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AIR STORIES

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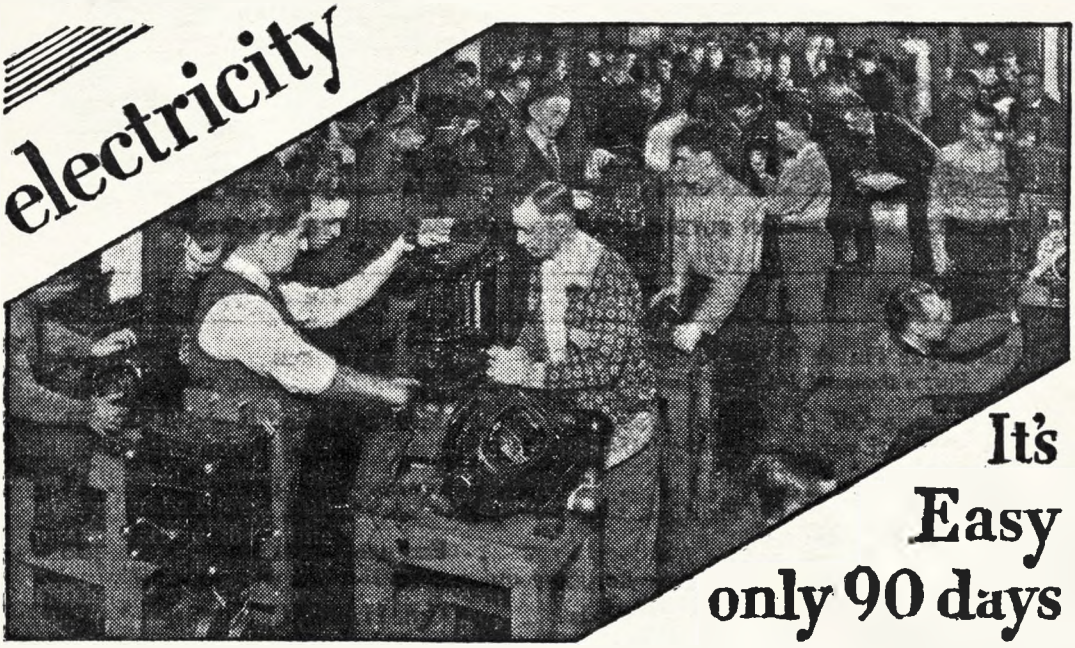

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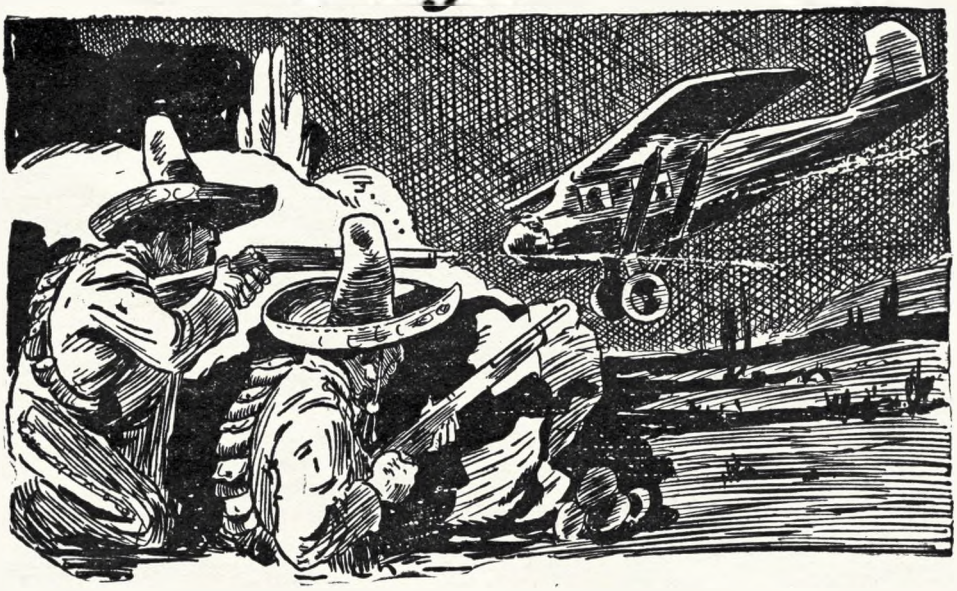


By George Bruce

Author of "Flaming Dawns," "Courage is Born," etc.

Behind him the Customs waited, with its sky-net spread. Ahead lay Ensenada and a thousand deaths for the grim-lipped pilot. But Carmencita was there, too—and Jimmy Stillman flew on to play his last chip in the Life-and-Death game with the yellow master of lost men.

Complete Air Adventure Novel

IGO TSURSKI'S eyes glinted as he watched the ship spin in. For many days he had been interested in the doings of the young pilot who gave exhibitions of stunt flying and carried passengers every day off the sandy beach of Mexicana in Southern California. Igo Tsurski knew that he could use this type of man who handled the great airplane as if it had been a toy on a string, who startled the crowds of onlookers with his breath-taking antics in mid air and his reckless unconcern for his own life.

Igo Tsurski needed a young man such as this in his business. A young man, reckless, uncaring, a master pilot of an airplane, willing to risk anything—desperate, carefree, courageous. And the other young fellow—the lad who walked upon the wings of the plane and hung suspended by his hands and knees from the under carriage and from the wing tips . . . Igo Tsurski drew a long, sibilant breath. Such a young man was well worth many five tael cans of the precious black gum it was Igo Tsurski's business to run into the Pacific Coast cities, from across the border line of Mexico, and to sell to the avid dealers in those cities at a great profit to himself.

Every day Igo Tsurski had gone to the beach to watch the young devil fly. Every day the desire to have him in his employ grew greater, until even the Oriental, unhurrying nature of Igo Tsurski cried out for direct action—

to go up to the young man, and to speak directly to him. But the ancestors of Igo Tsurski cried out against the thought, and so Igo had waited, as members of his race await favorable circumstances. And now it seemed that his patience was to be rewarded.

It had happened suddenly, this crash. One minute the rather old ship had been sailing serenely along, five hundred feet above earth. Then there had come a puff of black smoke from the motor, and the ship had lurched drunkenly, pointing its nose for the ground and spinning its wings, much after the manner of one of those grotesque Chinese tops Igo Tsurski knew so well. Then it continued its fall, the young pilot working like a demon in his cockpit to avert the inevitable ending of that particular flight.

Fighting the controls, with gas and switches cut, but the blaze from the motor whipping back into the face of the one passenger in the ship, the pilot managed to pull the falling plane out of the spin, and to almost right it, a second before it plunged into the ground, right wing first, to resolve into a tangled mass of flaming wreckage. He had not hesitated after the accident. It seemed that he was not seriously injured. He leaped out of the rear cockpit, and throwing himself into the flaming mass before him, dragged the limp form of his passenger to safety, just as the main gas tank blew up with a shuddering report and a great geyser of orange-colored flame and black smoke.

The ambulance took the passenger to the hospital, but the young pilot remained standing upon the sands, gazing into the cooling wreckage of the ship, seemingly giving no thought to his own injuries. Igo Tsurski could see that a livid burn extended over the entire right side of his cheek, that his hair and eyebrows were burned to stiff, almost invisible bristles, and that the fabric of his flying coat was charred and badly burned.

The hopelessness of the young pilot's attitude, the great sense of loss he expressed as he looked with unseeing eyes at the ashes that had once been a ship, the light of despair burning in his eyes. All these things were good omens to the eager desires of Igo Tsurski.

The pilot was speaking to the young man who walked the wings and caused people to gasp with his death-defying performances upon the flying ship. The pilot had silver hair, yet his face was that of a youth. Igo Tsurski marveled. His eyes were a calm gray, his cheeks firm and with the glow of health, except where the red mark of the burn seared the flesh. His hair, where it had not been singed off, was black—black, relieved by the gray streaks that so strongly marked it. Broad-shouldered, strong as a bull, the product of a lifetime of living in the open places, and in the limitless confines of the sky, his carriage marked him as virile, active; one who loved to live because the living brought him those moments of tautened nerves that were wine to his blood.

The young man who walked the wings was different. His hair was yellow, like spun gold. Of the same age, thought Igo Tsurski, but yet not marked as was the pilot; perhaps not the same in experience with the bad moments of life. His also was a great strength and broad shoulders. His eyes were blue, like the little flame that clings to molten steel as it is poured into moulds and made into finished metal. His posture, as he stood close to the side of his friend, was that of dejection and defeat. The smouldering remains of the ship seemed to hold a great personal loss for the two of them. The pilot was speaking.

"Well," he said with a shrug of the shoulder, "that's that!"

The wing-walker did not turn his head. "What happened?" he asked in a hushed voice.

"Gas line broke, close to the carburetor," informed the pilot shortly. "Shot a stream of gasoline upward, against the exhaust stacks and it burned before

I could cut the gas. The whole motor base was on fire before I could move, and while I was trying to do something about it, the crazy crate slipped off into a spin. I hope that fellow isn't hurt much. He didn't seem so when I pulled him out, but he was burned some."

"It looks like it's back to the flying field for us, and jobs at something or other," sighed the wing-walker dismally. "Well, we were on our own for a while. Then, zowie! and no crate and no jobs. There ain't no justice." He grinned in spite of his misery. "It's a tough break, I'll whisper to the goggle-eyed universe."

Jimmy Stillman smiled ruefully. "Wouldn't do us any good if some guy came along right now this minute and offered us a new production job right off the line and delivered here on this field. We are out. Here we are with a contract to hold down this field for one entire year, payable monthly in advance in honest to goodness money. No ship,—and with a reputation of half killing and half cremating a passenger. You can't laugh that off. Every time somebody in this neck of the woods thinks about going for a ride, some well informed bozo will come along and fix him with a devastating eye and whisper —'better not go with that fellow. He half killed a passenger on that same field; dangerous you know.' And the prospect will listen, and we'll starve to death. This spot was a beauty; plenty of activity, plenty of riders, plenty of money. And now look, just my dish—". He stopped short and moved his shoulders with a shrug of resignation.

"Tough," agreed the erstwhile daredevil. "Tougher'n blazes."

It was at this moment that Igo Tsurski's ancestors prompted him to approach the two young men, a meant-to-be winning smile upon his yellow face, a smile that hinted at condolence, and a 'perhaps it was all for the best' look in his calculating eyes.

"It is not nice that, no?" he asked. His English was as perfect as a Celestial's English can ever be. For Igo Tsurski was the product of an American university, with an Occidental education to air his Oriental cunning, and with a mind that could judge from two standards rather than one only.

Jim Stillman glanced at the smiling Igo Tsurski and then turned his head away with a grunt.

"Pretty bad," he muttered to his partner, "when a Jap comes out to hold the crying towel we're weeping in."

Igo Tsurski came of a persistent race. "Are you gentlemen planning to remain on this field," he asked. His eyes had narrowed and held a dangerous glint as Jim had ignored him by turning his head away, and paying no attention to his query.

Jim Stillman swung around. "What do you care what we're planning?" he demanded. The bland smile of the well dressed Igo Tsurski softened his anger. His taut body relaxed a trifle. His voice was softer as he next spoke. "We aren't planning anything," he told the Oriental. "We're doing just what you're doing. We're looking at a wrecked ship and wondering what's next."

"Perhaps I could help to solve your problem," suggested the still smiling Igo Tsurski. "I am a business man. I would really be glad to have such men as I have seen you to be in my employ. It is dangerous work."

"We'll stick to flying," informed Jim shortly, studying the face of Igo Tsurski. "We haven't ever come to the point where we had to work for a Jap, and I guess we never will. Adios, amigo."

Igo Tsurski would not be dismissed. "This would be flying," he insisted. "I would buy you the latest and best ship and pay you much money to fly for me. You and your friend."

"How much money?" asked Stillman, his eyes holding glinting lights. Inwardly he was desperate, everything had seemed to go wrong with him since the war. He had come back to a country that seemed to hold nothing for him to

do, except to fly, and it seemed that he never could make money in commercial aviation. Tough luck hounded him like a bloodhound on the hot scent of an escaped convict. No one had heard much of Jim Stillman after he had been 'demobbed' after the war.

Once or twice he had appeared on familiar flying fields, sitting in the rickety cockpit of some decrepit crate, somehow managing to worry a living out of barnstorming—and then, he would appear on foot, shipless, and jobless. Still, he always seemed to have a ship of some kind—goodness knows where it came from—and many times he had visited localities and remained for long periods in those localities, almost starving, still managing to get by—just because that locality had a nice field.

The war had been a test of Jim Stillman's guts. The war had silvered his hair and had lined his face. The war had injected the bitterness of the fatalist in his soul. That, and the post-war conditions that greeted him after he left the Government hospital that housed him for over a year following the armistice. When Jim Stillman had returned to normalcy—that is when he was able to get around under his own steam following the year in the hospital, he found that all of the troops had marched in reviews, all the bands were stilled, all the flags had been taken in, and that patriotism had run its riotous course, and that people were bored to death with tales of the war. Not that Jim Stillman told any tales of the war, he didn't—he wasn't that kind. But his 'papers' told the tale for him.

He became, to all intents and purposes, a 'tramp flyer' going with the wind's direction each morning, carrying random passengers for his food and gasoline and oil, footloose, carefree, uncaring, reckless—and yet, each of the pilots who knew him felt that deep in his heart, Jim Stillman was something more than an 'air tramp'—that somehow he had a set purpose in life and was irresistibly moving to a fixed end that would sometime make itself manifest but at which none of them would hazard a guess.

'Bud' Taylor, his wing walker, was a recent acquisition, and a fortunate acquisition. Jim had picked him up on the field at Denver, and offered him the 'wing walker's' job in the one-ship circus, and 'Bud' had leaped at the chance. Since that moment they had been inseparable.

Bud was watching Jim Stillman narrowly as he put the question to Igo Tsurski. "How much money?"

"Two thousand dollars a month for you and a thousand for your friend," tempted the Jap, still smiling.

Stillman's face reflected his amazement. "Two thousand," he repeated with a low whistle. "It can't be honest."

The Jap's face was poker-flat. "It is a business," he informed with the inscrutable smile of his race. "It is a rich business, of which you need know nothing. You merely fly, where and when I tell you in the best ship you can buy for me. I pay all of your expenses and your salary in addition."

Stillman studied him through narrowed eyes. "Anything that would threaten the peace of this country or could do it harm?" he asked as if considering the offer.

Igo Tsurski smiled. "I hope not," he said. "My business depends upon the peace and prosperity of this country. I care nothing for war. No my friend, it is not 'spying' as you may suspect. It is strictly commercial. You fly across the border of course, else I could not pay you such an enormous salary. You bring back in the ship a load. Not a heavy load. Perhaps you will fly once a week. Not an arduous job, no?"

"Smuggling!" snorted Bud. "The Jap wants us to turn smugglers, and us honest airmen."

Jim Stillman was silent. "I'll take

the job," he declared suddenly. "Frankly at this moment I'd take any old kind of a job—and two thousand dollars a month is a windfall. If it's dishonest o. k. I've never made a thing honestly and I've been honest. I'll try the other track for a while. You've hired the pilot and wing walker. When do we start?"

The Jap thrust out his hand, showing his pleasure at the decision, by a flash of his white teeth. "Immediately," he promised them, "we shall buy the plane at once." The smile faded from his face in an instant, for Jim Stillman had turned away from him to speak to Bud, leaving the offered hand outthrust, unnoticed. Again the evil light seeped into the Jap's eyes, but when Stillman again faced him he was smiling and the hand had been drawn back.

THAT night in the hotel at which they were stopping, Bud expressed his amazement at Jim's decision.

"It's just as I said," remarked Jim thoughtfully, "I'm tired of being broke, That crack up today took the heart out of me completely. I'm going to sit in on his game. You can come in if you want to, or stay out. I'm not encouraging you to enter a life of crime, but it should be interesting for a while. And a thousand a month is plenty of bread and beans."

"I'm coming in," declared Bud. "I'm game for anything you are, and if YOU say it's all o. k. then who am I to kick about morals? You've been the squarest shooter and the best guy I've ever known, and if you can stand for the play, why it's good enough for me. I'm in."

"The game will be smuggling hop," predicted Jim thoughtfully, "and I hate that traffic worse than poison."

He was cleaning and oiling a dangerous looking automatic pistol as he sat on the edge of his bed. From time to time he lifted the gun and weighed it in his hand, gazing reflectively at the opposite wall.

CHAPTER II
Mexico

THE little town of Ensenada, nestling at the foot of the mountains and touched by the warm waters of the Pacific as it entered the Bay of Todas Santos would have recalled to the mind of any of the old forty-niners a typical town in the heart of the gold rush territory during that first hectic period of golden prosperity which settled upon California following the first gold strike. One thing was different. Where the merriment and life of those gold rush cities was based upon the desire of hard working men for play and recreation, the life of Ensenada, while also based on gold and the desire of men for play, was a life of vicious, cruel play, for the men of that city were vicious and cruel.

Situated ideally as a base for smuggling operations directed against the customs forces of the United States, Ensenada had become the center for all of the men on the west coast engaged in that thrilling, if dangerous pastime. Todos Santos Bay, opening directly into the Pacific, and only fifty miles south of the California border, offered an easy shot at the coast line above San Diego without a great deal of difficulty to be feared from errant coast guard cutters.

Night after night, rakish, softly purring, powerful motor boats sped out from Ensenada skirting the coast of Todos Santos Island and then turning keen bows northward, ran the line with whatever cargo they might be carrying, engines muffled, without lights and with only the phosphorescent gleam of the bit' curling up from around the bow as the fast cruiser cut its way through the sea to its goal, where more gold was to be had for spending on the pleasures of Ensenada.

Perhaps Captain Kidd's or Morgan's rendezvous, on the Spanish Main, had witnessed wilder scenes as the pirates' ships dropped anchor in the harbor and

a money-glutted crew sprang ashore to lavish the ill-gotten gains upon the pleasures of those cities. But certainly Ensenada was the wildest of all in our day and neither Kidd's nor Morgan's crew were more wild nor more dangerous than the men who used Ensenada as a base.

Lately a serious crimp had been put into the illicit activities of Ensenada. An unfeeling Federal Government had dispatched a triply augmented force of revenue cutters to take up base at San Diego and to make life more exciting and more real for the motor boats which plied over the sixty-mile stretch of Pacific water that seperated Ensenada from San Diego. Boats had gone out never to return.

Precious cargoes of Chinamen packed in the close confines of the motor boats cabins had been jettisoned as some inquisitive revenue cutter had picked up the speeding pirate craft in the white beam of its searchlight and a barking one-pounder had hurled the steel projectile across the fragile bows of the pirate with the curt command to heave to.

"Chinks" paying from $750 to $1,000 a head for any kind of transportation to within the boundaries of the United States represent a tough cargo to lose, but the skippers of the pirate crafts did not think of money or gain or even the "Chinks" when the wolf-gray form of a revenue cutter hove into sight—they threw the "Chinks" overboard as fast as they could be passed up from the cabin. They knew that such a maneuver would delay the pursuer, for the pursuer had a heart and stopped to pick up the frightened, drowning, living cargo while the pirate craft went ahead, repeating the operation whenever the pursuer came too close for comfort.

The smuggling of opium and Chinamen and diamonds and all other things which were smuggled from Ensenada in through the United States was no longer a "sure-shot" by the water route, and so Igo Tsurski, wise beyond all of the wise men who operated from that little city which touched both the mountains and the sea, turned to the air.

It was exactly four in the morning and pitch dark when Jim Stillman decided that he was in the immediate vicinity of Ensenada. He throttled the motor of the cabin monoplane he was flying and hung for a long moment like a night flying vulture. He studied the terrain below before gliding down to an easy landing. He knew that he was between the mountains and the sea. He knew that Igo had promised a light would guide him to his field, yet, it was pitch black on the ground with the exception of the twinkling lights of the little city. He circled about impatiently, holding his altitude and keeping close watch on his turn-bank indicators. Then below him he saw a straight white beam of light cutting upward through the darkness, as if an automobile head lamp had been rotated upward. The light described five complete circles and then went out. He nosed the monoplane down gently—that was the signal for which he had been waiting.

HE saw the light shining parallel with the ground, illuminating a large expanse of closely packed sand. Without hesitation he prepared to land for he knew that ocean sand makes an ideal runway.

On the ground he cut the switches and eased himself out of the cockpit swinging down in front of the single wing and then dropping lightly into the sand. A figure approached from out of the darkness, sharply outlined in the light rays from the automobile head lamps and a voice heavy and cordial called to him.

"You're Stillman, aren't you?" asked the voice.

Jim felt his hand grasped by a great paw as he admitted his identity.

"Been waiting for you an hour," informed the voice. "We had the 'office' from San Diego that you were coming

through tonight. "I'm Bill Kelso. I run things down here for the gang in San Diego."

Jim acknowledged the introduction and in turn presented Bud Taylor. "My buddy," he told Kelso. "Glad to find one white man who speaks English. What'll we do next?"

Kelso's laugh boomed out in the darkness. "Why," he announced, "we'll just mosey up to the Bloody Shirt and proceed to liquor up. Nothin' to do till tomorrow."

"Soft life," grinned Bud. "A thousand a month and never anything to do until tomorrow."

"Oh, you'll carry a load tomorrow sure enough," promised Kelso. "The stuff is all here packed up into nice bundles easy to handle."

"Suits me," said Jim, "let's liquor."

The Bloody Shirt was a typical Ensenada dive. Even at this late hour or rather early hour in the morning things were running full blast. In one corner a pasty faced trio of seemingly American youths were making the night hideous with jazz music produced from a groaning piano, a tenor saxophone and a blatant trumpet. In the broad center of the dance floor fifty or more couples were dancing, and a blue haze of tobacco smoke hung like a thick pall from floor to ceiling. Along one side of the big room ran the biggest bar Stillman had seen since Prohibition and three white aproned bartenders, working with deft fingers, had all they could do to provide liquid stimulus for the patrons.

Around the walls were draped brilliantly colored Spanish shawls and sombreros, with pictures cut from the colored supplements of American newspapers. While gayety held sway one could sense that it was a grim, almost defiant gayety, as if all of the merrymakers expected momentarily a strong hand with clutching fingers to descend upon their shoulders. The girls, for the most part, were brilliantly arrayed, painted creatures, fitting exactly into the life of the place, hard-eyed, calculating and wheedling. They danced mechanically with rough shirted, stubble-face desperadoes, looking only for the price of a drink, and with eyes always riveted on the main chance—the "taking" of a rich poke from some besotted merrymaker.

The male patrons were all heeled. They wore their guns openly in heavy holsters dangling from cartridge filled belts and tied to the leg just above the knee by a rawhide thong. They were dangerous men, with the viciousness and uncertainty of their calling stamped hard upon their faces, knowing no law except the crashing bark of their own guns and the desire of their own minds.

Kelso along with Jim Stillman and Bud Taylor pushed through the crowded dance floor, Kelso's ready shoulder and towering bulk forcing a pathway for the newcomers, and bellied up to the polished bar.

"Name it?" invited Kelso, "the house is yours."

"I'll take mine straight," stated Jim.

"None for me, thank you," returned Bud. "You can't drink and fly too."

Kelso whirled with a startled look. "What?" he demanded, "you don't want nothing?"

Bud shook his head. "Shucks man," insisted Kelso, "you can't get a reputation like that down here. All the girls will be slapping you on the wrist."

"Let 'em," grinned Bud, "I can stand it." Kelso was holding a filled whiskey glass in his hands, pressing it on the reluctant Bud. Jim Stillman's fingers closed over the big man's wrist. "He don't drink if he don't want it," said Stillman flatly. "Some folks go in for the cup that cheers and others don't, if Bud don't like it, he don't drink it; not while I'm around."

Kelso diverted his eyes to escape the icy stare of Jim Stillman. He lifted the filled glass in his hand and drained it in one gulp. "O.K." he answered, "that goes as it lays from now on."

They took a seat at one of the tables. Kelso was discussing life in Ensenada.

A fluffy bundle of femininity reeking with some foreign perfume settled into Stillman's lap and brushed a pair of carmined lips across his cheek. He looked down in amazement and was about to push the girl onto the floor, Kelso laughed loudly. "Well," he said in his booming voice, "look at this, here fifteen minutes and the belle of the Bloody Shirt falls for you like a pile driver. Pretty lucky."

"I saw you come in," whispered the girl in Stillman's lap. "I'm Carmencita."

Stillman's cheeks were brick red. Everyone in the room was looking at him, most were smiling in expectancy, some were not.

"HAVE a chair," invited Stillman.

"I like it here much better," she told him with a saucy toss of her head, "Americanos have such nice laps."

Even Bud Taylor was grinning at him. Stillman's embarrassment was plainly evident.

"You will dance with me, no?" she coaxed.

He lifted her to her feet. It was better to dance than to sit with her on his lap like some blushing idiot. They danced out onto the floor. Kelso and Bud watched them go, each of them grinning broadly.

"He'll get into plenty of trouble pronto, if that little girl pays him any attention," said Kelso to Bud in a low tone. "Half the greasers and Chinks and Americans in this man's town are ready to sail into battle over that broad, and I don't mean nearly. She's just plain poison."

"I'll tip Jim off," promised Bud.

"Won't do any good," said Kelso positively. "If she wants him she'll get him and he'll have little to say about it. Nobody has much to say where Carmencita is concerned."

Out on the dance floor Jim Stillman had evidently lost all of his former embarrassment, for he was dancing about with the exotic Carmencita looking down into her face and talking with her earnestly. In turn she was looking up at him, her head resting upon his shoulder, her flaming crimson shawl half draped about him, her magnificent, luster-filled eyes fixed on his face, just as earnestly answering him.

Kelso touched the back of Bud's hand with a stabbing forefinger. "See that Spick over there, the one with the green waistband," he whispered hoarsely, "that's 'Ramon the Knife.' One rough, tough Mexican hombre. He thinks he has the inside track on this Carmencita girl. From the looks of his face, some fun is about to pop. I told you that woman was plain poison." Kelso shifted the heavy gun at his hip forward until it lay almost upon his lap with the worn butt close to his hand. Bud glanced across the room.

Standing with his back to the wall, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, stood Ramon the Knife, apparently unconcerned. But his nervous, thin fingers caressed the heavy silver mounted hilt which protruded from his green waistband and his eyes, swirling pools of molten jet followed the every move of Stillman and Carmencita. He stirred uneasily once or twice as Carmencita gave Jim an unusually alluring smile and his hand closed completely over the gleaming hilt.

They were dancing a slow moving tango. She was pressed closely against him and her soft lips brushed against his ear as she spoke. "This Ramon standing there," she whispered in Stillman's ear, "wishes to kill us. He is not a nice man, this Ramon, I do not like him."

Stillman looked over her shoulder toward the Mexican. At that minute Carmencita said something funny and he smiled broadly. He looked down at her.

Ramon the Knife tossed away his cigarette with a vicious sweep of his arm and a sudden stillness swept over the room except for the blare of the three-piece orchestra. Ramon strode across the room, his mouth working and his face twitching. He came up to the

unknowing Stillman and grasped him by the arm. Carmencita pushed roughly by his shoulder, fell backward several paces, Stillman looked into the narrow slits behind which burned the eyes of Ramon the Knife.

"This woman; she is mine," hissed Ramon. "You stay away, sabe? One more time and I have to kill you."

Stillman's face was white and strained looking. He jerked his arm away from the clutching fingers of the knife man. His right arm drew back and snapped forward with a quickness of lightning and the clenched fist struck the Mexican full in the face with such terrible force that blood splurted as the plunging blow shattered the rather fragile nose. Ramon the Knife struck the floor flat on his back. He bounced to his feet with a scream of rage and his hand flashed to the green waist band. There was the gleam of highly polished steel, the whistling sound of a keen blade cutting through the air and then, at the same instant, the crashing explosion of a heavy pistol. The knife whistled by Stillman's cheek just as he leaped forward to close with the Mexican. But he was too late. Ramon the Knife was a limp, inert heap of flabby flesh upon the floor with a great crimson stain seeping out upon his white shirt from below the heart.

Across the room Kelso stood, a smoking pistol in his hand and a quiet smile upon his face.

CHAPTER III
Igo Asserts Himself

THE next night, in the gloom of midnight, Jim Stillman climbed into his cockpit to carry his first load of opium into the United States. The motor was turning over with a muffled sound. Kelso had just tossed the last of the carefully packed sacks of cans into the cabin.

"Go easy," he cautioned. "Fly high, in a straight line over the border, and don't stop to investigate anything—it isn't safe."

Stillman's voice floated back to him from over the wing. "I'm going high, wide and handsome," he laughed. "It'll take an angel to catch me. And from what I've seen, there aren't any angels on the border, nor across it. I'm taking no chances."

