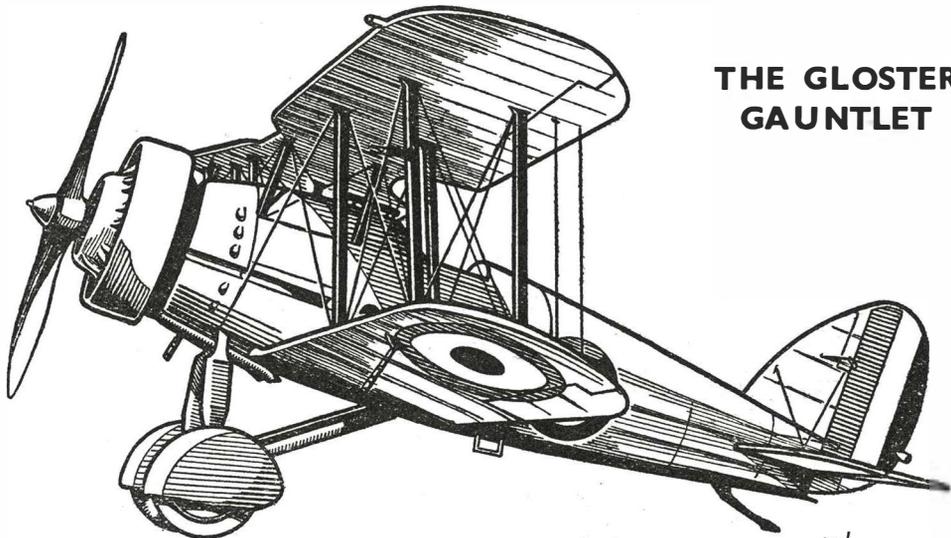
DESIGNED to combine the duties of long-range bombing and troop transportation, the Armstrong Whitworth Type 23 is one of the latest bomber-transport to be built for the Royal Air Force. A twin-engined, low-wing cantilever monoplane, it has an unusually roomy cabin for the transport of troops, supplies, spare engines, etc., and is fitted with an undercarriage that can be withdrawn into the engine nacelles. The gunners' cockpits

in the extreme nose and tail are provided with turrets of transparent material which greatly improve the accuracy of fire by protecting the gunners from the force of the wind. Power is supplied by two Siddeley Tiger radials, each of 760/840 h.p., but performance figures are not yet released, as the machine is still undergoing official tests. The Type 23 has a wing span of 88 ft. and a length of 80 ft. 9 in.

THE latest and fastest type of single-seater day and night fighter with which the R.A.F. is at present equipped, the Gauntlet is a two-bay staggered biplane driven by a 600 h.p. supercharged Bristol Mercury engine. It has a maximum speed of 231 m.p.h. at a height of 15,500 ft., and a service ceiling of 33,000 ft.

As a home-defence machine intended for the speedy interception of enemy raiders, the Gauntlet has a rapid rate of climb, being able to reach the 10,000-ft. level in four and a half minutes and 20,000 ft. in ten and a half minutes. Normal military load consists of a pilot, parachute, two

Vickers guns let into the sides of the fuselage and accessible from the pilot's seat, oxygen, night-flying equipment, and wireless. The small span relative to its total wing area of 300 sq. ft. renders the Gauntlet exceedingly quick on lateral control and it is one of the most popular machines in the R.A.F. for individual and formation aerobatics on account of its ease of handling. No. 19 (Fighter) Squadron was the first R.A.F. unit to be re-equipped with Gauntlets, in 1934, and further squadrons are now in process of being re-equipped with these fighters. Main dimensions are : span, 32 ft. 9 in. ; length, 26 ft. 2 in. ; height, 10 ft. 2 in.



**THE GLOSTER
GAUNTLET**

AC
EVERINGTON

BRITAIN'S WAR BIRDS

300 m.p.h.
Hawker
Monoplane
Fighter

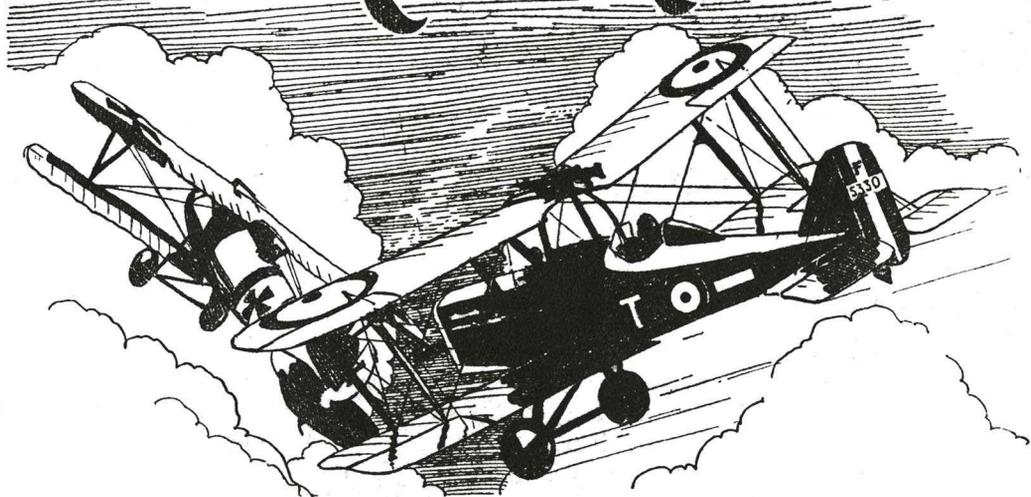
THE FIRST single-seater fighter capable of more than 300 m.p.h., carrying a full war load, this all-metal Hawker monoplane is one of the latest types of warplanes to be designed for R.A.F. use.

Specially noteworthy features are the transparent, sliding cockpit-cover, the retractable undercarriage, the wing flaps (to reduce landing speed) and the variable-pitch propeller.

The engine is a new-type liquid-cooled Rolls-Royce Merlin, the exact power of which is an official secret.



No. 74 SQUADRON R.F.C.



A Brief History of One of the Most Famous Fighting Squadrons of the Royal Flying Corps

By **W. MACLANACHAN**

Late of No. 40 Squadron, R.F.C.

AT the end of the Great War there was no R.F.C. squadron of fighters that could claim such a "credit" balance as that of No. 74. In seven months of determined, aggressive fighting they destroyed 126 enemy machines, sent 90 down "out of control," as well as accounting for many observation balloons. No. "74" made history on a magnificent scale, and the combined efforts of the fighters of that squadron comprise a gallant chapter in the immortal traditions of the Royal Air Force of to-day. That chapter is an epic of achievement summed up in the official records as the accounting for 216 of the enemy with the loss of only 16 killed, 3 wounded and 5 taken prisoner.

Such a record was not achieved by haphazard or undisciplined training or without the co-operation and inspiration of experienced fighters, and in

this respect "74" can claim to have been nurtured in the very temple of Mars. Founded at London Colney in February, 1918, as a training squadron, No. 74 Squadron was sent overseas to land their S.E.5's at St. Omer on March 31st. The commanding officer was Major Keith Caldwell (known everywhere as "Grid"), and the flight commanders were Captain Edward Mannock ("Mick"), late of 40 Squadron, Captain W. E. Young, and Captain Cairns, late of "19."

Throughout the training Mannock, who already wore the M.C. ribbon and bar, lectured on the business side of the squadron's future—namely, that of fighting for conquests. His job it was, by teaching his pupils both offensive and defensive tactics, to instil into them some of the spirit that had won for him his coveted and well-deserved decorations. With his per-

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sonality and enthusiasm he had the power to turn good pilots into brilliant fighters. Major Caldwell had served in a sister (Nieuport) squadron to "40," and for sheer devilment and daring no squadron had a better commander at that time; one whose sole desire was to get to grips with the enemy and to lead his squadron, instead of sitting behind our lines under the protection of the unenforced regulation that officers of field rank were not to "go over the top."

Five Victories in One Day

THE day on which "74" was allowed off the leash was the historic one on which General Haig issued his desperate "Backs to the Wall" order. The Germans were advancing on the ground, and the Imperial Air Force was attempting to wrest the hard-won supremacy from our fighters. Things looked rather foreboding, but not a whit dismayed, the flight commanders of "74" pitted their might against the enemy.

On the first day no fewer than five enemy machines were downed, and Mannock had the honour of sending the first of these spinning to its destruction. Although the pilots, with one or two exceptions, had seen no previous service with the R.F.C. in France, they clearly demonstrated that their tuition and spirit had made them a match for the experienced German pilots. Second Lieutenant Ira Jones had won the Military Medal while acting as an observer. This fearless young officer was afterwards Mannock's closest friend, and, recently, his biographer in a book entitled "King of Air Fighters."

During the first two months the German fighters were on their mettle, and every day the squadron found adversaries worthy of their steel. The enemy machines they encountered were Fokker triplanes and the Albatros, and Pfalz single-seaters, while occasionally Hanoveranner, D.F.W., and Rumpler two-seaters provided "easy prey" for the swift S.E.5's.

Young pilots such as Jones, Dolan,

Clements, Giles, Roxburgh-Smith, Kiddie and Hunt did noble work, and by June 1st the squadron had accounted for fifty enemy machines. On May 24th Mannock's total alone had reached forty-one, and he was awarded the D.S.O.

At that time all types of aggressive fighting were practised: lone flights by "Grid" Caldwell, Mannock and Jones, voluntary patrols with one of these stalwarts leading a pupil, flight patrols of five machines, or massed flights' attack in squadron formation.

On all of these the supremacy of the British fighters over their enemies was brilliantly maintained. Instead of merely keeping the lines clear of enemy aircraft, "74" made their object the right of the British to rule the air. Their patrols were carried out over or behind the German aerodromes at heights between ten thousand and nineteen thousand feet, and their success was in great part due to the tactics employed on these patrols.

A flight of "74" would cross the line south of their patrol area, penetrate fifteen or twenty miles into enemy country and then, creeping up to the line from the east, would get between the Germans and their own aerodromes. As a general rule, the vigour of the attacks was such that the enemy's one desire was to escape from the hail of lead that was poured into them by the enthusiastic scrappers looking for blood.

But occasionally a flight would meet with a German patrol that was not only prepared to face a dog-fight, but would actually attack a "74" formation. This happened only when the enemy had some considerable tactical advantage over the S.E.5 pilots, or a preponderance of machines.

Mannock Leads the Attack

A TYPICAL fight is recorded in "King of Air Fighters," by Squadron Leader Ira Jones, D.S.O., M.C., D.F.C., M.M. He says:

"The Squadron was flying in tiers, each being about half a mile apart and about 1,000 feet above one another,

No. 74 SQUADRON, R.F.C.

Mannock leading the foremost lower flight. After a short time on patrol he spotted a flight of eight Albatros and Pfalz about four miles over the lines and flying north. He decided to fly south for a short while and then east, pretending he was not interested in them; then gradually he changed his direction to north. After a while he had manœuvred his flight into a safe attacking position; and, quicker than the swoop of a hawk, he was down among his prey, wreaking havoc; Dolan and Clements were by his side and Roxburgh-Smith and Howe not far off. In less than three minutes his guns had sent three enemies to their doom, while the remainder of the squadron were dealing with the others, Jones, Giles, Roxburgh-Smith and Young each gaining a victory. Unfortunately, this decisive victory was robbed of much of its joy by the death of Dolan, who was seen to go down out of control and crash near Walverghem."

On other occasions smaller formations encountered superior numbers of enemy scouts, and the S.E.5's had to battle every inch of the way back to the lines, doing their best to down the Pfalz and Fokker D.7's as they carried on a running fight. Several pilots were forced to land near our trenches, their machines riddled by the bursts of enemy fire after they had been caught napping or had tackled the stouter of the German pilots.

The only disadvantage the S.E.5's had was their petrol supply. Carrying out their patrols so far on the German side of the lines, the flight commanders, knowing their petrol would last only two and a half to two and three-quarter hours, had to be more mindful of their clocks than of their aneroids. In entering into a dog-fight which might only last six or seven minutes with engines revving full out, petrol positively drained through the carburetter, so that, after an hour and a half spent in trying to entice the "unsociable" enemy fighters to meet them, flight commanders had to move nearer the friendliness of the British trenches.

The front covered by the squadron,

operating from Clairmarais aerodrome, extended from Houthulst Forest in the north to Bethune in the south. This covered a good part of the front over which Mannock had served previously and with which he was well acquainted. As the confidence of the flight commanders in their flights increased, the patrols raked the area north of the La Bassée canal with greater and greater vehemence, and it was a high tribute to the leadership of Mannock, Young and Cairns that very few pilots were lost. The most grievous losses in the first two months were when Stuart-Smith and Bright were shot down far on the German side on May 8th, and again when Captain Cairns was shot down on June 1st. Captain Glyn was given charge of Cairns' flight, but, owing to his ill-health, the patrols were mostly led by Lieutenant Giles.

In the middle of June, Mannock came home on leave and was promoted to Major on being given the command of No. 85 Squadron in place of Major "Billy" Bishop, V.C.

One Hundred Victories in 9 Weeks

ON June 20th, 1918, the squadron created another record. In a week over two months they had destroyed 100 of their enemies, the honour of bringing the 100th to his last fatal dive falling to the guns of Ira Jones, who had been given command of Mannock's flight and promoted to Flight Commander.

For the remainder of the summer the three redoubtable flights continued to press home the advantage of their early training and experience, and the score of victories steadily rose under the marksmanship of the two most prominent fighters, "Grid" and "Taffy" Jones, with the keen and able support of Giles, Gauld, Gordon, Clements, Howe, Kiddie, Hicks, Shoemaker, Caldwell, Roxburgh-Smith, Luff and Carlin.

Carlin had been wounded during a spell in France in the infantry, and, after having a leg amputated, had joined the R.F.C.—flying his machine with a wooden leg. This doughty and spirited patriot jumped into prominence by the

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personal animosity he seemed to bear towards the unsightly German balloons. In a week he succeeded in demolishing six of them. Although the observer in a balloon was "almost a civilian," the "filth and corruption" (as we called flaming onions, phosphorous shells and machine-gunnery from the ground) that one had to face justified the claim that, as far as courage was concerned, it required the same amount to destroy one balloon as to bring down two enemy machines. Afterwards "Timbertoes" Carlin, as Mannock had nicknamed him, was shot down on the German side of the line, and the details of his capture by the enemy were related by a German who was made prisoner by us. This enemy spoke of a British airman "with lots of medals and a wooden leg" who attempted to escape by *running* back to the British lines.

A Collision in Mid-Air

BEFORE this, however, Carlin and "Grid" Caldwell had a serious "set to" in mid-air. They attacked a German machine together, and each, in his determination to "finish" the enemy, forgot the existence of the other, with the result that they crashed together in mid-air. Carlin's machine was not so badly damaged that he could not regain control, but one of the C.O.'s wings was so badly smashed that controlling the machine was impossible. It spun determinedly towards the earth.

"Grid," however, was not beaten. He climbed out on to the wing and managed to stop the spin, only to find himself diving straight into the ground a little on our side of the lines. Before the shattered S.E.5 hit, "Grid" jumped, and, somersaulting, came to rest in the shell-bespattered ground. To revenge himself, he went up on the next squadron patrol twelve hours later, and vented his wrath on several E.A., sending one crashing to earth.

Raiding the Enemy's Aerodromes

THROUGHOUT July, the squadron kept up the pace, driving the enemy fighters to seek the refuge of the ground,

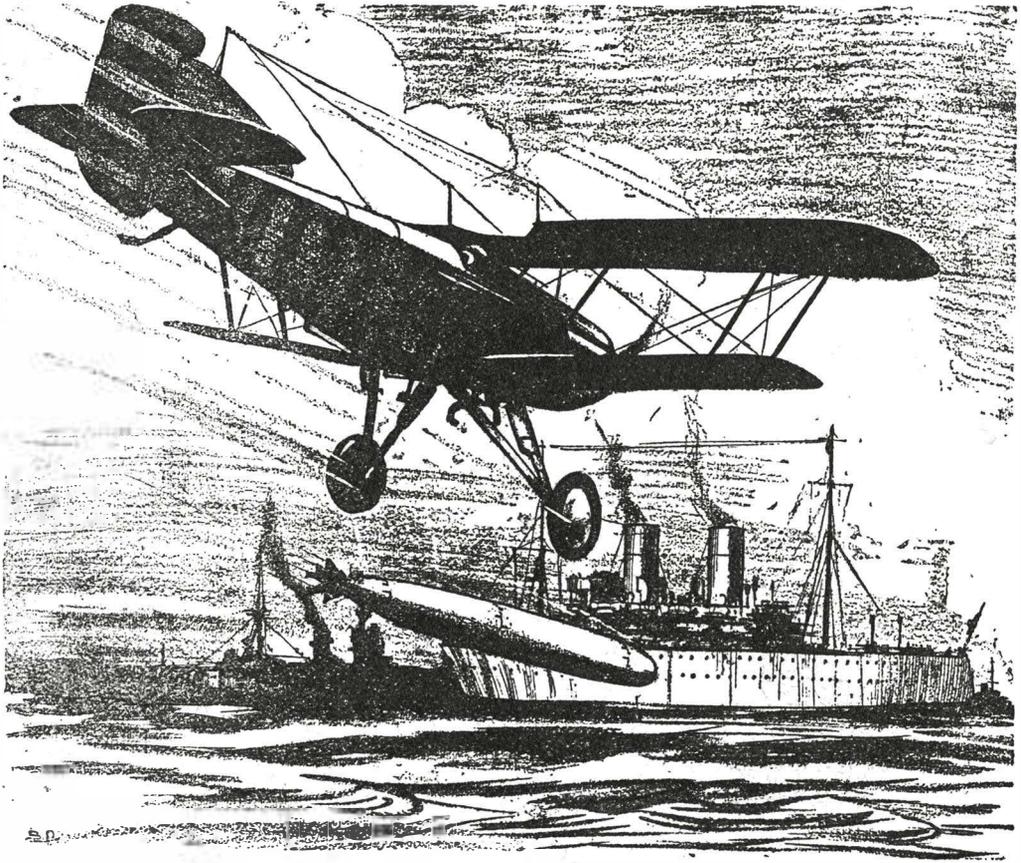
and early in August, working with several other squadrons, "74" set out on a daring venture. Previously, pilots of the Mannock and Ball type had determined to prove that the air was no safe place for Huns, but in this August attack the 11th Wing commenced a studied demoralisation of the enemy by proving to them that they were not even safe when on the ground and in their own hangars. Courtrai aerodrome, the nest of the German fighters, was attacked by machine-guns and bombs, each S.E.5 carrying six 20-lb. Cooper bombs and over 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

It was this overwhelming desire to make the air safe for Britishers that completed the demoralisation of the German fliers and ground forces. Gradually the infantry and gunners, backed up by the invincible air fighters, turned the tables on the advancing German troops, and by September it was clear that our side had the Germans "on the hop." As evidence of the vigour that was put into the final struggle, No. 74, who had been about ten miles behind our lines, had to move up to La Lovie near Poperinghe and, ultimately, to Courtrai, the place they had so often attacked and over which they had waged such gallant battles.