Kelso was speaking in a whisper, standing on the rubber-tired wheel of the black monoplane. "Listen, Jim," he said cautiously. "You keep both lamps focused on that Jap Igo. Understand? He's bad medicine. He's a suave, educated, smiling devil, with a grin like a wolf and as cold as a miser's heart. Murder is just a pleasant diversion with him. Keep clear; don't rile him. I'd hate to find you propped up somewhere with a bullet or a knife in your back. And that's how that Jap works. He's mean."

"Thanks," said Jim gratefully. "I don't like him over much. I have you to thank for getting me out of one jam, and trying to keep me out of another. If you hadn't been watching that Ramon affair, well—"

"Cut it out," demanded Kelso disgustedly. "You're white and he's a Spick, and you're one of my own kind, and if we don't stick by one another in this hell-hole; who will? I wasn't always the head of a gang of dope smugglers either—."

Stillman reached over the edge of the wing and pressed Kelso's hand. "Thanks, Bill Kelso, for everything," he said. "Maybe we can all pull out of this racket into something decent after a little while and I'm not forgetting you. I'll be back in a day or two if everything goes O.K. Keep the youngster happy."

"Oh, I'll look after Bud," exclaimed Kelso. "He'll be in good hands—mine."

Stillman pushed the throttle forward and eased it off again as if on second thought. "Say," he called to Kelso. "Kind of keep an eye on that Car-

mencita girl too, will you? I've got a particular reason for asking. She isn't like the others, wish I could tell you why, now. But I can't, I don't know yet, but don't let any of the boys get fresh while I'm away."

Kelso grinned knowingly in the darkness. "They all fall sooner or later," he chanted in the dark. "O.K. kid, I'll look after the sweet child—but believe me bootlegger, she's plenty able to look after her own little self. Any more aid to her would merely be extra and added."

THE roar of the radial cut short his farewell speech. He stepped off the wheel as the slip stream beat against his face. A stream of green-red flame came from the motor exhausts and the ship moved forward slowly. Kelso ducked beneath the wing. "Adios, amigo mio," he called into the roar of the motor. But Stillman was gone, and in the cabin behind him rode fifty thousand dollars in black gum Mocca opium, carefully prepared and sealed in five tael cans; ready for the Pacific coast "trade".

Stillman flew low along the beach until he worked up enough flying speed, then he pointed the nose of the black monoplane up at an almost acute angle and climbed rapidly. The moon threw the ominous shadow of the speeding plane down at a funny angle upon the ground, until it looked like a moving cross following in the track of the ship. To his right were the snow-capped peaks of the mountains, shining with a weird glow as the moon picked up the white of the snow and caused it to glow in the velvet darkness. At twenty thousand feet, there was an intense cold, and Jim struck northeast by north across the mountain range.

At times the jagged peaks seemed to leap up out of the darkness to reach eager fingers for the taut fabric of his wings. His altimeter showed twenty-three thousand, and as he looked straight down, in front of the single unit wing, the ground seemed to be no more than five hundred feet down. In the stillness of the mountains the roar of the motor seemed louder than the fabled trumpet of Gabriel. Stillman was conscious of a sense of tremendous isolation, and a tense expectancy, knowing that the mountains were dangerous to extreme, and that any minute an unseen, uncapped peak might rise before him, out of the darkness, and there would come an instant of terrible suspense followed by a splintering crash as the speedy little monoplane flew into the solid wall of the mountain at full speed.

He drew his first free breath when the range had been crossed. He dropped down to around ten thousand feet, to escape the cold. He knew that below him now was nothing but a sandy plain that would extend almost to his goal—the field at Mexicana.

He smiled to himself once or twice as he thought of the cleverness of Igo Tsurski. Igo had said that no one must know who had provided the new ship. He must not leave the field he had leased at Mexicana. He must continue to carry passengers there, as if he had ordered the ship for that single purpose. Hence he could be supected of having no other business.

His trips into Ensenada would take two hours each way. He could leave after dark and be back before dawn on the same night if he so desired. The monoplane had a maximum speed of one hundred and fifteen miles per hour. From Mexicana to Ensenada was a matter of only fifty-five miles—an easy night's work.

An automobile would meet him, showing no lights as he landed without the aid of his motor upon the field at Mexicana, close to San Diego. His cargo would be transferred into the auto—when dawn came, no one in the beach resort would know that the ship had left its field. Simple? Of course. Igo Tsurski was a clever Oriental.

Stillman and Bud had been paid in advance for the first month's work. Two thousand dollars was a lot of money to

Jimmy and a thousand was a whale of a lot to young Bud.

Watching his clock and air speed indicator, Stillman ruddered a trifle to the west. He knew this territory like a book. He could land anywhere on it blindfolded. Ten minutes more and Mexicana, and Igo Tsurski, and the waiting car. The altimeter still showed ten thousand. In exactly ten minutes, Jim cut the gun, and began a sweeping spiral to the ground. He flew about in an easy glide in big circles, the air singing softly against the landing struts. The descent of the black monoplane was almost soundless. There were no exposed wires to scream with the rush of wind, or hum as the ship slipped. There were only the big stream-lined struts running down to the landing carriage.

He saw the cleared spot in the moonlight, when he reached a thousand feet. There was an instant flash of light. Igo was signalling that he was waiting, in spite of his intention not to do so. Jim nosed down sharply to regain flying speed, and leveled off at the north end of the field. The gentle night breeze was from the south. He felt his wheels touch and the easy motion of the ship as it ran along the ground. His judgment of distance was so accurate that he stepped out of the ship, almost in the spot where the ground stakes were driven to tie up the ship. The car was at the side of the road, not twenty-five feet away.

"Nice work," commented Igo Tsurski. "You have the shipment?"

"O. K.," grunted Stillman, "it's aboard."

"Throw it out quickly," commanded the Jap in a tense voice. "We must hurry."

"Who in blazes do you think you are talking to," snapped Stillman, "some coolie? I'm pilot of this crate, not a stevedore. If you want it thrown off, throw it off yourself, or call one of the hired hands. I'm going to bed."

"You'll throw it off or do anything else I tell you," hissed the Jap's voice in his ear. "Start working." A hand with steel gripping fingers settled upon Stillman's arm, close to the elbow. Stillman whirled, just as the fingers bit deep into the flesh. He went to his knees as the same fingers found a nerve center.

"Jiu-jutsu?" grunted Stillman, choking back the rush of pain to his brain. He heaved himself upward and grasped the Jap about the waist with his free right arm. He whipped him in close to his body, the savage contraction of the arm smashing the Jap against Stillman's powerful chest. He dashed his head downward and felt his skull crash into the soft face of the Oriental. The hand on his left arm relaxed, and taking advantage of the opportunity, Jim tore his left arm free, grasped the Jap about the body with both arms, and lifting him high above his head, hurled him to the ground with terrific force.

"There," he grunted. "Try some more fancy stunts, and I'll crack your head." He touched the groaning form of the Jap with the toe of his boot. "Get up, Mr. Jiu-jutsu expert," he ordered, "and start unloading. Don't ever make the mistake of putting your filthy paws on me again."

Igo Tsurki climbed stiffly to his feet. He was shaken and battered from the impact with the ground. His eyes, masked by lowered lids, were points of steel. Then he smiled. "You are a strong man," he told Stillman, "and I'm glad you will fight when you must. I have been trying you out as I do with all my people. I don't like cowards. They are dangerous. I had no intention of making you unload the ship. I have, as you say, 'coolies' to do that work." He clapped his hands softly and several shuffling-footed, soft-stepping figures came toward him from the dark roadway. He spoke rapidly in Japanese to them, and they took the sacks from the cabin and piled them into the waiting car.

"Listen, fellow," said Stillman, his voice grating through his teeth. "Don't try to give me the salve you were only fooling. It don't go down. If you

could make me do what you wanted you'd like it. It's part of you, but you won't, ever. Another thing, don't ever make the mistake of telling me that if I'm not a good little boy that you'll turn me over to the revenue people. I don't scare. And if you ever try to double-cross me, I swear I'll kill you. Understand? I'll wring your yellow neck until it cracks. There's two things I hate in this world, first a Jap and then a stool-pigeon. If you ever have the idea that I'm not a nice thing to have around, you better get rid of me peacefully, or you'll have heavy trouble on your hands."

The Jap's face bore the inscrutable smile again. "You fellows who fly," he remarked softly. "All of you are so impulsive. So reckless with your lives. Oh, no, I have many other ways to remove people I don't care to associate with or who are embarrassing to me. Many ways. I understand from your remarks that I am to consider that we are, shall we say, friendly enemies, nothing more. Business only."

Stillman nodded his head emphatically. "You're right!" he came back. "And you can leave the friendly out if you want."

"In that event, I might as well say that I am more than interested in that girl Carmencita," informed Igo softly. "She belongs to me. I resent the fact that you caused the death of one of my most faithful employees; that Ramon, who was killed last night."

"Oh, so you know about it?" asked Stillman.

"I know about everything," smiled Igo. "Many things you do not think I know about."

"Well, snap this off then," answered Stillman. "Your interest in Carmencita is dead from now on. I'm interested in her, too—and we both can't be. That goes along with everything else I've told you tonight, so I might as well get that off my chest, too. Hands off. Understand?"

Igo walked a few steps toward the hidden car, then he paused and called back over his shoulder. "Really, Stillman," he said in his soft voice, "you carry the bulldog thing too far, entirely. I fear that some time or other you'll prove to be, shall we say, embarrassing to me? You are a valuable ally, as it were, but even those things overstep the bounds of value at times. Be careful."

"I'll be careful," promised Stillman. "Thanks for the warning."

"Don't mention it," floated back over the Jap's shoulder. "I'm not so kind to other people, but I rather like you." He left the field, the muffled beat of the auto's motor fading away in the distance.

That night, at his room in the hotel, Jim Stillman wrote a long letter and when he had finished, sealed it carefully in a strong envelope. He carried it downstairs to the night clerk. "Keep this in the safe for me," he directed. "If I ever am gone for a period of more than ten days hand running, mail it according to the address on the front. *Buenos noches.*"

And again he went upstairs to dream the dreams of the just and untroubled.

CHAPTER IV
Rysik

KELSO nudged Jim in the ribs with his elbow. They were sitting in the Bloody Shirt. Stillman was down too make his third trip north with a cargo; he was due to pull out within an hour. Kelso was keeping him company in the meantime, and Bud sat at the table with them.

"Know that bird over there, leaning back against the wall with his feet cocked up on the chair?"

Stillman studied the man indicated for a long time. He was a peculiar-looking chap. His face was long and lean, and bore the stubble of a three days' growth of beard. His forehead was high and framed by a shock of uncombed, unruly black hair. His lips

were thin and cruel-looking. His nose long and pointed. His eyes were the startling things about him. They were like metal dots set in deep caverns. From where Stillman sat he could see no pupil reflection—they seemed to be without pupils.

The man had long, aristocratic, slim, tapering fingers, the hallmark of good breeding. Stillman was silent a long minute. Somewhere in his brain was the knowledge that he should be able to recognize this fellow.

"Seems like I've seen him before," he told Kelso. "But I can't place him. Who is he?"

Kelso smiled. "He's another air bird," he remarked. "From the tales that you hear passed around about him, he's the living and only reason why the Germans and their gang lasted out four years in the war."

"Oh, he's a war pilot, is he?" asked Jimmy with a new interest. "What's his name?"

"Rysik," informed Kelso. "He's some hand with one of them airplanes. I've seen him fly once or twice. Baby, the sky's the limit. I don't know it to be a fact, but I think our friend Igo has him on the string and has had him for many a moon."

Memory was turning over the name of Rysik in Stillman's mind. "He's not a German," he told Kelso. "He's an Austrian. If he's the great Rysik he certainly has changed in appearance. Rysik was a soldier—one of the greatest of the Austrian aces, ranked with Richthofen and Balcher—this bird is a wreck."

"That's why he belongs to Igo," laughed Kelso. "He's sold himself, heart, soul and body; and for nothing."

Stillman stared his disbelief. "Why, that fellow, if he's really Rysik, could get any old kind of a job," he said with conviction. "There's a hundred people that would employ Rysik."

"Maybe once," said Kelso grimly, "but not now. Nobody wants to play around with a hop head."

"Hop head?" echoed Stillman. "Why—"

"Take a look at him," invited Kelso. "Look at his eyes. Needle points. All charged up to a million. Not even Igo trusts him. He's down to the dogs. Lower than the dogs. He'd do anything for a shot of junk. Too bad. Seemed like a fine scout when he came out here, but he was on the stuff and Igo took advantage of the fact."

"I can't believe it's Rysik then," stated Stillman. "Rysik was too much the man."

The object of the conversation climbed stiffly to his feet and walked over to their table. He sat down wearily and reached his hand out for the remnant of Stillman's drink. He poured the raw liquor down his throat with a single motion and put the glass back reluctantly. "Needed a drink," he apologized. "You're the skipper of the black monoplane, aren't you?" he asked Stillman.

Jimmy nodded his head.

"Working for the Jap?" he asked in a grating voice.

Jimmy admitted that he was.

"Tough racket," informed the drug sodden creature. "Look at me." His voice was suddenly vibrant with repressed emotion. "You know me," he cried. "I know you. You're Stillman, the Yank who got von Seyfritz, my flying mate. We had it out. How long was it, a lifetime ago?" he cackled. "He's been telling you that I'm Rysik. You said I couldn't be; Rysik was a man—oh, don't look surprised, I can read lips as easy as I can hear. Rysik was a man, then. You know what licked me? You should know. You had the same, hours of flying and fighting and struggling against cold and sleep and starving and no sleep.." His voice was trembling and almost a scream of anguish. "No sleep, you hear. To close eyes just once. Fight. Fight, you cats, because you marched in where you didn't belong. Had 'em licked until you butted in and made us lose sleep, go

crazy, froth at the mouth. Then dope, you hear, dope. To keep us awake, so that we could face you. Dope in the place of sleep. Dope for months, for weeks, for days, till it clawed around inside of us. And it did this to me. You came out of it like you went in, except for some— Men like me that had to fight you, when you had no business in there, we had 'em licked. I hate you. I hate you because of what I am. You said Rysik was a man." His head slithered forward on the table. He was sobbing. He raised his head again and fixed Stillman with his blank eyes. "You'll pay for it some day. Not because you're you, but because I hate everything you represent. Just because if you hadn't come butting in I wouldn't be here. Rysik, a noble and a gentleman, in this hell-hole. Because of people like you—"

Kelso reached out a heavy hand and gave him a push alongside the head.

"Shut up, you calamity-howling cockroach," he bellowed hoarsely. "You can't cuss Americans around me, if you are charged to a million. Crawl under a table somewhere and keep quiet."

Stillman did not interfere. He sensed the hate that was seething in the drug-crazed brain of the former Austrian ace. It caused a thrill of fear to run up and down his spine.

"You see?" asked Kelso. "He is Rysik, he knows you, and he is a hop head and he does belong to Igo. Our dear friend Igo, who makes a million a year on boobs like you and me. Fine business. Only he don't pay Rysik nothing. Rysik will lick his shoes for one shot when the time comes. All Igo has to do is snap his fingers."

Stillman's soul was sick. This wreck of a man with his song of hate caused his whole being to recoil in horror. "Does he have a ship?" he asked of Kelso.

"Yeh, he has one and he flies it sometimes. I think Igo uses him to spot cutters, up near San Diego. He only comes in here about once every two weeks. You always know when a shipment is going out by boat. Rysik shows up, then he goes, and that night one of the launches pulls out loaded to the gills—and Rysik lopes back to S.D. to fly over the bay, looking for revenue cutters."

Stillman nodded his head slowly. "If he can still do that he can still fly," he told Stillman. "He's not a total washout."

"Why argue?" laughed Kelso. "You could see good in a Yaqui. Believe me, I wouldn't trust a bird that had been on the stuff as far as I could see him. He'd murder his own grandfather for a nickel, and as far as I'm concerned, they never come back—I never knew one that 'reformed.'"

"Well, I'll never be like that," stated Bud Taylor grimly. "To think of that fellow being a great pilot once—and now—"

"Wait till friend Igo gets finished with you, youngster," grinned Kelso. "He's not going to pay you a thousand a month for life, you know. He believes that if you put a man in touch with the little brain devils, nature will take its course."

Across the room, Carmencita was sitting alone, a pouting smile upon her face, her eyes turned to Stillman. He walked over to her and took a seat at her table. They talked together like old friends who had much to discuss.

"I have been trying to get you for a long time," she told him. "You would not come. Listen, I have news. The revenue men know that you are operating from here and they are going to trap you. It has been boiling within me all evening."

Stillman's face did not change a muscle, but he felt something tighten within him. "How do you know?" he asked in a half whisper.

"Carmencita knows many things," she told him, "one of which is that you should not be hooked up with our Jap friend. You don't belong with his crowd."

He looked at her thoughtfully. "He seems to have quite a crush on you," he told her quietly. "He bawled me out the first night I flew back to San Diego. Said he was interested in you, and that I should keep hands off." He watched her narrowly.

Instinctively her hand went to her bodice. He saw that a thin Italian poniard rested in the bodice ribbon. Her face was strained and colorless. "He said that?" she demanded.

Stillman nodded. "He didn't like it because Kelso bumped off Ramon."

"What did you tell him?"

"Well, after he picked himself up, I told him that I was interested also and that I wouldn't stand for any monkey business on his part."

"You mean you struck him?" she breathed.

"Not exactly that," grinned Stillman. "Igo couldn't stand being struck, he'd fall apart. He tried to put a pet hold on me and I jammed him in the nose with the top of my head, and then lifted him up and threw him down. We're the best of enemies."

She shuddered. "Be careful," she warned. "He has a hundred men who would kill you just for his favor. I know him. I've watched him work in the two months I've been here—he's terrible."

He stared at her with a new interest. "You mean you've only been here two months?" he demanded.

She smiled up at him. "Do I look as if I had been a hundred years?" she challenged. "Two months is a long time in such a place. I shall leave soon. I do not like it here."

"Good egg," he encouraged. "Go over to the States, you'll be better off. I'd take you in a minute."

She stroked his arm with her fingers and he felt the appeal of her beauty sinking into his soul. "Would you care very much if I stayed?" she asked softly.

His hand closed over hers. "Listen," he told her, "I'm going myself, pronto, next month maybe. I'm gone. No more, I'll have enough to do me and to start over. I may get the breaks this time. If you're game to try the life of a tramp flyer—why, listen that's not what I mean. I mean that when I've got my pile, if you'd marry me, I'd take you with me—anywhere." There was a fierce tenseness in his voice.

Her lips were brushing against his ear. "You mean, you'd marry me?" she whispered. "Knowing that I've been in the Bloody Shirt? Here in this place?"

The hand holding her fragile fingers crushed shut, she winced with the pain but her eyes held a luminous light of glory. "I've never heard anyone making any cracks about you," he said. "You can't be so bad—and if you were, it just seems that I wouldn't give a rap. Somehow I think of you all the time, and it seems like a year before I can come back here. I'm anxious to run another load, as much as I hate it, if only because it means that I see you each time."

She patted his hand. "You'd grow tired of me," she told him. "Carmencita, without her crimson shawl and her dance hall would not be the Carmencita you are used to seeing."

"I'm pretty regular," he said quietly. "When I want a thing I want it. Tell me, can I come back and take you away with me. Would you go? "

"With you?" she smiled.

"With me," he repeated.

"Anywhere!" she exclaimed, a joyous note in her voice. "Anywhere in the world, to face anything or anybody, to live as you live, if only for the joy of being near you—and I would love you—as only Carmencita could love you." Her eyes were shining and her lips were parted and arched. In that moment she seemed the most beautiful thing Jim Stillman had ever seen.

HE felt a great desire to have her within his arms, but he remembered the eyes that were upon him. "I'll take you," he promised. "I'll take

you if it's the last thing I do in this life."

"Promise me that you will not let Igo get me," she said, a tremulous note in her voice. "I am afraid of him. I laugh at everything, but deep in me is a great fear. It causes me to tremble when I think of him and his wolf teeth and yellow skin and inhuman eyes. I loathe him, and always I feel that he has his hand on my shoulder."

"He'll never get you," promised Stillman grimly. "Now what's this about the revenue men?"

She put her mouth closer to his ear. "They'll lay for you, tonight. They know the course you follow, and they will fly on three stratas—at three thousand, at five thousand, and at ten thousand feet. You know that place where you come out of the mountains—the pass? Well that will be the trap. If you go up the coast, they'll get you sure, for they're patroling the coast strip with all of the remaining ships from the San Diego base. They mean business. Can you get through?"

He was thoughtful. "You seem to know a great deal about the doings of the revenue service," he charged suddenly. "How do you know these things?"

"I know. I have a friend in the service," she finished rather lamely. "He tells me many things. You may be sure that this is straight information. I'm not guessing. The night is tonight. Can you get through?"

"I'll make it," he promised. "They'll do some flying before they get on my tail." He rose to his feet and patted her arm. "I'm off," he smiled. "I'm not forgetting, and no matter what happens, I'm coming back and I'm going to take you out of here. Don't worry and be a brave kid. Everything will be all right."

"I'm not worrying," she answered. "Not as long as I have you to fall back on. Good luck."

"I'll need it," he grinned, "when those Voughts start buzzing around."

He walked away from the table as nonchalantly as possible, and returned to Kelso and Bud. He took his helmet and goggles from off the table and lit a final cigarette. The hands of the clock pointed to three. "Let's go," he said shortly to Kelso and Bud. The three walked out of the bedlam of noise within the cabaret and into the great quiet of the night.

At the field, Bud climbed up into the cockpit and fitted the handle into the inertia starter. The mechanism whined and spun the propeller, after a moment a cylinder fired, then another—another second and the radial was hitting them off in regular order, quiet and efficient.

Stillman fitted his goggles, and snapped them into place. He called Kelso to one side. "Take good care of the Kid, and of Carmencita," he told him. "Look after Carmencita well while I'm gone. I'm going to marry her."

CHAPTER V
Winged Law

HE swung up into the cockpit and gunned the ready monoplane before Kelso could open his mouth. Next instant he was merely a blur of sand dust as the ship careened down the take-off and zoomed into the air. He had not said that ahead, there in the mountain pass the fast ships of the customs service were waiting to pounce on him.

He listened to the roar of his motor as the ship climbed. It was the steady swishing purr of all contented radials, turning the prop over in a powerful sweep that sent the slip stream humming along the fuselage, and gave that familiar "power pull" under the seat of the pilot as if eager to tear away from the ship altogether and to race ahead on the traction of the prop.

He was thinking strange thoughts as he ate up the distance between himself and the ready customs men. How could he fight them if it came to fighting? They were men he probably knew.

White men who were doing their duty. He shuddered. Duty. A devil of a word for him to think about. He couldn't kill one of them, nor even shoot him down. He had to get through on sheer bluff and guts—if he got through at all. He fingered a release ring, suspended from a hook near to his right hand tentatively. He knew that if he pulled the ring a little trap door in the floor of the cabin would open, and his load would fall out into space, and when the ship was searched—if he was forced down—nothing would be found to incriminate him. It was his own invention, that trap door—his "ace-in-the-hole."

If he had to land, in the face of overwhelming odds he would pull the ring, not before. It was time to change his course to northeast by east—to cross through the mountain pass, at the end of which, the enemy were awaiting him. He cut the motor to half throttle to deaden the noise, then he smiled. He had forgotten that the "enemy" could not hear his own motor over the noise of their own. He pushed the throttle ahead again, and the ship picked up speed.

Ten minutes and he was through the pass. He ruddered more to the north and watched the horizon line for the spitting flame from an exhaust. His altimeter read eight thousand feet. At that rate, according to Carmencita, there should be one ship over him and two below him.

He thought for a minute of climbing to a dizzy height to fool the ships, but he knew he would lose valuable time in climbing for altitude and that he would be an easy mark because of the flame from his exhausts. He gritted his teeth, pointed the nose down slightly and flew for speed, watching the trembling hand of the tachometer creep up as the engine revved up faster and faster.

Then he was aware of a new something behind him. It was a sub-conscious warning of danger. The same thing that had flashed over him in France when an unseen enemy edged in for his tail and a death thrust. He glanced back over the fuselage. Behind him was a flaring light, a green fuse it seemed to be, burning brightly behind the pilot of a pursuing ship. In the instant he looked he could see that it was a two-seater. A Vought patrol ship. He knew the green flare was the signal to the other two ships that the quarry had been sighted—"close in."

He bent over his instrument board, his head beneath the stream-lined cockpit of his ship. He knew that he was well protected from shooting from the rear. The great wing behind him was a bulwark, and the cabin below and behind him was an added protection. The Vought was overhauling him with the speed of the wind. He was over United States territory, he told himself.

The Vought drew up, flying alongside. A beam from a flashlight leaped out in the darkness and then flashed down upon the side of the pursuing ship. Stillman looked across the black void which separated them. The flashlight was illuminating a painted sign, held by a ghostly hand over the side of the Vought's rear cockpit. The sign, with large black letters read: *"U. S. Customs Patrol. Land at once."*

Stillman smiled grimly and nosed down more sharply to get the last ounce of speed out of the monoplane. He knew the Vought could outspeed him. The Vought was built for speed. Still, he didn't intend going down without a struggle. Below him he saw a dancing spot of light climbing to intercept him, to the left and farther away was another blur of light. He was in the center of a rough triangle and customs ships were closing in, pinning him in the center, to stay. The pursuing Vought again drew up alongside. The flashlight once more lighted a sign on the fuselage. This time it read: *"Land or we shoot."*

IN the circle formed by the light, Stillman could make out the grim outline of a Browning machine gun. The gun was uncovered, ready for action, even as

the light died and went out, Jim saw that it was turning, and pointing toward the fleeing black monoplane. He was coaxing every revolution out of the motor. Behind him, in the seat he had a Thompson sub-machine gun, but he dared not use it; not against his own kind. He grinned mirthlessly, and held his course.

A snapping noise sounded close to his ear. A glance at the pursuing machine told him that the grim little gun had gone into action at almost point blank range. He had heard snapping sounds like these before—many times before—it was the sound of steel machine gun bullets cutting through taut surfacing. He ducked his head inside the cockpit. The green flame from the Vought's gun pierced the night with a venomous glare.

Stillman reached for the little ring at his right hand. He hesitated for an instant, and then pulled on it sharply. The trap door in the cabin swung open and fifteen thousand dollars worth of black gum opium fell out of the ship and into space. The trap door, blown by the wind of the slip stream snapped sharply back into place.

A second Vought had position on his left, and at his side. He knew it was only a matter of seconds until he would be crippled—hit perhaps. He cut the motor and glided down. Anywhere below was a safe landing field. He was not worried about that. He was worried about the Browning guns that were cutting his wing fuselage to ribbons.

The pursuing ships followed him down. He landed with a rush, and they were close on his tail. Almost before he could step out of the cockpit, a flashlight, blinding him with its glare snapped full into his face and a stub-nosed service automatic covered him.

"Stand still," warned a quiet, ominous voice. "Stand still until we see what all the hurry in International flights is about."

They were probing into the cabin. Stillman could not repress a grin. The evidence was gone, swallowed up by the black earth. They made a thorough search. In his cockpit. In the baggage compartment. Everywhere. They only refrained from ripping the linen off the black ship in order to look along the longerons.

"Bare," reported a voice coming up beside the man holding the light on Stillman. "Bare as hell. Not a sign of contraband."

The officer with the flashlight cursed feelingly. "He had it when he pulled out of Ensenada. The 'office' from there is never wrong. How'd you get away with it?" he demanded of Stillman.

"Trap door in the floor of the cabin," stated Stillman truthfully. "When you birds overhauled me I just pulled the little ring, and out went the contraband. Too bad to cause you all the trouble. How soon do I get going?"

The officer with the light stepped closer. Something in Stillman's voice aroused his curiosity. He took a good look at the man his light was holding prisoner. "Jim Stillman!" he shouted. "By all the cross-eyed gods—Jim Stillman, and out here! Boy, I just wrote you a letter to your hotel in Mexicana."

Stillman's voice was quiet, but a nerve shock of alarm spread over him. "When did you mail it?" he demanded.

"Yesterday morning," informed the customs official.

Stillman groaned aloud. "Well, it's my fault," he told him. "I should tell you birds when I'm on a tear. I hope it's there when I get back."

The official's voice held a note of concern. "Anything serious," he asked.

"Can't tell," informed Jim. "Depends on what's in the letter."

"Plenty," assured the pilot. "I rehearsed the whole affair—not knowing you were down here. I'm sorry. Hope you don't have trouble. We knew that you were up and down here a lot, but we didn't know you were in this racket. Better move on—and in a hurry."

"Don't make much difference now," declared Stillman. "I'll get mine coming or going, one or the other. Sorry to

drag you boys out on a wild goose chase."

"Don't mention it," smiled the spokesman for the customs service. "Sorry to shoot hell out of you, but we had to investigate. It's part of the job."

"No hard feelings," assured Jim. "It's just a break in the game." He crawled back into his seat, and spun the inertia starter. The hot motor jumped into life. He waved to them and gunned the battle-scarred black ship. A half hour later he descended upon the field at Mexicana to find Tsurski waiting for him fuming with impatience.

"You're a long time in coming, tonight," complained the Jap. "What delayed you?"

"The delay wasn't all of the tough luck," grinned Stillman, secretly pleased at the discomfiture of the Oriental. "You'll find your cargo scattered over half the state of California. I dropped it. Customs hounds on my tail. Shot me down. Thirty miles south of here. Three of them. Had been tipped off—one of your lovely double crossing hop heads blew his guts I suppose. Your outfit makes me sick. I'm going home."

He turned away, but the talon-like-fingers of the Jap sunk into the flesh of his arm. "You mean that you threw fifteen thousand dollars worth of 'goods' overboard because you were frightened by the customs officials?" demanded Igo. "You stand here and tell me that—me?" he half screamed the last word.

"Take your dirty hands off my arm—I told you once before," warned Stillman. "When I'm flying that ship I'm doing just as I please. I'm not 'going up' for a measly load of gum even if you do own it. I'm a whole lot more valuable to myself than any load is to you. Now or any other time. I'll run when I please and I'll fight when I please. And if you don't like it, try to do something about it. If you think I ran down, scared to death, take a look at the crate. It has more holes than a sieve. Might as well go home and get a good night's sleep. That load is lost."

This time Igo permitted Stillman to leave the field. Jim walked away into the surrounding darkness, leaving the Jap staring after him, the wolf grin upon his face, and his hands clutching convulsively at his sides.

CHAPTER VI
A Letter Astray

JIM STILLMAN hurried toward the hotel with quick nervous strides. That letter worried him. If anything happened to the letter that had been sent to him at the hotel, well, he didn't care to think of probable consequences. He approached the clerk, struggling to keep eagerness out of his voice.

"Anything for me?" he asked.

The clerk glanced up. "Yes, sir," he replied. "There's two letters I think—just a second." He turned to the pigeon holes in the rack and found Jim's room number. He took a letter from the box, and then looked carefully within the narrow space. He scratched his head in perplexity, and turned to Stillman with a puzzled look.

"Could have sworn that I put two letters for you in that box," he grinned. "Funny what ideas a fellow gets. There's only one however." He stopped and his puzzlement grew. "No, I'm sure there were two. This one and another with a printed outside, an official business envelope Treasury Department, I remember it well, now that I think. Wait, I'll have another look." He probed into the key space again, and then searched the adjoining boxes without result. The general mail failed to reveal the letter, as did a search of the floor.

Stillman watched the search, a queer smile upon his face and far-off look in his eyes. He was thinking of the wolf grin of Igo Tsurski—if he had that letter!

"Not here," reported the clerk, regretfully. "I'm sure I put it in there, maybe up in your room."

"Don't trouble any more about it," excused Stillman, "it'll turn up sometime. If it does, send it up to me." He turned away and climbed the steps leading to his second floor room. His heart was racing. He knew he had to go and go quickly. Just time to throw his clothes in a bag and race for the field and the black monoplane. As he walked along the hall he was thinking of Bud and Kelso and Carmencita, down in the Ensenada hole; at the mercy of Igo the Jap. He gritted his teeth. "Well," he thought, "I'll be down there in a hurry, and then, look out." He knew that young Bud and Kelso and Carmencita would suffer on his account. All would meet the same accusation, Igo's vengeance and fury would be vented on all three, he pitied Carmencita the most, she was a woman. He fitted the key in the door lock, pushed the door open, and stepped within the room.

At that second, a searing noose fell about his neck and shut off his breathing, a pair of steel-muscled arms closed about his knees, and another pair, coming out of nowhere pinned his arms behind him. There was no sound, not even loud breathing. He heard the door closing softly and the lock snap into place even as he struggled impotently against the noose and against the vise-like arms. He felt a terrible shock of pain race down his spine as a pair of probing fingers touched a nerve center close to his shoulder blade. The noose tightened, as if in warning. He had known the contact of horsehair against flesh once before, and it was a horse hair noose about his neck—horsehair that can cut a throat as neatly and as quickly as a knife, and sears like fire.

His breath was half choked out of him. He fell to the floor, in a rising of flood blackness, his chest heaving and his tongue starting from his mouth. His back, where the knowing fingers had pressed, felt numb and dead. He lay quietly, barely conscious. He heard a voice speaking a curious guttural language—even in his half-stupor he knew it to be Japanese.

His legs and arms were tied hurriedly but well. Then he was lifted onto his own bed, the noose slipped from about his neck and a cloth gag fitted between his teeth. Then for the first time, he opened his eyes, and saw—Igo Tsurski grinning down upon him—his white teeth flashing in the gloom of the room. About him grouped in the shadows of the room were four or five other figures.

Igo was regarding the helpless figure on the bed with gloating eye. "So, Mr. Customs Inspector," he was saying, "you would attempt to play with Tsurski, eh? Well, have I not said, once before that I knew many things you did not think I knew? So? Why have I not killed you? Ah! I reward faithful service. You are going to be a witness to my engaging manner with women. Carmencita, a lovely creature, isn't she? You think quite a bit of her, no?" He paused.

Stillman remained quiet. He knew it worse than useless to give away to rage. It was the thing Igo was waiting for, to bait him. His brain was busy weighing the chances against him. Five against one—and the one bound and gagged and helpless.

"When you have been a witness," continued Igo in his suave, steely voice, "then I will show you how we treat traitors and spies in my country. Really it is very interesting. You see, we place the gentleman face down upon the ground, over a fixed broadsword, so that it just touches his belly, and then, every day we take a very sharp knife and cut a strip from his back an inch wide and twelve inches long. The sword is always there, the gentleman can always permit his belly to rest upon it. And so end the back stripping as it were. Meanwhile, if he desires to remain alive he has to suspend himself on his toes and hands to keep the sharp point from pressing into his abdomen, and of course every day there is the one-inch strip off his back. Appropriate, don't you think?"

Still the figure on the bed did not struggle.

"It was a smart trick to come here and to pose as a random pilot, in the hope that I would fall into the trap and employ you—and you in turn could betray me to the customs officials. Very nicely planned, but you made a grave mistake. I watch my people—all are potential enemies. Your friends were unwise and wrote you a letter. You should be more explicit in your dealings with your underlings. I should never make a mistake like that."

Still no sound from the bed.

Igo continued in his flat voice, masking the fury within him. "And then, there is another piece of news I would have you digest in your mind as Rysik flies down to Ensenada to clean house down there. Your little friend—Carmencita—ah—lovely girl—no? Well, what would be your surprise if I told you she was an agent of the Mexican government? Oho! Your eyes betray you! News, is it not? I thought so. She is a beautiful little creature, posing as a dance girl, to help trap Igo. Lovely plot? But again a mistake, she gave the warning and information to your people that sent you against me, so really, she is to blame for your present predicament. Still, much as I hate a spy, I shall not be too hard with *her*. I shall merely shut her up somewhere, where I can see her whenever I want to—I could not be hard with her. She is, what do you call it?—A very desirable young lady?—she will give me much pleasure. Farewell. Pleasant dreams, I'm leaving one of my "Chinks" as you call us—one of the people you hate so much, to look after you while I'm gone. I shall be back within a few hours at the most, and then the strips off the back. Adios, amigo mio."

Stillman watched him go. He was seething inwardly. He saw all but one figure follow after Igo as he dropped over the window sill, out of view. They had gained entrance by climbing up the outside of the building. Fool that he was to walk into such an easy trap! The one figure squatted on the floor, a dangerous looking knife in his lap, and never took his eyes off the still form on the bed.

Stillman knew that it would be worse than useless to try bribing his guard. In addition his mouth was securely gagged. He lay thinking of a way out—picturing Igo in the rear seat of Rysik's Fokker D7, speeding for additional vengeance in Ensenada. He could not know for certain whether Igo was speaking the truth when he taunted him with Carmencita's being a Mexican agent. Still, anything was possible along the border, and after all, she was not like the other girls at the Bloody Shirt. Without making a sound, he struggled with his bonds. His wrists were tied securely with thin hemp rope. The rope burned and bit into the flesh until it bled as he struggled against its unvielding tenseness. He drew his knees up against his stomach. His knees were not bound, only his ankles. He could move his legs. A thought came to him. He lay quietly for a long time—a time that seemed hours to him. After a while he heard his guard stir. He watched him through the tiniest space possible to one eye. The guard, curious because of the prisoner's silence and limpness came close to the bed, and studied Stillman's face. Patiently, Stillman held his pose of unconsciousness. The guard examined his gag and the ropes about his wrists, then he leaned down over the bed to inspect the lashings about Stillman's feet.

His head was level with Stillman's knees, and like a thunderbolt Jim lashed out with his feet, heels first, in a terrific kick with both legs. He felt his heels sink into the Jap's skull, and saw him drop to the floor inert—out. The heavy heels of Jim's boots had hit with the power of a blackjack. Stillman was galvanized into action. He rolled desperately about on the bed, cursing the unyielding ropes which held him prisoner. He rolled off the bed and fell with a thud on the floor.

Across the room was a mirror, he rolled over to it. Too high. His next thought was the window. He rolled to the wall, and by placing the back of his neck against the wall, close to the window, and digging his heels into the floor, he managed to gain a leverage, which inch by inch, and at the cost of terrific energy brought him up little by little to his feet. His face was purple, and his breath, hot and suffocating him. Every minute he expected the still limp guard to regain his senses and to plunge the knife into him.

He groaned as he thought of the knife. But he couldn't so much as hold it in his teeth, and the Jap was lying upon it, face down. Jim knew that he could not move him. He was almost up on his feet. The window was close by. A last tremendous heave and he stood upright, tottering, struggling to maintain his precarious balance. He leaned toward the window, and with a single butt of his head smashed the glass pane into a series of jagged remnants.

He turned his back, and by sense of feel, slipped the ropes about his wrist over one of the jagged projections. He sawed back and forth against the glass. He felt warm blood trickling down over his hands. He knew that he was cutting them to ribbons in his eagerness to sever the ropes holding his hands prisoner. He felt one of the strands part—and he redoubled his labors. The Jap was stirring and groaning softly.

A vicious plunge against the glass—a last strain, with the cruel hemp cutting into the lacerations and raw flesh of his wrists, and they were free! The gag suppressed a groan of agony at the pain in his wrists. His numb hands tore the suffocating gag from out of his mouth. He hopped toward the still unconscious guard, and fell to the floor beside him. With a heave of his arms, he rolled him to one side and grasped the knife with his hands.

The Jap opened his eyes and was staring at him with a vacant look. A single gash at the ropes liberated Stillman's feet, and at this moment, the Jap, with a shrill scream of rage, was upon him. Stillman had no mercy. He was cold as ice inside. He drove his fist into the guard's face, and charging into him football fashion, drove him against the wall, close to the window. The Jap, floundering, endeavored to rush, and met the solid impact of Jim Stillman's fist against his jaw, carrying a hundred and eighty pounds of iron muscles behind the blow. The Jap reeled backward, he fell with a crash against the jagged glass of the window. He squealed like a pig as the sharp fragments jabbed into the flesh of his back. He teetered a moment, struggling for his balance, and then, fell back and out of the window, to turn one somersault, landing on the hard ground below, flat on his back.

Stillman, jerking open his dresser drawer, seized a service automatic from the drawer, and throwing his weight against the frail door of the bedroom, crashed through out into the hall. Without stopping he plunged down the steps and out through the lobby onto the street.

An automobile was standing at the curb, the driver in conversation with a young lady. He looked up and saw a bloody savage, waving an automatic in his face, and bellowing something about an airplane. He terminated the conversation abruptly and drove the savage to where the black monoplane stood upon the flying field.

Stillman leaped from the running board and tore off the cockpit cover. He knew that he had plenty of gasoline and oil for five hundred miles. He climbed into the cockpit and wound up the starter. The motor coughed once or twice and began its swishing song. Stillman waited an instant, listening, then he blasted the tail around with the slip stream and poured the gun to the quivering monoplane.

He knew the Fokker was much faster than his commercial job, and that Igo and Rysik had at least an hour's start. They were already at Ensenada. He

bothered nothing about height. The ground slipped by faster—at least it seemed to, as he continued hedge hopping.

He held the nose of the monoplane even with the horizon line and his straining nerves were pushing it forward along with the screaming motor.

People looking up shook their heads as the flying demon passed overhead, almost touching tree tops. Across the border, and close to the pass through the mountains to Ensenada, he made his bid for altitude. He climbed dizzily, conserving every ounce of speed. He flew into the pass with the mountains rising on each side of him like the grim walls of a mighty fortress. At times the way was so close that the rock sides of the pass seemed too narrow for the passage of the ship, but he gritted his teeth and went through.

Every second counted. He couldn't waste time getting enough altitude to insure a safe crossing of the range. Through at last, and the sandy stretch of the Pacific beach! He ruddered to south sharply, and in ten minutes sighted Ensenada. He landed at a terrific speed. The ship sailed along the ground. When it stopped, Stillman blasted the tail around, and the empennage was almost touching the street of the pirate nest.

He dashed down the street, carrying his pistol in his right hand. The blood was still running from the gashed wrists and they felt numb but he thought nothing of it. He could only see the wolf grin of Igo the Jap, the dark eyes of Carmencita, and his only thought was the near helplessness of Bud Taylor and Kelso. For he knew that Kelso would see them through.

CHAPTER VII
Gun Talk From Kelso

THE Bloody Shirt was a raging battle ground. Tables were overturned and the acrid tang of burning powder hung over the dance floor, the crashing of heavy pistols punctuated the otherwise tense stillness, as hidden men outside pumped lead into the walls and doorway of the infamous resort.

Inside, crouching behind the iron tops of three overturned tables were Kelso, Carmencita and young Bud Taylor. Each held a smoking pistol, and the three pistols held the interior of the Bloody Shirt.

Igo, with Rysik, had burst into the Bloody Shirt an hour before, and without warning had ordered his men to seize Taylor and Carmencita. Kelso had interfered. The struggle had been sharp and deadly. Kelso, his guns flaming and his booming voice yelling defiance had blasted the attacking forces out through the door before they could get fairly organized. Several bodies, stretched out upon the floor about the room testified to the deadliness of his fire. Then, he had held the doorway against several rushes —while the frantic Jap, outside and under cover screamed maledictions in the Oriental tongue, and offered fabulous rewards to the persons who would drag the three out to him.

Kelso was worried, though he hid the worry with a cheerful grin. In his belt were sufficient shells for two reloadings of his deadly pistols. When they were gone, well, when they were gone, Igo would come in—that was all. He glanced at Carmencita and a wave of admiration swept over him. Her eyes were blazing, and her pistol never wavered from the doorway. Taylor was crouching quietly behind his table, alert and ready, his watchful eye guarding the windows.

It was Bud Taylor's first actual battle. Somehow he wasn't afraid. He had been cool and quick, just as he had been while crawling around on the wings of a flying ship. He wondered where Stillman was and what he was doing. He didn't understand the suddenness of the attack but he felt that it was aimed against his buddy.

A rush was organizing outside. Igo's

voice was urging the men on. A whiskey barrel had been broached and the attackers were screwing up courage with huge gulps of fiery liquor. A fusillade tore through the door. The men outside were putting down a barrage to cover the advance of the shock troops.

The light was suddenly blocked out of the doorway as they attempted to get by the deadline of Kelso's guns with a mad plunge forward. The heavy Colts in Kelso's hands spat flame and smoke, so rapidly that the explosions sounded like a heavy machine gun. The front rank of the charging gang was swept away and fell to the floor over the sill, tripping the men behind who were attempting to push forward.

Cool as ice, kneeling on the floor, fully exposed, Kelso fired from his hips, and the heavy slugs whistled into soft flesh, stopping the attack with sheer weight of the metal thrown by his Colts. He could hear Taylor's gun backing him up, and now and then the heavy crash of Carmencita's gun as she fired into the mob, carefully picking her target.

The charge recoiled, and once again light showed through the doorway. Across the sill was a grotesque heap of dead and dying. Kelso reloaded his guns with the last of his ammunition.

Then there was a stillness from the outside. He didn't like the stillness. It was ominous.

A thin curl of smoke ran a snaky finger along the front walls of the building. Kelso cursed feelingly and his heart sank. He knew the game was up. Igo was sacrificing the Bloody Shirt to his blood lust. He had fired the building. The only avenue open to three of them was to wait until the flame became too hot, and then to charge out—to meet death at the hands of Igo's gunmen.

He glanced about the room like a trapped animal. Across the room hung a fire bucket and a fire axe. He shot a terse sentence at young Bud. "Hold that doorway till you hear different."

Crawling on his belly, he crossed the room and reached up for the axe. He lifted it from its socket and crawled back across the floor. Still crawling he gained the back wall of the joint. He lifted the axe and hit the thin wood partition a terrific blow. The axe blade splintered the wood and let in the outside light of day. The flames were licking greedily at the front part of the building. The big room was thick with smoke and the three were choking and gasping.

Kelso struck heavy, quick blows. He broke through a jagged hole big enough to crawl through, close to the floor. Then he beckoned Carmencita and Taylor.

He thrust a careful head outside the partition wall. The rear of the building was deserted. He grinned, and pushed Carmencita through the hole. The attackers were waiting for them to roast or to come out shooting. Taylor was next through, carrying an automatic shotgun and his pistols. He had taken the shotgun from behind the bar and his pockets were stuffed with shells for the gun.

They ran away from the smoke and the flame. They had gone ten feet, when a yell of alarm came from behind them. Kelso turned his head. His hand flicked out and his gun belched flame. The warning shout was cut off in the throat of the discoverer of the retreat almost before it sounded, but the damage had been done. The pack was in full pursuit.

As if by blind chance they ran in the direction of the flying field. Taylor paused for an instant and leveled his shotgun. The blast of buck shot from its muzzle stretched out three men in the front ranks of the pursuers and slowed them down to a walk. Ahead, Kelso was pulling Carmencita along by the arm.

A figure ran toward them from the field. Kelso stared with unbelieving eyes. He saw a black monoplane, its motor turning over easily, standing on the field that had been vacant a moment

before. Jim Stillman, bloody, wild eyed, was racing toward them.

"Go back," bellowed Kelso. "We'll get away in the 'plane. I'll hold them until you're ready."

He thrust the panting Carmencita into the arms of Jim Stillman and turned to face the horde again racing after them. Bud Taylor was by Stillman's side. His face white, and his breath coming in short gasps. A dull red stain showed on Bud's shoulder. He pulled the cabin door of the monoplane open, and they lifted Carmencita inside with a united heave.

Behind them, backing slowly, a step at a time, and holding the fire, came Kelso. He had slowed up the attack. None of the horde desired to face the absolute death that vomited from the twin guns in Kelso's hands. They knew his reputation as a gun fighter—and the dead and dying around the Bloody Shirt were not a pleasant sight. Igo's screaming voice, urging them forward, before the plane could take off, sounded over the crackling of pistols.

Kelso reached the side of the ship. Very calmly he knelt in the sands and waited. The rush came just as Stillman was climbing into his cockpit. A blast of flame came from the gang, and a shudder passed over Kelso. He half fell forward and then regained his position on his knees. He lifted his guns, as if by a super-human effort. Then they were in action. The smooth rolling crashes of a two-gun master. In front of him, men went down and stayed down as the heavy slugs tore into flesh. Kelso coughed and a blood red tide surged from his lips, and a stain appeared on the front of his shirt, under the lungs. Still his guns sounded. Bang. Bang. Bang. A steady regular rhythm, and every time they spoke a man plunged face down into the sands from the ranks of the mob.

Stillman yelled a warning. Kelso endeavored to struggle to his feet. Bud Taylor dashed around the tail of the ship and dragged him to the little cabin door. With a superhuman burst of strength he heaved him upward, limp and unresisting. Carmencita reached out and helped drag him back into the cabin. The ship was quivering. Bud yelled. Stillman poured the gun to the radial, just as a clawing hand reached out in a futile clutch at the tail section. The slip stream hurled a barrage of stinging sand into the faces of the mob, causing them to turn away to avoid sudden blindness. The black monoplane raced down the sandy take-off and leaped into the air.

Behind them Igo the Jap raised clenched fists to heaven and shrieked after them. Then he turned to Rysik. "The ship! Quick, you fool—you have guns on your ship. They have none. Quick!"

They raced across the little town to where Rysik's Fokker D7 stood. Rysik cut on the switches and spun the prop. The motor roared the first time over. He leaped into the forward cockpit. Igo, his face a gray mask, climbed into the second seat, without helmet or goggles. Rysik poured the gun to the Fokker and it skimmed off the ground.

The monoplane was a dot on the north horizon.

CHAPTER VIII
Mountain Combat

STILLMAN, looking back over the wing of the monoplane, saw the fast Fokker overhauling him. He closed his eyes for a moment and imagined the kind of flying hate and a drug sodden brain would promote. He knew that Rysik hated him, venomously, blindly. He didn't know whether or not the Fokker *was* armed, but he thought that it most likely was—if it belonged to Igo. He judged that he would be overhauled somewhere on the Mexican side of the mountain pass through which he must fly. It seemed that the Fokker was overhauling him hand over hand, for it

grew larger and larger on the south horizon, and he could distinguish the wings from the fuselage.

He concentrated on getting the maximum revolutions of the laboring motor. The ground below was becoming rougher and rougher, the foothills to the mountain range. To his left he caught the shimmer of the Pacific.

Inside the cabin, Carmencita was laboring over the unconscious Kelso. A great hole had been torn in his chest, and the blood around it oozed with each agonized breath. She tore a great strip from off her skirt and making it into a compress, placed it over the wound. Kelso opened his eyes for a brief moment and the ready grin flashed over his face, only to give way to a grimace of pain he could not suppress, and he lapsed into senselessness again.

Bud, bleeding from his shoulder, was reloading the automatic shotgun. In his mind he knew it to be a futile weapon against the Fokker, but its touch gave him a feeling of security. He loaded the magazine and shifted the shells in his pockets so that they might be easily reached. A glance out of the window showed him the unrelenting Fokker bearing down on them. It was close enough now to distinguish a head in each cockpit. The muscles of young Taylor's face twitched, and he appeared thoughtful.

THE Fokker was within range. Stillman darted a look back and saw that it was armed. He could see the sharp outlines of two guns mounted over the motor cowling to fire through the propeller. He groaned inwardly. He couldn't fight that. They were in the mountains now. Jagged rocks stretched below them. He shuddered as he thought of crashing helplessly into that jumble of cruel rock, as the black monoplane, riddled and disabled spun down to a sickening crash—with Carmencita and Taylor and Kelso locked within the fragile cabin.

The snapping sound filled his ears. A look back. Rysik had opened fire. Stillman saw a second face peering at him from the back cockpit. It was a yellow face, wearing a nervous wolf grin.

He looked sharply. Within the cabin, Carmencita and Taylor, trying to hold Kelso on the floor, felt a nausea and the ship looped and regained level. They were thrown violently against the wall of the cabin. "Straps!" bellowed Taylor. He dragged Kelso to one of the wicker seats and propping him up, adjusted a safety belt about his waist to hold him in place. Kelso's wound was again bleeding.

Carmencita staggered to the opposite side and sank into a chair, pulling the web belt about her—just as Stillman rolled to escape the deadly rain of steel Rysik was pouring into him. He knew it to be a mere matter of seconds. While he was fairly well protected by the bulk of the wing, the gas tanks were in that same wing, and if they were pierced—and pressure went down, he glanced over the side at the terrible rocks and shuddered.

Bud Taylor, his face white with determination, opened the frail cabin door and looked out along the fuselage. The automatic shotgun was in one hand. He swung out into space, along the sheer side of the fuselage, then with a swing of his body, and a twist of his shoulders, he thrust himself forward, stumbled and grasped the landing gear —wing—support—strut in the crook of his elbow. His powerful muscles, trained to respond to the call of life—as he dared the dangers of wing walking, held like grim death, and little by little he pulled himself up until he was astride the strut, close to the fuselage. He still gripped the automatic shotgun —although it forced him to climb along the side of the monoplane, his safety balanced in the strength of his fingers and one arm.

Up he climbed. It was a new experience. Monoplanes of this type had always been deemed impossible from a

wing walking standpoint. He set his foot in the pilot's step, and with one hand pulled himself up level with Stillman's face.

"Fly straight," he screamed in Jim's ear, "I'm going to try to pot that bird if he comes close."

Flat on his belly, he eased out on the wing. The smooth surface of the wing offered no chance for a handhold. If Stillman hit a current or the ship bucked it meant a death slide, off and into space. His eyes were steel points. He eased the automatic shotgun forward and watched the Fokker narrowly.

Rysik was excited. Perhaps it was the effect of drugs, perhaps he was too anxious to finish the symbol of the thing he hated. Perhaps the snarling voice of Igo the Jap was urging him on from the rear seat. He cursed as he saw chips fly from the fuselage and wing of the monoplane in front of him and yet seemed unable to get in a vital burst. He jockeyed the Fokker up close to the tail of the fleeing monoplane and reached for the gun trips. He had not noticed the crawling figure of Bud Taylor on the broad surface of the wing. Rysik's pin point pupils were fixed on the back of Jim Stillman's cockpit, and the inch of head that showed above the wing.

Taylor looked over the sights of his gun. The Fokker was directly on the monoplane's tail, scarcely fifty feet away. He saw Rysik's hand go to the gun grips, and his white face framed in the circle of his gun sights. Convulsively Bud's forefinger closed on the trigger of the automatic shotgun.

The shock of the quick, heavy explosions against his shoulder told him the gun was firing—and then as quickly it was silent—empty. But it had done its work.

The first heavy charge of buckshot had shattered the Fokker's propeller. The second charge had swept in over the cowling, unhampered by the whirling blade, and had literally blown the head off of the Austrian pilot, just as his hand closed on the triggers of his machine guns. The Fokker was finished—stilled. It flew on a straight course for several long seconds, its inherent stability keeping it on even keel, then one wing dropped as an eddy caught it. Lower and lower, seeming to fight against a spin but useless, the dropped wing, dragging at the ship, threw it into a slow spin, driven by a motor on three-quarters throttle.

Stillman looking back, saw it going down. Below, at the bottom on the narrow pass, was a jagged mass of rock. He glanced back at the ship behind, spinning down faster and faster—then he turned his eyes away.

Only Taylor saw the frenzied figure of the Jap leap wildly out of the rear cockpit and go hurtling down through space, to merge with the dark shadows of the rocks below. The Fokker spun in on one wing and its nose, bucked for an instant and then became a shapeless mass of tangled wreckage. It was flaming—burning, and in the cockpit, unknowing and unfeeling, burned Rysik, once a great man and a great ace.

THEY WERE over the border patrol field, close to the border. Taylor had thrown his shotgun overboard and trembling as if with a sudden ague, had crawled back into the cabin of the monoplane. His shoulder burned as if seared, and he had to grit his teeth to fight back groans of pain. Carmencita, white faced and drawn, merely glanced at him as he crawled in through the little door leading to the cabin.

Stillman nosed down sharply. He was circling for a landing on the patrol field. Taylor groaned. "Giving himself up because he had Kelso and himself wounded and helpless and a woman on board," he thought. "Well, they'd go to the 'pen' together."

Carmencita, alarmed at the downward dive, opened the little window, into the pilot's cockpit. The motor was throttled down.

"Where are you going?" she demanded. "Not down there? They'll arrest you."

"No they won't," assured Stillman with a wan grin.

"But why?" she demanded.

"Because I happen to be boss of that bunch—in my spare time," he answered.

He did not hear the glad cry that sprang to her lips, and he did not know that she had fainted until he was on the ground and tender hands were lifting the three passengers out of the cabin. Then he carried her into the barracks in his own arms.

Kelso lived. He lingered between life and death for months—but his great strength brought him through, and young Bud Taylor didn't go to the 'pen', rather he went into a pilot's job in the service at the recommendation of Jim Stillman, Customs Inspector.

THE END

CHEAT DEATH ON ICE

The victory of three men over ice, cold and starvation, was told recently in the survival of two Canadian airmen and an Eskimo guide who cheated death after two weeks on ice floes of the north Atlantic and the mountain wilderness of Labrador.

The tale of the survival of the trio was related in a message to the marine department from Squadron Leader T. A. Lawrence at Port Burwell on Hudson straits.

The battle began when Pilot A. A. Lewis, and Flight Sergeant N. C. Terry, with an Eskimo guide, were forced down on an ice floe 60 miles at sea in the north Atlantic and ended when the trio staggered into Port Burwell on Hudson strait.

Small ice pans, used as rafts in the journey shoreward, the keen marksmanship of the Eskimo guide who provided raw meat for food, and the help of a native hunter over Labrador mountains brought the trio out of the north alive.