In the latter part of October, up till the Armistice, chasing the Germans further and further on the road to Berlin, Caldwell, Roxburgh-Smith, Kiddie, Gauld, Gordon, Giles and Ferrand added still more victories to the brilliant record of the squadron. Ferrand, taking his first hurdle in fine style, brought down three enemy machines in flames on his first patrol over the lines. His own machine, riddled with bullets, collapsed on landing.

In his book on the life, work and death of Mannock, Ira Jones (known the world over as "Taffy") states: "The glorious title of King of Air Fighters of the War of 1914 belongs by right of conquest to Major 'Mick' Mannock." That being so, the squadron that owed so much to his leadership may justly be described as "The ruling princes of the air."

THE WASP STINGS



Thundering Down upon the Ordered Ranks of Britain's Finest Fighting Ships came the Robot-Bomber—a Pilotless, Radio-controlled 'Plane and the Greatest Aerial Invention of the Age. Then came Disaster, Swift and Amazing, for the Hand that Guided the Winged Automaton was the Hand of Treachery and Death

By Captain JOHN E. DOYLE, D.F.C.

CHAPTER I

The Queen Bee's Successor

QUARTERMASTER BILL ROGERS watched the drifter belonging to H.M. Aircraft-Carrier "Uproarious" as she left the Dayton Pier. He continued to watch until she had rounded the point and was outside Portsmouth Harbour. Then he

turned and walked into his office, lighted a pipe, and made an entry in the log.

"'Uproarious' drifter arr. 13.00 hrs. dep. 14.00 hrs. with two officers and five ratings."

That was all. Everything, he reflected, was very quiet on the pier to-day. Good job, too. To-morrow all would be hot air and excitement, for half the Government, it seemed, was going on board the Admiralty yacht, "Witch," to see some

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flying show got up for their benefit. Yes, to-morrow he'd need to be in about three places at the same time—all the blessed day. The 'phone by itself would be one man's job.

The 'phone bell rang at that moment, and he walked across to the instrument. "Quartermaster, Dayton," he announced to the receiver. "Yes, there was a parcel for Squadron Leader Drummond. . . . Wrong parcel, is it? Well, whose fault's that? . . . No, of course I can't get it back—can't swim that fast. . . . You should have thought of that before."

There was a scream of brakes and skidding tyres as Bill Rogers hung up the receiver, and he walked to the door as a taxi came to a standstill. A young man in civilian clothes bounded out, suitcase in hand.

"Any news of 'Uproarious' drifter, Quartermaster?" he inquired in a bright voice, but with an anxious expression on his face, suggesting that he feared what the answer might be.

"Been gone this fifteen minutes, sir."

"Hell!" The newcomer's further remarks were drowned by the 'phone bell's shrill summons.

"Quartermaster, Dayton," replied Rogers. ". . . No, sir, drifter's been gone this fifteen minutes . . . very good, sir. . . ."

"Hang on a minute, Quartermaster," exclaimed the new arrival. "Who is it?"

"Lieutenant James, sir."

"Where is he?"

"At the gates."

"Ask him to wait there, and say that I'll join him in a couple of minutes—Flying Officer Spalding. . . . Don't know when'll be the next drifter, I suppose?" added Spalding, when the Q.M. had hung up the receiver.

"No idea, sir."

"Then I'll just have to ring you," said Spalding as he re-entered the waiting taxi.

LIEUTENANT JOHN JAMES was duly found waiting at the gates. He was calm and unworried, by way of contrast

to the other. "So you've missed it again, Pat?" he queried.

"I have," agreed Spalding miserably. "And you needn't look so darned cheerful about it; you're in the same boat, I take it."

"Certainly not, my lad, my conscience is clear. I'm due on board this evening, but if there is no drifter . . . well . . . 'it's O.K. with me,' as the Yanks say. If they can't get on without me, they know what to do about it."

"How long have you been away?"

"Fourteen days."

"I've only been ashore for twenty-four hours, but I had to catch that drifter on pain of death. The confounded part of it all is that I was back in Portsmouth by midday, had lunch at the 'Royal Lion' . . . and . . ."

At the mention of that well-known hostelry James immediately became more human. "There's a little place just round the corner," he proffered; "come along and I'll show you. Italian keeps it, but he's an obliging chap, and if you treat him the right way you can get a drink any hour of the twenty-four."

Anton Maraschi, proprietor of "The Goat," was pleased to see them. "Come in, gentlemen," he welcomed, "and eef you wish for to talk I can advise the back parlour." Ushering them into a small room marked "Private," he took their orders, and quickly returned with the drinks.

"Good luck," said James, and raised his glass.

"Thanks," replied Spalding, "I need it!" And after a pause: "Dammit, I've got to get to that ship somehow! There'll be the devil to pay otherwise. But how is it to be managed?"

"It can't be, I'm afraid, unless you can get the Gosport crowd to fly you on."

Spalding shook his head. "No, that's impossible. There's to be no flying on to 'Uproarious' to-day, whatever happens."

"Thank God there's still a British Navy!" was James' apparently irrelevant remark.

Pat was equal to the occasion. "Is

THE WASP STINGS

there one still?" he inquired blandly. "I was under the impression that they'd all rammed one another."

"The sort of remark I'd expect from a half-wit Air Force bloke." James' calm had been ruffled at last.

Spalding was generally ready for a wordy scrap, but at that moment he was anxious for peace. He turned the conversation. "The Wasp is due down here from Farnborough to-day; wonder if she's arrived yet."

"She's the wireless-controlled 'plane, isn't she?" James queried. "The successor to the old Queen Bee."

"That's right, only instead of being a light aeroplane, she's a damned great torpedo-bus. She's supposed to be able to fire her guns and release a torpedo accurately. The idea for to-morrow's show is that she will shoot-up and torpedo a dummy battleship. The said battleship will not sink because she's empty, or, to be more accurate, she's filled with airtight tanks. Then the unfortunate 'plane is to be brought down by combined fire from 'Nelson,' 'Rodney,' and 'Hood.' And there's a peach of a story about her end, too. Rumour hath it that if the gallant Navy doesn't manage to hit her within two minutes of opening fire, the Wasp will set herself alight and fall in flames. So your people are vindicated, whatever happens. But I give full marks to the designer of the 'plane. A brain like his makes us feel pretty small fry."

"You say the Wasp should be here to-day," commented James, presently. "In that case she may be in the dockyard at this moment."

Pat Spalding became suddenly excited. "That's a brainwave, if you like! Why didn't I think of it before? If we can get into the experimental dockyard, I can get to 'Uproarious' with the Wasp!"

"I can get you into the dockyard easily enough," said James, "but we shall need a taxi. . . ."

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said Maraschi, who entered at that moment, "will you not have one little drink with me?"

"One's no good to us, old sport," replied Pat on the instant, "but make it two doubles, and snappy, and we're your friends for life."

"A pleasure, gentlemen, and if you want a taxi, the hotel car is at your service, and my man, Ravati, will drive you."

"D'you know, I believe that little devil's been listening!" exclaimed James, when the man had left.

"Nonsense," said Pat. "You were shouting the odds when the fellow came in. Anyway he probably can't understand what we were talking about, and if he can, what does it matter? . . . Here's your drink. Skin off your nose, and let's be off."

CHAPTER II

Disappearance of a Chauffeur

AFTER a word to the guard, James got permission for the car and its occupants to pass into the Gamma dockyard, and a few moments later the two officers were getting out in front of a huge hangar, the entrance to which stood open. Inside could be seen a large biplane of an unfamiliar type. A ladder stood against the cockpit, and a man was descending to join a little group nearby.

"Everything is in perfect order, sir," he said to a white-haired and bespectacled member of the group. "I only had to make one adjustment, which is pretty good after the journey."

The elderly gentleman raised a hand to an ear. "Eh? What's that? Speak up, man. . . ."

A man in the uniform of a commander, R.N., at that moment detached himself from the group. There was indignation on his face as he approached Spalding and James. "Who are you?" The question was snapped abruptly, challengingly. A few words from James, however, and the whole atmosphere was changed.

"Duncan's my name," the commander vouchsafed. "So you want to get aboard 'Uproarious' . . . well, I suppose it's all in order, but you're

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only just in time. The Wasp is to be towed out on a pontoon right away. Come and meet the designer—dear old boy, deaf as a post and blind as a bat. But some brain! Professor," he raised his voice to a roar, "may I introduce two officers from 'Uproarious'? . . . Lieutenant James, Flying Officer Spalding—Professor Julius Wondermere."

The professor, attracted by Duncan's booming voice, turned and bowed towards the commander. Duncan tried to remedy the mistake. "Here's James," he yelled, "Lieutenant James."

James grasped the professor's hand. "Honoured to meet you, sir," he screamed, taking his cue from Duncan.

Professor Julius Wondermere beamed.

"I've no brain for wireless." James' voice filled the huge hangar with sound, and came echoing back from the lofty roof and distant walls.

"Don't be afraid to speak up," whispered the professor. "I've become hard of hearing these last few years."

Pat Spalding's mouth quivered. "Speak up, man," he echoed.

"Shut up, worm!" snapped James viciously, and braced himself for further effort. "I've always understood . . . I say, I've always understood that it was impossible to transmit power by wireless. How is it that a heavy aeroplane can be thrown about in the air by this means?"

"Ah. I see that you do not understand the underlying principle, young man." The professor was warming to his favourite subject. "Have you your note-book with you?"

Spalding, convulsed with mirth, turned round to hide his face. He produced a note-book and thrust it into James' unwilling hands.

The professor beamed approval, and continued: "I do not transmit power, except in minute quantity. The primary power needed to operate the aeroplane's controls is supplied by compressed air from a cylinder by way of tubes. That part of the business is not my affair." He paused to allow James to make notes. James shot a murderous glance at Pat, and opened the book.

"The air is admitted to each tube as required by a mechanical valve. Some power is naturally needed to operate these valves, and this is supplied by electric current furnished by batteries—generators would cause interference, and so cannot be used." Again he paused, and again James scribbled.

"Now, this electric current has to be controlled and directed, and that is my particular province. The principle is not unlike that of the thermionic valve, with which you will be familiar. But there is a fundamental difference which I will try to explain . . ."

THE professor's discourse was interrupted at this point by Duncan, who insisted that time was short, and that the process of getting the Wasp out to "Uproarious" must begin without delay. Wondermere was sorry. He would have enjoyed a three-hour dissertation on his pet subject.

"Where's that driver of yours?" Duncan asked, in sudden irritation. "Tell him to get this car out of the way. He'd no right to leave it in front of the hangar!" The men were then standing in the brilliant sunshine in front of the hangar, and he peered into the comparatively dark interior as he spoke.

"I'll find him, sir," said James, confidently, and trotted off. But for the moment Ravati had completely disappeared.

"Get that car out of the way, you men."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And get this 'plane down to the slipway. Don't rush at it there. Keep her moving steadily . . . and, hi! you, see that that driver's found immediately and escorted to the gates."

"Where the dickens is he?" Spalding asked James.

"Darned if I know. Bit fishy, if you ask me—with those new submarines under construction. Still, I can't see what he can hope to discover. Probably just gone to call on one of his pals here and'll be back any minute. Hope so, anyway."

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THE following day broke cloudless, and with a promise of heat. The special train conveying those members of the Government who had accepted the Admiralty's invitation, together with their relations and friends, left town early. The party was on board the Admiralty yacht "Witch" by 11.30, and the Fleet Air Arm immediately got busy. But this was only a curtain-raiser. Then came lunch—the first item of real importance on the programme. There was something of a scramble for the saloon when the meal was announced, owing to a rumour that there would not be enough food to go round. The rumour proved false. There was plenty both to eat and to drink, and as soon as this fact was proved to their satisfaction, the party settled down to more leisurely enjoyment. The tension relaxed, and everyone was happy except Lord Maymyo, the War Minister, who was sadly out of temper.

Sylvia Mandeville, the charming daughter of the Secretary of State for Air, was sitting next to him, and sensed that something was amiss. She was not accustomed to being neglected, and did not intend to be on this occasion.

"What's biting my lord?" she asked presently, in a shameless mixture of mediæval English and modern American.

His lordship jumped, and looked round in a startled way. "What's that? Nothing, I hope!" His eyes met Sylvia's, and he relaxed—even smiled. "Forgive me, my dear, for neglecting you in so shameful a manner. The truth is that I was annoyed and preoccupied. I was thinking that my coming here was a mistake.—More champagne, waiter, please.—It seems to lend support to the Admiralty in their demands—but you wouldn't understand, my dear."

"Please go on!" coaxed Sylvia. "I'm not quite as stupid as I look."

"I'm sure you're not, dear lady . . . I . . . I mean you look a most intelligent young person. Well, you see, as I was saying, the Admiralty are going to demonstrate this afternoon that aeroplanes are powerless against

warships. Then, supported by this demonstration, they will put in their claim for many more battleships and cruisers, and the claim will probably be granted by Parliament.

"Now I'm a soldier, first and last . . ." Lord Maymyo instinctively sat up and squared his shoulders, ". . . and I know that aeroplanes are powerless also against efficient troops, trained to cover. But, unfortunately, the Army is now cut to the bone; to the very bone! Never in our history have we been so greatly in need of increases in our land forces. . . ."

LADY Maymyo, sitting opposite, decided the time had come to make her presence felt. She leant forward. "Cecil, dear, I've been trying to convert the Italian Ambassador to our point of view, and I think I've succeeded, have I not, Count D'Antonio?"

"Damn Antonio!" muttered the War Minister.

Meanwhile, Charles Mandeville, His Majesty's Secretary of State for Air, next to the Prime Minister, was making the most of his opportunity. ". . . As a nation we've not yet begun to realise the meaning of air power, my dear Premier."

"I think you're wrong there, Charles. Personally, I have a great regard for the Air Force. During the war they were of considerable assistance to the troops, and acquitted themselves well."

"That's exactly my point," exclaimed the Air Minister vigorously. "Our airmen then had to serve the Army, under whose orders they were placed. They were allowed no freedom of action, otherwise they might have been used as one mighty force with which to drive the enemy from the sky, to destroy his aerodromes and to force him, blinded, to sue for peace."

The Premier was getting bored. "All that's out of date, to-day, Charles, but this afternoon we are going to see how our modern Navy deals with the air menace."

The remark stung Mandeville to fury. "Are you going to be influenced by

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what happens to one tame aeroplane against three battleships? Do you realise that during the next war . . . ?”

“Please, Charles, one question at a time. I am going to be influenced by this afternoon’s display, one way or the other. At any rate, I am going to view it with an open mind.” These secretaries went too far, the Premier thought, but he prided himself on his ability to deal with them.

CHAPTER III

Launch of the Wasp

ON board “Uproarious” there was a keen anticipation of the show which the Wasp was to put up, but it was tinged with an element of doubt. Especially so in the case of the flying personnel. To them it seemed little short of miraculous that an aeroplane without a pilot could do all the things which were required of this craft. There were so many calculations involved, each dependent on the other as links in a chain, and each of a complication which made the brain reel.

The Wasp was in the upper hangar surrounded by a group of interested spectators. Cullis, who had come down from Farnborough with the machine, was making a last check-over, blueprint in hand. From time to time he would bellow some question at the professor. The answer was always satisfactory. All was in order, so it seemed.

“If this outfit works,” remarked Commander Craddock with a grin, “we shall be able to think about dispensing with the services of you fellows.”

“Not a hope!” replied Squadron Leader Drinkwell. “We won’t have to do any more actual air fighting, of course, but our services will always be needed to direct the course of battle. In fact, I think I will have an aerial fixed on the roof of the Grand Hotel so that I can control operations from an armchair in the . . .”

“Seen James anywhere about, sir?” panted Spalding, who had run up at that moment. He seemed excited and somewhat out of breath.

“No, Spalding, but what’s the trouble? Seen a ghost?”

But Spalding was already backing away towards the ladder. “N . . . no, sir,” he stammered, “it’s just that he’s a friend of mine, and I wondered where he was.” He had reached the ladder, which he now proceeded to climb in a manner and at a speed which would have done credit to an old-time hand before the mast.

“Quite touching, this affection between the Services,” remarked Craddock drily.

“H’m, I wonder,” replied Drinkwell. “They’re not usually quite so inseparable.” He consulted his watch. “Getting near time. On to the lift with her, Stevens.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

Pat Spalding found James at last—up on the flying-deck.

“Hullo, Pat, I was just thinking about you . . .”

“How nice for you!”

“Yes—and I was also thinking about that Italian chap. Bit mysterious! Wonder if they’ve found him yet.”

“They’ve not!” snapped Pat. “Just what I wanted to tell you about. I’ve been searching the ship for you for the last twenty minutes. Looked everywhere. Even thought of dragging the bilge . . .!”

“None of your low air humour,” broke in James, and glanced instinctively at his immaculate uniform.

“Listen, John!” Pat became serious. “There’s the very devil of a shindy brewing over that little Wop. He’s simply disappeared—faded right out. They’ve been dragging the waters in the dockyard all night. Where in heaven’s name can he have got to?”

“How should I know?” John James asked angrily. “I got him in, that’s all that worries me. And it’s all because you missed the ruddy drifter.” He paused, and seemed to calm down a bit. “But let’s work the thing out by a process of elimination. He may still be in the water—hope he is. It’s easy to miss a body . . . Hullo! We’re weighing anchor; the fun’ll be starting soon. Suppose he’s not in the water,

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what then? He didn't pass the guard, we can rule that out. He couldn't have scaled the wall without a thirty-foot ladder, and some mats to put on top of the spikes. He'd have been spotted, anyway. He's not still hiding inside, I suppose?"

"Every inch of the place has been combed!"

"Very well, then, he must have left by air—which we can rule out—or by water, on the surface, I mean."

"That's ruled out, too. The dock people are emphatic that nobody has left the yard by water since the Wasp was towed out."

"Then he's become an invisible man!"

"Wait a minute. . . ." Spalding brightened. "We haven't ruled out the possibility that the fellow left in the tug. Let's try to remember . . . no, he couldn't have gone up the gang-plank in full view of everyone—that's certain. That leaves only the pontoon, where he would have been exposed the whole time."

"Unless he was inside the Wasp," James put in sarcastically.

"No need to try and be funny! I'm only following up your own argument. I expect there's some fault in the process of deduction, but if not . . . why . . . he *must* have got away in the 'plane.'"

"And is still sitting in the cockpit, I suppose!" said James, irritably.

"Did you look into the bus?"

"No."

"Well, I did. There's a sixty-gallon tank behind the pilot's seat. That tank has been filled right up, not that it is needed for range, of course, but so as to make a really big blaze when the poor old bus goes up in flames. Between the top of that tank and the fuselage there is a gap, sufficient, I should say, for a small man to creep through. Behind, of course, there's masses of room."

AT THAT moment the ancient Napier Lion engine which had been honoured with the task of pulling the Wasp on her first and last flight awoke

to life. The Wing Commander was in his cockpit, the Captain in his. The "Uproarious" was steaming fifteen knots on a southerly course.

"Clear the deck!" megaphoned the Wing Commander.

"Come on!" shouted Spalding. "Let's get aft and see the fun." The two men doubled to a position abreast of the arrester gear, now out of action, and dropped over the port side to the lower platform. Cullis was in the cockpit of the Wasp, and was running up the engine.

"Damned shame to sink a fine engine like that!" said Pat, as he listened appreciatively to the healthy roar.

"I suppose you'd like to put it in your motor-bike," James remarked drily.

Pat was unconscious of the irony. "I'd like it in a car."

Cullis had throttled back . . . he was getting out . . . pausing to observe that the stabilising gyroscopes were doing their rev's. These gyroscopes were responsible for taking the 'plane off and holding it on a steady course until the wireless control from the ship cut them out and took charge.

There was still five minutes to go before take-off time, the Wing Commander noted. "Test those guns, of course!" he resolved. "Just the way to fill in the time and see if the contraction works. Brainy thought, that!" He chuckled, and 'phoned to the wireless cabin. "Very good, sir," came the reply. He hailed Cullis, and told him his intention. Cullis returned aft, made a throttle adjustment and signalled back the "all-clear" to the Wing Commander.

"Up, George!" the latter shouted, and the direction-finding frame aerial which, on the "Uproarious," always answered to the name of "George," obediently rose from the middle of the flying-deck.

"Carry on," said the Wing Commander to the 'phone.

The "Uproarious" was steaming south. Ahead was only empty sea. After a brief interval the two synchronised Vickers guns chattered harshly

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CHAPTER IV

An Admiral is Alarmed

as they belched tracer-white threads of fire to weave skywards. Just one short burst and each gun was stilled.

"Good!" 'phoned the Wing Commander, "that worked. Now time's up. He replaced the receiver and shouted, "Down, George!"

As the aerial descended from view, he signalled to Cullis, who was hanging on to the side of the cockpit, his overalls flapping in a twenty-knot wind, his hand on the throttle. Cullis' hand went forward till the engine was running at half-throttle. He hung on closer as the slipstream joined forces with that twenty-knot wind.

"Away chocks!" yelled Cullis. Men were holding struts. Chocks were withdrawn. The Wasp trembled as though in eagerness to throw restraining hands aside and be off.

Spalding and James watched, enthralled. Suddenly a dent appeared in the fuselage towards the tail. The fabric bulged as though struck from the inside. Once, and then again, and this time a small split showed in the fabric.

"Jumping Jupiter!" gasped Pat. "Did you see that?"

Cullis' left arm was raised. The men watched, awaiting the signal.

"Yes!" said James weakly.

"We must stop 'em!" shouted Pat, and climbed to the deck.

Cullis' arm dropped at the same moment that his right hand jabbed the throttle wide. He pushed himself away and dropped to the deck. The men fell and the Wasp moved forward, straight as an arrow for that wisp of steam in the bows. She lifted from the deck after a run of only a few yards.

"She hasn't got her tail up, has she?" queried Craddock.

"Hell! . . . no," yelled Drinkwell. "She's as tail-heavy as a . . . my hat! . . . she's going to . . . to spin in! No, she's all right now, but it was touch and go."

"I thought it looked a bit queer," commented Craddock.

"Up, George!" came the order from the Wing Commander's cockpit.

AT the moment the Wasp took-off from the carrier's deck the Admiralty's distinguished guests were extended in deck-chairs along the port side of the "Witch." They were drowsily content. Some, indeed, appeared to be asleep. Lord Maymyo's eyes were hidden from view by his cap, which had slipped forward, but his mouth was open, and a strange gurgling sound came therefrom and was wafted by the gentle breeze down the deck to where his wife sat. That lady stiffened as the familiar sound reached her ear, and she raised her parasol.

"Cecil!" she hissed in a stage whisper.

"Gurgle-gurgle," replied his lordship.

"Cecil!" Her voice was a little more insistent.

"Gurgle-gurgle-gurgle."

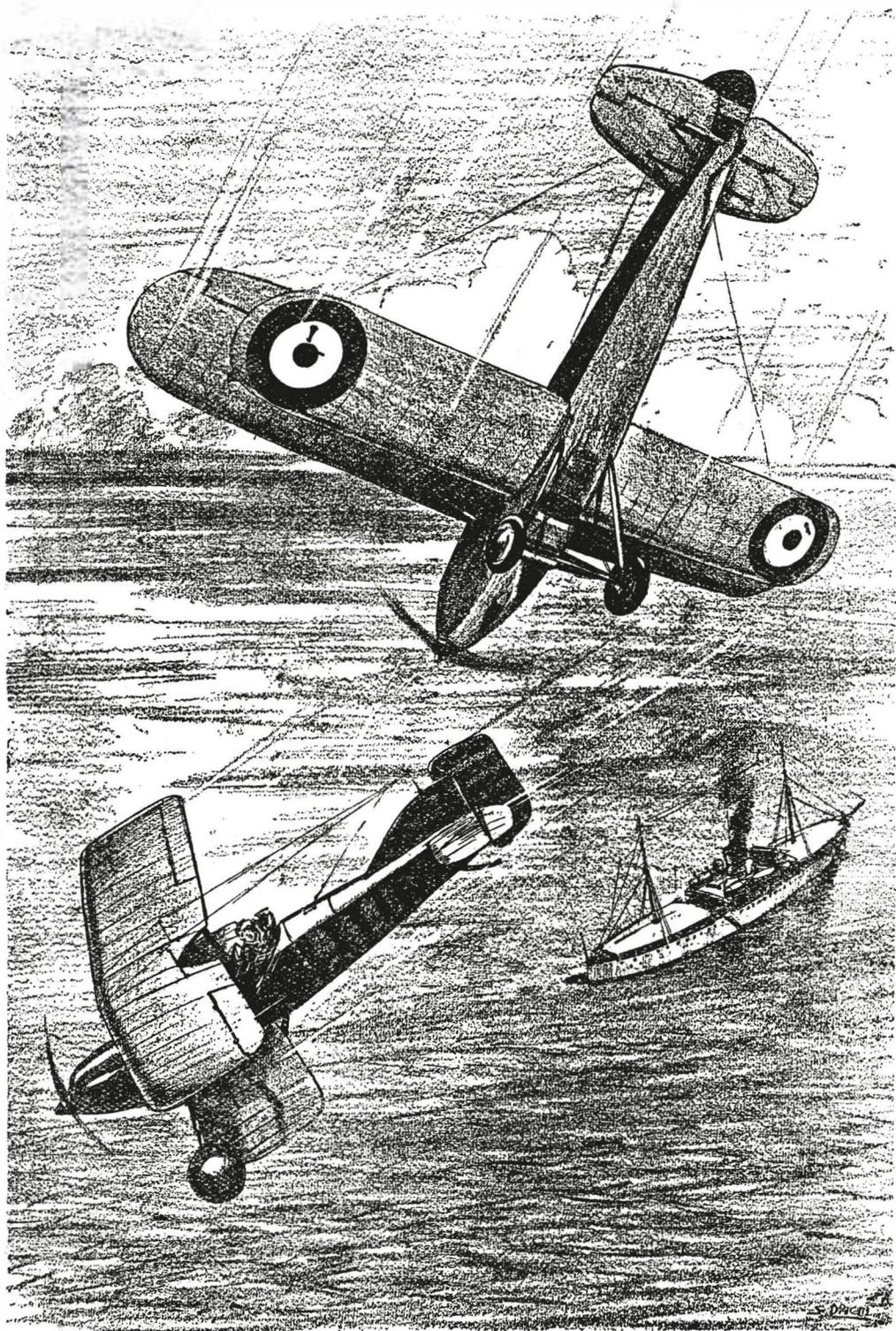
"This afternoon's performance . . ." boomed a loud-speaker just above his head. Lord Maymyo's heels clicked together as though at a word of command, he gave a wild snort and sat up. Sylvia rescued his cap and handed it to him with a sweet smile. ". . . has been staged by the Admiralty in the confident hope that it will bring the vexed question of the Fleet's ability to deal with aircraft a stage nearer solution. Those responsible for this display have endeavoured, successfully we think, to make the conditions resemble as nearly as possible those of actual warfare."

The loud-speaker took a deep breath after this effort.

"Most interesting, I'm sure," said Lady Maymyo, more to distract attention from her husband than because she thought it would be.

"The programme is this," continued the loud-speaker. "An aeroplane, without a pilot, and controlled entirely by wireless from the ship, has just taken off from the Aircraft-Carrier 'Up-roarious.' You may be able to see this ship about eight miles to the south if you look straight to your front, seated as you are."

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At last he was on the fellow's tail, and so close that his guns could not miss.

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Several pairs of field-glasses were raised at these words. "I don't see any boat," wailed a feminine voice.

"That flat thing, I think, rather like an island," explained a Cabinet Minister.

"... the aeroplane, though you will not be able to see it yet," the loud-speaker boomed on, "is now flying directly towards us. It is still being controlled from the 'Uproarious,' but when it has come closer it will be taken over by the battleship 'Rodney.'

"To your right front, about half a mile away, is the target ship which is to be sprayed by machine-gun and torpedoed by the aeroplane. The torpedo, I may add, is a fairly large one, weighing five hundredweight, and it will be instructive to note the damage it inflicts on the target.

"The anti-aircraft guns from the battleships in the vicinity will then open fire, and again the result should prove instructive. The attack differs mainly from the real thing in that the aeroplane will be allowed to deliver its attack on the ship before the guns open fire. In actual warfare, of course, hostile aircraft would come under a devastating fire long before they were close enough to launch such an attack." The loud-speaker paused, and then: "The aeroplane will take some four or five minutes to reach us, and I will fill in the interval with the record—'A Life on the Ocean Wave.'"

Before the familiar strains had died away, the Wasp had been sighted by the whole party—to judge by the gesticulations and pointings which were going on. Sylvia Mandeville rose from her chair and waiked to the side. With elbows on the rail and tips of fingers to chin she watched the oncoming 'plane. Here at last was a promise of distraction. There was something rather thrilling in the thought that that aeroplane, growing rapidly in size, was flying under its own control. Or, she supposed it would be more accurate to say that it was without a pilot. For someone was surely guiding it. Who?

As though in answer to their thoughts, the loud-speaker woke to life once more:

"The wireless-directed aeroplane, which I expect you will all be able to see now, has passed out of the control of H.M.S. 'Uproarious,' and has been taken over by the 'Rodney.' Actually, gyroscopes are at the moment keeping the aeroplane to the straight course on which it has been set. In ninety seconds, approximately, the machine will cross this yacht, in order that you may get a close view of her appearance. Immediately after crossing, she will be seen to turn to the left, continuing to turn until the wide circle is complete and the 'plane is back, more or less, where she now is. Then she will turn sharply at right angles and dive to the attack on the target ship. Here she comes."

All eyes were lifted to the Wasp as she roared overhead, the Napier engine bellowing under full throttle like a frightened bull trying to escape its doom. Then the machine began to turn, banking gently as rudder went on.

WHEN the Wasp was launched from the deck of the "Uproarious," the ship turned out of wind and headed back to her anchorage. There had been the morning's squadron formations, and now the carrier's work was done—as far as flying was concerned. Or so it seemed.

Spalding was distracted; even James was worried. Pat was convinced that the Italian, Ravati, was in that aeroplane. He had little enough evidence to come to so extraordinary a conclusion, but what there was seemed to piece together only too satisfactorily. Yet no one would believe his story.

"What's the next move, John James?" he asked.

"Wait and see what happens, of course. We can't do anything."

"It will be too late to do anything then!" moaned Pat.

"All right, then, I've made a suggestion, now you make one."

Pat moved away, exasperated, and found his squadron leader.

"May I go up and see the fun, sir?" he asked him.

Drinkwell raised his eyebrows and looked hard at Pat. Could Spalding

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be drunk, he wondered, and then dismissed the idea. He was certainly queer, but just as certainly sober.

"We're turning out of wind, man, surely you can see that!"

But Spalding was to go up just the same, for already Signals had been getting busy. The behaviour of the Wasp was giving rise to some anxiety, it seemed. She was not answering control as readily as she should. The Admiral ordered the "Uproarious" to send up some 'planes—just to be on the safe side. The Captain spoke to the Wing Commander. The ship was brought back into wind. Best get some Nimrods up. A messenger was sent to find Squadron Leader Drinkwell, and arrived just as Pat was moving disconsolately away.

"Here, Spalding," shouted Drinkwell, and: "Flight Sergeant!"

Pat returned to the small office, surprised but unhopeful still. Flight Sergeant Brown hurried across the hangar in response to that urgent summons.

"The Navy's losing faith in its new toy," said Drinkwell.

"Why, what's the matter?" Pat put in.

"It doesn't seem to be sufficiently docile, and I'm sending 'B' Flight up at once to keep an eye on it. Right away, Flight. Oh, and you'd better get Mr. Spalding's machine up first, as he's on the spot and anxious to see the fun." He turned to Pat: "You'll get your orders by wireless."

"Thank you, sir," said Pat, and doubled off for his kit.

In an incredibly short time the Nimrod's Kestrel engine was ticking over, and the 'plane had been pushed on to the lift. Mechanics stood motionless around the machine. The Squadron Leader stepped on. The lift rose six inches and paused while the bolts were withdrawn. Nobody moved, but Pat came running down the hangar with his kit on, and in flagrant violation of rules, took a flying leap on to the lift just as it started to rise, landing almost in Drinkwell's arms.

"Caught in the act!"

"Very sorry, sir, but didn't want to waste any time." Pat was climbing into the machine as he spoke.

Drinkwell eyed him curiously, but said no more. He liked Spalding, but was unable to understand him. The fellow was a curious mixture. Keen as mustard on his work now. Tomorrow he'd be in some scrape or other. The lift emerged onto the sunlit flying-deck, overshot by six inches, paused and sank flush. The Nimrod was pushed clear, chocks replaced, and the engine run up. The chocks were then removed in response to Pat's signal. There was no delay, for the Wing Commander signed all clear, the Kestrel roared again, and the Nimrod sprang forward, lifting easily into the air after a few yards' run.

The wind was light, and the "Uproarious," steaming fifteen knots on a southerly course, was now well out in the Channel. Pat swung round and headed for the northern horizon.

CHAPTER V

The Sting of the Wasp

THE spectators on board the "Witch" were being mildly entertained. To them, at any rate, the experimental 'plane seemed to be behaving perfectly. That wide circle was almost complete when, according to plan, the starboard wing lifted sharply, and the tail rose to follow as the machine went into a steep dive towards the target ship.

It was at this moment that Lieutenant Ravati, late of the Italian Air Service, slipped unceremoniously head first on to the pilot's seat of the Wasp. His shoulder struck the control-stick, with the result that the diving angle of the machine was momentarily increased.

As was well known at the time, Britain led the world in her experiments with wireless-controlled aircraft, and several countries were making determined efforts to wrest her secrets from her. Such machines, it was thought, would give the country possessing them an immense advantage in time of war.

To Ravati alone, however, had come

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the daring plan of stealing the Wasp, and he had felt confident that, given a few favourable conditions, he could accomplish the apparently impossible. When he had so easily got into the dock-yard, and when he had managed, unobserved, to get into the cockpit, he had been certain of success. He did not feel quite so sure now, but then he had just been shot with considerable force on to his head, and that is enough to shake anyone's confidence.

The trouble was that he had been delayed in getting out of his hiding-place in the tail of the aircraft. He had crept in over the top of the tank easily enough, for he was a small man. But getting out again had proved a much harder matter, just because there happened to be a splinter, or a nail projecting from the inside of the fuselage above him. This had caught in the collar of his jacket, and with the small amount of purchase he had been able to exert, had held him fast—until the Wasp had dived.

Now he scrambled to a sitting position and took hurried stock of the situation just as the two machine-guns opened fire. He saw that he was diving on a ship towards which tracer streamed, and that he might collide with it at any moment. He wrenched at the controls, and although there seemed to be considerable resistance to his pressure, the machine came out of the dive and banked to starboard. He had control of the 'plane, that was one thing accomplished. But the guns were still blazing away without any help from him, and now they were aimed at a small yacht dead ahead. That must be the English Admiralty yacht. He pulled up and set off on a south-westerly course. If his plans had not miscarried, there would be an Italian yacht waiting down Channel which would salve the essential mechanism of the 'plane if he could put it down on the water in its vicinity.

THE visitors on board the "Witch" had watched that spectacular dive on to the target-ship with interest.

"So far, you see," exclaimed the

loud-speaker, "the movement has proceeded according to plan. Now watch carefully what happens. The machine-guns are about to open fire on the target."

There was a gasp of astonishment from the onlookers as streams of tracer leapt from the diving machine. For, though they had expected it to happen, the obedience of the aeroplane seemed positively uncanny.

"I don't believe it!" said Mrs. Fitzwilliam, the Premier's wife, with emphasis.

"What don't you believe?" inquired the Under Secretary to the Foreign Office.

"That that aeroplane is empty. I mean, I'm sure that there is a pilot in the thing. It's too ridiculous to expect us to . . ."