Coming down in thick weather and facing the intense cold of arctic winter, the trio lost two days at sea when, being without bearings, they traveled eastward for one day before the weather cleared and they discovered they were heading away from land. They turned about and, using their small emergency raft until it was lost, began the journey toward land. After the raft was lost, they paddled across open water between floes on small ice pans.

After consuming part of their emergency rations the flyers and their guide were forced to lighten their burdens by throwing the rest away, the raw meat of walrus, shot by the Eskimo guide, furnished food from then on. They landed on the Labrador coast in the vicinity of Kanaktorvik, from where they made their way over forty or fifty miles of rough mountainous country to Port Burwell.

"When abandoned," the message added, "airplane was intact with exception of broken propeller and stiff legs on skiis caused by running into heavily drifting ice."

The airmen were lost while making a fortnightly patrol over Hudson straits, designed as a study of ice conditions with a view to establishing aids for ship navigation.

The Plunge Off

By
Joel Townsley Rogers

A ghostly avenger rides the air-trails —and Captain Jack Christmas stares into eternity from the white-hot spreader bar of a flaming ship.

Air Adventure Novelet

JUST before four o'clock of that cloudy June afternoon, King O'Kane came running across the air mail field at Hempstead, New Jersey. He was swinging his helmet and goggles, and his parachute pack slapped against his back. He was due to take up the Washington mail at four, and he thought he was late.

Halfway across the field, a man in the cockpit of a little golden Vought single-seater, which stood with idling engine, hailed O'Kane. The hurrying mail pilot recognized the closely cropped, unhelmeted head from afar. It was Captain Jack Christmas, of the New York aerial police. He saw Christmas's keen blue eyes wrinkled toward him, Christmas's brown face breaking into an iron smile.

"I'm late as the devil, Jack," O'Kane panted, as he came toward the Vought. "What brings you over here?"

"I've been looking for Slug Huzzard," said Captain Christmas.

"Oh, that hophead!" said O'Kane contemptuously. "I've put them wise to him. He won't dare show his face around here."

"There was a little job pulled over on Long Island last night, and a dead man found, that I think Slug Huzzard might explain," said the police flyer quietly. "He may be making for Canada—Nova Scotia, that's his home. But I thought I'd give a look in at Hempstead. Watch out for him, King. He's a bad actor, and he's laying for you. Don't laugh like a fool, boy! Slug Huzzard could break you in his hands."

Saying which, Christmas gave a curt nod. He waved a friendly farewell to King O'Kane, and shot his throttle open. The little golden Vought streaked forward across the field. Straight up it fled toward the stormy sky, leaving a faint smoke trail. In an instant it seemed a thousand feet high, and it whipped over, heading eastward toward the Hudson.

King O'Kane hurried on. "All ready to shove off?" he gasped to the mechanic who stood beside his mail ship.

"She's all fueled, but I don't know if they've loaded on the mail yet," replied the mechanic doubtfully. "I don't think it's time, Mr. O'Kane. I only came down myself this minute."

"It's way after four," said O'Kane, still breathing heavily. "If I don't hop off pronto, Old Beelzebub will skin me. I've been late once too often."

King O'Kane was a handsome boy, tall and lithe, rosy-cheeked, with long-lashed dusky eyes. He was cocksure and debonair. He carried himself with a swagger. And he had some reason for doing so. He was only twenty-one, and rated the best flyer at Hempstead. Unfortunately he was not always punctual, though punctuality is a virtue more precious than any other in the sight of the air mail. "Old Beelzebub," of whom he spoke, was the flying superintendent at Hempstead, by name, B. Z. Bell. O'Kane did not care to have Bell, or Beelzebub, catch him late again, for the superintendent had a sharp and bitter tongue.

"I've got bad news for you, Mr. O'Kane," said the mechanic in a lowered voice. "I hear Slug Huzzard is laying for you."

King O'Kane wasn't listening. He had lifted up the cover of the mail cockpit. He flashed a cursory glance inside. A striped canvas mail sack was spread just below the cockpit hatch, and the compartment seemed filled to capacity. He slammed the cover down impatiently, and snapped the catch. Quickly he swung himself into the pilot's seat, which was just forward of the mail cockpit.

"Sure the mail's been loaded on," he said. "Looks like three hundred pounds of it. Did I hear you say something about Slug Huzzard?"

The mechanic stepped up close to O'Kane. He put his hand to the side of his mouth.

"I say Slug is laying for you," he repeated.

It was the same warning Captain Christmas had given.

"Let him lay," said O'Kane flippantly. "He's been cackling long enough."

"Rattling, you mean," said the mechanic ominously.

Cautiously he looked around him, for he had an uncanny sensation that Slug Huzzard might have overheard him. No one was visible, however, within a clear hundred yards of the ship. It stood to one edge of the flying field, on grass too short to hide a sparrow. King O'Kane only laughed.

Huzzard was a discharged pilot of the Hempstead field. He had cracked up too many ships while under the influence of cocaine. A sullen gorilla of a man, with knotted, bulging muscles, he could fly like a fiend at times. He was a hophead, a dope, yet his strength was still greater than that of any two men. King O'Kane and he had come to outs about a woman. Huzzard was known to nourish, in his twisted and cunning brain, the belief that O'Kane had had him broken from the service.

"Laugh your head off, Mr. O'Kane," said the mechanic warningly. "But Slug could take you in his two paws, and wring your neck like a dish rag."

"He'll not get his lousy hands on me," said O'Kane coolly.

"He was sneaking around the station early this morning," said the mechanic. "At least, that's what some of the boys think. Captain Christmas himself was down here looking for him. There was a job pulled over in Rockaway last night that Christmas lays to Slug.

We've hunted the station high and low for him."

O'Kane's ruddy face had grown a little paler, but he smiled. He glanced around watchfully at the bare field, where no man was moving or hiding. He glanced above him at the bare sky, where no bird was flying.

"I'll let you fellows worry about Slug," he said. "Nothing's going to get me in the air."

The mechanic swung the stick with brawny arms. The great blade swirled, the motor choked and roared. Far across the field O'Kane saw Superintendent Bell, Old Beelzebub, running toward him. He jerked his helmet over his head without bothering to strap it. Full speed he jammed the throttle on.

The mail plane was headed southwest, facing the wind that was driving the great rain clouds overhead. It shot forward with a bellow. The blast of its propeller stream beat on the crouching mechanic. It skimmed the grass. O'Kane hauled its bow straight upward in a zoom. Higher he climbed, putting the earth below him, heading against the storm wind southwest toward Washington.

He breathed easier now. Like any true flying man, he was never so confident and happy as when in the air. There he was lord of the universe, of the seven whirlwinds and the tallest stars. There nothing could touch him.

Steadily the keen wind rushed over his cockpit visor and swept like a mighty ocean below his keel. He took a deep breath. He was climbing to the ceiling. He felt a curious and uneasy desire to put plenty of blue space between himself and the ground. Slug Huzzard laying for him! In spite of O'Kane's air of cocksure contempt, the quiet warning of Captain Christmas and the mechanic had troubled him.

"I'll buy a gun in Washington," he thought, "and I'll go loaded for Slug Huzzard. He'll not put his hands on me—the hophead!"

At a thousand feet altitude he peered behind him at the field. Two little figures of men were down there, running slowly and futilely. They were the mechanic and Superintendent Bell. They appeared no larger than two tortoises crawling flat across the earth. Against the storm wind sweeping head on, the DH9 was making a ground speed of sixty knots. Ironically O'Kane waved a hand overside.

"Foxed you that time, Old Beelzebub!" he grinned.

The tiny figure of Bell still continued running. He was flapping something aloft in signal. It was an empty mail sack.

"Confound it, the mail's aboard, if that's what you mean," the pilot growled.

He was fairly certain that he had looked in the rear cockpit. It was a routine gesture which he always made before hopping off, as instinctive as testing out the plane controls. But he'd better make sure again, he thought. He'd better see about it.

CHAPTER II

Slug Hazzard Appears

THE roaring DH had climbed to eighteen feet, close under the smoky fringes of the nimbus. The sky looked blacker, the earth looked grayer. The clouds had closed together overhead, and the last pale glimmer of sunlight was cut off. Though it was late June, King O'Kane felt a coldness run through his body. He shivered. From the vast cloud ceiling, red lightning flashed.

He cut his engine and nosed over in a slow glide. The field was three miles and more away by now. O'Kane half stood up and swung his body around, stretching out his right arm toward the hatch of the mail cockpit. Again the silent lightning flashed. A tentacle of the lowering cloud mist, coiling slowly downward, drifted about him.

His fingers fumbled on the hatch. The pressure of the streaking wind forced it down. O'Kane gripped one knee about his control stick to steady it, and reached back with both hands. He hooked his fingertips under the hatch rim, and tugged violently.

"Confound it, come up!" he said.

Even as he said it, King O'Kane's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. Half standing as he was, beaten by the swift wind, his torso twisted clumsily about, he remained like a wooden image. The hair bristled on his nape. For the cockpit cover was coming up, and it was not his hands that moved it!

"What's this? What's this?" he stammered.

That was the faint and foolish word he uttered there in the high sky, above the drifting earth. Too late he tried to push the cover down, he pressed both palms upon it and bore down with his weight.

Like a jack-in-the-box it opened up, pushed by the knuckles of a great hairy fist. The empty mail sack lying below it was flung aside. It swept over the cockpit coaming like a departing bird, and flew away in the wind. Out of the dark well of that rear cockpit arose Slug Huzzard. There was a deep and silent laughter in his bloodshot eyes.

THE man was a lunatic. He was crazed with cocaine fiends. There was a foam upon his muttering lips. Unwinkingly he stared at King O'Kane. There was nothing human in his look; neither reason nor compassion.

King O'Kane moved his paralyzed tongue. "What do you want?" he croaked.

The thick hair of Slug Huzzard, brown with ashy streaks, was matted over his forehead and over his small, gleaming eyes. His nostrils were flattened. Slowly he began to hunch his massive shoulders forward. Through the wide rents in his tattered shirt O'Kane could see the giant's muscles ripple and play like the muscles of a horse. And slowly Huzzard brought his hands upward from the waist.

In a vast singing silence the pilotless ship swept along its flat glide. The wires between its wings twanged with a single humming note. Except for that high, whining sound the silence was so tense and mute that King O'Kane might have heard the seconds of his watch ticking his own life away.

With a frozen look he stared. He could not move his limbs. His tongue was swollen in his mouth. In that prolonged and deathly instant he knew right well what eternity is like.

Thin and cold seemed the sweeping wind. The world was gray about him. He felt the beating of his pulses like the thundering of ocean surges on a shore, heavy and loud, slow and loud. His head reeled. And suddenly he straightened up, banging his fist on the back of his seat.

"You haven't any business here!" he cried. "What do you want?"

Slug Huzzard laughed.

O'Kane gave a cocksure fling to his shoulders—he, the debonair and gay. He wet his lips with a creeping tongue. Suddenly he was sobbing.

"A-ah! You—!" snarled Huzzard.

His face was black. King O'Kane was sagging down upon his seat, wanting to hide, wanting to hide away. Desperately into that heavy, snarling countenance he looked. He tried to smile. It was a look he would wear forever after.

"What do you want?" he whimpered.

The massive shoulders of the giant were drawn together like a lump of stone. The furrows of his face were creasing deeper. His broken teeth seemed like black gravel in his mouth. King O'Kane crouched down within the cockpit, smiling desperately, smiling still. Slug Huzzard's great knotted fists had come upward. And, swift as a wild gorilla from a jungle tree, his whole body seemed to leap.

"I want you!" he said.

The cloud came over them, then.

CHAPTER III
Sky-Murder

THE thick storm cloud moved in a solid roof over the valley of the Hudson. Two thousand feet high, it surged northeastward in endless waves, a vast silent ocean. At intervals lightning gleams burned in its deep core.

At four o'clock the police flying field north of Manhattan was dark as twilight. Out of the clouds a swift ship came tearing down into clear air. It was Captain Jack Christmas's golden Vought. It sideslipped in long sweeping arcs, one wing down, and then the other. It straightened out, and flashed across the field like a golden tornado toward its hangar.

The recall flag was up. All other police ships were battened down, and their pilots had left the field. Christmas's mechanic, Peter O'Toole, was waiting on the grass for him. O'Toole was a pink-haired little Irishman with a hump between his shoulders and a twisted knee. He claimed to be the seventh son of a seventh son, and to have the gift of second sight.

"A fine day for a murder," said Christmas with a bitter grin, springing out. "It's as dark up there as the inside of a crow's belly. Nothing but clouds to ten thousand feet. No sign of Huzzard at Hempstead, Petey. He's given me the slip."

He strode swiftly to his locker inside the hangar. Deftly he stowed his parachute and other flying gear away. His bright brown face was wrinkled in its habitual smile, but O'Toole knew that the look did not always indicate pleasure. Captain Jack Christmas was uneasy over the disappearance of Slug Huzzard. And perhaps he was a little alarmed.

"Confound the hophead gorilla!" he said. "I thought I had my hands on him. Well—run the ship in, Petey."

O'Toole grasped the propeller of the light ship. He dragged it into its hangar as an ant drags a dead moth.

"Get in, and stay in!" he said, as he rolled shut the doors. "Behave yourself, and go to sleep!"

Peter O'Toole loved Jack Christmas as a father, and the golden Vought as a child. He talked to it and argued with it, he prayed over it.

"Sick and worrit I've been all day," he confided to Christmas in a lowered voice. "Last night as I tossed on me bed there came to me a bogey dream. And the sweet little ship crashing down all afire at me feet! And yourself diving like a dead man through the bitter black sky! And me with the gift o' sicond sight I have, that never yet has failed me."

Jack Christmas, still in his shirt sleeves, was wiping oil from his hands. He grinned at the little lame man's superstitions.

"To the devil with your second sight," he said.

He turned his head. In that instant his office telephone had commenced ringing. It was ringing furiously, with a hoarse commotion. He hurried to it.

"Bell, of Hempstead, speaking,' a breathless voice broke in on him. "King O'Kane took off from here fifteen minutes ago. Have you seen him, Captain?"

"A lightning bolt couldn't fly thirty miles in fifteen minutes," said Christmas. "Use your head. King's carrying the Washington mail. Why look for him up this way?"

"The flying fool shoved off ahead of schedule, and without his mail," said Bell. "He climbed up to the clouds, and whipped his ship around. We heard him driving through the cloud away to the northeastward, going like a bat out of a bonfire. If he keeps on going the way he's started out, in four hours he'll hit Nova Scotia."

Captain Christmas set down the telephone slowly. The steady smile had left his face. Queer thoughts darted through his mind, queer suspicions—

Swiftly he wheeled, and ran out toward the hangar. He cocked his head. He stared up at the seething sky. Far away he heard an airplane engine droning.

It was coming on from the southwest, from the direction of Hampstead. Peter O'Toole, with his quick hearing, had caught the sound already.

"Making knots, whatever it is, but flying crazily," he said. "It's a Liberty, and going with all it's got."

Out of the smoky southwest sky, swept on the wings of the great rain wind, beating like a thunderbolt across the valley of the Hudson, the unseen ship came roaring toward the zenith. By the tone of it, it might have been half a mile up, five hundred feet within the clouds. It was not flying straight away, but sweeping in long curves through the caverns of the mist. Its course could be followed by the ceaseless, uncanny *hroom-hroom* of its invisible thunder.

"It's slipping now—now it's diving," muttered Petey, crouching on the grass and staring up intently with his green cat eyes. "Listen to 'er roar! It's some lost soul sweeping blind as a mole, and he don't know where he's at, nor nowhere. Why don't he nose over, and come down to clear air like a Christian?"

Captain Christmas had run past. Desperately he was sliding back the hangar door. Storm wind whipped across the field, raising little swirls of dust and rattling the iron door. He put his stocky shoulders to it, and ran it open.

"Oh, worra, I knew it!" shrieked Petey, as Christmas jerked the golden biplane forth. "Oh, the black day, that ever me eyes have lived to see it! The sweet little ship never more will I see, and yourself like a dead man in the sky!"

"Stop your infernal banshee screeching, you funeral harp!" cried Christmas.

Swiftly he rolled the Vought out onto the field. He opened the ignition and shoved blocks beneath the wheels. The engine caught with a hornet song as he snapped the propeller over. He vaulted into the cockpit, half crouching above his seat.

"Knock the blocks out," he said to O'Toole, with a peremptory gesture. "Bring me my flying gear."

Among the clouds, soundless lightning flashed in a sheet. Its crimson gleam swept through the mist. For a brief instant the vast gray surges of the storm, its tumbled mountains and its caverns, were illumined to their center. In the flash Jack Christmas caught a glimpse of the dim, fog-veiled wings of the lost ship. It was nearly overhead, and climbing steeply.

"It's O'Kane's ship, all right," was the thought that flashed into his mind. "One of the old flying coffins."

Through the tattered fringes of the mist the DH9 was tearing like a bat through cobwebs, swift and crazily. She had lost her bearings. She seemed to be turning back. Immediately the crimson lightning glow faded away. There was only the sombre storm cloud rolling.

"Ay, a bogey ship it is, and there's bitter woe in it!" muttered Petey O'Toole.

He was crouching inside the hangar door, at Christmas's locker. He had paused to stare at the ghostly ship. His pink hair seemed to be bristling up. His eyes were round and wild.

"A bogey ship—"

Abruptly he leaped up, and flung his arms overhead with a wild shriek. Out of that thick cloud ocean, two thousand feet above, the black spinning figure of a man had dropped.

DOWN through sheer space the falling man came like a hailstone in the wind. Twice his tiny form seemed to somersault, head over. He appeared to be scarcely moving, he was so far away. Yet he was falling with a probable velocity of nearly two hundred feet a second. The wind blew him at a diagonal bearing him toward the hangar.

"God be merciful to his soul!" shrieked Peter O'Toole. "He hasn't got a 'chute!"

He heard the roaring of the golden Vought, streaking up from the ground. Captain Christmas had jammed his throttle wide at first sight of that falling man. He was still half standing in his cockpit, riding the ship like a charioteer, bare-headed, bare-armed, as he left the field with a hurricane roar.

"Your parachute!" O'Toole screamed at him, staggering a step in his wake.

Jack Christmas heard no word. Into the teeth of the wind the Vought went soaring up like a fast balloon. Her wings were tilted to the maximum pitch. She seemed to be streaking straight up with a breathless yell toward the ocean of the clouds. The altimeter shot to a thousand feet as a man snaps his fingers.

The pilot was hurled hard down into his seat. The breath went out of him. Mechanically he lashed the safety strap about his waist. The fierce wind burned his naked eyeballs.

In that first steep leap, batted vertically by the wind, he had risen almost as fast as the falling man had descended. They were alone, the two in the vast air, rushing head on like comets.

An instant Christmas saw, or rather felt, that hurtling shadow above him. It was King O'Kane, no mistaking him. It was the lithe, agile body of O'Kane, a man keen as a falcon in a ship, but now no more than a dead stick plunging through the wind.

He was falling like a hailstone. His body was folded from the waist, so that his legs and arms dangled straight down, and his head between them. He wore no parachute harness. And there was no hope for him. He was lost—lost utterly. Yet if he was alive, he must be conscious still. That was the horror of it.

An instant that shadow was above the Vought, a rushing projectile that Jack Christmas felt, rather than saw. It flashed by with a terrific speed.

Headlong Christmas pushed his ship's nose down. Engine yelling, wings quivering, it shot toward the earth in a vertical plunge. The earth leaped up at him—trees, hangar, shadowy fields and ribbon roads, all mingled in a flashing gray. He had a desperate intention of catching O'Kane's body athwart a wing.

He passed O'Kane. The falling man was above him now. Christmas snapped his engine switch. There rose a howling silence. Faint in the cloudy ceiling high above, above the shrieking of the wind, his thundering ears heard the lost DH9 still booming on its course.

The shadow of the falling man was hard behind him, behind the Voughts tail, hurtling fast. O'Kane's body had straightened out. In the tenuous fluid of the air he was plunging with extended arms like a diver. A grin was frozen on his snow-white face. It seemed as if, conscious and undespairingly, he was stretching out his arms to the uttermost to grasp the trailing edge of the ship that fell below him.

"Grab it!" Jack Christmas opened his mouth to shriek.

But the wind beat the words back in his throat. Blood thundered in his brain. Everything had turned gray; he could not see. A treacherous sense of peace flooded over him. He had, in that instant, a sense of remoteness and lassitude, a desire to sleep.

Snarling, jerking his head, he wrenched loose his safety strap. Feet braced against the quivering rudder bar, he stared over the edge of the upper wing. The gray world shot up with incredible speed. Could he snatch up that falling man and level out before the great earth smashed him?

The ailerons and tail surfaces had set up a swift fluttering. The control stick rattled in his hand. The outboard edges of the wings were bending up. Before the massed weight of its tremendous plunge the wings might snap off sharp as glass, leaving the fuselage to hurtle downward like a cannonball.

No more than two seconds had passed. The plunging body of O'Kane,

gathering momentum with each yard, seemed in arm's reach. For the instant, as both ship and man plunged earthward with approximately the same speed together, Jack Christmas had the illusion of remaining motionless in space. They were not dropping, so it seemed—it was the whole gray surface of the earth that was sweeping up to crush them. It came up like a thunderous wall, at a speed of four miles a minute.

There were automobiles creeping along brown highroads. There were palls of smoke hanging inertly above the chimneys of isolated houses. Over the field O'Toole was staggering crazily. His figure seemed no bigger than a mouse, a little lame, hunchbacked mouse. Yet an instant more, and he would be big as a man.

All these things Jack Christmas saw in a flash, as his head cleared. Drowning men, it is said, in the same manner see all the days of their lives. Three hundred feet to go! Let the clock tick once again.

His lips drew back from his teeth. He was grinning like a death's head. Over his left shoulder he flashed a look at King O'Kane. Look at him now, Jack Christmas, for you'll never see that face again this side of black Styx river!

O'Kane was almost on the Vought. He could have touched it. The folds of his shirt were taut as skin against his ribs. The helmet had torn from his head. His long black hair, oiled and shining, streaked back from his scalp like a ribbon. So near he was that in the flashing look Christmas saw the snow-whiteness of O'Kane's smiling face, his dusky eyes that were like lumps of coal.

Yet no longer did King O'Kane appear, as a half second ago, to be frantically reaching after the wing's trailing edge—though now was the moment, if ever, to seize it and cling. His knees were doubled idly back. His arms drifted wide from his shoulders, like the pinions of a bird. His arms moved backward in the wind, as if, impatient, he was motioning the little golden Vought away from the straight, clean path of his fall.

With prodigious acceleration, his body flashed past the ship's wings, against the ground.

"Done!" thought Christmas.

O'Kane had not cried to him. And O'Kane had not looked at him with those long-lashed, dusky eyes. No, nor had King O'Kane felt any fear of the ground that rushed up to smash him, flesh and bone. In the instant that the swift body of him hurtled by, Christmas saw that his neck was broken, and the life had gone from him long ago.

At a velocity of four hundred feet a second, he tore into the earth. . . . And Jack Christmas was jerking back on his controls. Pulling with all his shoulder weight. Laying his strength to it. The rapid earth flashed up, too swift to see, and a blackness crashed over him.

CHAPTER IV
Madmen's Trail

ON the field below, little lame Peter O'Toole watched this swift drama. It was over in six seconds.

"Ye're going to your death!" he shrieked. "I knew it! Oh, I knew it! God save your soul, for I had the sicond sight! But you would not heed me."

He staggered ten paces out on the field, clasping Christmas' parachute to his breast. He saw the little golden ship streak up beyond the falling man. He saw it whip over and come hurtling down, shooting by O'Kane. Then he could see little more. It was too swift for eyes to grasp it.

All the rushing wind seemed filled with a prolonged, increasing shriek—the piercing cry of the Vought's struts and flying wires as it sliced down. The shadow of its wings was cast upon the ground, spreading outward with a rush.

Frantically O'Toole stumbled, waving his arms. Like a thunder-bolt the blow fell. A missile too swift to see struck the earth with a thud. The shrieking blackness of the Vought was on O'Toole then. He dropped flat, digging his finger-nails into the sod.

With a lightning whip the Vought flashed over him. Its spinning under-carriage wheels seemed almost to brush his body. The hurricane wind of it beat him down like a pressure of heavy water.

When he opened his clenched eyes and scrambled up, the golden ship was high in the air, soaring through a thin silence. It had hooked out of its dive with not ten feet to spare, snapping upward in a steep V. It made no sound as it volplaned up its steep incline. The momentum of it was carrying it a thousand feet high without engine power.

O'Toole knew enough about the air to realize that no man, not even the iron-nerved, quick-handed pilot in the cockpit of the little Vought, could have retained consciousness through that lightning renversement. He arose, and stumbled forward with his crooked knee. He was sobbing, and tears streaked down his oil-coated face. Wildly he waved the parachute pack aloft, as if it were some kind of net with which he could catch both the ship and the unconscious man within it.

The speed went out of the darting little ship, high up. An instant it seemed to remain motionless, poised in high air, like an alert humming bird. Then its wings seesawed to right and left. Its bow hooked over, and it whipped downward in a jerking spin.

At five hundred feet O'Toole could see the face of Captain Christmas, lean and brown, slowly lifting up to peer over the cockpit rim. Blindly he jerked his head.

"Level 'er off!" shrieked O'Toole, forgetting that the sound of his feeble voice could not reach so far. "Jam your stick down! Give your rudder a poke! Snap out of it, sweet and easy!'

And Jack Christmas did snap out, as his eyes cleared and he got his bearings. In a straight swoop the golden Vought plunged down out of its rickety spin. Its radial motor caught with a high-pitched whine. It curved, it soared toward the high sky again immediately, leaving a faint smoke trail like a kite string in the wind.

"Are you crazy?' shrieked O'Toole helplessly.

Straight up, swift as an angry hornet, the little Vought was buzzing toward the tumbling billows of the storm cloud, in the obscurity of which Slug Huzzard, the hophead, the gorilla, was driving the blind DH9 through crazy twists and turnings.

"The sweet little ship never more will I see, and him, himself, like a dead man!" sobbed O'Toole, sagging through every limb. "Oh, the black day! Oh, my God!"

Into the rolling clouds the tiny biplane vanished, two thousand feet above. Stalwartly it went, and bravely—and quite insanely, for it had not a fighting chance. Peter O'Toole would not see it again.

For a minute, for many, many minutes, the little lame mechanic stood as motionless as a post, listening for its speedy huming sound. But the vast fog of heaven had swallowed it. The hornet wings of it could not be seen, the hornet singing of it could not be heard above the thunderous *hroom-hrooming* of the stolen DH9.

TO get the mad gorilla, alive or dead, who had killed O'Kane, Jack Christmas went up into the cloud. He had small doubt of who the killer was. It was a foolhardy act to undertake. But temporarily he was driven by a sanguinary berserk fury, such as attacks strong men at times, and he was out to finish it.

Far back in his cool, clear-thinking brain, he knew the folly of it. He knew that it was almost certain suicide. But for the moment he did not care. So he laughed.

With throttle open wide, he struck into the mist. All the gray look of the moving earth below was blotted out. He lost the sensation of movement. No longer was he flying. No longer was there top or bottom to the world, space or height or profundity. There was only the thick fog, softly creeping on all sides.

Warily he sucked the dank air into his nostrils. In spite of the motionless look of it, his wind gauge showed him he was shooting through it at a hundred and thirty knots. And somewhere in it likewise, swift and unknown in the heart of it, whether a yard away or a mile away he could not tell, the DH9 was flitting speedily, bearing the killer of King O'Kane across the unseen wind.

But where? Jack Christmas closed his throttle an instant, for the sound of his own engine drowned his hearing. Keenly he listened for the roar of the De Haviland's Liberty.

Suddenly he caught the full-throated sound of it. There it was! It beat on him like the roaring of a waterfall. The sound of it reverberated through all the tenuous walls of mist. There it was! Where? He ceased to breathe.

A sense of direction began to come to him in the treacherous grayness. The roaring DH was sweeping over him. High up. A thousand feet above him. Or perhaps no more than two hundred feet. Who could tell?

He laughed then. "I've got you now!" he thought.

But he himself might get his death.

He opened his engine. He swept up in a corkscrew climb, boring through the fog. He had the greater speed. He could overhaul the larger, clumsier ship at almost a mile a minute. Yet first he'd have to find it.

His altimeter crawled to three thousand feet. Once more, as he listened, the DH was above him. He climbed.

With soundless brightness, the crimson lightning flashed. It burned the infinitesimal drops of the mist to the glitter of ruby dust. Caverns and rolling mountains of vapor sparkled through the vast rain cloud, with a splendor too bright to look at. He turned his dazzled eyes downward, cowering before the terrific gleam. Directly under him he saw the pirated DH9 drifting!

Slug Huzzard was crabbing sidewise through the fog fifty feet below. His wings were almost perpendicular. He cut athwart the Vought's course like a bat.