"And now," broke in the loud-speaker, talking rapidly and with an excited ring in its voice, "comes the great event. The torpedo will drop away at any moment . . . and remember that the anti-aircraft guns of three battleships are trained on the aeroplane and will open fire the moment the torpedo has been loosed. This should have already happened, I think." The voice slowed up, and a faint anxiety was apparent. "Yes, definitely, it is too late this time, and the aeroplane will have to be brought round again. Just some slight misjudgment—very excusable when we think of the circumstances. Hullo . . .!"

The last remark was one of astonishment, the cause of which was obvious to even the least initiated of the spectators. For the Wasp had banked vertically to starboard, a wing-tip seeming as though it must touch the water. It altered course some 90 degrees, and then flew straight towards the yacht, and but a few feet above the sea.

"There is no need for alarm," said the loud-speaker rapidly, "but it is thought advisable that you all move across to the starboard side of the ship."

A bluejacket came running down the deck. "Hurry across, please."

"I knew there was a pilot in that machine!" said Mrs. Fitzwilliam tri-

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umphantly, as she was helped out of her chair.

A burst of bullets sprayed the yacht. Most of them passed harmlessly over; a few ripped into the hull. The noise was like the cracking of a thousand stockwhips.

"Take cover!" ordered the loud-speaker. Then a bullet struck it. "Grr . . . bz . . . bz . . . grr!" it continued, and fell silent.

Lord Maymyo was triumphant. "Damned lot of foolery!"

His wife was by his side. "Look! Cecil," she said as the torpedo fell away. "That aeroplane has dropped something."

Those who have not heard a torpedo explode at close quarters can have no conception of what it means. It is impossible to describe that devastating concussion, that blast of sound which then shattered the peaceful day. The yacht shuddered from stern to stern, and was already listing heavily when a wall of water which had been hurled into the air by the explosion thundered down upon the deck.

But for the fine naval discipline that was displayed and the fact that a destroyer was already bearing down to the rescue, the death-roll must have been heavy.

Pat was still miles away when the yacht was struck. Too far off, indeed, to be able to see the Wasp. He did, however, see that wall of water which was flung skywards, although he did not immediately grasp its significance. He wiped his goggles and pushed the throttle a notch farther forward. Such was his speed, that two minutes later, he was able to make out the details of the disaster. The Admiralty yacht had been torpedoed, and was sinking rapidly, surrounded by some of the finest fighting ships of the Fleet. A destroyer, he noted, was already steaming at full speed to the rescue. Fortunately, the water was both calm and warm, for there was neither time nor opportunity to launch boats. Just as the Nimrod flashed overhead, the doomed "Witch" lifted her bows and slid quietly from view, as though anxious not to make any fuss about it.

IN the excitement of the moment, Pat had completely forgotten to switch on his receiver. Hurriedly he rectified the error, and immediately was nearly deafened by a blast of sound.

"'Uproarious' calling," screamed his headphones. "'Uproarious' calling, calling Flying Officer Spalding."

Pat gave the routine reply.

"The wireless-controlled aeroplane . . ." went on the 'phones.

"Wireless, my hat!" muttered Pat.

". . . has made off on a south-westerly course, flying straight. You are to follow and destroy it. The magnetic bearing will be given you in two minutes' time. The wireless-controlled aeroplane . . ." repeated the 'phones.

Already Pat was in a vertical bank, and he pulled his 'plane round and straightened up on his new course. Forgotten was the scene below. This was the sort of job he had dreamed about, but which he had never dared hope would come his way. He might have lived a hundred years, he thought, without such an opportunity.

England seems a very small island when one is travelling at some 220 m.p.h. In a very short time Pat was well down Channel and some miles from land. Dartmoor frowned to the north. Plymouth must be nestling somewhere at its base. "Mount Batten Station calling," said the 'phones.

"Thanks," said Pat to himself, "I was just thinking about you," and then acknowledged the call.

"The wireless-controlled aeroplane . . ." went on Mount Batten, ". . . has been sighted by one of our flying-boats . . . still keeping to its course. The flying-boat has been ordered to join in the pursuit. I will repeat that. . ."

"Don't bother," thought Pat. Then he saw the flying-boat, cruising along at a modest 100 m.p.h. With its tail cocked high, it reminded him of a swan paddling along with its brood. He waved to the crew as he shot past.

The flying-boat was out of sight astern when Pat spotted the Wasp. The latter had its nose well down, and was diving in the direction of a white-

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painted yacht that lay hove-to off shore.

Pat was closing rapidly with the Wasp, and he pressed his gun-triggers. The range was rather a long one still, but it was worth trying. The nose of the Wasp came up till the machine was climbing . . . now it was going vertically up . . . now was on its back. A flick half-roll and it was flying straight at the Nimrod, its guns spitting. The fellow meant to ram him—the thought came to Pat in a flash. There was no room to pull up, no time to turn. Pat shot the stick forward and left the seat. His shoulders were compressed into the harness, the blood was driven to his head—nasty feeling. He wouldn't let the fellow do that again—if he ever got out of the dive in time.

Pat was very close to the waves by the time he had flattened out. He must have been doing 400 m.p.h. He'd had a shock, and his blood was up. At the top of the zoom he was still below the Wasp. It dived, but Pat was ready and turned towards it, pulling round again as it went past. Now at last he was on the fellow's tail. Ravati was trying that loop-cum-half-roll again, but Pat was close up this time and followed him round, saw him half-roll through the Aldis sight, and pressed the triggers. The range was close enough, and he eased the throttle to avoid a collision. The Wasp nosed down vertically, and dived into the sea like a gannet after fish.

"Sorry!" said Pat, "it was a stout effort—but we couldn't let you get away with it!"

The yacht was under way again, but Pat ignored her. That part of the business was no concern of his. He headed north-east and stuck his nose well down.

In due course he picked up the "Up-roarious" directional wireless, and soon afterwards glided down to her landing-deck and hooked his tail in one of the arrester cables. Mechanics rushed up, unhooked him and pushed the Nimrod on the lift. "Up, screen!" shouted the Wing Commander, and the screen rose to break the force of the wind.

"Lumme, sir!" said Pat's rigger

as the lift descended, "you've got a bullet-hole here!"

"Don't breathe a word about it unless I tell you!" hissed Pat.

He made his report. He had shot down the Wasp; it would sting no more.

PAT got James alone in his cabin at last and told him the story of the chase, and of his conviction that the pilot he had seen in the cockpit of the Wasp was none other than Ravati, one-time chauffeur to the landlord of "The Goat."

"But why did the fellow want to sink the 'Witch'?" James asked after a pause. "I can understand that Italy—or almost any other Power, for that matter—would pay handsomely for full details of the Wasp's innards, but why on earth shoot up that crowd on the 'Witch'?"

"Search me! Just hate, perhaps. Or maybe he did it to distract attention from himself. He may not have done it, in fact. Remember it was a wireless-controlled aeroplane—I'm just about sick of that expression, by the way—and he probably found his guns were registering on the 'Witch' before he had properly got control. But anything might happen with a box of tricks like that. But what are we going to do about it? That's the point."

"Better tell all we know."

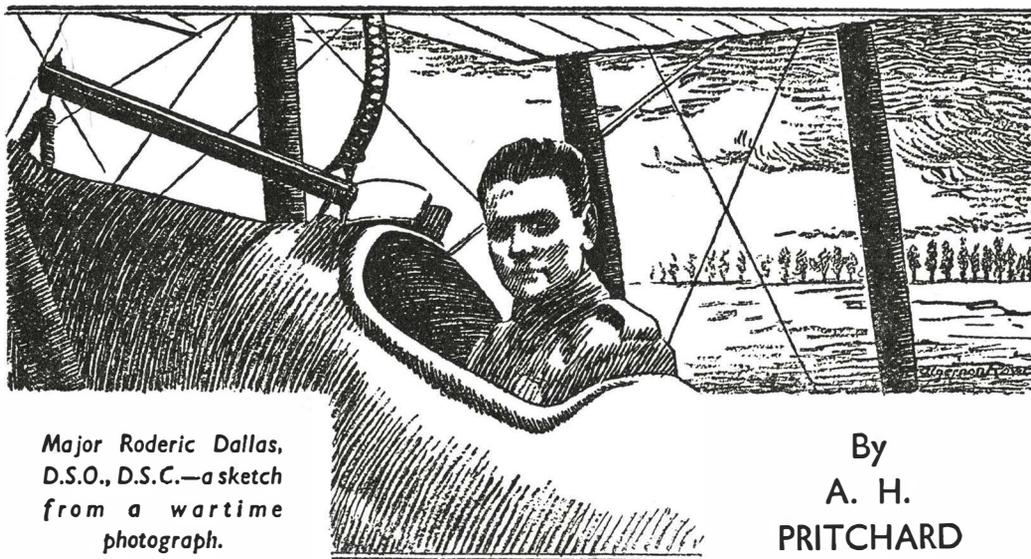
"But we don't know anything for certain, remember."

"No, I suppose we don't, when you come to think of it," James mused, then added, with sudden inspiration, "perhaps we'd better regard the whole matter as an official secret—like all you Air Force blokes do when you don't know the answer to a question!"

"Rudeness apart, that's not a bad idea," Pat agreed, "and in true Naval tradition I propose we now adjourn to the bar and splice the main brace. It's been a trying day!"

"By the way," ejaculated Pat, when drinks had been ordered, "were there any casualties on the 'Witch'?"

"Not a chance——" was the reply. "You can't get rid of politicians as easily as that, my lad!"



Major Roderic Dallas,
D.S.O., D.S.C.—a sketch
from a wartime
photograph.

By
A. H.
PRITCHARD

A Forgotten Hero of the Air War

Victor over Thirty-nine Enemy Aircraft and Hero of a Hundred Sky Duels, Roderic Dallas was a Fighter whose Name the Empire must Ever Remember

FOR some unknown reason, the greatest difficulty is always experienced when trying to trace the records and deeds of Britain's air "Aces." Write to America, Germany, or France for information about their leading air fighters, and nine times out of ten much useful data will at once be forwarded. Try the same thing here, and the Air Ministry will reply, "No records of the number of machines shot down by individuals are available," or you may not even be favoured with a reply. For reasons best known to themselves the Powers That Be have a mania for hiding away the deeds of the junior service. Take, as a fitting example, the case of Major Roderic Stanley Dallas, D.S.O., D.S.C., and Bar. Victor over thirty-nine enemy aircraft, hero of a hundred sky duels. His name is practically unknown.

Born on July 29th, 1892, Dallas enlisted in the Australian Army just after his twenty-first birthday, and had won himself a commission by the time war broke out. A fine figure of man-

hood, nearly six feet four inches in his socks, with a natural flair for command, he could have made a name for himself in any branch of the Army, but, like many other daring young men of his time, he had set his heart on flying one of those flimsy contraptions which, at that time, passed for aeroplanes.

For months, he sent in applications for a transfer to the R.F.C., only to have each one returned. Dejected by the constant lack of success, he applied to the R.N.A.S. as a forlorn hope. To his own amazement he was accepted as a Flight Sub-Lieutenant, and his papers ordered him to report at Hendon for training on June 25th, 1915. He celebrated his twenty-third birthday by doing five hours dual and, flying the creaky old Bleriot's and Farmans, he quickly became an efficient pilot.

Later he was sent to Dover for coastal patrol work. A month of long and monotonous patrols over the heaving grey waters of the North Sea followed, with never a chance for action. Then came the call for help from the sorely-pressed

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R.F.C., at that time taking a terrible beating from the German Fokkers. In answer to the appeal, Dallas's squadron, No. 1 R.N.A.S., arrived at Dunkirk on November 27th, 1915, to co-operate with the French and Flying Corps squadrons on the Belgian coast.

From that date until May, 1916, no mention of Dallas can be found in official reports, but during that month he sprang into the limelight as one of the most daring pilots on the Front. Flying a Nieuport Scout, he seemed to delight in attacking large enemy groups. The 12th brought him his first victory, an Aviatik that fell in flames. On the 20th, he met with a patrol of five tough Friedrichshafen two-seaters that were returning from a raid on Dunkirk, and catching them over Blankenberghe, he proceeded to "mop-up." In and out of the formation he flashed until it had split up into scattered units, then he pounced on a straggler and down it went, minus a top wing. The remaining four scooted for Germany, but Dallas was not to be denied, and another started earthwards with a long oily plume of black smoke to mark its funeral pyre.

At 3.30 a.m. the following morning, an alarm was sounded, and No. 1 Squadron was ordered to watch out for twelve enemy bombers that had dropped forty high-explosive "eggs" on Dunkirk. Just as the first grey streaks of dawn lit the heavens, Dallas, flying alone at twelve thousand feet, spotted the enemy coming towards him, and, undaunted by the size of formation, he dived for the rearmost machine. The Lewis on his Nieuport spat ten splinters of lead, and a great pillar of fire plunged down to ruin near Westende. Shaken by the fierceness of the lone attack, the Germans fled in confusion, hotly pursued by Dallas until his petrol and ammunition were exhausted, and he had to make a forced-landing on a shingle beach.

The next day, while out on patrol with R. H. Mulock (who won fame by destroying a submarine with a bomb, and later became Colonel Mulock, of

the Independent Air Force) still another group of Dunkirk bombers chanced to cross his path. Into the raiders went the two Britishers, each destroying their chosen victims in flames, with their first long burst of fire. Pulling away from the demoralised formation, Mulock turned, and coming up under the belly of another raider, sent that, too, to a fiery end, his second victory towards his final score of twelve.

For his exceptional skill and daring during these three days, Dallas was mentioned in despatches and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

One Man Against Eleven

JUNE saw Dallas cement his reputation as a fearless fighter when, on the 9th, he attacked a mixed enemy formation of eight scouts and three bombers. He shot one bomber about so badly that the fuselage broke in two between pilot and observer, the separated parts forming coffins for their unfortunate occupants. A scout dived for Dallas, but soon followed the two-seater and the rest of the formation drew off.

Less than a week after this the Grim Reaper reached out for him, but by brilliant flying and a large slice of luck, he managed to elude the grasp of Old Man Death. It all happened during a dogfight between five machines of No. 1 Squadron and a Fokker group, during the course of which Dallas's engine was smashed by bullets. He was forced to lose altitude, and drew away from the fight, and, seeing his predicament, two Fokkers on the look-out for "cold meat," left the main body and dived after him.

If this had happened later in the war when machines had synchronised guns, Dallas would never have stood a chance, but having a wing-mounted Lewis, he could still make an attempt to fight back. On came the Fokkers, one above him and one to the left and slightly below. As the topmost one dived over him, Dallas smacked a burst clean through its petrol-tank, and down it went, wrapped in flames. The survivor grew more cautious and held back, but, taking advantage of the wind, Dallas managed to swing his

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machine into a gliding turn, and get in a long-range burst before his powerless 'plane stalled. More by luck than skill, the burst sped true and one wing of the Fokker crumpled, and slowly folded over the cockpit, shutting the pilot from the two-mile fall of death that lay beneath him. Describing his feelings after the fight, Dallas said, "I had the wind up so much that it blew me back at the Fokker."

Throughout the year Dallas continued to make himself a pest to the Imperial German Air Force, and when, in early 1917, No. 1 Squadron received Sopwith Triplanes, he excelled all his earlier efforts. An example of what he could do with the "Tripe" came on April 21st, 1917.

Into the sky of "Bloody April," a sky filled with the deadly Albatros Scouts, went Dallas and a squadron-mate, Lieutenant T. G. Culling. Over the shell-pocked rubble that had once been St. Eloi they spotted a formation of two-seater Albatros observation 'planes, protected by a swarm of shark-bellied, fish-tailed scouts—Albatros D-3's. At a signal from Dallas both "Tripes" went hell for leather for the two-seaters, and Culling shot the wings off one, while Dallas hit another in the petrol-tank, the luckless two-seater exploding and scattering itself all over the sky. Down came the "invincible" scouts, and for exactly fifty-eight minutes Dallas and Culling fought a one-sided battle with the best of Germany's men and machines.

Despite the terrific odds, the Triplanes flew rings round the famous Albatros D-3's, and when the flare-up finally ended, Dallas had destroyed one Albatros in flames, whilst Culling claimed two "out of control." Although both machines were bullet-shattered wrecks, neither pilot had received a scratch during the fight, although Culling knocked two teeth out against his dashboard when his machine fell to bits as he landed. For his part in this epic fight Dallas was again mentioned in despatches, and the French showed their appreciation by awarding him the Croix de Guerre,

June 16th saw him shoot down an Aviatik two-seater and then, on the 22nd, he won a bar to his D.S.C. In the morning he destroyed an A.E.G. two-seater that had been protected by six scouts and in the afternoon got another A.E.G. and a Halberstadt D-3. Near Messines he spotted the A.E.G. busy taking photographs, and soon sent the inquisitive one down in flames. Out of the sun at his back came five Halberstadt Scouts, and bullets flicked uncomfortably close to his head. One 'plane zoomed across his nose, to draw his attention from two more coming up beneath him, and Dallas let the decoy have a ten-round burst clean through the cockpit. Drilled through, the pilot collapsed over the stick, and the 'plane flew wild. It went straight for the other Halberstadts, then attacking Dallas from below, and they scattered out of the derelict's path. In the confusion, Dallas flew merrily away.

A Student of Tactics

LIKE the more famous Jimmy McCudden, Dallas was an ardent student of air-fighting tactics, and kept an invaluable note-book in which he entered his methods of attacking various types of enemy aircraft. This practice stood him in good stead when he was appointed C.O. of No. 1 Squadron early in July, and under his careful guidance the squadron gave a good account of itself during the Messines drive of the same month. A kindly commander, ever ready to give help and advice to his pilots, he was extremely popular with the rank and file. If the men had to make any special effort to keep the machines in fighting condition, he always thanked them personally, and they worked the harder for it.

For nine months Dallas commanded No. 1 Squadron, but when the R.N.A.S. and R.F.C. were amalgamated in March, 1918, a great deal of shuffling about took place, and with his score at twenty-six, Dallas left to take command of No. 40 Squadron, equipped with S.E.5's. The great German spring offensive was

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under way, and the fliers of the black cross were to be found in swarms.

Dallas soon began to show his new squadron what he could do. A week after his arrival a Rumpler appeared over No. 40's aerodrome at Bruay, and ten minutes after its appearance high-explosive shells began to burst around the 'drome, directed there by the gentleman in the rear cockpit of the Rumpler. Dallas ordered his machine out and tried to reach the German, but could not get up to it. Simulating engine trouble, he enticed the pilot to attack him, and then shot it down near Lille.