As the red gleam flashed, lightening all the cloud, the killer of King O'Kane had looked upward. Straight at Jack Christmas he stared, with little eyes that burned scarlet in the light. His countenance was bearded brown, carved by deep wrinkles. He sat with shoulders hunched, like a great pre-Cambrian toad—like one of the cold-fleshed reptile giants that crouched and crept upon the face of the earth in the aeons before Adam. There like a toad he crouched, not fifty feet below, dazzled and betrayed in his misty lair.

For the instant Slug Huzzard was muddled. Cool-thinking, yet tensed with rage, Christmas had hurled his little ship downward in a hook. He half arose in his seat. His heart was thundering. His steady eyes measured distances by inches.

In a rapid arc the Vought's bullet bow flashed toward the tail of the DH. He was aiming it to slice off the control surfaces of the slower ship with his undercarriage. It was a gesture of fine and audacious flying. As the golden Vought whistled downward like a keen sword blade, Jack Christmas laughed.

Slug Huzzard expanded his mouth in a roar that was utterly soundless. He knew the courage and the flying fury of Captain Jack Christmas of the police. Waving a crazy fist, into the fog he hooked away. Ship and all. He vanished.

The glistening circle of the stick on the Vought's bullet-headed bow had missed the flippers of the DeHaviland by a scant yard. Slug Huzzard had gone into the obscurity which left no

trace. Christmas found himself diving headlong through emptiness, in a wing-breaking contortion which was dangerously like the beginning of an outside loop.

It was a matter of minutes, and they must find each other. At times they were miles away. At times their swift wings almost brushed, like bats in a narrow room.

Captain Christmas had lost all sense of direction. Not alone was north indistinguishable from south, but he could not even tell where the earth lay. His compass was spinning, his inclinometer bubble swayed like a pendulum.

On his back, or with wings vertical, he was twisting and hooking about, harrying the fog like a lost hawk, straining his eyes for sight of Huzzard's shadowy ship again. Once, as he cut his engine and hung seemingly motionless, he felt a rush of wind against his right cheek, and knew he was sideslipping rapidly. The next instant, in what he thought was level flight, he fell away from his seat, tugging hard against the safety belt. He knew then that the earth was above his head, curiously topsy-turvy.

And all the time about him, as he plunged through those fantastic heiroglyphics, Slug Huzzard was also hurtling through the mist, swift as a hurricane, invisible. Now high, now low, his ghostly engine bellowed, as he roared through slips and dives.

"Stunt your wings off!" thought Christmas, as he caught that sound. "Loop and break your back!'

In the instant his right wing shot below the shadowy DH, with few feet of clearance. There was a flash of somber wings. There were red spurts shooting from the exhaust pipe of the DeHaviland's engine, as its hard-driven cylinders beat out their mighty anvil chorus in the cloud. Christmas lifted up his bow, straight up.

Long, long would he remember Slug Huzzard's deathly look, staring overside at him. All the furrowed face of the giant had gone gray, as if the dust of many years had sifted over it. He was beset by a terror hardly human. Though he was a hophead, though he was merciless and a killing fiend, Slug Huzzard could not face his own death. Beneath high heaven, in the upper cloud he must have known now that he was doomed and damned. He had fallen in an utter frenzy.

The streaking Vought had undershot the DeHaviland. Christmas cut his engine. He pulled up in a stall. But as he curled around again, looking for Huzzard, there was no sound to be heard. Where had the giant vanished in that world without dimensions? Had he soared, or had he dived? Had he turned, or continued straight away?

The answer came to Jack Christmas before he could wonder long. Nosing over from that sluggish stall, skidding around with diminished speed in a slow, searching turn, the DH struck him.

CHAPTER V
Death Rides High

FROM below, out of the mist, the DH came lifting with pointed nose, with propeller turning slowly. It was on the summit of a stall. It was not ten feet below, on Christmas's port quarter, when he saw the radiator of it, and its revolving stick. Too late he tried to haul the sagging Vought around. She dropped, instead; no flying speed in her. The bow of Slug Huzzard's ship struck her broadside on.

There was little speed in either ship. Beneath the impact they skewed sluggishly around. Their left wings interlocked with a slow splintering of struts. The whirling propeller of the DeHaviland churned into the fuselage of the golden Vought—ate its way half-way through, and broke off.

"Are you on your way to Nova Scotia?" cried Jack Christmas, with a high, clear laugh in the silence.

Head to tail, wing locked with wing,

the two ships swung together. The DH's broken propeller had become hooked in the fuselage framework of the Vought, completing the work of entanglement.

"We'll sleep in Hell tonight," said Jack Christmas.

He had snapped out his police pistol. He thumbed the hammer delicately. His burning eyes bored into the ghastly face of Huzzard, peering from above the cockpit of the DH. He sprang out onto the Vought's left wing.

He heard the crack of splintering spruce, as the interlocked wings came together. There was no tail to the little Vought. The broken spars of its fuselage skeleton stuck out like naked bones. In great sheets the linen fabric ripped from it and blew away through the fog, whipped by the unseen wind. The Vought was finished. It was a quaking wreck. Only its locking with the DeHaviland held it in the air.

Joined in their stranglehold, the two ships had begun a flat spin. Like dancers in a stately reel, they went around and around. Slowly they bored down through the cloud. The altimeter was sinking like an hourglass's sands.

"You're afire!" Slug Huzzard screamed.

Jack Christmas laughed. With pistol in fist, he moved out on the left wing of the Vought. Sturdy and lithe, he advanced like a wolverine. He clung to the struts as the ships spun.

Deep in the cockpit of the DH Slug Huzzard crouched. His matted ashy hair formed a veil before his eyes. From the broken tail end of the Vought a sheet of flame had flashed. A spark from the DH had ignited it. Its gasoline-soaked fabric was all afire.

Christmas was on the wing of the DH now. He felt the blistering heat billows at his back. He heard the hollow roar. But he did not turn his head.

Only the top of Huzzard's matted head showed above the cockpit coaming. His little red eyes were like the eyes of a fox. He threw up a hairy fist, covering his eyes.

"Drill me!" he shrieked. "Don't let me burn!"

Christmas swung his right arm back. Deliberately he hurled his weapon at Slug Huzzard's face. It whizzed past the giant's head, and plunged down through the mist.

"Stand up, and take it!" said Jack Christmas.

He crouched for a spring. The gorilla overtopped him by six inches, outweighed him by forty pounds. Yet Christmas felt a cool elation at coming to grips with the huge killer. It made little difference, it was true. One way or the other, he would die. But the Berserk fury was still in him, and the hunger for a fight.

With a swift gesture he ripped off the shirt from his torso, laying bare the thick muscles of his chest and arms.

"Stand up!" he said with his cold, bright laugh. "Be a man, and die fighting!"

Slug Huzzard had arisen. His tremendous shoulders were bunched. He lifted a pair of hands that were like rocks. Jack Christmas growled with laughter at the implied threat. He swung himself toward the cockpit.

The cocaine courage had fled from Slug Huzzard. His eyes were little and terrified. He could not stand and face that onslaught. Deep in his throat he whimpered. He would go to his death a coward—which is not a good way to die.

"Stand and fight!" said Jack Christmas.

He grasped one arm of the giant, and stretched out for Huzzard's naked throat. With a hoarse bellow, Huzzard tore himself free. He sprang to the seat, and scrambled over the back of it. He straddled the fuselage. Rapidly he inched his way out on it toward the tail, holding hard with his knees as the ship spun.

"Stay and burn!" he bellowed.

Snarling and wild, Christmas sprang

to the cockpit, and crawled after the killer. Slug Huzzard had snatched up something from the cockpit floor as he leaped. It was a parachute pack—the pack he had taken from the body of King O'Kane. With thick fingers he was trying to adjust the harness about his body.

"Burn!" he shrieked.

He could not get the harness fastened. Behind him Christmas came along the fuselage in short, desperate leaps. Huzzard tugged at the rip cord. The great silk umbrella bellied slackly out behind the tail in the wind of the ship's spinning.

Christmas's outstretched hand grasped a fold of the giant's shirt, and that was all. The parachute had not filled out for a pull-off jump, but Huzzard did not wait. With his forearm twisted about a slack suspension shroud, he rolled off the tail like off a log.

Down through thin space he plunged, clear of the jerking wings. Fifty feet below the great white mushroom opened full out, with Huzzard hanging hard to a handful of its shrouds, spinning round and round. Malignantly he grinned up, with a distorted face. His wild shriek of laughter resounded.

DESPERATELY Christmas scrambled back toward the cockpit again. But there was no safety there. The sheeting flames from the Vought had swept far over onto the DH itself. Already its left wings were wrapped in a red billow.

Christmas sprang out of the cockpit. He ran blindly toward the tip of the right wing. He was cornered like a rat, and no way out.

In crisp waves the scorching heat rushed for him. Already the fire had reached over the cockpit, and was lapping up the wing which he was on. In an instant he would have to go overside, in the way of King O'Kane. There are worse things than that.

He started to run inboard once more, but the fire was too hot. He swung himself down over the edge of the wing, his legs dangling over emptiness. The end could be only a matter of seconds. He hung suspended by one arm from the outboard strut and grasped the curved iron bar below the wing. There he swung as the ship snapped through its flat spin.

With an abrupt roar, the blazing husk of the Vought broke free. It went shooting down at an angle, disintegrating into a myriad fiery particles. The shower of them, blown by the wind, fell far to one side of Slug Huzzard's white umbrella.

The velocity of the DH's spin increased. It shot down below the clouds. Two thousand feet below Jack Christmas saw the gray-green earth, on which in seven seconds he would be a cinder. In the swift whipping of the ship he could make out no object on the ground, nor could any cry from below have risen up to him.

Yet in his last desperation, clinging to the bar that was already hot in his fist, Jack Christmas thought he heard the sorrowful keening of Peter O'Toole, him of the second sight, crying his banshee wail.

Oh, the black day, and the sweet little ship that no man would ever see again, and himself like a dead man in the sky!

The fabric of the wing's under surface was smoking overhead. The swift and bitter heat had crisped the hairs on his naked arms and breast. Grimly he jerked his head.

"Jack Christmas, your goose is about cooked," he thought, trying to smile at the poor pun.

The patchwork of earth swirled round. He judged himself to be fifteen hundred feet above it. Better let go now—it would soon be over. But still he clung, for a drowning man will cling hard to a straw, and a falling man to a burning shingle in the air.

Hundreds of feet below, the parachute of Slug Huzzard was descending. Slowly it floated downward, no more rapidly than the ship. The gorilla had

spilled air out of it, warping it away from under the DH. He was fifty feet clear to the right. He would float down as safely as a lamb.

"You're a cunning dope, you gorilla," thought Christmas, not without a bitter kind of admiration. "There's not enough left of King O'Kane for any man to know you killed him. And what happens to me is only my own pig-headed fault."

The fiery left wing of the DH snapped off with a crackle. Far downward through gray space the particles hurled. As the wings parted, the spinning ceased. The fuselage and remaining wing halted for a shuddering instant. Then they plunged straight down, a blazing meteor.

CHAPTER VI
Winged Vengeance

THERE was a little pink-haired man upon the ground. He was running with his twisted knee. He was running blindly, sobbing and stumbling.

In the blind pursuit through the clouds the two unseen ships, cutting circles miles in circumference, had come again over the police field at the moment of their crash. So it happened that the fire-twisted engine metal of the Vought came plunging down not far from Peter O'Toole, as his dismal dream had foretold to him.

The air above was filled with blazing struts, spinning over and over. They trailed long ribbons of smoke and flame as they rained down from the sky. A white parachute came drifting down like a white peony from the clouds. There came into view the little blazing De-Haviland, which writhed and writhed, like a worm trying to shake off some great and agonizing pain.

"Oh, worra! Oh, my God! Oh, the sicond sight I had captain dear!" sobbed Peter O'Toole. "Would God I was up there instead of ye, and you a whole man on the ground!"

Helplessly he cracked the knuckles of his lean hands. He lifted up binoculars and focused them on the burning ship. Hanging from the wing bar, the body of Jack Christmas had begun to swing.

O'Toole could see him clearly—his muscular naked torso drenched with sweat, his thick and sinewy arms. He was swinging like a pendulum. A puff of wind, it seemed, or the sharp jerking of the ship, would shake him loose. Still to the last he was clinging grimly.

"Let not me eyes behold this sight, but let them be burned out of me head!" whimpered the lame man.

He swung his binoculars downward, till the white mushroom of Huzzard's parachute loomed into his vision. The hemisphere of silk was drifting down softly, several hundred feet below the DH, and to the right. With fists clenched in the suspension shrouds of it, Slug Huzzard's great body clung like a gorilla to a tree limb.

"I am going to cut the living heart out of ye!" whispered Peter O'Toole. "For who ye are I do not know, but ye've murdered two men this day, and one of them the finest that ever sailed a ship!"

Again he swung his glasses up toward the DH. The blazing left wings snapped off it in that instant. The little figure of Jack Christmas was swinging far and rapidly then from the tip of the right wing. As the fiery ship poised, and dived straight down, Christmas was to the extreme right of his wing.

Suddenly he released his handhold. Like an acrobat leaving a trapeze high up beneath a circus tent, his body flashed in an arc far outward, and dropped. Captain Jack Christmas had taken his last desperate plunge off into sheer air.

He shot downward at an angle, a tiny figure seeming little bigger than a raindrop. Idly his body turned about, as a swimmer turns in water. He clasped his forearms about his knees, doubling his body into a ball.

Peter O'Toole stumbled, and fell upon his knees. He could not take away his eyes.

"Why couldn't I be going to a smash instead of him," he whimpered, "and me only a poor hunchbacked thing, and him a man so quick and strong?"

He watched unblinkingly. Slowly he followed that little tumbling figure downward, keeping it within the circle of his binoculars. And suddenly the parachute to which Slug Huzzard was hanging came into his view—both the figure of Christmas and the glistening white parachute within one circle together.

Jack Christmas had aimed himself, in his last desperate plunge off, toward that shining white hemisphere hundreds of feet away from him. He had literally hurled himself at it through empty space. It was a chance as desperate as shooting in a rocket at the moon. Yet there was no other chance.

If he missed by a hand's breadth that comparatively tiny blot in space below him, he'd hit the earth in three seconds. Swinging far out, he had hurled himself downward at a slant toward it.

"He's going to miss!" thought O'Toole.

His heart stood still. Yet almost before the despairing thought had come to him, the huddled figure of Jack Christmas had struck the white hemisphere, and disappeared.

Square in the center of the great silk umbrella, Christmas had struck his target. O'Toole could not see him now. The impact had knocked air out of the silk. It had become no more than a great fluttering veil, sagging and swooping downward emptily.

O'Toole saw the huge body of Slug Huzzard writhing in the shrouds and fabric. From the lofty distance there came to the watcher on the ground the faint sound of Huzzard's repeated screaming.

Buried in the smoothing silken folds, Christmas could not be seen; yet he was twisting and fighting like a wildcat in a sack. Tangled in the empty 'chute, at hand's grips, yet separated and blinded from one another, the two of them were sweeping down toward death together.

The sagging white billows were less than eight hundred feet high now. Through the binoculars O'Toole could see this scene as clearly as if it were within arm's reach.

Pawing away big handfuls of the silk, Jack Christmas came into view. The billows of the 'chute were swelling out, as wind got beneath it again. Suddenly Christmas was at the edge of the swelling folds, and the whole mushroom opened up wide. On the edge of the hemisphere Christmas crouched, staring down at the gorilla dangling from the shrouds below.

The parachute was sideslipping, driving down at a slant, the air spilling out of it beneath Christmas's weight. So still, so clear was the air, that it almost seemed to Peter O'Toole he could hear the hoarse breathing of those two men above him.

Wildly Slug Huzzard was writhing. He hooked his elbows about the shrouds. His two great hairy fists were knotted. He had set himself for the last struggle.

"You devil!" he shrieked at Christmas, with half a sob.

The spirit was broken in the gorilla, and he was a yellow dog. He had pulled out a knife. Jack Christmas laughed with a sharp, hard sound.

"Don't touch me!" Huzzard shrieked.

His dangling legs were threshing desperately. His elbows were hooked over the ropes at the level of his chin. He twisted up the knife blade, holding it threateningly before his face.

Slowly Christmas eased himself over the edge of the big umbrella. He grasped a shroud in his hands.

"Let's fight it out like men," he said.

Huzzard was shrieking yet, wild and incomprehensible blasphemies that never ceased. Futilely he slashed his knife upward when Christmas was still ten feet above. The glance of Jack Christ-

mas, hard and smiling, yet utterly implacable, blazed down on him.

The spilling 'chute was not more than a hundred feet above Peter O'Toole then. Its great shadow drifted over him as he ran. He reached up his arms.

"I'll cut his heart out!" he panted.

But he had no breath left for shouting. His cry was no louder than a whisper. Certainly those two men above him could not have heard his feeble voice.

Suddenly the stocky body of Jack Christmas shot down the ropes. His stiffened legs were aimed like a battering ram for Huzzard's face. The writhing giant was howling like a coyote. He tensed himself for a killing blow. He doubled up his knees. His mighty shoulders were bunched. Swiftly, and with iron force, his mighty hands lifted up—.

Slug Huzzard seemed to spring upward in the air, though he had no foothold. There was a horrid shriek bursting from his throat. He leaped as the swift body of Christmas shot down toward him. The vicious knife in his hand clashed like a rattler's head at Jack Christmas's groin.

It was a blow to rip the entrails from a man. Too swift and bright it struck for O'Toole's eyes to follow it.

Yet he saw the agile figure of Christmas swinging far out, and knew that the blow had missed. The feet of Christmas had smashed hard into Huzzard's face as the gorilla leaped for him, and he had swung aside.

Slug Huzzard, the hophead killer, was shrieking yet. With face uplifted and empty hands, he was dropping down! He had released his grasp on the ropes in the fury of that last assault. He clutched at the dangling parachute harness. He clutched at the hollow wind. He clutched his great iron hands upon his breast—and the earth hit him.

Swinging with a tight grip to the shrouds of the spilling parachute, Jack Christmas dropped to ground. He somersaulted like an acrobat, and sprang up. Swiftly he ran to where Slug Huzzard lay groaning.

"Both legs broken," he said to Peter O'Toole, "but he'll live to burn. I didn't want to kill him."

He lay down on the grass.

"Give me a cigaret," he said. "I'll believe your second sight next time, Petey."

Then he closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

THE END

Plane Jane

By Frederick C. Davis

Author of "Haunted Hangars," "Ordeal By Air," etc.

"When you fly tomorrow—you fly to win!"—Ned Knight, pilot of the racing plane, climbed into the cockpit with those words ringing in his ears—but when the finish line neared, his hand faltered, and his ears shut out everything save the roar of another motor, beckoning him to destruction.

DON'T go wonderin' if I'm a expert on the subject, but ain't there a kind of girl that looks her prettiest when she's wearin' a kitchen dress and rollin' out biscuits? And ain't there another sort of girl who transforms herself into the most beautiful when she appears in a filmy evenin' gown and waits for you to waft her out into the moonlight? Then there's another that becomes the one and only when she is wool from head to toe and cuddlin' beside you on a toboggan. And there's one who is a shade above Venus when she comes slashin' out of the surf glistenin' and lithe and fresh.

Jane Alton wasn't any of these kinds, but, oh, what a dream she was in a flyin' suit! Jane was born to ornament the air. With a stick in her hand and flyin' joy in her eyes, she was an angel—and, of course, bein' an angel, she belonged in the sky. She put herself there every chance she got!

It was a mornin' full of smooth air and high visibility when Jane came rompin' around the hangars, shinin' leather all over and, seein' us, smiled brighter 'n the sun and ran straight for our plane.

Ned Knight was in the fore cubby, jazzin' the motor, ready for a take-off. He grinned and remarked over his shoulder:

"Benny, ol' nut-twister, here's where you lose your seat, back there. Jane's all set to take another trip to her home port, Heaven, and there's no use tryin' to stop her. Better start gettin' out."

I'd already begun startin', and I was all the way out when Jane came up laughin'.

"Thank you, you ol' darlin'," she said

to me, and I ain't so old, either. "I can't wait another minute to get up into all that glorious sky. Ned, would you mind changin' back to Benny's seat?"

"What!" barked Ned. "Listen, Jane. I'm takin' this little Alton up for a check-ride. Your Dad is waitin' for the data on it. Just this time won't you ride in back, just this once, and lemme—"

"Ned Knight," came back Jane, "am I not the holder of a pilot's license?"

"Yes, but—"

"Haven't you, my only instructor, pronounced me to be a flyer equal to any other you know?"

"You sure are, Jane, but—"

"Can't I handle that stick and do a good job of gatherin' data myself?"

"I'm not sayin' you can't, but—"

"Do you want me to go up in another plane, *without you,* Ned Knight?"

"No!" said Ned, and so he began gettin' out!

Me, I couldn't 've held out half that long against Jane Alton. I was plenty crazy about that girl, but bein' only a grease-monkey, and havin' a map resemblin' a mauled-up bulldog's, I confined myself to bein' just her slave. Ned Knight, however, being the best flyer in the state, and the handsomest in six, got a lot of time from her. I suspected maybe that there was some kind of romance goin' on there, between the flyer and the daughter of the plant owner, 'cause they flew a lot together, those two.

So, with Ned back in the rear pit, Jane climbed into the front one, settled to the controls, jazzed the motor, and waved one tiny gloved hand to me. I socked the blocks; she stepped on the gas; and the Alton was off. It trundled to the other edge of the sand, and Jane pulled it up neatly; she circled twice, got herself a nice lot of altitude, rode a few air waves in sheer joy, and then deadheaded across the blue.

Now and then she cut the motor. Say, there wasn't any tellin' what went on between them two, all alone up there, so close to Heaven! I know they didn't exactly dislike the open solitude of that sky! I remember once, when Jane hopped out of the Alton, after a spell of hootin' with Ned, she said to him: "I *love* to be all alone with you up there!" And Ned was never quite the same when he came down from a flit with Jane, anyhow!

Well, while the Alton was banking and skimming at about a thousand, Robert Bennett Alton himself came out onto the field. He was owner of the field, and of the factory where the Altons were made. He was manufacturing a sturdy, speedy, almost foolproof plane that was just about the ultimate in aviation on a small scale. A man dissatisfied with anything short of perfection—that was Alton. And a fine man, in and out from the heart. He stood beside me, watching his little moth weave across the sky.

"What a ship!" I said. "What a joy of a ship!"

"It seems to handle well, Benny," was all Alton said. "What—what's that?"

Starin', I went cold. From the front of the plane some black smoke spouted out; and then came the flashin' of fire. Fire it was! The nose of that plane was bein' licked by the flames leapin' back from the engine. One second it had been all o. k., and the next it was pushin' a bonfire through the sky! If the fire reached the gasoline lines and the tank—if it kindled the linen—it meant disaster! And I, myself, I had inspected that ship to make sure it was o. k. All but passin' out, I continued to stare, and Mr. Alton got as white as the clouds.

"Benny, who's pilotin' that ship?"

"Jane!"

"What!"

Now the plane was sideslippin' away from the flames; it tore off them, and they disappeared.

"And Jane knows her stuff!" I shouted.

Once havin' snapped away from the danger, Jane dove at full throttle, but the fire flashed out again, worse than before. As soon as it did, Jane sideslipped again, and the wind put the fire out. This time when she recovered she banked steep,

gradually losin' altitude and made for the T. Mushin' out, she cut the gun, and the Alton glided for the sand. The fire popped out again, not so bad this time, but bad enough!

The burnin' ship trundled in, and before it stopped Ned Knight was out of it. Jane jumped right behind him. Ned scooped up sand and threw it on the fire, and Jane worked just as fast. Mr. Alton and me and some of the other boys ran for the ship, but by the time we got there, the fire was all out.

Ned Knight, plenty mad, stepped up to me chin first. "Benny, your job is to keep these ships in trim, ain't it—'specially this one, that's goin' to fly the race—or was! Then how come the timin' is off, and fire got sucked back into the carburetor? I'll bet my hat that the screen and drain is in bad shape, too, you—. Good gosh!"

"Well, I got it out all right, didn't I?" inquired Jane, who seemed to think that any scrape wasn't very bad if she got out of it alive.

"You sure did! You got us out like a veteran. Jane, you're all right. Benny, dang you—"

I wasn't wastin' time standin' there and bein' bawled out. I put my head into that motor, and it took only a minute for me to find out that some monkey business had been goin on—grease-monkey business! The engine had been tampered with. Our pet Alton! The ship we were dressin' for the race! And with Jane in it! Lord!

I whirled around and barked out my troubles. And then there was plenty of quiet for a minute.

NED KNIGHT moved first. Some other members of the hangar crew had come out to share the excitement. He singled out a pilot named Stud Walker, and stepped right up to him. Ugly eyes that man had, and an ugly face, and an ugly heart—Walker. His eyes sort of flashed with fear, and he tried to back away, but Ned had him nailed.

"Walker, lemme ask you some questions! Last night, while I was fussin' around the field, I heard somebody inside this Alton's hangar. That was strange. By the time I got it unlocked, and went inside, the noises stopped, and the hangar was empty. But I found a hole in the sand, under the tin wall, that was fresh dug, and that hole was hid by two empty oil barrels. You know anything about that? I'll answer for you. You know *all* about it. You're the man that tampered with the plane!"

"You can't prove—" Walker gulped.

"Your guilty face proves it for me! I'm goin' to smash—"

Ned began to sail in with both hands and feet, but I grabbed him. While he was talkin', two other greaseballs had got behind Walker, and blocked his retreat. Also, they kept Ned from killin' him. And right then Mr. Robert Bennett Alton himself stepped up and spoke.

"Ned, if you're accusin' this man of tamperin' with that plane, I hope you can prove what you say."

"Mr. Alton," Ned came back, "some time ago I caught Walker tappin' a gin bottle on the field, and ever since then I've been watchin' him. A few days ago he acted funny. I watched closer. After dark a sedan drew up, and Walker got in. The car stayed, and I watched it. Inside it was Gifford, at the wheel—Gifford, of the Stormbird people. He and Walker were talkin' low. Then I saw Gifford pass money to Walker. That is proof enough for me that he's in Gifford's pay, working against us. He was clever enough to jim the plane so I couldn't find the trouble last night, but he's got now!"

Walker looked plenty sick. Alton looked at him, and he couldn't look back. He might 've killed Ned Knight and Jane—Jane!—with his trick, done for pay. He couldn't face the man that had hired him out of good faith.

"Walker, you look guilty!" Alton spoke up. "You've tried to cripple us in favor of the Stormbird people—so they

can win over us, of course, in the air derby tomorrow. Thank the Lord you won't have a chance to get in any more of your dirty work! The Stormbirds are so afraid that we'll outfly them that they have to hire crooks to beat us, eh? Do you know, Walker, that you could be jailed for what you've done?"

Walker was white around the gills.

"Walker, I don't want to bother with you. I think too little of you and what you've done to prefer charges against you. Now, Walker, get off this field. Get off! If you show your face on it again, man, I'll break you with my bare hands!"

Alton didn't usually say much, but this was plenty for the occasion, and he meant every word. Alton's contempt was worse than a lickin' for Walker to take. Let loose, he shambled away, looks of disgust and hate followin' him. When he disappeared around the hangars, the field seemed like a better place to stay.

Mr. Alton spoke quietly now to the boys, askin' 'em to look over the planes careful, suggestin' that a guard be put around the hangars tonight so that nothin' could happen to the planes before the start of the air race the next day; and they'd better keep a gun handy; and—

"Ned!" Jane called out, not bein' able to hold herself in any longer. "Please, let's get another plane out and go right back up!"

"JANE," Mr. Alton said, "I want to talk with Ned a little, so you'd better let the flyin' go a while. Benny, is that ship damaged much?"

"No, sir," I answered. "By adjusting the timer and putting in a screen, and some new ignition wires—they're burned off—she'll be shipshape again."

"Start on it right away," Mr. Alton told me. "Ned, how did the ship feel today?"

"Better than ever before," Knight answered. "Jane was at the stick, but I could feel the pull of the new prop. We get the proper revs now when we're climbing."

"The stabilizer?"

"Works like a dream. The ship's as steady as a Rolls Royce on Fifth Avenue and she stays that way. Also, it's easier to hold her head up. And the ailerons can be used when she's throttled way down—that's somethin' that's improved with the new prop and stabilizer. She's ready for any race now, Mr. Alton."

"Good!" said the Boss.

The boys'd been helpin' me to roll the plane tail-to into the hangar, and then, leavin' Mr. Alton, Jane, Ned and me in there alone, they went back to work. I tore off the old ignition wires while Mr. Alton talked.

"Ned, are you ready to fly your best tomorrow? Goin' to reach Curtiss ahead of all the other entries, are you?"

"Sure he is!" spoke up Jane. "I'm his mascot!"

"I think your plane is a better flyer than any other in the line-up, Mr. Alton," Ned answered. "The Stormbird will tail us, but we'll win."