A FEW days later the Germans forced the British troops back, and several divisions became isolated. Dallas and several other pilots went up to try and locate their position, and going down to investigate a body of troops, Dallas saw they were Germans. A machine-gun promptly opened fire, and a bullet tore through his leg just above the knee.

A fortnight in hospital, and then Dallas was back with the squadron, even though he could not walk without crutches. Early in April, although his wound had not yet healed, he decided to avenge that hole in his leg and, loaded to capacity with bombs, he attacked a German aerodrome and bombed and machine-gunned the whole field. For this and his good work

during the retreat, Dallas was awarded the D.S.O.

On May 8th he made another of his spectacular attacks on a large formation. Near Ballieul he found seven Hun scouts, Pfalz and Fokker Triplanes, and had shot the wings off a Pfalz before the enemy pilots even saw him. Three days later he got another Pfalz and, on the 23rd, a Rumpler and a Fokker Triplane. By the 28th of the month, his score was thirty-nine, but the Grim Reaper was out to get this mere mortal who had once given him the slip.

On June 1st, he was out over Lievin, when he saw a Fokker Triplane a thousand feet below him. One triplane was nothing to a man who daily attacked a dozen, and he went down after it. As his hand went to his guns, Spandaus chattered behind him, and bullets tore through his body. He had been caught by a decoy, and two triplanes had come out of the sun and riddled him before he had time to turn. In gentle turns, his S.E.5 went down, guided by a dead hand, then, a few hundred feet up, suddenly nose-dived and hurtled earthwards with ever-increasing speed.

The Grim Reaper had scythed down yet another flower of the Empire's manhood, and Roderic Dallas had passed on, to join in Valhalla that gallant fellowship—the forgotten heroes of the war in the air.

“WHEN YOU SOAR INTO THE AIR . . . ”

The Song of No. 22 Squadron, R.F.C., sung to the tune of “D'ye Ken John Peel”

WHEN you soar into the air on a Sopwith Scout,

And you're scrapping with a Hun and your gun cuts out,

Well, stuff down your nose till your plugs fall out, 'Cause you haven't got a hope in the morning.

FOR a batman woke me from my bed,

I'd had a thick night and a very sore head,

And I said to myself, to myself I said,

“Oh, we haven't got a hope in the morning.”

SO I went to the sheds and examined my gun,

Then my trusty engine I tried to run,

And the revs. that it gave were a thousand and one,

'Cause it hadn't got a hope in the morning.

WE were escorting “22,”

Hadn't a notion what to do,

So we shot down a Hun and an F.E. too,

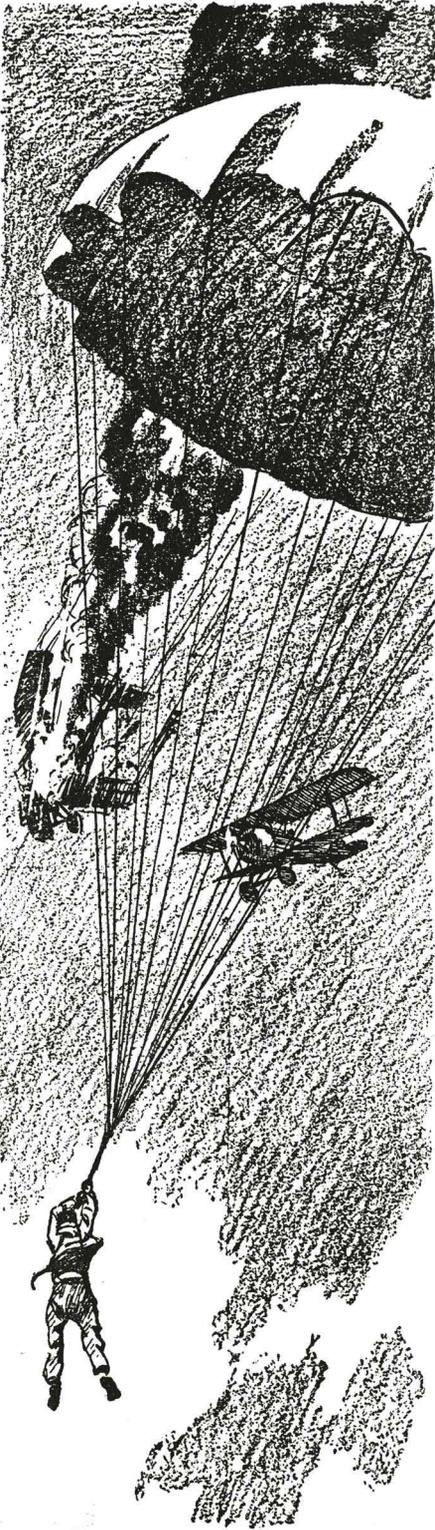
'Cause they hadn't got a hope in the morning.

WE went to Cambrai all in vain.

The F.E.'s said, “We must explain.

Our camera's broke, we must do it again,

'Cause we haven't got a hope in the morning.”



Jackson's plane had exploded—his own would go up at any second!

One Minute To Live

A Thrilling Short Story of a Man Who Planned a Murder in Mid-Air

By SIDNEY BOWEN

THE idea of murder came into Corbin's mind shortly after he had kicked Prop-Wash in the ribs. Prop-Wash was a playful hound belonging to Jackson, Number Two stunt man of the Ajax Film Company. Corbin was Number One stunt man; but he was fast losing his rating, if he hadn't already lost it.

For two weeks now, Corbin and Jackson had been doing the stunt flying in Ajax's air extravaganza, "Golden Eagles." The cool daring of Jackson had won the frank admiration of everyone. Corbin hated him more and more each day; he couldn't stand being shoved out of the spotlight by a better man.

And then kicking Prop-Wash climaxed everything. It happened this way. Seething under the caustic remarks of the director, Prouty, for a poor showing during a preliminary take, Corbin slammed in through the door of the dressing-room, slammed his parachute pack on to its hook and sank down on the bench. In one corner of the room, Prop-Wash was contentedly chewing at the sleeve of an old flying-coat that belonged to him. And Prop-Wash belonged to Jackson!

Corbin charged towards the dog.

"Drop that, you damn dog!"

Prop-Wash pricked up his ears, wagged his stubby tail. This was a game he'd often played with his master. Usually, though, it was a shoe, or something not so bulky as a flying-coat. However—

He waited until the outstretched hands were almost on him, then he jumped nimbly to one side and scampered across the room, sharp teeth still crunching the sleeve of the old flying-coat. Hands grabbed the trailing coat, and jerked so hard that he was spun around on all fours. Very well, then, a tug-of-war it

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would be ! He braced his paws, wagged his tail and made noises in his throat.

Prop-Wash didn't see the booted foot lash out. It sank into his ribs. He yelped with pain and collapsed. The coat-sleeve was wrenched savagely from his mouth. Unable to move, he looked with hurt, puzzled eyes up into the distorted face bending over him.

At that moment a shadow appeared in the doorway. Prop-Wash whimpered weakly as his master leaped at Corbin and spun him around.

"Here, what the devil?"

Corbin shook off the hands that held him.

"I'll break every bone in his body if he doesn't leave my stuff alone!" he shouted.

"Corbin, if you ever hit that dog again, I'll give you the worst beating of your life! And you can kiss the book on it, too. Come here, old fellow. Hurt you much, eh?"

Trembling with blind rage, Corbin swung his clenched fist. But his fist only fanned thin air; Jackson had struck first. From the floor and through a haze of spinning stars and comets, he saw Jackson and Prop-Wash go out the dressing-room door.

IT was when the stars and comets stopped spinning that the idea of murder occurred to him. It didn't have to be murder exactly. He could do it in such a way that it wouldn't even look like murder. A stunt pilot's life was a dangerous one; accidents were always happening. Take the case of Brady, last week. No reason in the world why his wings should have come off. But they did. And Brady's parachute hadn't helped him at all.

Now if Jackson's wings came off during that final take to-morrow. No—that wouldn't be sure enough. For one thing it was problematical if he'd have the chance to doctor the 'plane. There were always one or two mechanics in the hangar. Another thing, too, Jackson might notice something was wrong and have the 'plane re-checked. And, lastly, there was always the chance

that Jackson might jump free. No, it had to be some way that was sure. Absolutely sure, and not the slightest suspicion cast in his direction.

Perhaps he'd better wait. A perfect opportunity might present itself in time. But, no. He couldn't afford to wait. Jackson would have his job before "Golden Eagles" was finished. He'd be another has-been. Prouty, damn him, would see to it that he wouldn't get a job on any of the lots. Prouty had said that he was getting yellow. And when a stunt pilot got the reputation of being yellow, well——

No, he couldn't afford to wait. He had to get Jackson out of the way. He—wait a minute! The perfect opportunity was staring him right in the face. Over there on the wall hook. Jackson's parachute, hanging beside his own. Why, certainly! They were both due to jump at the end of that final take to-morrow. Perfect! He had only to slip back here to-night, open the flap of the 'chute just enough to allow him to get at the shroud lines. A sharp knife blade would fray them just enough, but not noticeably so, even if the unexpected should happen and Jackson re-folded his 'chute before he went up. He'd never done it before, though. But, even if he did, he certainly wouldn't notice the weakened shrouds. And when he jumped out——

"**A**LL right, you two," Director Prouty's voice came crisply. "I don't want to spoil a single foot of film, so listen carefully, as I go over it for the last time. You two go up to eight thousand. You, Jackson, to the east side of the aerodrome. And you, Corbin, to the west. Wait until you see me fire the green Verey light from the camera 'plane. Then head for each other and start mixing it up. This is World War stuff, and I mean, mixing it up! No cream-puff stuff to-day. Corbin, you understand? Now when I fire the red Verey light, you are both to yank the smoke release lever, see? In the deadly combat you've each got your man, see?"

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"Now as soon as you yank the smoke release, twist away from each other, and jump clear of your machines. Rather than be burned alive, you've jumped, see? Now, for heaven's sake, don't open your parachutes until you've dropped out of camera range. You've got to free-fall out of the picture before you use your 'chutes. Now from the time you yank the smoke release, you have a full minute in which to get clear before the time bomb goes off in the petrol tank. One whole minute, which is plenty. Okay! Any questions? None, eh? All right. Up and at it!"

No cream-puff stuff! Face smarting, Corbin walked over to his 'plane and climbed in. A minute or two later, he sent it thundering across the narrow field, pulled it clear, and went racing up towards western skies. Little beads of sweat studded his forehead, but his mouth was bone dry. For the ten thousandth time he retraced in thought every step he had taken last night. No, there hadn't been a single slip-up. Jackson had been wriggling into the parachute harness when he went into the dressing-room this morning. He'd only been a few seconds behind Jackson, so he knew that the other pilot had not re-folded his 'chute.

Sure, everything was all right. It was just that his nerves were jumpy. After all, he'd never killed a man in his life. But he really wasn't killing Jackson. Jackson was killing himself. Certainly! It would be Jackson's hand that would pull the release-ring of the parachute. He'd take a rest after this, though. Go away some place and forget. Then he'd come back better than ever. And no Jackson, damn him, around to—

The green Verey-light! It seemed that he'd been in the air only a couple of minutes or so. Time was whipping past. That's what he wanted, though.

Here comes Jackson. Make it good, Prouty? You're damn right, I'll make it good. I'll give you a piece of flying you won't forget for a long time. Hi!—not so close, Jackson! You'll get it soon enough without wrecking us both. Cut it out, blast you! Your wheels

almost touched the top wing that time. Showing me up, eh? Well, it'll be the last time. The very last flight for you, Jackson. I wonder what you'll think when you see those shroud lines part, and the silk fold up? I wonder if you'll guess, Jackson? I hope you do. I really hope you do! Look out! Damn you, look out! Ah, the red light! Good-bye—Jackson!

There! He's going over in a half roll. There he jumps out. A whole minute. I want to see him open up. I'll still have plenty of time. There—there! He's down below camera range. His pilot 'chute—he's pulled the ring. Now—now, Jackson! Now, watch the silk. Now—

My God! The silk has billowed out, *and the shroud lines are holding!* They weren't frayed enough! Not a single one of them has parted. But, they should, they should! But Jackson was floating down! He—

His own 'chute? Had he made a mistake? Had he hung Jackson's 'chute on the wrong hook? No, he couldn't have done that. He put on his own 'chute this morning. It was on him now. Or was it? If he could only twist around and see the name tag sewed to the back of the pack. God! Jackson was still floating, so *he* must be wearing the defective 'chute. He'd made a mistake!

Jackson's 'plane! *It had exploded!* His own machine would go up any second. Time had whipped past. There was only a few seconds' leeway. Get up—jump out! Maybe you haven't made a mistake! Get up—get up! Move your legs! Move your legs! Move your arms! Get up—*get up and jump!*

DIRECTOR PROUTY, Jackson, and the Ajax property man stared puzzled-eyed at the dirt and blood-smeared parachute pack on the dressing-room table. A bit of white cloth was sewed to the back of the pack, and stencilled in ink on it was the name Corbin.

"Something must have happened to him," Prouty said in a hushed voice.

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"Maybe he fainted. He had plenty of time."

"Maybe," echoed the property man. "But he'd started to jump. He'd unsnapped his safety-belt. I could tell that from what was picked up after the 'plane exploded. But he didn't get out in time. Look at that release-ring. His body hitting the ground didn't even jerk it loose. The explosion got him before he was free. Tough, when a man has to go out that way."

"Yes," agreed Jackson thoughtfully. "By the way, how was it you put a different 'chute on my hook this morning? Where's my regular one?"

"In the dustbin," was the blunt reply. "I found that darn dog of yours chewing off one corner. He'd pulled 'em both off the hooks, but he was making a meal out of yours. Shroud lines all frayed to hell. You'd better keep him tied up. He'll be getting you into real trouble one of these days!"

HERE'S THE ANSWER

Readers' Questions are invited and should be addressed to AIR STORIES, 8-11 Southampton Street, London, W.C.2. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany ALL enquiries.

GLOSTER GLADIATOR (T. H. Dunwill, London, W.13). The principal dimensions of the Gladiator are: length 27 ft. 5 in., span (top and bottom planes) 32 ft. 3 in., track 7 ft. 5 in., stagger 27 in., dihedral (top and bottom) 3 deg., incidence $2\frac{1}{2}$ deg.

VICTORY SCORES (D. Griffiths, Cheadle, Cheshire). The victory scores of those who went out to France with Colonel W. E. Bishop as 85 Squadron were: W. E. Bishop 72, E. W. Springs 12, S. F. H. Thompson 11, W. H. Brown 8, D. C. Inglis 8, M. C. McGregor 7, A. C. Randall 7, W. M. McDonald 7, T. McD. Grider 4, E. L. Benbow 4, Cuning 3, Dixon 2, Rorison 2.

DEMON SQUADRONS (P. L. Goodacre, West Kirby, Cheshire). Hawker Demon Two-Seater Fighters are the flying equipment of the following R.A.F. squadrons: Nos. 23, 29, 41 and 65 (Fighter) Squadrons and No. 604 Auxiliary Air Force Sqdn.

WARPLANE DATA (D. C. Smail, Edinburgh). (1) The Blackburn Kangaroo was produced in November, 1917, and the Avro Bison about August, 1918. (2) The F.E.8 was fitted with a 100-h.p. Mono Gnome engine; the Fokker E.3 with an 80-h.p. Oberursel, and the Short F.3 flying-boat with two 375-h.p. Rolls-Royces. (3) The Handley Page V-1500 used various types of engines, the most popular installation being either four 375-h.p. Rolls-Royces or four 500-h.p. B.H. Atlantics. (4) The Bristol Braemar Mark 2 had four 400-h.p. American Liberty engines. (5) We have no record of a Vickers Bullet; do you mean the Bristol Bullet built by the Bristol Aeroplane Co. in 1917?

HAWKER WARPLANES (Derek Webber, Swindon). The following are the various types of Hawker aircraft now in use by the R.A.F.: Fury single-seater fighter, Demon two-seater fighter, Hart light bomber, Hart trainer, Hind light bomber or general purpose type, Audax army co-operation type, Hector army co-operation type (actually the Audax, but fitted with a 24-cylinder Napier engine instead of the usual Rolls-Royce), Nimrod single-seater fleet fighter, Osprey two-seater fleet

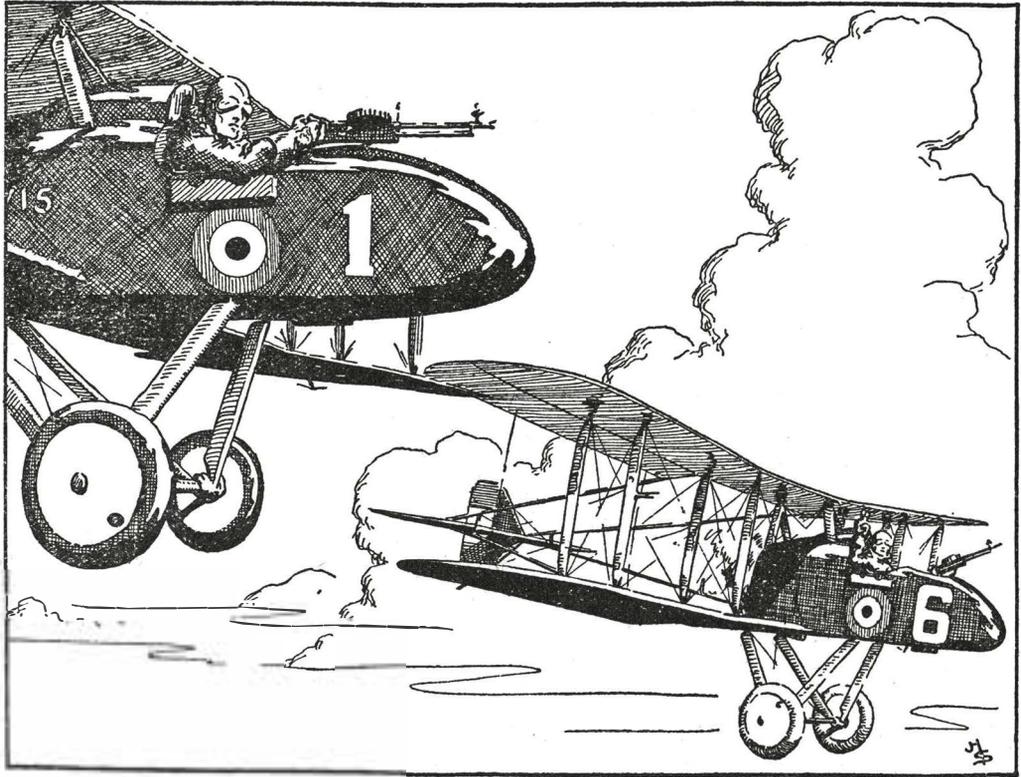
fighter reconnaissance type, Hardy two-seater general purpose type.