"I hope so!" Mr. Alton came back, sighin'. "Ned, I'm goin' to take you into my confidence. You're goin' to pilot that ship tomorrow, and Benny will be along with you, and you both ought to know that I'm bankin' on you boys heavily. Aside from the purse—which, of course, the pilot is goin' to keep, for he's the man that is goin' to earn it—the reputation of the Alton is at stake. The number of accidents that have happened recently in Altons has given us a black-eye, Ned—you know that."

"People'll forget that when we zip across the finish field first," Ned answered.

"They will—if we win," Mr. Alton answered. "That will help. But that's not all. That ill will has hurt our business. We have been runnin' on a shoestring—and we've just about reached the end of it. We need the winnin' place in this race because of the good it will do our business. If we don't come in number one, Ned, I'm afraid that we'll

have to be closing up the plant soon."

Ned got pale, and I forgot work, and Jane listened plumb excited. Mr. Alton was talkin' in a low, serious tone. Since the Alton plant was all any of us had in life right then, it was serious. We knew business had been bad, but we never suspected it was that bad—never suspected that this air derby was becomin' a life and death matter for Alton planes.

"I'll explain a little more," Mr. Alton went on, solemn and quiet. "You know that the United Airways is holding up a large order of planes—enough to keep us busy for the better part of a year—and will place its order dependin' on the outcome of the race tomorrow. They're lookin' for speed and stamina, and they think they'll find it in the winnin' ship. I had a talk with Finley, the manager, last night. 'Win the race, and I'll place my order with you,' he said. That's how the matter stands. And that United order, if we get it, will save our lives."

Lord!

"There are other orders in the balance, too," Mr. Alton went on. "The government is going to give the winner some places in the air mail and border patrol fleets, to replace the antiquated DeHavilands. There's a passenger airport in Texas that I've been tryin' to land, that's waitin' for the winner to take the order away from it. I could name half a dozen more such examples; but it isn't necessary.

"You understand, Ned, that when you fly tomorrow, you'll be flyin' to win—win not only the purse for yourself, but a new life for us. And if you lose—but we won't think about that now. You're goin' to win."

"Yes, sir," said Ned. "We're goin' to win!" He gave a look at Jane, and Jane's eyes sparkled. "There's still another reason why I'm goin' to win, Mr. Alton?"

"There is?"

"A pilot that ain't married usually hasn't got a habit of savin' his money—and I've spent all mine, till lately. But if I had to buy a house and a lot of furniture, right now, I couldn't do it. But with that purse in my pocket—five thousand dollars—it wouldn't be so hard! I want to do that, Mr. Alton. I want to win that race, and then step up to you, and say, 'Sir, I want to marry your daughter!'"

Mr. Alton smiled. "From Jane's conversation at home, which has just two subjects—flyin' and Ned—I'd suspected the situation." He chuckled. "I'd rather have a pilot for a son-in-law than anybody else, and of all the pilots I know, you rate highest with me, Ned. Well, after you win that race, and step up to me, and say your say, I'll talk with you about it!"

"Thanks!"

Mr. Alton walked out of the hangar, havin' said *his* say to us—which was plenty. For a few minutes I was stunned. Things was comin' too fast for me. That whole big plant, out there, was in danger of vanishin'. Those peppy little Altons were in danger of eventually droppin' out of the air. Altons had been the subject of our talk and dreams for years, and if they went—it would be worse than a death in the family. And yet, there the whole matter was, flat up and lookin' us in the face—and all of us swore, right then, that this Alton *had* to win that race!

I turned and got to work on it—and how I began to work!

Somethin' that happened behind me sounded a whole lot like a kiss.

"So!" said Jane Alton. "You think, do you, Ned Knight, that you're goin' to win me in a race as though I was a kewpie doll on a rack?"

"Why—"

"And if you don't win the race, you won't ask me to marry you at all?"

"Well, gosh!"

"Young man," said Jane in her most business-like manner, "I have somethin' to say to you—in private!"

She tugged him out of the hangar. Beyond the doors I could hear 'em whisperin'. Then they moved away, and I

didn't see either of 'em again that day—because I wasn't lookin' at anythin' but that plane.

I worked on her like a maniac. I forgot lunch and dinner and kept workin' on her till my arms were about ready to drop off. I wouldn't let anybody else touch her. I tested her everywhere, tuned her to the prettiest pitch she could give, tightened her everywhere she would tighten. There wasn't any dingus on that plane that I overlooked. When I called a halt it was after midnight.

Then I put blankets beside her, and tried to go to sleep; but I couldn't sleep. I had to get up and look her over again. Every half hour after that I was up, to make sure I'd tested somethin' that I thought I *might* have overlooked. I couldn't stay away from that plane. Too much was dependin' on it and the shape it was in.

And at last, as I was for the tenth time feelin' over the control wires, I saw light comin' through the cracks of the door, and I knew it was tomorrow.

The day of the Trans-state Air Derby had come!

IT was the day of days. All over the country, airplane makers had been lookin' forward to this day, and preparin' for it. Every maker of light planes was goin' to be represented with the best job they could turn out. A string of single-motored planes was goin' to line up, every one ready to do its best, and compete for the championship—and the competition was goin' to be murder! A big Commission was behind the project, directin' it. Newspapers all over the world were runnin' notices of it, 'cause the results were goin' to be official; and the winner's name was goin' to be written right into air history in big red letters.

There'd been guards outside the hangar all night; and when a knock came, I opened the doors. Ned Knight, fresh and dapper, came in, bringin' a early mornin' paper. He showed it to me. Splashed all over the front page was big headlines: *Planes Ready For Big Cross Country Race!* There below was the list of makers: Alton, Stormbird, Zephyr, Lightning, Ranbros, Impco, and all of 'em. And then the pilot's name: Alton carryin' Ben Benson and piloted by Ned Knight. Stormbird carryin' William Carson and piloted by—

"Good gosh, Ned!" I busted out. "That must be a misprint!"

"Nope, Benny; it must be true. Stormbird's made a change in pilots at the last minute."

Right there in black and white it said that the pilot of the Stormbird entry was goin' to be Stud Walker! Stud Walker, the self-same crook that we'd fired off the field—who had been in Stormbird pay, and jimmed our plane! It was easy to see that Stormbird was usin' him because Walker would be hell-bent to beat us out, for our handlin' of him. We were goin' to have a real enemy flyin' against us!

"Gosh!" I croaked. "Ned, we can sure count on Walker's beatin' us if he possibly can. He'll fly like a wild man to beat us!"

"I'm goin' to do some flyin' myself," Ned came back. "Is the plane ready, Benny? If it is, we'd better be gettin' over the field. We've got to check in and get lined up. Mr. Alton has drawn third place for us."

"Third? Who's second and first?"

"Impco is second."

"And—?"

"Stormbird is first."

"Hang it all! They're gettin' the breaks all around. I suppose it figures out all right in the end, but— I hate to have 'em leadin' us at the very start!"

"Benny, aren't you goin to dress up? Those overalls of yours 're dirty enough to walk around by themselves."

"I wouldn't change 'em for a suit of ermine, Ned," I answered. "They may be dirty as mud, but I love 'em!"

Then, Ned tells me, we should be on our way. We roll the plane out, and block her; Ned gets in, contacts her, and we pump the prop. She roars off, higher

and higher, and the engine begins to warm and sing a sweet song. When she's hot, she's the sweetest soundin' motor I ever heard. Grinnin' all over our faces, Ned and I get set. She steps off down the field, swings into the air, and away we go, for the startin' field, as full of hope as any man could be without bustin'.

Pretty soon the field slides into view. There's a crowd pushin' around on it, and lined up, staggered in back of each other, are planes. We circle and come down, and taxi smoothly across the field. Then we ground-loop neatly, and come amblin' back. Ned cuts the motor, and we hop out. For a minute we're busy registerin', and then official greaseballs push the plane into place, third in the line.

And there's the Stormbird, our deadly opponent, with its nose 'way out in front. As we come past it, the pilot comes away from it. It is Walker, lookin' uglier 'n ever, with gloatin' eyes and crooked sneer. We give him hard looks and want to go on, but he has somethin' to say .

"Yesterday was your innin', you hooters. Today is mine. I'm goin' to fly you off the map!"

"Not in that wash-tub!" I come back.

"Hush up, Benny!" Ned nudges me. "Walker, you're takin' all the joy out of this race. We want to fly with real flyers, not with crooks. Depend on it, man, we don't intend to be beaten by dirty play. And if you fly square, Walker—you've only primed yourself for the lickin' of your life!"

Walker glares a killin' look at us, and cusses us out as we pass on.

Then there's a squeal, and Jane Alton comes rushin' around the line of officials, followed by her Dad. She runs up to Ned and, right out in public, gives him a big kiss. She talks fast as a whirlwind, bein' all jazzed up with excitement and hope. Her Dad just shakes us by the hand and says:

"In a few minutes you'll be off, boys. Remember—we're goin' to win."

We promise him—our hearts in our throats. That big Stormbird looks like a flyin' devil to us and winnin' won't be a cinch for anybody.

Jane asks, breathless: "Ned, won't you *please* take me along?"

Ned laughs. "No, Jane. It can't be done. I'm sorry."

"Oh, please!" she begs.

And he chuckles again, "No!"

Mr. Alton closes in then for a confidential talk with Ned; and Jane, in a minute, grabs my sleeve and pulls me a little bit aside.

"Benny, will you do somethin' for me?"

"Jane," I says, "All you've got to do is ask."

She pulls me aside a little farther. "Would you do it for me, even if it meant a lot to you?"

"Well, Jane," I say, "I guess I can equal anybody so far as doin' things for you is concerned. You know that."

She tugs me still farther, and we're gettin' close to the locker room.

"Benny," she says then, "I want to fly in this race with Ned."

I choke up at that unexpected request, but I might 'a' known Jane would 've been dyin' to get up in the air on this big occasion.

"Gosh, Jane!" I say. "We couldn't stow you away. It'd overweight the plane and hurt our chances to—"

"Oh, I don't want to stowaway!" she says. "I want you to let me take your place!"

Oh, boy! She was askin' the impossible. There she was, with her implorin' blue eyes close to mine, eyes shinin' with hope and fire, and beggin' me, beggin' me. No, sir, I couldn't let her do that—but there she was, a girl I just couldn't refuse if she'd asked for my life. Lettin' her go up in my place would be a crazy thing to do, but she kept beggin' me with little pleases and won't-yous, and Bennies, spoken soft like, and—Lord!

"If you let me get into your coveralls, and helmet and goggles, nobody'll ever know the diff'rence!" she said.

"Jane, please don't go beggin' me!" I begged her. "It ain't fair to me. I can't resist you any more 'n the tail of a plane can resist the prop. You know Ned would blow up if he heard of it, and your Dad—and Lord!"

"Benny, it's the only thing I've ever asked of you; and it means more to me than anything else in the world right now. I've *got* to fly in that race—*got* to. Benny—Benny—please!"

"Oh, Lord!"

"All you'd have to do is slip into that private locker and take off those overalls, and then stay out of sight. I'd just get in 'em, and climb into the plane, and stay there. Benny—please?"

"You can't do any good up there—"

"Don't you know that Ned will fly worlds better if I'm along with him? And you want us to win, don't you?"

"Oh, Lord!" I said. "Well—here goes!"

Right then she flung her arms around my neck, hugged me close, and kissed me one, two, three times right on the lips, and said, "Oh, Benny!" And after that I wasn't nearly in my right mind. I dived into the locker, shed my overalls, and eased out again. With one last look at her, I dived into the crowd and lost myself.

Jane hurried into the locker, and in a minute she was out, in my coveralls and helmet and goggles. I could hardly believe my eyes, she looked so much like me! It was sure astonishin'. She eased back toward the planes, just when a guy in a megaphone was shoutin' the last warnin'. Jane walked right past Ned and Mr. Alton and made for the plane.

"I've got to get into the ship!" Ned said. "Say, where's Jane? Ain't she goin' to wish me good luck?"

They looked around for her, while she was within ten feet of 'em.

"Say, Benny, have you seen Jane?" Ned hollered at her; and she wags her head: no!

The last minute is gone; and Ned is forced to his plane. Jane was already in when he got there; he climbs in, not givin' her any special notice. There is a poppin' and roarin' of motors all around, up and down the line. Greaseballs turn the Alton over, and she sings a sweet tune. The whole line-up is stirrin' up a tornado when *bang!* a shot-gun goes off —which means the race is started!

The Stormbird tears off like a maniac, lifts, climbs steady, and then deadheads on. Thirty seconds pass, forty, fifty, sixty. Then, *bango!* the gun goes off again, and the Imp plane stretches itself out across the sand. It lifts, roars, pulls on, and flies in the wake of the Stormbird.

Ned Knight bends to his stick and glues his eyes to the instrument. The seconds are tickin' off. Forty—fifty—sixty! *Whacko!* The gun! Ned stomps on the gas. Away goes the Alton. It takes off quick, climbs fast and, roarin' high, plows into the sky.

And I, back on the field, watch it go with tears in my eyes!

One by one, at sixty-second intervals, the planes take off, and soon they're parading along the sky, and trailin' out of sight. Once they're gone, there is nothin' to do but wait for reports along the way. The crowd lingers, and I avoid Mr. Alton. He goes to his car; I just float around. What's happenin' to Ned and Jane now, I wonder? What's goin to happen to 'em as they drive across half a dozen states. Are they goin' to pull onto Long Island and get down to Curtiss first? Oh, Lord!

Well, plenty happened in that plane on the way, and this is what!

Ned Knight concentrated on his controls as he had never concentrated before. In the back seat Jane just sat and enjoyed herself. Little by little the Alton went up to her top speed. With the throttle gradually opened, she tore through the sky screaming. With the wires shrieking, the struts rattling, the whole plane trembling and throbbing, it roared on its way, hell-bent for victory.

The string of planes kept goin' across the sky spaced like they were at the take off for a while. At the Ohio line

one of them began to drop, and took to the ground, disabled, and disqualified, 'cause the race was a non-stop affair. Another one soon followed. Others began to draw back a little, and still others drove ahead a little. And while Ned was strivin' to pass the Impco and reach the Stormbird, Jane removed her helmet and goggles, and then reached forward and gently tapped his shoulder.

Ned looked back; for a minute he thought he was dreamin'. Then he shouted something that was lost in the thunder of the motors, and bored on. He couldn't snap off the ignition a minute; 't would slow the plane. Jane smiled at him, still enjoyin' every minute; and then he looked back again, and grinned. He'd caught onto the joy of the thing and then Jane was satisfied.

Ned bent to his controls again, for the Impco was slippin' closer. It wasn't bearin' up under the continued, terrific strain. Ned grasped the opportunity and kept the throttle wide open. Bit by bit the Impco slid back, and Ned gave it a wide berth. Slowly, but surely, the Alton advanced. For miles the planes bobbed side by side; and then the Alton crept forward, inch by inch, until it was leadin'.

Jane gaily waved at the Impco pilot and threw him a couple of kisses!

The Alton bored on, and Ned concentrated on the Stormbird. It was still thundering on, a strong ship, much better than the Imp, perhaps equal to ours—perhaps even better! Ned kept the throttle wide; and Jane settled down to the serious business of takin' the lead.

The earth was bobbin' below the planes, slidin' by gentle but fast; one town and another came into view and disappeared. And then the Alton began to wobble. The motor roared up and down. Ned was actin' funny with the controls. Jane watched him close; and then she saw Ned's head bob, and his shoulders slide forward. Just then the ship began to dive and lose speed.

"Ned!" Jane screeched, grabbing his shoulder and shakin' him. "What's the matter?"

He pulled himself together some, looked around; and in his eyes was a dreamy, sick look. Jane shook him again; but he acted almost drunk. His lips mumbled words that were lost in the motor's roar; but Jane knew that something was very much wrong with him.

The ship was losin' speed; the Stormbird was leading by a long distance; and even the Imp was drawing close again. Jane didn't wait for any more trouble. She unsnapped her safety belt and, calm as you please, put one leg across and into the fore pit. Then she pulled forward, and came into the pit with Ned. She crammed herself down into and on him, and grabbed the stick. Ned's feet were loose on the rudder-bars, but the stabilizer kept the plane on an even keel without much help from the controls.

Jane shook Ned again; and he was conkin' out fast. He pulled off one glove and looked at his right hand. It was red and swole up, and across it was a red streak, a scratch. He looked up with eyes full of pitiful request for help, and tried to talk. Jane was desperate; she cut the switch to hear him.

"Sick," he mumbled. "Scratch—somebody on field. Bumped against me. Must be—poisoned. Oh, —I can't—go on ——"

And he slumped forward in the pit. Jane snapped on the ignition, kept the stick steady, pulled Ned back up, and pleaded in his ear.

"Try, Ned! Try to get up! Try to get back into the other pit. I'll handle the stick. You get back—try! Please try!"

Sick as he was, he tried. He dragged himself up and tottered in the air, while Jane assisted all she could. Then Ned tumbled into the rear pit, half on the seat, and without makin' a move to get up, passed out completely.

Jane settled to the controls with all

the fire she had—which was plenty! She snapped on the ignition and opened the throttle wide as she could. The motor blasted. The plane almost jumped ahead. The Imp, which was almost nose to nose with the Alton again, gradually dropped back. There was the Stormbird, far ahead. Jane fixed her blue eyes on that plane, and kept the throttle open, and prayed.

She didn't understand perfectly then what had happened to Ned. It was this: while he was on the field, talkin' with Alton—while Jane was talkin' with me, private!—somebody brushed past him, and then Ned discovered a scratch on his hand, lookin' like it was made by a pin. He thought nothin' of it, but that scratch was full of a drug. What it was we don't know yet, but it was powerful, and without the shadow of a doubt it had been used by somebody in the Stormbird people's pay—somebody, probably at Stud Walker's behest. The object was to put the Alton out of the race by cripplin' its pilot—and, if it hadn't been for Jane, the trick would have succeeded! But with Jane at the stick, it was far from succeedin'!

Jane stretched that ship to the limit. The Imp bobbed far behind. Territory unreeled under her. The Stormbird loomed large again. Both ships were goin' their limit. The race settled down to a question of which ship had the more speed and power and stamina, and the victor would be decided by a very narrow margin. Jane kept the throttle wide, and waited for the Alton to do its stuff—and it did.

Slowly she drew up. She kept the Alton on a level with the Stormbird's tail for a hundred miles. Then slowly the differences in the ships began to tell. The Alton crept up. An inch. Another inch. Another inch—forward always, at a mad airspeed, the motor blasting like a demon loose out of hell, the whole ship shaking, the wires screaming. The earth spun and veered. Another inch—another. Little by little the Alton crept up on the Stormbird until, prop even with prop, they drove ahead without either gainin' a mite.

Once again the Stormbird began to slip back; and Jane—yes!—tossed Mr. Stud Walker an ironic kiss!

Jane kept that ship howlin'. On she went. On. The skies began to darken. The air got a little bumpy. The visability dropped. The exhaust tubes of the planes, white-hot, spouted orange fire. And Jane drove on. Little by little, again, the Alton took its margin of lead.

What was that? Water! Long Island Sound! Only a few miles away was the finish field!

Jane kept the plane drivin'. The Stormbird howled on the Alton's tail. Both planes were crazy flyin' things—crazy.

Then the field, the big square! Closer and closer! Jane stepped down to it, slowin' as little as possible. Down she swooped, and the ground swung up at her. She felt the trucks touch. She zipped across the sand; she ground looped; she trundled back. And as she came to a stop, and the crowd started for her, the Stormbird dropped out of the sky.

Jane jumped out of her plane. She knew Ned wasn't seriously hurt, but he needed help, and to the first man she saw she shouted: "Get a doctor!" Then, with reporters mobbin' her, she just smiled, gave her name and that of the plane,, and waited until a fat man with an official badge, head of the Committee, came up to her. Then she said pertly:

"Well, I guess I won, didn't I?"

The Committeeman was flabbergasted. He hadn't expected to see a girl. Reporters were yowlin' for Jane's name, and facts about her, knowin' that a girl hadn't been scheduled to pilot the Alton, and sensin' a big story. The Committeeman muffed a few words, not knowin' what to do or say, but seein' plain enough that she had got to the field first.

Then a man in leather tunic and with goggle-prints around his eyes came

pushin' through the crowd, with four other Committeemen, all lookin' indignant and outraged. That guy was Walker—Walker was howlin'.

"There she is!" he yelped. "This race is bein' run on the square, ain't it? Well, you can't rate her winner. She isn't the pilot that belongs to that ship. Her name is Alton—the pilot registered for this plane is named Knight!"

The Committeeman got red-faced and mad and still more dignified. They waved a hand for silence and bellowed to the reporters, after a hot and fast conference among themselves:

"The Alton is not the winner of this race. The Alton is not the winner! It is disqualified because of irregularities. The official winner of the race is the Stormbird, with Walker pilotin'!"

"Just a minute!" Jane spoke up, pert and clear. "Where are the irregularities? The Alton has come through clean, without any. The pilot of this ship is supposed to be Knight, and it wins the race because *my name is* Knight!"

That's a poser.

"I intended to fly this ship all along!" Jane declared. "And I win the race—"

"Your name is Knight?" the Committeemen demanded in one big voice.

"Yes, indeed," said Jane. "Mrs. Ned Knight. It has been that since last evenin'. So there!"

Whenever I see Jane comin' onto the testin' field of the big, boomin', prosperous Alton factory, to take a little sky-spin with her husband, I size her up and sigh and tell myself all over again that that girl sure looks right in a flyin' suit!

MORE FLIGHT STATISTICS

The Gates Flying Circus, in its report for the year 1927, furnishes some interesting statistics to persons who still doubt the safety of aerial transportation. In its annual report to the Department of Commerce, it furnishes a record of 48,695 persons transported over a distance of 377,716 miles, without injury to pilots or passengers.

The flying covered in this report to the Department includes passenger transportation and flying school operations at the Teterboro Airport, at Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, as well as the mileage and passenger transportation in the tour of the country which the circus made under the supervision of the American Society for the Promotion of Aviation, during which passengers were carried at one dollar per person.

At the same time, the National Air Transport releases statistics showing that N. A. T. planes fly approximately 5,800 miles every twenty-four hours. Since 1926, when the planes of the N. A. T. first began operation of the Chicago-Dallas airway, these ships have traveled nearly two million miles. Of the 5,800 miles traveled daily, about 3,500 miles are flown at night. The addition of the Detroit and Tulsa extensions of this airway will increase the daily flight total to a little over 6,000 miles.

Let's Go!

By Eustace L. Adams

Andrews and Miller were all set for Paris leave until a bloomin' captain upset their plans. But then, what's a leave or two when there's a good scrap in sight?

ENSIGNS SAM MILLER and Bob Andrews adjusted their white chokers, dusted off their mirror-like cordovan puttees, cast last admiring glances at their new, English cut, forestry-green naval aviators' uniforms and decided that if they were to make that train, they had better be easing along.

It would never do, they agreed, to miss it. The idea of losing even an hour of their long-anticipated forty-eight hours' leave in Paris would have appalled them.

A vigorous knock rattled the hinges of their door. The Skipper's yeoman entered.

"Sir," he announced, "the Captain's compliments, and will all the officers kindly come to his office." Then, relaxing from regulation with a sigh, he added, "You'd better give 'er the gun, too, 'cause he's feeling sort'a peckish!"

"Hope he makes it snappy," murmured Bob, as the two pals mounted the rough board steps of the new administration shack. "I figure we have about twenty minutes leeway."

Promptly as they had answered the summons, they found all the other flyers ahead of them, standing in a semi-circle around the Commander's rude pine desk. At his right stood Ensign Bill Hemmingway, who, judging by his oil-smeared face and tousled hair, had just come in from patrol. The others stood at ease, awaiting the Skipper's pleasure.

Lieutenant-Commander Jack Malloy, U. S. N., mentally checked off the last arrivals and the gimlet-like blue eyes under the red shock of bristling hair rested briefly upon each of the waiting men.

"Mr. Hemmingway," he said brusquely, "reports that he was fired

upon by a sniper from the beach at Souilly-sur-Mer, forty kilometers up the Channel. That is, of course, Allied territory, well this side of the German lines.

"From what he tells me, I think we have the same men to deal with who have been raising the devil with us for a month. However, I'll let him tell you himself. Proceed, Mr. Hemmingway."

"Well, fellows," began the pilot, "I was coming back along the coast from the eastern patrol. I had bucked a headwind all the way out and was pretty low on gas, so I was taking all the short cuts I could to make it back to the station. You know the wide beach at Souilly?"

The other pilots nodded silently.

"I was a thousand feet up when I heard a bullet snap by my head and saw a couple of holes appear in my lower wing. I looked down, and there was a man on the beach shooting up at me with a rifle.

"Well, I got red-headed—" he paused suddenly and glanced at the Skipper's flaming mop in embarrassment—"I lost my temper, I should have said, and started down after him. I had No. 42, a bomber without a machine gun, so I couldn't shoot him down. So I put her over in a nose dive, turned and went for him. I figured that if I could catch him with the leading edge of a pontoon, it would do as well as a tray-full of bullets.

"He had nerve, all right, for he waited until I was right on top of him, all set to cut him in two. Then he suddenly dropped flat on the sand and I missed him by a couple of inches. Before I could turn the heavy bus to come back at him, he had scrambled to his feet, run across the beach and was up in the woods where I couldn't get to him.

"The funny part of it is this, fellows. He was the same bird, with a gray tam o' shanter and red sash, that we ran out of here a couple of days ago. You remember, the Belgian carpenter who had been working on the new hangar and barracks? I got a square look at him just before he dropped, and I know that he's the same man."

"Now, listen, gentlemen," the Captain's crisp voice broke in. "Without a doubt, that's the same man who put emory dust into our oil, filed our control wires, took the cotter pins out of our flipper hinges and fooled with our depth bombs. He's the man who is responsible for Lieut. Williams being killed by the premature explosion of a Mark Four bomb just as he was taxying away from the beach. He is also to blame for our being held behind in our flying time until we have been handed the raspberry from Paris all the way to London.

"It's partly my fault. Naval Intelligence couldn't hang a thing on him, but I should have known that he was a lousy spy and turned him over to the French, who know how to handle such birds. Instead of that, I just kicked him out because of the number of coincidences that happened while he was on the station.

"Now, I've tipped off the French and Belgian Intelligence Services, but while he's loose, most anything may happen.

"I'm sorry to have to do it," his eyes flicking toward the dolled-up Sam and Bob, "but all leaves and liberty parties are suspended until further notice. Mr. Miller and Mr. Andrews are next up. They will make their patrol to the east. When they pass Souilly, they will be especially watchful. That's all!"

The two young flyers walked back to their rooms in dismal silence. They pulled off their best uniforms, dressed in old flying clothes, slammed the door behind them with a mighty thwack and walked gloomily down to the beach, where their two little

single-seated seaplanes were already ticking over.

Still without a word, they clambered into their cockpits, were turned around, gave their ships the gun and, zooming high into the early afternoon sky, headed east over the Channel.

What a war, growled the disappointed Sam to himself as he listened involuntarily to the even roar of his engine. Here they had been planning a "bust" in Paris for many dreary weeks of constant patrolling. At last they had succeeded in wangling the coveted forty-eight hour pass out of the Skipper, only to have it revoked a few minutes before train time. He had even heard, as he stood in the Commander's office, the piccolo-like "tweet-tweet" of the locomotive as it had pulled out of the station.

His mouth became parched as he thought of Henri's, the Chatham Bar, the Café de la Paix and all the other marvelous retreats for war-weary flyers. Phooie! what a war!

AS was their custom on patrol, Sam flew fairly close to shore, keeping a wary eye on the shoreward skies and looking into the innumerable inlets on the rocky coast, while Bob ranged far out into the English Channel, keeping just within sight. Thus the two covered a wide sweep of a dozen miles as they flew high over the turbulent water.

They carried no bombs, those two. They were fighters, hoping to meet a straying patrol of German seaplanes out of Bruges or Zeebrugge. These two ports were the festering sores in the side of Great Britain, for from them came fleets of submarines to harry the shipping in the Channel. Likewise came airplanes and seaplanes to protect the almost-invulnerable submarine bases and the canals and locks which led into them.

Bob's boredom was relieved when he sighted a long, lean American destroyer cruising slowly along, its knife-like bow dipping deep into the green rollers. From the stern clusters of gobs waved their watch caps at him and he threw a series of loops in salute.

Inshore, Sam's gloomy meditations were dispelled when he noticed, a few miles ahead, a small steamer which was unusually close to shore and, apparently, slowly going closer and closer to the beach. That was unusual, he knew, for vessels in this section of the Channel usually kept well out from the treacherous coast. There was no port for her to be putting into, only the little hamlet of Souilly, which was a couple of kilometers in from the beach and had no harbor at all.