VICKERS GUN MECHANISM (J. McCormack, Glasgow). (1) The Vickers is usually fired by means of a Constantinesco synchronising gear consisting of cams on the airscrew shaft which, through a suitable hydraulic system, fire the gun when the airscrew blades are momentarily clear of the muzzle. (2) As far as we know, there is no reason why the same device should not be used on a Lewis gun, except that the latter has to be re-loaded by hand after every 97 rounds, whereas a Vickers belt contains 600 rounds.

FLEET AIR ARM FORMATIONS (D. W. H. Roberts, Blackheath, S.E.3). (1) In the Fleet Air Arm a flight formation usually consists of four machines. A squadron comprises three flights, making a total of twelve machines in all. (2) For details of colour and markings of Fleet Air Arm machines see the Nimrod on this month's cover.

ROCKET GUNS (J. B. Martin, Auckland, New Zealand). Le Prieux incendiary rockets were widely used by Allied aircraft, principally against observation balloons and airships. They were usually clipped to interplane struts and fired by an electrical contact which released the clips and ignited the rocket-charge. Ball once stated, in a letter home, that he "loved to dive on an enemy formation and scatter them with rockets." On the whole, however, they were not a success and, when fired, were liable to perform strange and dangerous aerobatics. One D.H.2 was completely wrecked by the premature explosion of its rockets.

CABIN WARPLANES (J. O. Oakes, Prestwich, Manchester). Yes, it is true that Germany had cabin-type machines during the Great War, though there is no record of one having actually seen active service. The Siemens-Schuckert firm produced two such machines, both bombers. One had the pilot's and front gunner's cockpits enclosed, whilst in the other all cockpits were completely enclosed. No details are available of these machines beyond the fact that both carried a crew of six, a useful bomb-load and were armed with four machine-guns.



A "PUSHER" SCOUT

The History of the War-time F.E.8 Single-Seater Fighter
with Full Instructions for Building a Scale Model

By JAMES HAY STEVENS

PRODUCED in 1915, the F.E.8 was the product of the brains of the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough. The initials F.E. were applied to a series of pusher designs, each separate design being allotted a distinguishing number. The letters "F.E." originally signified "Farman Experimental," as it was considered that the Farman brothers were the originators of the pusher arrangement. Later, the letters were taken to mean "Fighting Experimental" because of the general trend of the designs produced.

The earlier "Feeplanes" were two-seaters, of which the F.E.2B and F.E.2D were the best known. Unlike

the subject of this article, these machines were both two-seaters with water-cooled engines, and were produced as two-seat-fighters and bombers. They were used, long after they were out of date, until the end of the war, as night-bombers with the Independent Air Force.

In 1915, the Royal Flying Corps had to have single-seater fighters (or, as they were then called, "fighting scouts") to oppose the highly successful German single-seaters—Fokkers and Halberstadts mostly—which were wreaking such havoc among our defenceless B.E.'s, R.E.'s, and Moranes. As, at that date, the only interrupter gun-gear was that invented by Antony Fokker, the

AIR STORIES

Allies relied for the most part upon the pusher machine for fighting purposes. Some French designers had managed to produce tractor aeroplanes which circumvented the difficulty of having no synchronising gear—Nieuport, by mounting the Lewis gun to fire over the airscrew, and Morane, by fitting steel “deflector” plates on the airscrew of one of their small single-seaters. In this country, however, the problem was solved by making the machine a pusher, and giving the pilot a gun which was fitted on a movable mounting. What was lost in performance was gained by the good view obtained for the pilot. The two most successful machines of this type were the D.H.2 and the aeroplane under review in this article—the F.E.8. Both had quite respectable performances despite the mass of struts and wires which held wings, nacelle and tail together, and, from the point of view of manoeuvrability, they were not very much inferior to the tractor machines of the day.

The wings were of the normal wood and fabric construction employed at that time. They were of two-bay arrangement, the tail booms joining the rear spar in the same plane as the inner pair of interplane struts. Full inter-bay and incidence bracing was employed. The ailerons were very large, and composed the trailing edges of all four planes from the inner interplane struts outwards. The operating cables ran externally from the nacelle to the control levers on the ailerons.

The Pilot's "Office"

THE pilot sat in his nacelle some four feet in front of the engine, and he found it very cold work at altitude

or in wintry weather. His head rested against a streamline pad, which faired his head and shoulders into the rotary engine—in fact, the whole nacelle was quite a good streamline shape. The pilot's armament was a Lewis gun mounted on a special pivoting set in the fore-part of the cockpit. The ammunition drums were carried in external racks on each side of the cockpit.

The undercarriage was a normal vee wire-braced affair, with rubber cord shock-absorbers. The tail booms, as may be seen from the illustrations, tapered slightly in plan, and met at the tail plane spar centre-line in elevation. The booms were wire-braced both in plan and elevation. One of the weak points in the design of this machine was that the tailskid was attached directly to the bottom of the rudder. The fin being attached to the middle of the tail plane, the stresses set up by a heavy landing were transmitted from the tailskid through the fin to the tail plane, thus straining the whole unit. Owing to this feature, the tail unit had to be very carefully inspected, and gave “Ack Emmas” some good practice in maintenance work.

The engine fitted was a 100-h.p. Gnome monosoupape rotary air-cooled. This was one of the most successful of the early aero engines, being moderately light and simple in construction. The Gnome engine drove a four-bladed pusher airscrew. The machine weighed 1,050 lbs. empty and 1,570 lbs. when loaded with fuel for two and a half hours. The top speed was 94 m.p.h. at ground level, and it could climb to 6,000 ft. in nine and a half minutes. It is said to have been an exceptionally nice machine to fly, and was very light on the controls.

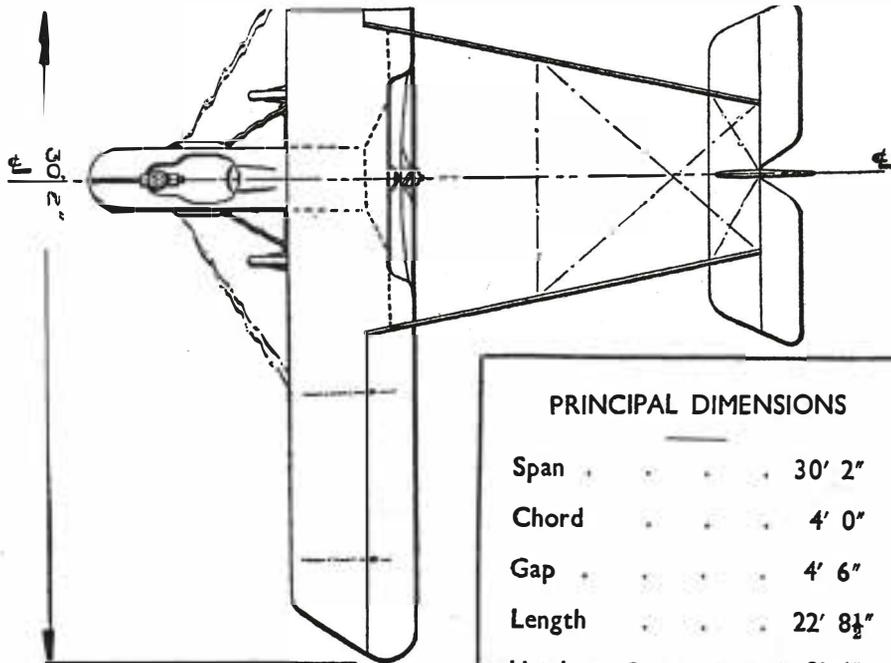
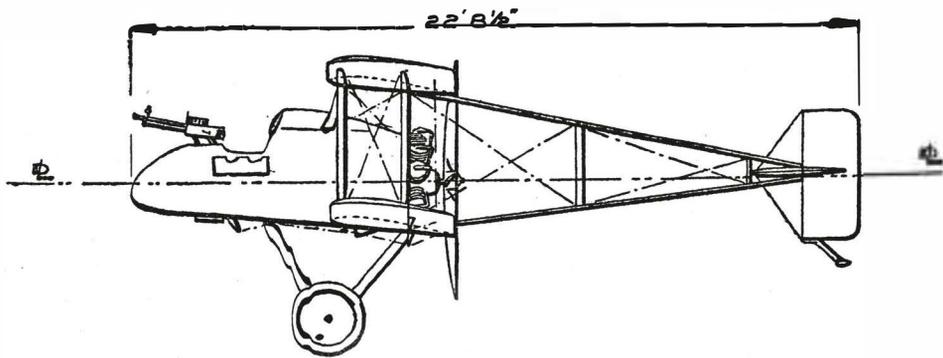
BUILDING THE SCALE MODEL

Details of Tools, Materials and Method of Construction

ONCE again the scale for this model is $\frac{1}{72}$ nd, drawings and all dimensions of material being given for a model of that size. If it is preferred to use another scale, it is quite easy to do so,

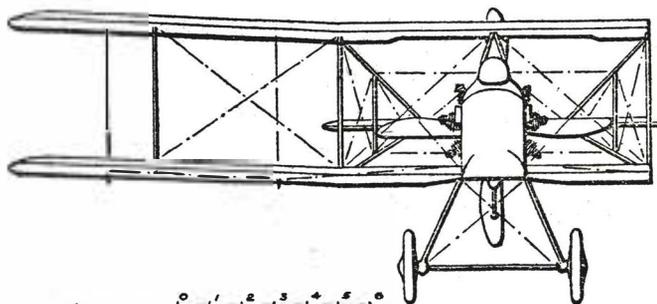
but it is advisable to make a copy of the scale drawings to the actual scale size of the model it is proposed to build. This model will be found to be rather more tricky to make than the others

THE F.E.8 SINGLE-SEATER SCOUT



PRINCIPAL DIMENSIONS

Span	30' 2"
Chord	4' 0"
Gap	4' 6"
Length	22' 8½"
Height (in flying position)	9' 4"



Scale 1/4" = 1' 0"

A General Arrangement Drawing, showing dimensions and three-view plans of the F.E.8.

AIR STORIES

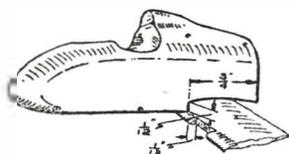


Fig. 1.—The nacelle, showing cut-out for the lower plane.

previously described in this series, owing to the booms which carry the tail unit. However, with care and patience in reasonable measure, the task should not prove too difficult for the inexperienced modeller.

Tools and Materials

THE following materials will be required :—

Block of wood $1\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{3}{4} \times \frac{3}{8}$ in. for the nacelle ; sheet of wood $5\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. for the wings ; sheet of celluloid $3 \times 1 \times \frac{1}{16}$ in. for the tail unit ; 18 in. of 20-gauge brass wire for the wing struts and undercarriage ; 14 in. of 16-gauge brass wire for tail booms.

The wheels, engine, airscrew, and gun can be made from scrap pieces of material, and this method of construction will be outlined later. An alternative is to buy some cast models of these parts, of which there are some good examples to the 7/2nd scale on the market.

A coil of fine florist's wire will be necessary if the multitudinous bracing wires are to be fitted.

Here is a list of the essential tools : $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. chisel ; small plane ; penknife ; small file (flat or, preferably, half-round) ; $\frac{1}{16}$ -in. bradawl ; fretsaw ; small long-nosed pliers ; plastic wood ; tube of glue (a cellulose glue will be found the most satisfactory) ; a penny ruler measuring in $\frac{1}{16}$ ths, $\frac{1}{2}$ ths, and $\frac{1}{10}$ ths of an inch ; also soldering iron, flux, and solder.

Method of Construction

A TRACING of the side elevation of the nacelle should be made from the General Arrangement Drawing. The

Fig. 2.—Showing stages in construction of the engine.



tracing should be placed on the block of wood for the nacelle and the outline pricked through. A cut-out to take the lower plane should be marked as shown in Fig. 1. Cut out the side elevation, and mark on the top and bottom surfaces the centre-line and thereafter the plan of the nacelle. Again cut the wood to shape. The bullet-nose and rounded

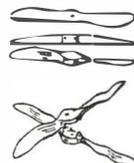


Fig. 3.—The four-bladed airscrew in course of construction and assembly.

top-decking should now be formed, and the cockpit hollowed out. Drill the holes for the centre-section struts and the front undercarriage legs. The finished nacelle should then look something like Fig. 1.

The engine is made from a piece of scrap wood cut out to a blank of the shape shown in Fig. 2a. Round the cylinders carefully with a sharp penknife (Fig. 2b) and make a small piece of wood to the shape shown in "C" for the crankcase. The size of the engine is shown in the G.A. Drawing on page 369. The four-bladed airscrew is carved from two pieces of wood, and the two pairs of blades interlocked, as shown in stages in Fig. 3. Firmly glue the airscrew to the crankcase, and make a hole through the whole unit, so that it turns freely on a pin. Do not yet fix the engine to the nacelle.

Now mark the outline of the main planes on the sheet of wood. The lower plane has a cut-out to fit into that in the nacelle. The planes should be cambered to shape, and the outlines of the ailerons scored with a bradawl and ruler. The holes for the interplane struts should be made. Holes have also to be made horizontally into the trailing edges to take the ends of the tail booms—these require very gentle handling.

The tail booms are best made in the following manner : Make a jig from a piece of board and some nails, as shown in Fig. 4. If the rest of the model is accurate, the sizes given in the sketch

A "PUSHER" SCOUT

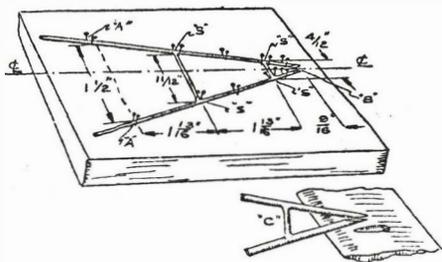


Fig. 4.—The soldering jig for the tail booms and, "C," the method of tail attachment.

should be correct. Fit pieces of 16-gauge wire into the jig and solder them together; leave a surplus at "AA" for fixing into the wings, and file the ends at "B" to fit, as shown in "C." Solder at points "S." Cut out the tail plane and make slotted holes in it to take the ends of the tail booms, as shown also in "C." The fin and rudder unit is cut from celluloid, and is slotted to lock into the tail plane. The tailskid should be cut out of the celluloid in one piece with this unit.

The undercarriage vees are made from 20-gauge brass wire. The wing struts are also 20-gauge wire, and are made to fit. Wheels may be made from wood or from linen buttons—if the latter are used they should be slit open and filled with plastic wood. The size and shape of the Lewis gun is shown in the G.A. Drawing, and may be made from scrap wire and celluloid.

Method of Assembly

MAKE the dihedral angle in the

planes by gently bending them between the fingers in the steam from a kettle or the heat of a candle flame. Note that the dihedral only starts at the inner pair of interplane struts, not at the centre-section. Glue the lower plane in place. When firm, make the holes for the rear undercarriage legs, but do not yet fit the undercarriage.

Fit the centre-section and interplane struts; adjust the top plane; glue, and allow to set.

Push the ends of the tail booms gently into their holes in the wings. Interlock the tail plane and rudder unit, and fix with glue. Glue the tail plane in place at the rear end of the tail booms and allow to set. Fit and glue the undercarriage vees, thread the axle and wheels, burring the ends of the axle with the pliers. Pin the engine and airscrew in place. Fit the Lewis gun.

Colour Scheme

PAINT the model dark green or brown with cream-coloured undersurfaces. Struts were varnished spruce, and should be painted a light yellowish brown. The engine should have black cylinders and an aluminium crankcase. The airscrew should be either stained mahogany colour and varnished, or be painted grey. The back of the hub should be silver. Red, white and blue cockades should be painted on the wings and nacelle. The rudder was not always painted with red, white and blue stripes, and this addition is, therefore, optional.

NEXT MONTH: The Armstrong Whitworth "Scimitar."

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Contributed by J. D. SCARLETT.



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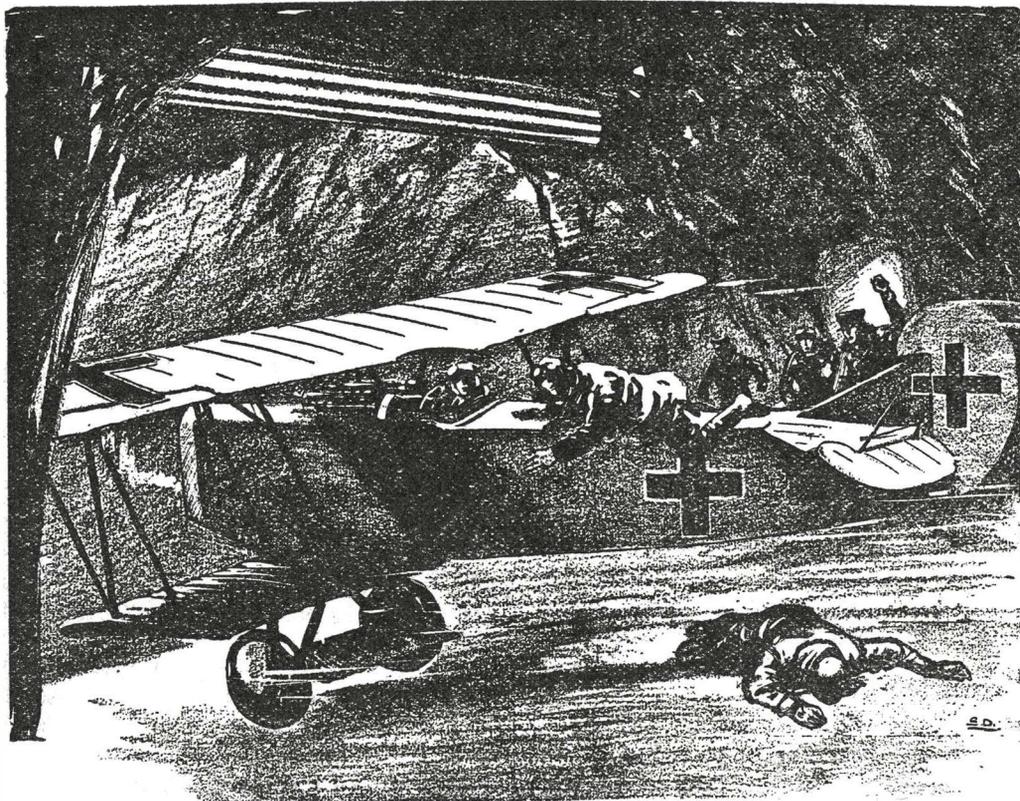
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Blaney jabbed open the throttle and the Fokker leapt forward with a roar.