Souilly! His mind flashed back to the conference which had cost them their trip to Paris. Surely there could be no connection between the sniping spy and this ship. It was absurd. Still, he'd be there in a few minutes and would have a look-see.

Five minutes later his inquiring eyes looked down upon the decks of a tiny freighter which flew the Norwegian flag. Upon its rust-streaked sides it bore in great white letters "Helga—Norge." Its spindly funnel and the forest of a cargo booms grouped around its masts marked it at once as one of those half-starved wanderers of the seas, a tramp, now come into comparative opulence as a result of wartime demand for charters.

Such a ship went, he knew, into queer places, but what was she doing here, so close to shore? Sam swung around in a wide circle gazing down upon her in perplexity. A thin, milky wake beneath her stern showed that she was still going ahead at dead low speed, although she was headed straight toward the beach.

Sam headed in for the shore himself, to see if he could find any reason for the ship's strange behavior, but

so far as he could see, the beach was absolutely deserted. He could find nothing to fasten his vague suspicions upon.

Well, he'd give it up! So he wrote, on a small piece of paper, a message to the captain of the tramp.

"Head back into the Channel. You are going aground."

He wrapped it in his handkerchief, weighted it down with a spare spark-plug, and, flying low over the freighter, dropped it on her deck. As he wheeled around, he saw one of the crew pick it up and carry it up the ladder to the bridge, where an officer in civilian clothes seemed to puzzle over it for some time. At last, he apparently gave an order to the quartermaster, for the *Helga* swung her bow out toward the open Channel.

Sam squared away to continue his patrol. Bob had started in to see what had delayed his flying mate, but upon seeing him head east again, turned back on his own course.

Ahead of them was now a long stretch of uninhabited coast, bordered by salt marshes, the last remaining strip of what had been a proud, valiant little nation, Belgium. Only a few miles ahead of them was occupied territory, in the hands of the invader.

It would be here, if anywhere, that they were likely to find a scrap. Wandering military planes from the lines sometimes flew out here to get a change of scenery, while the German naval patrol was usually willing to mix it with them when they met over the Channel.

He cast a last look back at the *Helga* now dim in the distance behind him. Then he quickly banked his plane over on its wing, heading back with wide open engine.

The ship's captain, apparently thinking the flyers had forgotten him, had turned again toward the beach, and was now hardly a mile from the shore.

Sam cursed wholeheartedly. He didn't know what was wrong, but felt sure that his first suspicions had been correct. Something about this loitering Scandinavian was very queer indeed and he meant, this time, to find out what it was all about. He glanced over his right shoulder and noted with satisfaction that Bob, from far out at sea, had seen him turn and had himself pivoted around to join him.

The tramp grew larger rapidly as the speeding plane hurtled over the water. The pilot held the stick forward a little, nosing her down to get the last knot of speed out of the sturdy motor.

Suddenly his keen eyes narrowed and he fired a burst from his machine gun to warm up the grease. There, on the water, about thirty feet from the side of the steamer, was a row boat, with its occupant exerting his utmost strength to gain the lowered ladder on the ship's side before the plane reached him.

Sam dived. As he neared the boat his bronzed face set itself in stern hard lines. The man in the boat wore a gray tam and a vivid red sash! Beside him on a thwart was a rifle! Sam fingered his trigger, ready to press it when he was sure of his target. Just as the ring sight spotted the laboring figure at the oars, there appeared close in front of the pilot's startled eyes, a thin vicious line of gray smoke. The trailing edge of his lower wing seemed to dissolve as he glanced at it. Involuntarily he kicked the rudder bar and swerved away. He looked down at the *Helga*. There from each of four machine guns that had, as if by magic, appeared on her formerly bare deck, came long smoking streams of tracer bullets.

At bow and stem appeared the ugly black muzzles of four-inch naval guns, already swivelling around toward him. Manning each piece was

a disreputably clothed but efficiently trained crew, who had spilled out of the companionways at the same moment that he had dived for the row boat.

In his hasty glance he saw the Norwegian flag drop from the jack staff, while the Imperial German ensign was quickly run up to the main truck.

Sam zoomed away to shake off the searching tracers and to get distance for another screaming dive at the row boat. Just two things were distinct in his mind. He had stepped right into a hornet's nest, and he *must* stop his man! There was no mystery now. This innocent-looking *Helga* was a fully armed little war vessel, which had probably slipped out of Zeebrugge to pick up the spy, relying upon the comparatively short distance it had to cover to enable it to return safely during the usual early evening fog.

And what an important spy this must be, he thought, as he measured the distance to the boat, to justify risking an entire ship with its crew! Such a disguised ship, he knew, usually operated on lonely seas far from home, relying on distance from the war zone to be its best safeguard from inquisitive enemy ships. It was obviously not armed to stand and give battle to any but the smallest patrol and picket boats. Yes, he had to get his man!

He swung around, as though on a pivot, and swept down through the tracers, straight at the row boat. His motor raced and vibrated as though it would jump out of the engine bed. He was too late, he thought, for the little boat had now reached the ship's ladder and the red-sashed man was scrambling hastily up the rungs.

Tracers smoked by the pilot's head. A strut on the center panel parted in the middle and the two short pieces stood straight back in the wind. He'd never last through this dive, he believed, but his hand held firm on the stick.

His fingers pressed the trigger and from the vibrating muzzle of his own gun a line of bullets whipped into the water at the foot of the ladder, churning it into a boiling, seething cauldron. He pulled back slowly on his stick. The tracer leisurely climbed the ladder after the spy. It caught up with him just as he reached the rail. Then it passed over him on to the deck. But the brief instant had been enough. The man threw up both arms, pulled away from three of the ship's crew who were there to help him, and then cartwheeled back into the sea. Two of the men at the rail sank to the deck.

Sam pulled hard back into a zoom. For a moment the aerial between the masts had loomed high over him, but he cleared it by a hair's breadth and straightened out just in time to avoid a stall. Nosing down again to regain flying speed he looked about for Bob.

Good old Bob! He was already in a vertical dive, heading straight for the deck of the *Helga,* his gun spitting venomously.

A great concussion jarred the air and a huge billow of luminous gas shot out of the bow gun and hid the whole forward part of the steamer. Just behind Bob's hurtling plane an enormous mushroom appeared in the air. Above the roar of his own engine, Sam could distinguish the high-pitched shriek of the wind as it shrilled through Bob's wires and struts. He wondered how the other plane could hold together under the incredible strain.

From his high seat he watched the line of Bob's tracers sweep into and around the gun crew and saw the men working the naval piece drop in huddled groups on the rusty deck. He held his breath for a moment—Bob would crash into the gun mount

behind his own bullets! But in the last split-second before he would have hit, Bob banked over and just missed the steamer's rail, recovering himself in a vertical zoom just as his pontoons skimmed the waves.

Sam dived for the after-deck gun and found himself looking squarely into the round black muzzle. As he dropped toward it, hoping to beat the gunners to the trigger, the gun disappeared in a flash of smoke and vivid flame. His plane leaped under him as though a mighty hand had jerked him a dozen feet into the air. A terrific blast of air swept under him, accompanied by a valkyrie-like scream that nearly burst his ear drums. He fought his controls like a madman to straighten out his ship before he crashed on the steel deck of the steamer, or into the rough waters of the Channel beyond. For the moment, he forgot his machine gun; he was intent only upon saving his plane. Through the lingering cloud of powder gas he plunged and, as he passed, he could almost have reached over and touched the startled gun crew.

He managed to level out his ship just in time. In another five feet he would have crashed headlong into the sea in a dive that would have ended the war for him.

MORE than a little shaken, he held his course a moment to catch his breath. Then, as fast as the lunge of a rattlesnake, he zoomed, whirled about and struck at the gunners from the rear. Before they had time to swivel their piece he was upon them. He squeezed his trigger and saw the gun crew melt under the hot stream of lead from his stuttering guns.

A steady line from each of two machine guns on the deck riddled his lower wing. The altimeter and tachometer on his instrument board disappeared as though they had suddenly been wiped off a blackboard with a damp sponge.

He veered to one side and hastily looked over his plane. Surely the rain of bullets through which he had been riding had taken a heavy toll. Yes, he considered, it was a miracle that he had lived through that last swoop. The seaplane was nearly riddled. He looked down at his left pontoon. He could see daylight through a mass of perforations in the mahogany surface that made it look like the top of a salt cellar. Trailing from the underside of the long, slender float, were thin, shattered strips of veneer—the whole underside was gone. Apparently the wind had caught in the bullet holes beneath and had ripped the entire bottom off. Well, he thought, that was important only if and when he had to land. In a forced landing here and now, for instance, it would be curtains! His luck had been with him so far, and maybe he hadn't used it all up yet. Let's go!

The steamer was, now, headed straight out into the Channel and was forging ahead at a speed that amazed Sam. Apparently the rusty sides and spindly funnel camouflaged a set of engines that a destroyer might have envied. But her topmost speed counted for little against two fighting seaplanes.

Sam and Bob seemed to be everywhere at once. They darted around the fleeing steamer like angry swallows around a marauding chicken hawk. First Bob would dive, then, as he pulled away, Sam would follow him down. Their teamwork was perfect. Not once did either pilot get in the other's way, nor did either once follow-up an advantage gained by his partner.

New crews had taken the place of the gunners mowed down by the seaplanes. Again and again the big navy guns belched. They were almost useless against the flitting

planes. Built for long range work against comparatively steady targets, they now had to contend with almost point-blank range against tiny ships that moved in front of their muzzles at more than a hundred miles an hour. Despite their knowledge that the guns could hardly hit them with a shell, the two flyers took care not to be close to, or in front of their mouths as they spat flames and steel.

Again and again the brave little groups about the machine guns were cut down, until around each mount was a heap of sprawling men, from which ran red streams into the already crimson scuppers. Now and then men crawled away from their guns on their hands and knees and disappeared within the sheltering deckhouses, or else lay down, midway to safety and lay quiet, as though too tired to crawl any farther.

Sam was thoroughly convinced, by now, that he and Bob must be leading charmed lives. At times the enemy's tracers criss-crossed within inches of his eyes. He could see an unbelievable number of holes in his wings and fuselage, yet, miraculously the bullet which was to send him to a forced landing had not yet arrived. If once he had to hit those waves with his bottomless pontoon!

From the top of a zoom, Sam saw Bob sweep the bridge and charthouse from end to end with his tracers. As he followed him down he noted that the charthouse seemed empty. The quartermaster had disappeared from the wheel. He poured another burst into the windows.

The wake behind the steamer became irregular; she suddenly appeared to be turning a huge circle. Then she slowed down and her propeller ceased to kick up white water under her stern. At this moment, the scattered men working the deck guns left their posts as if by signal and raced for shelter. The bloody deck was now deserted.

Sam and Bob flew about aimlessly, wondering how to carry on. Obviously their bullets could not penetrate the steel hull and there were no other targets to shoot at. Then a door behind the charthouse was opened and a lone figure emerged. Both planes wheeled and nosed down simultaneously, but turned away in full flight when the man waved a white flag. As the two seaplanes flew in close circles, the officer limped back to the mainmast, pulled down the Imperial ensign and hoisted the flag of surrender in its place.

SAM pulled close to his partner and turned to fly parallel to his course. Then he cut off his motor and put his ship in a thin glide. Bob followed suit and drifted so close to him that the two planes nearly locked wings.

"Go get the destroyer!" shouted Sam above the singing of the wind in his rigging. "I'll stand by!"

The other waved, pulled his ship's nose up and gave her the gun, turning to the westward.

Sam laboriously wrote out another message and dropped it upon the *Helga's* deck. In a few moments, one of the crew cautiously appeared, picked it up and retreated hastily to the shelter of the deckhouse. After a brief interval, several men appeared, and, casting anxious glances toward the solitary plane, climbed the ladder to the high bow and clustered around the anchor. The big mud hook splashed overboard and many fathoms of chain followed it into the water. The steamer slowly headed up into the wind and lay there, motionless and apparently deserted.

The flyer climbed to fifteen hundred feet and, cutting his motor down to 1,000 revolutions, flew around in

great, slow curves, just killing time. As he neared the beach on one of his long swings around the ship, he was astonished to see scores of people standing there watching the scene. Apparently the entire hamlet of Souilly had rushed down to the shore when they heard the firing. There was a plentiful sprinkling of horizon-blue uniforms among the crowd—some of the French soldiers billeted in the village.

It suddenly occurred to Sam that, since the telegraph communications along the shore of the channel were very complete and efficient, the news of the afternoon's action would doubtless precede them to the air station.

For twenty minutes or more he idled around his anchored captive. His eyes searched the western horizon restlessly. While Lady Luck had ridden his shoulder all afternoon, he would hate to have her desert him now. If his engine should suddenly conk, he might just as well have been shot down by the enemy!

At last he breathed a sigh of relief. A tiny spot on the water to the westward grew larger, with a stiff black streak of smoke trailing it. A smaller dot in the sky rapidly developed into Bob's seaplane. In a very few moments, the two planes were abreast of each other. Bob, smiling broadly, raised both hands over his head and shook them in mutual congratulations.

Sam looked down for the last time upon the peacefully anchored *Helga,* then he measured the distance to the destroyer. The lean, gray wasp of the sea was scarcely three miles away, plunging through the long rollers like an express train through a snow-drift.

He suddenly realized that he was very tired and that their captive might now be left in other hands. He pulled over close to his pal and together they winged their way through the long, slanting rays of the late afternoon sun.

IN a long, slow spiral, they glided down for a landing at the inlet in front of the new U. S. Naval Air Station. Sam kept his motor at half speed, holding his ship off the water until he had almost reached the beach. Then he set her down carefully on her right pontoon, and, as the shell of his shattered left float touched the water, he gave her the gun.

One hundred and eighty horsepower was all that saved his valiant little ship from sinking there and then, but the whirling propeller pulled her hard up on the smooth sand. Bob was twenty feet behind him. Slowly the two motors ticked over, backfired once or twice, coughed and stopped.

From the midst of the crowd lining the beach—a crowd composed of every officer and every enlisted man on the station—catapulted a sturdy figure surmounted by a blazing red thatch. He leaped to the pontoon of the nearest plane and climbed like a monkey to the cockpit.

"Were you fellows planning to go to Paris?" demanded Commander Jack Malloy. Sam grinned a tired little grin and nodded. "Well, there's a week's leave ready for you at the office. You birds have got a world's record. I've been flying since you wore curls, but I'm everlastingly scuppered if I ever heard of two flyers capturing a seagoing ship before. You'd better get on that train 'toot sweet' before you're kissed by all the bearded generals in the French Army. Beat it!"

Sam raised his oil-spattered goggles and looked at his pal.

"Come on, Bob! Let's go!"

True Stories of American War-Birds

Col. HAROLD E. HARTNEY
S. C. 27th Squad. A.E.F.

What were the sensations which gripped the war-birds as they hurtled through the clouds to do battle with a foe? What feelings swept over them as they stared into the flame-spitting guns of enemy aces? In this department you will find the answer! Here will be printed the stories of American War-Birds. Each issue will contain a thrilling account of some phase of a war-bird's experiences "over there." They are true stories and are written by the airmen themselves.

Sky Conflict

By Col. Harold E. Hartney

IT'S mighty hard, after living through such a gigantic phase as the World War proved to be, to point to some particular event which transpired and say "that was the most interesting or exciting thing that occurred to me." As a matter of fact, there are a number of things which occur in the course of the day's work in such a struggle which vie for first place in a man's memory.

This is particularly true when one considers the fact that I've had the finest flyers of any army flying with me—men like Rickenbacker, and Lufberry and a dozen others who've made wonderful records for themselves before going West or the end of the scrap brought them their discharge.

I have been credited officially with six planes. Each one of those planes was brought down in scraps which can never be forgotten. I was shot down, in the winter of '17, by the famed Baron Von Richthofen. That, too, was one of these so-called "incidents" which cannot be forgotten.

However, out of it all, there is one scrap which has made its mark on my memory, and which I like to think of as my mind turns back to the "grande guerre." It happened just north of Toul, the point at which the 27th squadron was stationed.

I was commanding the 27th squadron at the time. I had been transferred from the 20th pursuit squadron, British Expeditionary Forces, to the American air service upon the entry of America into the war. As a result of many months of experience in combat fighting on the French and British fronts, I was able to tell these young pilots of the 27th a lot of things about aerial warfare. And I was feeding them this knowledge in large doses.

However, until this particular time, I had not been able to add to my record of enemy aircraft victories which I had gained while with the British. And I was rather eager to do so, not only from the standpoint of personal ambition, but to bring to the boys of the squadron actual proof of the fact that I knew whereof I spoke, as well as to buoy the morale of the boys as much as possible.

On this particular night in '18, C flight was on *alerte*. You see, the routine at the time was to have a number

of flights patrolling the sector, while another flight remained on the ground in readiness for anything which might happen. The planes of this flight stood on the line, their engines warmed up, and the flyers all set for the take-off.

It was 7:30 p. m. and still light. The Nieuports which we were flying, 28's, were on the line, their engines ticking over gently. The men of C flight were standing by, ready and waiting. I had come through a comparatively easy day, and I strolled over to the flight to look around.

The flight leader, I observed, seemed weary. Truthfully, none of us was any too bright, and our eyes showed signs of the terrific strain which we had all been under for the past weeks. But C flight leader looked in a bad way—his whole aspect was one of dog-tiredness.

I strolled over, and, taking his helmet and goggles from his hand, remarked that he seemed tired. "All right, Captain. Get yourself some rest. I'll stand for you." He was a game chap, though, and insisted on staying out his period. But I cut him off good-naturedly, and he finally consented to take some minutes of hard-earned rest.

I stood about for a few minutes, chatting with the boys of the flight and speculating as to what the chances were of some action before darkness. They were all eager for action, these boys. And many of them seemed to be praying just for the signal to send them off into the skies on a hunt again.

I'd just finished some remark concerning our chances of getting in some action when the field telephone rang the *alerte*. C flight was ordered into the air for a look around. Evidently some of the Boche must be coming over for a sight-seeing cruise. Or perhaps they were getting playful and had sent a bombing party over.

At any rate, three of us hopped into our Nieuports and within two minutes the three ships raced across the field and into the air. We had sturdy ships under us and I, for one, was determined that if there was any action to be gotten up there, we'd get it.

LIEUTENANT HILL was flying on my right and behind me and Lieutenant McArthur was flying opposite Hill. We immediately circled for altitude, both boys watching my ship for signals. I headed the Nieuports to the north of our sector, toward St. Mihiel, figuring that we might circle about and get our ships in that manner.

We kept going on toward St. Mihiel, to the north and west of us, when I noticed a number of Archie puffs ahead. The puff of the shells as they exploded in the sky told me that our anti-aircraft batteries had sighted the enemy and had opened up on them. I kept on, heading for the west, keeping my eyes open all the while for a glimpse of the Boche ships.

It wasn't long before I spotted the ships. There were two of them. One, a heavy two-seater, was an L. V. G. Directly behind it and flying about 2,000 feet above it, hovered an all-red Albatross, a pursuit ship. Evidently the lone Albatross was acting as escort for the heavier machine.

As I sighted the ships, I climbed for altitude. We were flying to the west of the two ships and were therefore in the sun. I hadn't signaled to the boys yet and, looking about, I found that they had not as yet sighted the enemy. They continued on their course without looking about them, their eyes intent on my own Nieuport waiting for a signal from me.

Then it seemed that the enemy, in a playful mood, started dashing back and forth over the lines, evading the Archie puffs, dodging in and out of the clouds. I decided to do the same thing. The best game, I had found, was the waiting game. Let the other fellow decide to do something; and when you're sure of what he's trying to do—stop him!

We swept back and forth over our own area for more than twenty-five minutes, Hill and McArthur evidently

wondering what all playing was about. They had not yet sighted the enemy, who were quite a way off to our left, and couldn't quite understand this dashing back and forth on my part.

Then the enemy ships must have sighted us. With a suddenness of decision, the heavy two-seater made a dash across and into our rear. The Albatross, still at about two thousand feet above it, dashed across with it. That was the move I had been waiting for all the while. Certain now as to what they intended, I waggled my ailerons as a signal to the boys that the enemy had been sighted. They closed in as they followed me in a dash for the Boche.

Twice I looked about me in the skies to make certain that this was no Boche trap. Any moment I expected to see a flight of the Boche planes come diving down through the clouds to get us as we sailed after the decoy ships. But, evidently, this was not what they were doing. They were playing a fair game and, to all appearances, were our meat.

I circled down lower and signaled for McArthur to close in on the two-seater with me, leaving Hill to take care of the Albatross above. I figured, of course, that Hill would keep the pursuit ship from jumping on us while we paid strict attention to the demolishing of the other ship.

Instantly, as we dived down, the L. V. G.'s gunner started flinging tracers through the air. A number of bursts came uncomfortably close as we circled above the ship. And then, in a moment, McArthur found an opening and lunged in. It was a close call for both ships.

While I held the fire of the observer, worrying him by hanging on to the tail of the ship, McArthur swooped through in a death-dealing dive. But his tracers hadn't found a weak spot yet. He redressed as a few bursts of shells came whining through my own wings and fuselage.

Once again McArthur came back and across the two-seater's bow, and this time I realized that the two-seater was finished. Leaving McArthur to finish the ship, I swung over and around to see how Hill was faring with the Albatross. Incidentally, I kept an eye peeled for more enemy planes.

Looking over to the left of me as I swung the nose of my Nieuport up, I saw Hill's plane spinning madly down toward the earth, while the all-red Albatross kept diving steadily on its tail, raking the fuselage and tail with a veritable hail of machine-gun fire. Hill was finished. That Albatross just hung on to the tail of his Nieuport like a bulldog. And then, before I could think of anything, the two ships came hurtling down past my Nieuport.

Instantly I swerved, put my nose down, and as the Albatross hurtled by, directly behind the Nieuport, it lined up in my gun sights for a fraction of a minute. That fraction was enough. I tripped my gun releases and the Boche was raked from stem to stern with a withering fire.

The Albatross was through. It was over in a minute. Just a second before she had been riding Hill's tail as he spun madly to earth endeavoring to escape from the hail of steel which rained out of that ship's guns. And then my guns sent the Albatross spinning after the Nieuport.

Hill kept right on down. Out of control, he managed a semi-crash landing just behind the lines. McArthur, by this time, had finished off his two-seater and she was spinning to earth, a flaming mass of wreckage.

The flight was over. I had gotten my first plane with the American forces and it felt good.

I discovered, when Hill was brought back to the base, that while we had relied on him to keep the Albatross off our own tails as we finished the two-seater, he had never *seen* the Albatross until its machine-gun had opened up on him and sent him spinning to the earth below!

Phantom Wings

By Thomson Burtis

Author of "Feud of the Sky," "Sky-Trails of Peril," etc.

MacNeil fights a grim sky-battle—and Sheriff Watkins rides the feud-trail as tampered guns bring destruction to the army flyers.

Part III

BUT Nolan's ship was not diving for the target, it was spiraling downward, and Seaton was behind him.

A swoop across the wreck in the woods told him nothing. Not a sign of life could he see, but the ship was not afire. Out on the surface of the water Snapper's ship was still afloat, and both he and his mechanic were perched high on the tail, four feet above the water-level.

He banked around and started climbing, headed back for Kerryville. As soon as he had reached a thousand feet he leveled out and with the Mercedes turning up its maximum flew a bee-line for the field.

Eight minutes brought him within a mile of it, and he started his dive. He side-slipped in over the road, skidded, and dropped to earth fifty feet from the fence. Before the ship lost half its speed he risked a groundloop, turning the scout toward the trucks. Only four men had been left at the field, and two of them came running out to help him.

As soon as he had reached the line he cut the switches and vaulted out.

"Three ships crashed over at Blaney," he said quietly. "Crank up the truck with the first-aid stuff in it. Only one man will go—the driver. Hustle!"

The last word was like the snap of a whip, contrasting sharply with the restraint of his other words. Without asking any of the questions which rose to their lips the men leaped to do his bidding.

In a few seconds the powerful canvas-topped truck was trembling to the beat of the motor, and the pilot clambered in beside the driver. With cut-out open they rolled swiftly across the

field, through the opening in the fence, and then down the road with the chauffeur's foot holding the accelerator to the floor.

Broughton maintained his silence, and the driver, after a few surreptitious glances at him out of the corner of his eye, decided not to start conversation. As they passed through the village, dust-clouds billowing up behind, Broughton's steady eyes watched the faces of the people on the street closely. There was no way for them to know what had happened, and yet there was a certain eager interest in the big truck and its passengers which was very obvious. Lounging men pointed at it, and women looked out of windows curiously. The gradually forming theory in his mind was being borne out by the available evidence, so far.

Two miles outside of Blaney he saw the two De Havilands which had escaped the disaster scudding homeward above the hills. As the truck rumbled through the outskirts of town a fast-traveling car coming toward them slowed down.

"Get ready to stop!" yelled the flyer, and the driver eased up obediently.

As the two motors drew abreast he saw that Mr. Day was the only occupant of the other car.

"I was just on my way out there," shouted the bespectacled Kentuckian as his car came to a stop. "Lieutenant Gobel's leg was broken and Sergeant Reade, with him, was killed. The others are all right."

The man's thin face was twitching with excitement, and his eyes gleamed behind the big glasses. For a moment Jim was silent. The driver's low "Good God!" came vaguely to his ears.

"Where are the busted flyers?" Jim inquired gently, his equable manner especially noticeable in comparison with the poorly restrained nervousness of the others.

"Gobel in the hospital, the sergeant at Cory the undertaker's, and the others at the places they're living, getting dry clothes," was the jerky response.

"I'll see Harry Flanders around at Sutton's, then," nodded Broughton.

"Think I'd better go on over and get the other boys?"

"They'd appreciate it, probably. Nolan goes on as O. D. today, but Seaton'll want to come back. So long—see you later."

Both cars jerked forward simultaneously, as though possessed with the spirit of their drivers. Broughton instructed the driver where to go, and in a few moments drew up in front of the mayor's impressive domicile. Apparently every one in town had heard of the accidents, for the Army truck tearing along the streets was the focal point of all eyes and was oppressed with no traffic regulations whatever.

The distraught captain was striding up and down the drawing room, fuming to the sympathetic mayor and his portly, commonplace wife. He whirled on Broughton as that unexcited young gentleman entered.

"You've heard about Gobel and Reade?" he asked tersely.

"Uh, huh. Howdy, folks. Harry, were all three of those props shot off?"

"Absolutely!" replied the captain, his fist landing emphatically on the piano.

"Where's Novmeyer, the armament sergeant?"

"Around at headquarters. Why?"

"Because I know and Novmeyer knows that when those ships left Goddard Field every one of those C. C. gears was in perfect shape. I tested 'em myself."

"I know you did."

The solemn mayor and his wife whose eyes showed signs of weeping, had their eyes on Broughton, sensing some definite idea behind his deliberate words. The stoical pilot had a quieting effect on Flanders who stopped his pacing and stood facing the man he had known so long and so well.

"Unless Novmeyer has fiddled with them, somebody else has. And Nov-

meyer hasn't. Three props don't go flooey for nothing."

"Of course. But who?"

"As a detective I'm undoubtedly a good crap-shooter, but I've got an idea to investigate that may tell us just which one of Kerryville's playful citizens did it."

"It must have been one of those visitors yesterday," stormed Flanders. "MacNeil probably let 'em wander all over everything and never kept an eye on 'em. If he did—"

"He probably was careless," admitted Broughton absently. "But it don't take but a few seconds for an expert to put one on the blink. Mr. Sutton, where could I find a list of Kerryville men who served in the war?"

"Over at the county building. Why?"

"I'd like to look 'em up and see what they did. I—"

"There's an honor roll for the county there giving all the details about every soldier. I'll take you down. What are you driving at, anyway?"

"I'm aiming to put my finger on the exact man that jimmed those gears, killed Reade and tried to bump off the others. Let's go, eh?"

"How that list will do that I don't know," said the puzzled mayor as he led the way, followed by Flanders, who was just as much at sea.

The limousine sped townward swiftly, and in five minutes was rolling through the small park which surrounded the county court-house.

The honor roll of Hale County's soldier-heroes was a huge, ornate poster which decorated the entire side-wall of one of the rooms. Hale was a sparsely populated county, so it was natural that less than two hundred names be on the list. Blaney was the only town above a thousand people in the territory.

"Which are the Kerryville men?" enquired Broughton, running his eye over the big sheet.

"The three named Kerry, and two Budwells—Jim and Garford. They're all listed alphabetically."

The Mayor and Flanders read the brief histories of these five men, along with Jim, wondering what he was seeking to find.

"Well?" inquired the captain finally.

"Read that story about Mr. Elijah Kerry once more, and notice that after being drafted into the infantry he finally lit in a machine-gun battalion and then in the 303rd Armament section, attached to the 8th Pursuit Group," said Broughton with a slow smile.

Dawning comprehension in the captain's eyes caused the smile to widen.