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By **RUSSELL MALLINSON**

CHAPTER I

A Bristol is Bent

IN war, as in more peaceful pursuits, some comparative triviality can influence profoundly, a man's personal destinies.

If Lieutenant Robin Blaney—irreverently known as "Turnbuckle" Blaney owing to his lack of inches and rotundity giving him a physical resemblance to that gadget—had not stolen that extra ten minutes in bed, he would probably not have collected the packet that came to him in the subsequent twenty-four hours of merry hell.

Second Air Mechanic Soames, plumber by profession and batman for duration, had dutifully shaken the somnolent Mr. Blaney into wakefulness in the fuggy Armstrong hut on that misty July morning.

"Five o'clock, sir."

Blaney grunted. To drift back from blissful dreams of leave to be reminded that one was on dawn patrol was depressing.

Blaney yawned and stretched himself lazily under the issue blankets, musing on the bleak vista of early patrols looming ahead before his name climbed up the leave list.

AIR STORIES

Per Ardua ad H.E. Blaney's spirits rose in anticipation of two weeks' ease and comfort at the Bruton Street Air Force Club, the reunions with cheery wallahs in the Long Bar at The Troc. . . . that priceless little night-club off Tottenham Court Road.

Ten minutes. Numerals of Fate. They sped past without warning to the dozing Robin Blaney of the satirical interest of the gods, and Mars in particular, in his immediate destinies.

When at last he rolled out of bed and wriggled into an oil-stained Sidcot, he shivered a little. It was a typical Flanders dawn, raw and misty and silent, save for the distant rumble of heavy gunfire. Gathering up his helmet and goggles and gauntlets from the litter on the upturned crate beside the camp-bed, Blaney streaked out to the duckboards.

Tony Steele, his observer, was emerging from the neighbouring Armstrong. Steele's lean face wore its customary expression of melancholy belied by the humorous tilt at the corners of his wide mouth.

"We're late, my son," observed Steele languidly with a wary glance towards the C.O.'s Nissen. "Bet the old man has got his eye glued on his canteen Mark IV. wrist-watch, and his ear cocked for the purr of the Bristol."

Blaney grunted.

"If we're lucky, he's got a hang-over from the guest-night binge, and is snoring sweetly."

They made a quaint pair, clattering with heavy flying-boots along the duckboards to the mess. Steele, long and thin like a bracing-wire, and his companion short and as round as the bracing-wire's inseparable attachment.

They were a useful combination in the air, with something of a reputation in the Ypres sector for Art. Obs., Contact Patrol, and Trench Strafing. Blaney could throw a Bristol about the sky with a skilful imitation of a single-seater, and Steele was pretty deadly with a rear-seat Lewis. The lead he splayed from seemingly impossible angles had proved to be the requiem of more than one astonished Boche.

They slid into the mess and gulped down some hot coffee. Around them a litter of empty glasses and piled ash-trays bore evidence of the aftermath of the guest-night binge.

Through the mess window they could see the Bristol ticking over on the tarmac before "C" Flight sheds. In the chill air of dawn, the Rolls was firing with spasmodic flutterings.

FLIGHT-SERGEANT NEAL slid down from the cockpit and saluted with a hovering hand in the vicinity of his right ear.

"She's rather sluggish, sir," he warned. "Better warm her up."

Blaney clambered into the cockpit, and his gaze travelled slowly along the dashboard. The glass facets of the myriad instruments gleamed in the grey light; immobile robot faces, yet strangely alive with their pulsating needles as if they throbbed with the blood-stream of some living thing.

Behind him, Steele draped his six feet of lankiness over the Scarff mounting and, tapping Blaney's shoulder, jerked his head warningly towards the living-quarters.

Across the 'drome an ominous figure had appeared in the doorway of the Nissen. Major Reed, with pink and white pyjama legs flapping beneath his British warm, was registering glowering disapproval.

Blaney throttled back, and hurriedly waved away the chocks. The tail-skid rumbled as he taxied into the wind and opened out. The Rolls spluttered, and the rev. counter flickered warningly. Blaney held her down for another twenty yards and then lifted her. The Bristol's nose rose reluctantly, and then fell away with a protesting creak of under-carriage buffers.

Steele yelled in his ear, "Mind that damned ridge."

Blaney's glance sped along to where the notorious bump—a relic of an Aviatik's bomb-dropping attentions on a recent night—raced into his line of vision. He yanked back the stick. But the Bristol responded slowly with

CRASH CRATER

that deadweight of guns and ammunition and four 20-lb. Cooper bombs.

Bong! The two-seater shivered, and there came an ominous crack above the engine roar.

Tony Steele leaned out of the cockpit and peered beneath the vibrating longerons.

"Undercarriage spar gone," he announced glumly. "The port-side wheel is jammed against the bottom plane."

Blaney banked warily down-wind.

"Blast! A nice mess of raspberry jam we'll make if we pancake with these live Coopers. We'll have to get shot of them."

He was listening to the Rolls with new anxiety. The engine had now settled down, however, to a rhythmic roar, and Blaney cursed himself for letting the C.O. rattle him into taking-off with a sluggish engine.

Steele leaned across the oil-flecked cowl and tapped his shoulder.

"The old man's semaphoring. Silly ass thinks he's still in the R.N.A.S. Yo-ho, me lads! Stand by for Nelson's last signal."

Blaney hung out of the cockpit. Two hundred feet below he spotted a dwarfed figure festiculating on the steps of the Nissen. It was Major Reed waving his arms to shoo them off to the lines.

Blaney swung the Bristol's barrel nose eastwards.

"Suppose he thinks we may as well do a job before we crash. Anyway, we've got to get rid of those Coopers. I'd an idea that we'd drop them into Dickebush lake. But they'll do a better job on Jerry's side of the line."

He climbed steadily. Height was comforting with the reflection that he would have to jettison his bombs hurriedly should the engine pack up.

Four thousand feet below, Kimmel thrust its sombre heights through the shrouding mists. Black "Woolly Bears," unrolling their shrapnel bursts with that deceptive suggestion of casualness, heralded the customary morning hate.

"That nice little Julie at the Hout-

kerke estaminet," mused Tony, "told me she used to go picnicing in Kimmel woods."

Blaney grinned.

"Hell of a satyr you'd make, Tony, chasing young nymphs through the forest glade."

"Some nymph our little Julie," laughed Steele. "*Demi bouteille vin ordinaire pour aviateur Anglaise, intrepide, Twenty francs. C'est la guerre, monsieur.*"

BLANEY hung out of the cockpit, his experienced eye roving over the shell-scarred ridges that had been solidly fought over for three desperate years, Roulers, Polygon Wood, and the gaunt desolate ruins that was Bailleul.

The mists were clearing. The rising sun was flinging its shimmering beams of orange-red and gold across the eastern sky. For a moment Blaney forgot the sombre desolation of war as he watched the beauty of the awakening day.

Meanwhile the more practical Tony sent down a general squadron call.

"O.K. L.R.C.P. L. 4893 working."

They had crossed the lines now, and Steele was searching the shell-blasted terrain for signs of new earthworks, transport tracks, fresh flashpoints from enemy batteries, or balloon movements, the customary routine of a C.A. patrol.

A line of Ack-Ack puffs belched out in front of them. Blaney abruptly changed his course, side-slipping away from the immediate danger-zone.

He was searching for a target for the Coopers, and would feel considerably happier when they were clear of the wrecked undercarriage. Then the inevitable pancake landing when he got back to the aerodrome would no longer be fraught with quite such disastrous consequences.

Near Vierstraats' shell-spattered cross-road, he spotted some rather clumsy camouflage laced across shattered tree stumps. Partially obliterated lorry tracks converged towards a huddled mass that suggested ammunition dumps.

He pointed it out to Tony, who chuckled in anticipation.

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"A dump all right," he grinned. "Down we go, old son."

Blaney dipped the Bristol's nose as Steele dived into the office. The engine roar rose to a shrill scream, the wind lashing through the wires like a surging war cry. Steele saw suddenly the agitated movement of grey green figures amidst the dark shimmering mud rushing up to meet them. Coal-scuttle-helmeted men were running for the shelter of concrete dug-outs beside the road.

"They're not waiting for the Brock's benefit," Steele chuckled.

The Bristol pulled out of the skilfully judged dive, dead over its target. Steele's hands tightened on the bomb release and, as if flung from some giant catapult, a metal egg hurtled downwards, to be followed an instant later by a second blunt-nosed Cooper.

The first shattering explosion swept the camouflage of netted rope and fabric into a shambles, and lifted the shell cases like tumbling dice. There was a sudden inferno of noise and smoke and flame as the dump went up. The Bristol rolled in the fierce uprush of air. Frantically Blaney steadied her, and banked vertically back on to his tracks.

"Three!" he counted with relief as he watched the last pear-shaped projectile but one hurtle down to explode beside the concrete pill-box.

He hung on, waiting for the fourth. M.G. fire from the ground reached up at them with flaming fingers. But the hurtling Bristol was an elusive target, requiring considerable judgment in deflection if the ground gunners were to wing their quarry.

For another minute Blaney watched intently for that fourth burst. Then he turned an inquiring glance towards Steele.

"A dud?" he questioned. "I didn't see that last burst."

Steele looked worried.

"I'm not sure it fell," he jerked, and craned his head over the cockpit. "Hell! There's a live Cooper stuck in the undercarriage. It's wedged in the broken spar."

Blaney whistled.

"That's torn it! It's hoist with our own jolly little Cooper we'll be if we land with that live squib waiting to blow us to blazes. Hold on, laddie, and I'll have a crack at stunting it off."

They had climbed away from the blazing dump. The satisfaction of those moments of high-speed "strafing" was considerably dimmed by the realisation that their Bristol, with a live bomb that could scarcely fail to explode when they crash-landed, had suddenly become an almost certain death-trap.

Blaney pressed his shoulders against the back of the seat and tensed his limbs on the rudder-bar in preparation for some fierce stunting. Centrifugal force, he hoped, might sling the wedged bomb out into space.

Tony Steele took a tight grip of the Scarff-mounting and hummed cheerfully:

*"I've got a motto,
Keep our side of the line,
If you don't then you will find,
Every cloud has a Hun behind . . ."*

His voice died away in a sudden gasp. He went suddenly rigid in the cockpit as he stared incredulously at a trio of bunched Fokkers that came roaring up with snarling engines from beneath the Bristol's wings, stared with a sense of unreality at those chess-boarded attackers that seemed to have rocketed up from the very shell-craters themselves.

CHAPTER II

The Crater of Death

INSTINCTIVELY Robin Blaney threw his weight on the rudder-bar and slapped the stick across. He was stunting now with a vengeance. The Bristol cartwheeled into a vertical bank. The flaming burst from the leading Fokker's guns missed the two-seater's vitals by a fraction, and sliced the starboard wing fabric into jazzing ribbons.

As the Fokker fell away from the peak of its zoom, Steele jumped up in his cockpit and, slewing the Lewis in a half circle, cut loose. A stream of

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tracer lashed like a steel whip across the single-seater's cockpit. The pilot flung up his arms and fell on to the stick, and with flaming exhausts the Fokker went down in an uncontrolled dive.

Blaney held the Bristol in a tight spiral, warily watching the black-crossed 'planes. Even in those moments of shock, he was angrily reproaching himself for being caught like some callow "hun" on his first trip over the lines. Yet there was something queer about this whirlwind attack. He could not believe that both he and Steele, who were by way of being veterans, could have missed seeing those Fokkers if they had swooped down from above. Fokkers in a power dive could come hurtling down the sky like bats from hell, but always one heard their engines, or the warning of screaming wires.

A diving Fokker switched his thoughts to the danger of the hurtling fighter getting beneath his tail, the blind spot of the two-seater. He rolled out of the way of a deadly arc of tracer, but the Fokker pilot knew his job, and flattened out to dance round on the Bristol's tail.

Blaney felt the longerons shiver with the bite of steel slugs while Steele's none-too-steady hands tightened spasmodically on the gun trips, pouring flaming steel from his barrels like water from a hose. The shining arc of the Fokker's propeller blurred and disappeared in a flying medley of splinters. The single-seater dived out of the *mêlée*, and a wild-eyed Steele licked his lips and looked round for more.

The surviving Fokker hurtled above the Bristol like a bullet. The propeller lash of the check-marked attacker swept against Blaney's tense face. The Hun swiftly half-rolled, and with a perfect Immelman was on the two-seater's tail. Blaney banked madly, but the Bristol's barrel nose seemed to come round with painful slowness. A trail of smoking tracers ripped through his top centre-section. He caught a fleeting glimpse of the jazzing Fokker in the ring-sight, and his thumbs went down on the triggers.

That deadly burst slashed the single-seater's tail assembly into a shambles of fluttering fabric and disintegrating ribs, sending it hurtling down in a convulsive spin.

Blaney's yell of glee died on his lips. The Rolls coughed, there was a sudden scream of outraged metal, and the prop. jerked violently and then stopped dead. The engine, taking the brunt of the Hun's last burst, had petered out completely.

As Blaney pushed down the bullet-scarred nose, the thought that the fierce tide of battle had momentarily swept from his brain, leapt again into his consciousness. He'd got to land with a live bomb wedged in his smashed under-carriage. It was too much to hope that the Cooper would not accomplish what the Fokkers had failed to do.

Steele knew it too. He laughed a little wildly as he straightened up behind his still-smoking guns.

"Stand by for issue of angels' harps and wings," he muttered with a twisted grin.

IT was then that Blaney, leaning out of the cockpit, his tense gaze sweeping the hopeless morass of mud and shell-holes, saw the Wytschaete crater.

It was a place of ill-omen in the sector, that monstrous pit, which had grown from innumerable shell-holes pounded together by months of heavy gunfire into one vast crater. A notorious landmark by day and by night with its expanse of fetid waters, the gas-drenched slopes of the Wytschaete crater had gained a sinister reputation, that of recent weeks had reached its zenith.

Around it, Blaney saw now the tangled wreckage of aircraft like skeletons bleaching in the sun. For some grim, inexplicable reason, the crater held a hidden menace for British aircraft. More machines than Blaney wanted to think about had met with disaster near the Wytschaete crater, photographic 'buses, C.P. two-seaters, and art. obs. machines. Yet in those moments of quick thinking Blaney realised that the expanse of dark waters might, this time at least, avert disaster.

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Tony Steele, after a swift survey of the uncompromising shell-scarred terrain rushing up to meet them, came to the same conclusion.

"Put her down in the crater," he yelled in Blaney's ear. "If you pancake on the water we may land softly enough to prevent that blasted Cooper from exploding."

Blaney nodded, his chubby face strained and anxious. He went down in a flat glide until he felt the controls grow soggy, then as he floated over the crater's ridge, he loosened the clip of his safety-belt, ready for the moment when they would hit.

The depth of that devil's bowl surprised him. The upper lip of the mud-logged slope was now above the top plane of the Bristol, yet the black waters were still several feet beneath the broken undercarriage. The sombre pit completely enveloped them.

When the wheels touched, the A.S.I. was flickering round the thirties, but the heavy Rolls jerked the nose down, and the tail came up with a whoosh. With a mighty splash the Bristol somersaulted. Tony Steele was slung clear, but Blaney, trapped in the cockpit, was less fortunate, and found himself struggling in a cage of struts and wires, which held him down beneath the putrid waters. His lungs were choking, as, in a frenzy of desperation, he struggled to kick himself free.

Then a dark shadow loomed through the waters to the accompaniment of vigorous splashings. Blaney felt hands gripping his shoulders, and after that his thoughts were somewhat disjointed. Vaguely he felt himself slithering past the fuselage wall, and then his head rose above the water, and he was drawing in deep gasps of reviving air.

When Blaney regained something approaching clarity of thought, he saw Tony Steele bending over him, where he lay half submerged with his back against the oozing mud of the crater wall.

"All right, old chap?" Steele said anxiously. "I thought you were a goner when I couldn't get a good grip on you until that third dive."

Blaney spat mud from his mouth.

"Thanks, old son," he gasped. "Hell's bells! and what do we do now, my fellow mudlark?"

"If you know of a better 'ole . . ." mused Tony.

Blaney shook his head to clear his buzzing brain.

"At least that darned Cooper didn't explode. If we lie doggo until dark we stand a chance of finding our way back to the lines."

He spoke with considerably more confidence than he felt, and all the time he was waiting with tensed nerves for the whine of shells that would herald Jerry's customary bombardment of a crashed machine. The O.Pip's could scarcely have failed to spot their enforced descent. Yet everything was oddly still. It was as if they had wandered into some *cul-de-sac* of war where, with the certainty of their being unable to escape, the Boche was leaving them to their fate.

Blaney gazed gloomily at the upturned wheels of the Bristol jutting up through the water. His muzzy brain was incapable of working out the cause and effect of it all; the stolen ten minutes in bed that had resulted in his taking-off with a sluggish engine, the consequent breaking of the undercarriage, and the wedging of the Cooper in the broken spar that had necessitated their inglorious landing in the Wytschaete crater.

It had all worked out almost like an axiom in Euclid. But Euclid wasn't Blaney's strong point. He was only familiar with the ribald jest of the mess, that a straight line was the shortest distance between two—pints!

SUDDENLY Blaney felt Tony grip his arm and, with an intensity that hurt, jerk him down behind the mud-logged ruin of an A.W. fuselage that lay half buried where it had crashed into the oozing crater bank.

Blaney gave vent to a spluttering oath as he sprawled on the stenching mud.

"What the devil . . ."

He saw no necessity for taking cover.

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"Shut up!" Steele's voice came in a warning whisper. "There's something queer going on up there."

Something in his companion's voice made Blaney stare quickly in the direction of Tony's intent gaze.

On the opposite wall of the crater something was moving, a quivering expanse that resembled the prevailing mud and yet . . .

A gasp of astonishment broke from Blaney's lips as he crouched behind the derelict fuselage.

A canvas panel of cunningly painted camouflage, splayed on pulleys and rollers was dissolving before his eyes. As it rolled up like a great curtain, it revealed in the shadowed culvert beyond a wide tunnel of concrete walls. Grey-green figures moved in the sombre cavern, and the echoes of guttural voices and derisive laughs drifted to the watchers' ears.

"They are drowned. *Ya wohl* . . . there is no escape from Wyttschaete crater, *nicht war?*"

Blaney's knowledge of German was scrappy, but he understood enough to realise that the Germans, who, astonishingly enough, were concealed in that hidden lair in the crater wall, were convinced that they were cold mutton.

"What do you make of it, Tony?" he whispered.

"Some devil's game. We're going to find out what's going on up there . . ." He gave a sudden gasp. "Gosh! d'ye hear that engine. They've got 'planes in there. . . ."

BLANEY, too, had heard the throb of engines, and the queer staccato echoes of engines pulsing in confined space grew steadily louder as they listened.

They peered cautiously over the rotting fuselage. Now they could discern the dim outline of fighting aircraft standing in the vault-like place which, on closer inspection, was a considerably more ambitious affair than it had at first appeared.

A flight of Fokkers were standing on a long, concreted slope, and the

space between the tunnel walls was considerably wider than the span of the iron-crossed wings.

Blaney whistled as the startling truth suddenly became clear. They had stumbled on an underground hangar excavated in the crater wall! The sloping platform suggested that it was ingeniously designed to provide a jumping-off station for enemy fighters to attack low-flying aircraft, machines engaged on photographic jobs, contact patrols, and art. obs.—to attack them, not from above where the pilots would be keeping a wary eye, but from below, as the chess-boarded Fokkers had zoomed up with such startling unexpectedness beneath the Bristol's wings.

The Germans had accomplished what was becoming increasingly difficult in the intensive air war, an entirely new and original element of surprise.

"Now we know where those damned Fokkers came from," muttered Steele grimly. "We've spotted the nest."

"It's certainly ingenious," agreed Blaney. "Only a photographic machine with a low altitude oblique could detect that sliding camouflage panel."

"A photographic machine wouldn't have a snowball's chance in hell of getting away," grunted Blaney. "Jerry must have a bunch of machines in that super-sewer. We crashed three of them off the strength, but I can count another four. But what beats me is how they get their machines into that sardine tin?"

"Probably fly them in at night," suggested Tony. "It wouldn't be any more difficult than landing on a ship's deck. I believe I can see rubber cables stretched across that concrete run-out, to slow up landing machines as they do on the aircraft-carriers."

Blaney eased his cramped limbs.

"I shouldn't be surprised if you're right, Tony. Painstaking bloke, Jerry—and their engineers are experts in tunnelling. Their reserve lines are supposed to be a mass of catacombs."

"What's the next move?" jerked Tony. "This appears to be our solo show."

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"We've got to lie doggo until its dark," Blaney decided, "then we'll try to get into that tunnel. If we can bag a Fokker we might get away—somehow—or, again, we might not! But it's worth taking a shot at, now we are here."

CHAPTER III

Victims of the Sky Trap

WHILE Blaney and Steele lay chilled and cramped in the water-logged culvert, waiting restlessly for darkness to descend, they had a grim demonstration of the efficiency of the crater trap upon which they had stumbled.

It was not long before they knew why the camouflage panel had been lifted like a massive Venetian blind, and why the Fokkers engines were ticking over.

Blaney glanced anxiously skywards, as the characteristic hissing whine of an R.E.8 drifted to his ears.

Some two thousand feet above the crater an art. obs. Harry Tate was cruising to and fro, obviously directing a shoot.

At periodical intervals the distant rumble of gunfire rose above the throb of the 140 air-cooled Raf. engine.

"Strewth! they'll get that poor devil," Steele muttered huskily.

An ominous rumble came from the vault, and the concrete walls threw back strident echoes as two Fokkers, in line ahead formation, came hurtling down the launching slope. Their tails lifted before the pilots had opened out, and the powerful fighters had gained flying speed before the terminating ridge of the runway slid away from their racing wheels. It was a tricky manœuvre, but the German pilots were obviously skilled at the game. They zoomed up over the crater's rim with the precision of robots.

With a feeling of nausea, the hidden Britishers watched the trap closing, and saw the Fokkers swing apart as they converged on their unwitting quarry.

Suddenly aware of his peril, the R.E.8

pilot kicked the two-seater into a vertical bank. Flame rippled from the observer's cockpit, and then the crackle of the Lewis was drowned by the scream of four Spandaus belching lead.

Blaney groaned as he saw the R.E. stagger. The tail assembly melted into flaming *débris* before that devastating fire of converging guns. The doomed R.E.'s nose whipped down as it plunged past the circling Fokkers. Blaney looked away, his face tense, flinching as he heard a ghastly crash, a dull explosion . . . and then silence. Crash Crater had claimed another victim.

"God!" he gritted, "we've got to stop this rotten business."

Tony gave a low hiss of warning, and jerked the irate Blaney back into the protective shadows of the culvert.

The Fokkers were circling to land. The Germans side-slipped skilfully, coming in low over the crater's edge and perched on the concrete runway with a perfectly judged three-point landing. The watchers saw grey-green figures running forward to hold the fighters' wings. Then with a rasp of pulleys the camouflage panel rolled down into place.

"Here endeth the first lesson," muttered Steele. "Do you reckon you could fly one of those Fokkers out of that sewer, old scout?"

Blaney's jaw hardened.

"I'll do my damndest. But first catch your Fokker, as Mrs. Beeton would say."

THEY waited restlessly for the light to fade. Their limbs were cramped and chilled. Slowly the glow of sunset dimmed, and the shadows deepened across the crater.

They had abandoned any hope of getting away by clambering out of the crater. The oozing mud of those precipitous slopes would make rapid progress impossible. It was a hundred to one chance that they would not be spotted. They must stake everything on the hope of bagging one of the Fokkers and pulling off an aerial get-away.

At last Blaney touched Tony's shoulder.

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"Now," he whispered excitedly. "Keep your tail up. Remember we're taking a leaf out of Jerry's book. The element of surprise is on our side this time."

Stretching their cramped muscles, they wriggled out from behind the half-buried fuselage, grateful for activity that would stir the blood in their frozen limbs. Guardedly, they crawled over the mud, their eyes fixed on the darkened slope where the camouflage panel blended with the shadows. It was slow going, but at least the oozing morass muffled betraying sounds.

Slowly they manoeuvred round to where the dark slope curved up to the opening to the vault.

A star-shell trickled up into the sky, lighting the crater with a blinding white light. They froze motionless in the mud, their hearts in their mouths. The light faded, and they resumed their slow climb.

At last Blaney's hand gripped something firmer than mud. It was a concrete step, and noiselessly he hauled himself upwards. By slewing sideways he was able to peer into the vault through a gap between the camouflage panel and a surprisingly solid pillar of re-inforced concrete.

For some moments he could only see the vague outline of machines. Then, as his eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, he saw grey-green figures moving about two Fokkers standing at the farthest extremity of the launching platform.

There was a sudden stir of activity in the vault, and almost immediately Blaney knew the reason for it. From overhead drifted the drone of a night-flying F.E. The Boches were preparing to close their trap around yet another victim.

Blaney tensed in the darkness. At any moment the camouflage panel would open and betray their presence. He took a swift survey of the vault, his eyes thoughtful as they rested on an alcove stacked with petrol-tins, and jutting back from the wall within a few feet of the tunnel entrance.

He weighed the risk of reaching that alcove without being spotted. It was a sporting chance, for the Boches starting up the Fokkers had their backs turned.

"Come on, Tony. It's now or never," Blaney gritted.

They crawled through the gap on to the concrete runway, their bodies pressed against the tunnel wall. The throbbing engines drowned what faint noise they made. Shadows mingling with the shadows, they wriggled into the alcove and lay flat behind the dump of petrol-tins, scarcely daring to breathe.

They were just in time. With a rasp of pulleys the camouflage panel slid upwards. The pilot in the cockpit of the foremost Fokker was waving his hand to the mechanics hanging on to the lifted tail, their heads ducked against the force of the slip-stream.

Blaney's eyes were fixed intently on the slim blonde pilot of the rear machine. The man was standing by the cockpit of the Fokker adjusting his helmet buckles.

Blaney came to a swift decision.

He jerked his elbow into the prostrate Tony's ribs.

"Come on, Flying Corps. Now's our chance to bag that kite . . ."

ABANDONING all attempts at concealment now, they ran out from behind the petrol dump, ducking beneath the swaying wings of the foremost Fokker as it shot along the launching platform and zoomed out into the night.

At the sound of their scurrying footsteps, the pilot of the remaining machine swung round.

"*Mein Gott . . . !*"

Robin Blaney had a fleeting impression of the Boche's goggling eyes, his ludicrous expression of amazement and fear.

Then Blaney's bunched knuckles crashed upwards, smashing against the German's jaw. The pilot staggered against the cockpit and went down in a crumpled heap.

Grimly aware of grey-green figures closing in on him, Blaney leapt for the cockpit, while Tony Steele flung himself

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across the fuselage, his long limbs straddling the doped fabric as he clutched at the padded rim of the pilot's cockpit.

Sudden tumult was let loose, and guttural voices were raised in alarm as Blaney jabbed open the throttle, risking a choke. To his intense relief the engine responded with a throaty roar, and the Fokker leapt forward like a shot from a gun.

Crack! *Crack!* spurts of flame stabbed the darkness. Revolver bullets raked the hurtling machine, beating a grim tattoo against wires and struts. The Fokker yawed horribly. The concrete wall seemed to leap towards the starboard wing, and Robin Blaney had a horrible vision of an almighty crash. Spasmodically he straightened out, and more by luck than judgment, hurtled down the launching chute and shot across the crater.

There followed nightmarish moments, struggling with a machine with whose vices he was unfamiliar. The crater bank hurtled into his line of vision. He yanked back the stick, crazily clearing the ridge by inches, and somehow he flattened out.

"Good lad! Keep her going." Steele yelled encouragement in his ear, and ducked his head again in the fierce lash of the propeller's slip-stream.

Unaware of the tumult in its wake, the leading Fokker still circled beneath the lumbering F.E., waiting for its companion to join it for the "kill."

Blaney chuckled.

"A sitter, if only I can get these darned Spandaus working."

He groped for the unfamiliar gadgets. His hand found the grips, and he pulled up the nose and let loose a flaming burst.

The range was so close that he could not miss the Fokker floating serenely in the ring-sights. The twin streams of tracer lashed into the fighter's fuselage. There was a sudden puff of black smoke and a lapping of flame, and the Fokker went hurtling down in a shroud of fire. Crash Crater had claimed its last victim.

As the fighter went flaming earthwards, Blaney yanked back the stick,

climbing with an almost hysterical urge to get away from the pit of death. He felt weary and spent. Reaction after the prolonged nerve strain of the past hectic hours was setting in. Yet there was still one thing left to do. The Fokker, he had noticed to his surprise, was equipped with wireless—part of the general scheme, no doubt, for keeping in touch with the listening-post in the vault.

His hand groped for the wireless key, and he goaded his weary brain into remembering the map reference numerals of Wyttschaete crater.

But somehow his mind would not function, and it was the spreadeagled Tony who, in response to his frantic request, shouted the pin-point numerals in his ear.

"But what's the big idea, Blaney?"

His companion laughed grimly.

"I'm going to blow that hornets' nest off the map."

HIS hand had closed over the wireless key, and already he was sending down a Zone Call, that devastating S.O.S. that was only permissible in grave emergency or in the event of the discovery of a target of important tactical value.

They circled, waiting for the response to the wireless call.

There came sudden ripples of flame from the dark rim of the night, and a shattering reverberating roar.

Shells, screaming from the distant British batteries, crashed down on Wyttschaete crater. Two thousand feet below the circling Fokker, flame seemed to leap from the ground. Earth and scattered *débris* were hurled skywards in a mosaic of death and destruction.

Not until the last reverberating explosion had died away, and the Wyttschaete crater had been reduced to a flattened morass of mud, did Blaney swing the Fokker with its double burden, westwards.

"That's the end of their game," he said huskily.

Tony Steele eased his sprawling limbs on the vibrating fuselage. A grin expanded his muddy face.

"Home, James!" he chuckled, "and don't spare the horses!"



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WE are privileged this month to welcome to the ranks of our distinguished ex-R.F.C. authors the first member of the Independent Air Force to contribute to AIR STORIES. This author is Lieutenant Wilfrid Tremellen, contributor of "Bring 'Em Back Alive," who joined the R.F.C. as a cadet at the age of seventeen and a half and went out to France, the day after he was commissioned, to join that gallant company of "free-lance fighters" known as the Independent Air Force.

One of Lieutenant Tremellen's most vivid memories of those hectic days of history-making is of an "incident"—the word is his, not ours—which occurred whilst he was an observer with 99 Squadron, I.A.F., doing long-distance daylight raids into the Rhineland on D.H.9's.

Whilst the bombers were laying their eggs one day over Metz, a Hun—one of eight that were attacking the British formation of four—put a burst through the gravity tank in the centre-section above the head of Lieutenant Tremellen's pilot. Blinded by the sheet of petrol that gushed out from the punctured tank, the pilot momentarily lost control, and, next instant, the bomber had collided with another D.H.9 in the formation. For a few breath-taking seconds the two machines hung locked wing to wing, then they broke away and Tremellen's machine began a slow spin earthwards

with fabric streaming from a badly-damaged aileron.

By amazing good fortune, and no little skill, the pilot managed to regain control before reaching the ground and promptly nosed-up again to rejoin the hard-pressed formation. "The climbing up again," Lieutenant Tremellen observes, "involved much chatter between my twin Lewises and the other fellows' Spandaus."

As the D.H.9 was eventually able to "bring 'em back alive!" it would seem that Lieutenant Tremellen was as efficient in the handling of the spade-grip of a Lewis gun during the War as he now is in the handling of a pen, and we shall look forward to the frequent appearance of this accomplished author's work in AIR STORIES.

How was Ball Killed?

FROM Mr. J. L. Smith, of Stockport, we have received the following interesting sidelight on the death of one of the greatest fighters of the R.F.C. :

"Controversy has been rife," writes our correspondent, "concerning the death of Captain Ball, and perhaps the following extract from the book 'King of Air Fighters,' by Flight-Lieutenant Ira T. Jones, will enlighten some of your readers. A certain Captain Hunter was wounded and brought down during the May offensive in the Lens district. On May 8th he was told by a German officer that Ball had been killed and was shown Ball's identity-disc in proof. The officer added that Ball had been brought down by anti-aircraft shells. This certainly explodes the credit generally given to Lothar von Richthofen for Ball's downfall."

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Against this version of Ball's death is another well-authenticated one to the effect that, following his disappearance, a message was dropped on his squadron's aerodrome stating that he had been brought down "by a pilot of the same calibre as himself." The only fully-established facts concerning his death are that in the middle of a dog-fight, in gathering darkness, Ball was seen to follow a German fighter into a cloud. He was never seen again and, after this long interval, we imagine it is very unlikely that the true manner of his passing will ever be established beyond all doubt.

A Curious Coincidence

ANOTHER interesting note concerning a great air fighter comes from Mr. T. Gadd, of London, S.W.8, who writes :

"I wonder how many of your readers noticed that Captain J. E. Gurdon, the author of that great story 'Winged Warriors,' was a member of the same squadron as Major A. E. McKeever—No. 22? Major McKeever returned to England in January, 1918, and the author of 'Winged Warriors' joined 22 Squadron in February, 1918. 'Lt. J. Warton' and his observer 'Lastor' must therefore have just missed meeting the ace of two-seaters."

No doubt the brilliant record of McKeever and his famous observer, Powell, was much in Captain Gurdon's mind when he wrote "Winged Warriors" which is, of course, founded on fact throughout.

In this connection, we wonder how many readers have noticed the extraordinary similarity between the last fight of the observer, Sergeant Coote (described by Captain Gurdon in this issue), and the incident in the career of Ernst Udet, as related by A. H. Pritchard on p. 73 of the January issue of AIR STORIES.

In that article, Mr. Pritchard described how Udet attacked a two-seater, saw the observer throw up his hands and fall beneath the cockpit coaming. Then, as he got into position on the machine's tail to put a final burst into it, Udet saw, to his amazement, the "dead" observer stagger to his feet, his face covered in blood, and direct a long burst into the triplane at point-blank range.

The two-seater, states Mr. Pritchard, was a Bristol Fighter; the date, March 20th, 1918—the time when Captain

Gurdon was serving with No. 22 Squadron, using Brisfits, on the Western Front!

Wanted!—A Villain

MR. E. WHITE, of Petersfield, Hants., is becoming a little tired of the constant heroism of the R.F.C. and suggests that the "villain" should sometimes be given a change of nationality.

"I wish, in your fiction stories of the War," he writes, "you would sometimes have a German hero for a change. It does get a bit boring after a while constantly to read of how the gallant British fought off a dozen or so sneaky Huns. Why not a gallant German occasionally, and so prevent AIR STORIES from deteriorating into the deplorable state of the Yankee magazines—which Heaven forbid!"

Sorry, Mr. White! We'll print a story soon about a British pilot who was so "super-sneakish" and "vengefully-villainish" that you'll want to change your own nationality on the spot!

Next Month—A Special Announcement

NEXT month's issue will be just about as good, if not better, than any we have yet produced. Pride of place will doubtless be given to a brilliant long complete war-air story, "The Macaroni Cup," by Lieutenant Wilfrid Tremellen, author of that great story, "Bring 'Em Back Alive," in this issue. Excitement, humour, realistic description and a strikingly novel plot are some of the qualities which combine to make "The Macaroni Cup" easily one of the best air-war yarns that we ever read.

That popular AIR STORIES author, Milford Hyde, contributes another rattling good yarn in "Mystery of the Marshes," and G. M. Bowman, whose great thriller in the March number, "Bats Fly by Night," brought many letters of congratulation, weighs-in with another equally good story called "Visibility Low."

Next month, too, we hope to make an announcement of outstanding interest, and some historical importance, concerning the life story of one of the greatest air-fighters of the War, a man whose brilliant record, strangely enough, has never yet been described in print. Watch out for the May number of AIR STORIES—on sale April 10th!