"Find Elijah, have Snapper tell us whether he was around yesterday afternoon or not, and we've pretty near found our man, haven't we?" he inquired softly.

He turned to Sutton.

"You see, Mr. Sutton, all three of these gears could not have gone bad unless they'd been tampered with. And the C. C. gear is a —— delicate and complicated piece of machinery. For that reason, nobody but an expert would know what fiddling with it would do, or how to go about it. On the other hand, an expert could jim one up in the twinkle of an eye.

"I knew that all these mountaineers eventually got to be gunmen of some kind during the war—sharpshooters, machine-gun men, and so forth—because they were born with a gun in one hand and a mouthful of bullets. I figured it was an open-and-shut case against some Kerryville man. It ought to be this Kerry boy. If Snapper, after seeing him, identifies him as one of the callers yesterday and proves that he had the slightest chance to use his knowledge, I think we've got proof enough to go ahead."

The mayor nodded soberly. A group of curious men hovered around the doorway of the room where the men were talking, not quite daring to enter. Sutton lowered his voice.

"You're right, I guess," he admitted, his fleshy face troubled. "I'll swear, this town is feeling as bad as you boys are right now about all this trouble, and the

thought of that poor boy Reade—and Gobel—it was horrible this morning, horrible!

"But that's not what I started to say. I just about know you're right—correct down to the name of the man. And that means get him. And capturing him means trouble, for the sheriff won't get him out of Kerryville with a posse and ammunition enough to have won the Civil War."

"We'll help," stated the captain, his black eyes glinting. "When we finally locate the man we'll get him. And we'll get him good!"

"Let's find Snapper," proposed Jim, "And—"

"Wait a few minutes until I hop upstairs to headquarters and call off all activities today as a tribute to Reade. I must arrange to send an escort back with the body, too. I'll be right down."

Recruiting headquarters had been furnished the flyers on one of the upper floors, and the captain made his way toward the stairway rapidly, heedless of the swarming onlookers.

Sutton lighted a cigar and puffed it thoughtfully.

"If you're right in your reasoning, Broughton, and the sheriff starts to abstract this boy out of Kerryville, fun is sure going to be popping!" he stated.

CHAPTER VII
Who Doctored the Guns?

THEY found Snapper MacNeil at the home of Mr. Grady, a leading merchant of Blaney, whose wife Snapper was regaling with a lurid story of recent developments.

When he had ensconced himself in the car and the party had started on their way to Kerryville, the captain, who had been unusually silent for a space, turned to MacNeil, who was in the back seat with Broughton.

"Snapper, did you personally conduct all the visitors around the ships yesterday?" he inquired.

MacNeil, on the alert for any attempt to blame him with the disaster of the morning, leaped to his own defense.

"Absolutely!" he returned with quick truculence. "That is, either I did it or assigned Rickert," he qualified.

"Sure?" persisted the captain quietly, his eyes watching the unfolding road ahead.

Snapper's face began to flush below the freckles.

"Of course I'm sure!" he burst forth vehemently. "If you think—"

"Was there any one who looked over the ships while you were, say, fifteen or twenty feet away?"

The quick reply which rose to MacNeil's lips was frozen as he thought of that first young mountaineer.

"W—well," he faltered. "The first man—I was a little ways away, but—"

The captain turned in his seat and his eyes, slightly sunken from the strain of the ill-fated trip, blazed into his junior's.

"Exactly. What did this man look like?"

Snapper described the young fellow haltingly, conscious that once again he was "in wrong," as he furiously told himself.

"Sounds a lot like 'Lije Kerry, although it might fit one or two other hellions over there," observed Mr. Sutton over his shoulder.

The captain hunched down in his seat wearily. The position of commanding officer of a recruiting party which had already killed a civilian and a mechanic, injured a flyer and lost three ships completely was far from a pleasant one.

"Why in the world, Snapper, did you take the slightest chance of dirty work?" he asked slowly, apparently more in sorrow than anger.

"How should I know?" blazed the flyer. "I was watching him all the time. I—"

"Don't use that tone to me, sir!" flared the C. O., twisting in his seat until his

suddenly fierce eyes burned into MacNeil's.

"It was one chance in a thousand that the man would have any opportunity to get in any funny work, and I know it, but under present conditions, for which you are entirely responsible in most ways, that small chance was too great to take. And I don't want any more of your impertinence when I ask you a question or give you an order. Understand?"

For a moment their eyes locked, then Snapper's fell. Hot tears rose to the surface, and in utter misery he slumped back against the cushions.

"If the man you have described proves to be Elijah Kerry we've got the man who scrambled those C. C. gears," came Broughton's even tones like oil on troubled water. "There was a man of that name who was in the Air Service armament section during the war. Mr. Sutton will point him out to us, and if he was one of your callers yesterday we've got evidence enough for an arrest, which will give us a chance to third degree or bluff the truth out of him."

"We may not find him," said Sutton, uncomfortable at having been forced to be a bystander at the recent disciplinary outburst. "He's liable to be back in the hills somewhere shoveling the festive mash."

Broughton grinned slowly.

"I wouldn't mind about a pint of the white mule," he informed the party. "Before this trip ends I'm liable to be a hophead."

Flanders laughed and then sobered quickly.

"It sure is a darb," he said, as the car came in sight of Kerryville. "Some way or other the two people killed—the little girl and poor Reade—were such innocent bystanders."

"It's a funny thing, Mr. Sutton, but when any 'expendable pilot' is killed in the Air Service it's looked at, even by his friends, as too bad but partly to be expected," Jim told the mayor. "Whenever one of the boys or a civilian gets it, it seems an awful lot worse, even though we don't know them at all. You see, it's our business to fly, while they—"

"Aren't included," nodded Sutton. "I can see your point. You fellows are in it with your eyes wide open, so to speak. Well, we'll slow down now and see what we can see."

At a snail's pace the car crawled down the street, Sutton's eyes keeping a constant watch. MacNeil was lying back in the seat, silent as the grave, his sullen face displaying no interest whatever in the proceedings.

Sutton stopped in front of one of the stores, where three men whittled and spit tobacco juice in fairly even measure.

"Morning!" he greeted them cheerfully.

It was returned with fitting reserve, and without cessation of either the tobacco chewing or the carpentry.

"You don't know where I could find Bill Kerry, do you?"

"Huntin'," returned the oldest of the three, lifting his eyes for a moment.

"Maybe Lije or Bide would do. I wanted to arrange to have some seed corn brought over to my house, and I always trade with Bill. Is Lije around? I hate to bother Bide after his bereavement."

The three Kentuckians, who acted as though they were recuperating from some strenuous effort, gave this question due consideration.

"Bide's up thar t' th' house. Lije's huntin'."

"Be back tonight, I suppose."

"Or t'morrer," nodded Sutton's informant.

"Thanks."

The car rolled away. Sutton turned his head and grinned.

"That old scoundrel Bill, and Lije too, are hunting the elusive dollar by running the wherewithal through the still," he said. "We'll have to come back I guess—"

"By Godfrey, there comes Lije now!"

Wandering up the village street came an undersized figure in colorless shirt

and tattered khaki trousers, holding a gun in the crook of his arm.

Snapper leaned forward, watching the man closely. A big straw hat, woven coarsely, shaded the youth's face a great deal, but at fifty feet the last doubt left him.

"That's the first man that came out yesterday," he said, and relaxed into the seat again.

Broughton's eyes were glowing softly.

"I guess that settles it," he drawled. "Now let's get the sheriff."

Sutton, without a word, turned the car around and started homeward.

"I wonder whether those fellows in front of the store were lying or whether Lije just happened back?" he asked oratorically. "Either might be the truth."

Conversation was desultory on the way back. MacNeil maintained his sullen aloofness, and vouchsafed not a word. The other men were reasonably busy with their thoughts—the captain of the report he must make immediately to the adjutant general and the camp commander; Broughton of the red-headed young firebrand next to him and his persistent "or'neryness," as the border man expressed it. He wondered whether MacNeil could be saved from himself—whether he had sense enough to want to be. It had been a streak of mighty hard luck for the youngster, made seven-fold more difficult by his own refusal ever to admit he was wrong. He imagined that every man's hand was against him, was Broughton's accurate judgment, and was proceeding to do his best to make his fancied isolation real.

They drew up to the court-house, only to find that the sheriff was gone for the day to bring back a criminal who had been apprehended in Cleary, forty miles away. He would be back that evening.

"I'll pick you gentlemen up at seven thirty and take you around to Watkins' house," offered the mayor.

"Fine. Now I must go up to the office and start the reports and things through," said the captain, and promptly disappeared.

MacNeil refused Broughton's suggestion of a movie, and took himself off in morose silence.

"Too bad," said Sutton, shaking his head.

"He just won't get wise to himself," agreed Jim. "Well, I guess I'll drop over to the hospital and shed a few tears over Gobel."

"A mere broken leg doesn't mean much to a flyer, does it?" inquired Sutton quizzically.

"Oh, it's not as bad as it might be, and then again it's a lot worse than it could be," grinned the pilot. "So long."

MACNEIL did not see fit to join the party that evening, for when the car called at the Gradys' and the maid gave them notice that he was off to the movie with his host and hostess and Miss Grady, a saucy Irish damsel who possessed almost as many freckles as the army man.

It was not important that he be present, but instinctively the three other men did not like the idea of his absence without any preliminary notice. It indicated to them all that the best interests of the expedition were not foremost in the young flyer's mind. It had the effect of crystallizing the captain's determination that insofar as Goddard Field and the 87th Squadron were concerned, MacNeil was through.

The sheriff dwelt in a small frame house gleaming whitely against the green of a small lawn. Blaney, while a city, still maintained the aspect of a rambling country town. With the exception of business blocks in the center of the town, there were no solidly built stretches, and four-fifths of the business district was confined to two parallel avenues and three or four cross-streets. A majority of the houses, like the sheriff's, were small, well-kept cottages.

"Watkins knows his business, and knows the mountain people," Sutton told them as they started for the house, set well back from the sidewalk. "Whatever suggestions he may have to make will

come pretty near to being gospel. He got his training on the Louisville police force, although he was born about thirty miles from here."

Watkins himself opened the door, although the flyers would have scarcely suspected that the short, ludicrously fat man could be the representative of the law in that desolate county had Sutton not performed the introductions immediately. They were ushered into a small parlor with horsehair furniture, crocheted tidies, and humorous old tintypes forming the chief furnishings.

The sheriff appraised his visitors with small, twinkling eyes, set in a face like a ruddy, full moon. One of them winked fleetingly, at times. It took Flanders and Broughton a few moments to size up this individualistic habit of the optic for a nervous ailment. In fact, Jim returned the first one.

G-glad to know you, gents," said the sheriff in a halting drawl. His voice was deep and throaty. "Set down."

"George, we're here on bad business, I'm afraid," said Sutton, plunging into the matter at hand immediately. "It means that you've got to tie into Kerryville at last."

"Pshaw, ye d-don't say," was the easy reply. "How come?"

"You've heard about those three airplanes going bad out at the lake today, destroying them all, killing one man and breaking another's leg?"

Watkins nodded, sitting motionless with his hands resting on the arms of the huge chair which held his bulk.

"Well, here's what we've found out. Maybe Lieutenant Broughton here had better tell you—he knows more about the technical end of things than I do."

Watkins' bright little eyes roved to Jim, who immediately started a brief, straightforward statement of the facts. He mentioned how impossible it would be for any one who was not an expert in such matters to have tampered with the C. C. gears, and what they had discovered about Lije Kerry.

"Of course, two ships being under water and the third cracked into sawdust, we can't prove just what he did to them, but as something of an armament man myself I have a good idea," he concluded. "What we believe is this—that Lije Kerry tampered with them, and that the other visitors were merely a blind to make it impossible, as they thought, to pin the crime on any individual, and that the combined facts of his knowing aerial armament, having been around the ships, and then the ships themselves acting as they did make suitable cases for arrest and at least an attempt to extort a confession. What do you think?"

Watkins considered this query leisurely.

"I hate to say it, but I think you're right," he drawled, his fat face wrinkling humorously.

"I don't envy you your job," stated Sutton.

"It's like to be tol'able delicate," admitted the sheriff.

He shifted his mammoth bulk slightly and raised his eyes to the ceiling.

"It was bound to come sooner or later," he opined equably. "That thar Kerryville is a cancer on the face o' the earth, and I know it and everybody knows it. Some of 'em not so bad, but a lot of 'em are snakes. It's been a case o' not attemptin' to do somethin' we knew we couldn't do, see? If you gave me two thousand men fer a year, I couldn't clean the 'shiners out o' Hale County—how's a man goin' t' find all the hidden stills in them mountains, clean 'em, and then keep on findin' 'em in new places?

"And lately that's all they been doin', but o' course we can't let nothin' like this git by. It's their first outbreak, really, in nigh onto three years."

His husky tones ceased, and he appeared to be ruminating placidly. Broughton liked the calm old mountaineeer tremendously. He had an idea that once his mighty frame started on a hunt he would be a hard man to stop.

"How many people know about your suspicionin' Lije?" he asked presently.

"Only the three of us here, and Lieutenant MacNeil, who identified him as one of the people who had been around the ships yesterday."

"'Spose ye could see t'to it that there don't nobody else git to know?"

"I guess we can all keep a secret," smiled the captain. "In fact, we had an idea the fewer in the thing the better."

"C-correct," smiled the sheriff, folding his hands over the rounded expanse of his stomach. "Then we'll just set a day or two so's any idee they get over thar regardin' steps o' retaliation 'll kind o' be lulled, and then I'll mosey over thar, sneak up on Lije from behind, and see whut I can d-do."

"Don't want any of our help, eh?" inquired the captain.

"No. Ye see, practically the hull o' Kerryville 'd fight if they knowed. Nobody'd git out o' thar alive, and then the hull town—menfolks, that is—would scatter in the hills and there wouldn't none of 'em be caught 'cept by accident. So I'd appreciate it, gents, if ye'd k-keep a close mouth."

"That's the least we can do for you," declared Sutton. "Thanks, George. We'll leave the whole thing up to you. If there is anything we can do, however—"

"The more help the more trouble," chuckled the sheriff, his body shaking like jelly. "Good-night, gents."

"Well, I hope it turns out to be as much of a picnic as he seems to think," laughed Jim as they got into the car.

"George don't worry much," Sutton told them. "He saves all his energy for the job itself. Which is a pretty good way, after all."

CHAPTER VIII
Watkins Gets His Man

THE sheriff waited two days before taking any steps to apprehend young Kerry, adjudging that length of time necessary for the lulling of any suspicious watchfulness.

Those days were full ones for the Army men. Snapper gave his acrobatic exhibition on the first day, to the amazement of the town and his own great personal satisfaction. The sensation that his upside-down work created helped him to forget, to a certain extent, his position among his fellows.

That his exile was a more or less self-made affair he refused to admit. He had brooded self-pityingly until he had worked himself into the belief that through jealousy or otherwise every man's hand was against him, and that they were all on the alert to blame their troubles on him. In every smile he saw veiled contempt; in the slightest of chaffing remarks he read something derogatory to himself and his ability. Consequently he kept by himself a great deal, and swaggered around in a studied attempt to show everybody that his opinions mattered not to him, Snapper MacNeil. When he became the town-talk through his acrobatic exhibition, thanks to Jim Broughton's coaching, this spirit in him was intensified. He had won back some measure of self-esteem, and felt that at last he was in a position to stand by himself in the eyes of Blaney.

Inevitably the other airmen felt this spirit of bravado, and Snapper was rapidly succeeding in making himself as real a pariah as his imagination had already constructed.

"MacNeil's foolishness is getting pretty old to me," stated Bob Nolan judicially, and every one agreed with him.

The captain's resolution that the youngster must be got rid of was strengthened by almost every word and action of MacNeil's during those days. He was belligerent, moody, disagreeable, self-satisfied.

Aside from personal relationships with Snapper, the recruiting party seemed to have struck a period of smooth sailing, and gratifying success was their portion. Blaney turned out for the flying exhibitions, and hundreds of people ex-

claimed in astonishment when, gathered in the town square, they heard the buzz of radio received from the ship and then heard Captain Flanders, at the wireless telephone, direct the movements of a ship three thousand feet in the air.

The tanned, clear-eyed enlisted men mixed around with the men of the town, their quartet sang at the Rotary Club luncheon, and at noon-meetings and other places their straightforward talk about the satisfaction a red-blooded young man who wanted to learn a new profession, could find in the Air Service found ready response. Recruits were coming in a steadily increasing stream.

Only Captain Flanders, Broughton and MacNeil knew of the clue which had turned up regarding the wrecked ships, and they waited as patiently as might be for the slow-moving sheriff to take action. Both Broughton and Flanders had sternly impressed upon MacNeil the necessity of strict secrecy, for both realized what an almost irresistible temptation to Snapper it would be to spread a new sensation like that around the town.

Finally Sutton told them that the sheriff, with two deputies, had started for Kerryville to round up Lije. MacNeil was officer of the day—due to Gobel's injury, and the captain's exemption from tour of duty, the O. D. assignment came frequently.

"George'll be moseying in quietly and peacefully in a few hours," the mayor assured them, his round face beaming jovially.

Meanwhile Watkins was doing his best to attain to his desire with as much quietude and peace as the law allowed. His two deputies he left parked in some woods a mile outside of Kerryville, close to the main road. They were to function as bodyguards after the bagging of the game.

The sheriff, astride his deliberate mount "Alexander," then took his way into the woods. He detoured Kerryville, working higher and higher up along the mountain as he went. There was but one small still on that mountain—most of them were farther back in the woods. The sheriff took care not to get near that still, although he was well-known and felt reasonably sure that he would not be the recipient of a bullet unless he first carelessly committed some act. However, he was not at all anxious that his secretive presence become known to any resident of Kerryville before the task in hand was accomplished.

It was only two hours after dawn when Watkins finally reached a point of vantage where his eyes could sweep the straggling, ugly village below. He tied Alexander, lighted his pipe, and drew forth a pair of battered field glasses. Any figure appearing on the street below was a target for his glasses. He kept a special watch on Bide Kerry's house, the one-time home of the little girl-victim of MacNeil's plane. Lije, a younger brother of Bide's, lived there.

It was a reasonably certain chance that sooner or later Lije would wander away from town, bound either on a hunting trip or to take his trick at a still. And Watkins had no mind to beard the lions in their den if there was a chance of catching them on neutral territory, for the mountaineer believes that the first principle of safety is keeping outside the hands of the law. His resistance slumps when once the dreaded "gover'mint" has him in its clutches. When he plays poker he prefers to fight it out before the draw, mostly.

It was a little aften ten o'clock when Watkins finally discerned the tall, stooping figure of Bide Kerry and the stunted form of the younger man emerge from the house and slouch down the street. They carried rifles under their arms, and proceeded leisurely. A little way outside of town they turned from the road and struck up a footpath. Trees made the sheriff's surveillance only periodic for the next few minutes, but he soon made sure of their route. This being determined, he mounted Alexander and started briskly to cut them off.

He crossed the dim trail they were following in a few moments, and hid the

horse in the bushes. He took up post behind two close-growing trees, and waited impassively, easing the strain on his trunk-like legs by sitting on a rock.

In a few moments the two men, Bide leading, came into view fifty yards ahead. Watkins waited until they had reduced the distance by half, and then stepped from his covert with cat-like quickness. Two pistols covered the slack-jawed mountaineers.

"Drop them guns, and throw up yer hands!" he commanded, his little eyes boring into the elder Kerry's unflinchingly.

It was a tribute to the sheriff's reputation for determination plus straight shooting that the two rifles fell to the ground promptly.

"Lije, I want you fur tamperin' with the machine-gun gearin' on them Gover'mint airyplanes, thereby causin' the death o' one man and pretty near of the hull lot of 'em," he announced calmly as he walked toward his captives.

"What d'ye mean?" asked Bide horsely.

His brother's eyes darted around like a cornered beast's. To the keen-eyed sheriff the man was definitely branded guilty by his own actions.

"Jest whut I say," he answered, keeping his men covered as he kicked the rifles one side.

"Ye ain't got no evidence!" Lije burst forth, his face white. "We'll git ye fur this! I ain't—"

"Ye'll find out all about evidence up to Blaney. We just been waitin' to git ye because we didn't want no trouble. Ye was seen tamperin' with 'em that day ye visited the ships, and ye're the only man in the mountains knows anything about them things. Stand back, Lije, and keep yer hands up!"

The younger man's eyes were craven as he obediently backed a few paces, but in Bide's there raged a terrible wrath. He stood wordless, shaking a trifle as Watkins quickly stripped his pockets of shells.

"Now change places boys, while I search Lije," ordered Watkins.

With gun in his prisoner's side and his watchful eyes darting often to the silent brother the sheriff extracted all the shells from Lije's pockets. He then ejected the shells from the rifles.

"Bide, ye can go and take the two rifles," he said. "And listen. I got Lije this way when I could o' sent a gang o' deputies right to the house, and probably shot it out with half o' Kerryville. Then ye'd all been in trouble, and as man to man ye can take it as gospel that after any more gun fights with you Kerrys there ain't goin' t' be any more Kerryville. I got some deputies down the line a ways to help me take Lije t' Blaney. Bide, don't you git no fool ideas in yer head and git up a gang to git Lije back. If ye do—ye'll be through for good. Come on, Lije."

Without a word the tall, stooping Bide Kerry picked up the guns and disappeared down the trail at a loose-jointed run.

Watkins mounted, and wheeled Alexander around.

"Walk ahead, Lije, and walk fast, straight along the side o' the hill. And I don't need t' remind ye that I'll shoot at the first crooked move ye make. Git along!"

A half-mile from the place where the two deputies were waiting the young Kentuckian screwed up his courage to the point where he risked an attempt to escape. The woodgrowth was particularly thick—luxuriantly growing bushes came to a man's shoulders, and at frequent intervals through the undergrowth sturdy tree trunks, provided possible shelter from bullets.

Here would be the right spot for the get-away, and Lije made a few lightning-like calculations. In a moment he was ready—and in another he moved. He made a lightning-like leap for the thicket and lunged sideways into the undergrowth.

(To Be Concluded)

Sky-Trap

By Frederick L. Nebel

Author of "Outcast Ships," "Sky-High Nerve," etc.

"Fly or your partner dies!" was their ultimatum. But Bill Gales, Yank sky-eater, couldn't be bluffed—and McGill had a wild ace in the hole.

WHEN Gales and McGill left Shanghai that afternoon they had a particular destination in mind. They intended to pull a casual non-stop flight of a little under fifteen hundred miles to Manila in the Philippines. They figured to do it in something like twenty hours, wherefore they loaded sufficient fuel into their battered monoplane *Redwing,* and by way of personal sustenance took on a few sandwiches and a thermos bottle of hot coffee.

They were not out to make a record flight. China was beginning to grate on their nerves. Their notoriety was of such a nature that many ports made it uncomfortable for them whenever they landed, and their names, having accrued a somewhat legendary flavor, were used by innumerable Chinese mothers as a means toward making their unruly offspring behave.

Gales took the red plane up, at the controls in the after cockpit. McGill sat in the front cockpit, behind his covered Vickers machine gun, looking over the starboard coaming, watching the city dwindle as the *Redwing* thundered and circled for altitude. At fifteen hundred feet Gales drew back on the stick and leveled its flight. His keen blue eyes passed back and forth over the dash, noting in sequence from left to right, the tachometer, the oil-pressure and oil-temperature gauges, the turn-and-bank indicator, the air speed and altitude meters. Everything was working with splendid precision. The twelve-cylinder Hispano motor roared steadily, smoothly, and the wind whistled and drummed through the struts and guys. He settled back more firmly, gave her the gun, and threw a look down and back to see Shanghai dropping rapidly from sight. The monoplane, scarred from snout to tail by various machine-gun encounters high in the blue, was doing ninety miles an hour effortlessly.

McGill turned around and grinned, and Gales grinned back. They hadn't been up for a week, and the air felt good. It was three in the afternoon, and if all went well they hoped to flop down on Manila at nine or ten next morning.

At twenty past four they wheeled low over Hangchow. Gales then set his course to southeast, turned the controls over to McGill, and worked on his charts. Dusk came at six and then darkness fell rapidly. At eight they hurtled over Foochow and Gales set the next leg for Amoy.

The stars were shining through a scud of racing clouds, and the *Redwing* was pounding due south with a beam wind from the east that rocked the plane like a ship at sea. The scud that piled across the heavens was torn and ragged, but in a short time all the ragged ends combined to blot every last star from sight, and the wind, growing in velocity, screamed and hooted about the laboring plane. The *Redwing* bounced, bounded on the air bumps, quivered in every fibre.

McGill looked around, concerned. He waved a gauntleted hand toward the murk above, and Gales nodded. Below was an empty void, black and desolate as the void above. Here and there could be seen vaguely the dim glow of a coastal town—mere patches of weak radiance glowing like fireflies in the wilderness. Even above the roar of engine and blades and the wild tenor of the wind, they heard the first baritone prelude of impending thunder. Then like a rapier maneuvered by the hand of an unseen giant, a blade of lightning impaled the night, shone for the briefest of seconds on the gypsy plane.

Then rain thrashed through the darkness, struck the plane like leaden pellets, hammered against the wings and the metal furelage, drenched the men in the cockpit. Their ceiling was limited due to the extra weight which they carried in fuel. There was nothing to do but hold everything and trust to the breaks of the game.

They could not talk. Ordinarily by rising high and throttling down to a plane's minimum air speed, they could have shouted and made themselves heard. But there was nothing ordinary about that night, and constant speed was necessary to keep headway and fight across the brutal wind that slammed in from the east.

Chaos descended from the heavens. Thunder rolled and rumbled prodigiously, boomed close overhead. Weird flashes of lightning flamed and lit up the drenched gloom, or barbed needles crackled across the clouds. The earth, the sky, were obliterated. Nothing remained but a world of howling darkness through which the *Redwing* bored steadily, life or death depending solely on the mechanical perfection of the motor.

It was a good motor—a priceless one, Gales would have said, and McGill would have supplemented that statement vigorously. Gales looked upon it as something almost human, a thing to be treated carefully, gently, considerately. It came near to having a soul. It had carried them safely over thousands of miles of country, never complaining, never balking—perhaps partly because it was Gales' custom to doctor it at the first minute symptoms of mechanical illness.

And when, after two hours of battling through the storm, there was a flash and click near at hand, Gales' breath stuck in his throat. Instinctively he gave her the gun hard, but the motor gasped like an animal choking for breath. Instinct again, or it may have been quick thinking, caused him to swing the ship into the eye of the wind. Then they were dropping.

Dimly he saw McGill's face in the gloom, and he shook his head grimly and clamped his jaw. McGill understood, crouched lower, looked between his Vickers guns and gripped the sides of the cockpit coaming. There was nothing to do but sit tight and take whatever come.

Down—down the *Redwing* skimmed on a dead stick, down into the black void beneath which lay the unyielding earth. What exactly lay there? Rocks? Paddi fields? Jungle?

The rain whipped at Gales' face, and the wind licked it off. Behind him boomed the thunder, and the lightning stabbed at the clouds. His hand was frozen on the stick, his face pale and grim, his eyes staring fixedly beyond the helmeted head of good old Mike McGill.

Was this to be the end? No time for words—no time for anything. No time to say good-bye, to grip his partner's hand. Down—down hurtled the battered gypsy of the skies.

Lights! Gales thought he saw lights, scattered about in the gloom below. That was the earth. It was rushing up at them. It leaped at them. Lights! They were lights. But what did it matter? Yet his eyes strained, and ached with the strain.

He pulled back on the stick, and a moment later the wheels struck. The plane rebounded like a rubber ball, lunged forward, struck again, rocked and heaved and dived onward like a mad bull. Then there was a crash. Something splintered, and the splinters whanged about the birdmen's heads. But the plane stopped.

It stopped half-way through somebody's house.

THERE were running figures on the ground, and the glint of sabres in lantern light. There were voices raised in indignant shouts, and several men picking several others from the debris. McGill, half-dazed, stirred and pushed off part of a table that had landed on the cockpit. Gales stirred beneath a beam, muscled it out of the way, and sat erect rubbing a streak of blood on his cheek. McGill looked around. His freckled face essayed a grin. Gales grinned too. Then they shook, while the crowd around the plane grew in size and took on all the aspects of a near riot.

"Well, Bill," said Mike, "I never expected to shake your hand again, and that ain't no bolony, either."

"Same here, Mike," replied Gales.

It was not until then, not until they had finished congratulating each other on the fact that they were still alive, that they turned their attention to the collection of sabred officers. The majority of these were Chinese, but four were white men wearing the uniforms of the Cantonese Army. One of these managed to elbow his way through the crowd. He was a spidery young man, wearing a hint of a mustache and a cap set rakishly over one ear.

"I see you are alive," he snapped, dark eyes glittering. "Get out and come down—immediately."

"Hold your horses, young feller," said McGill. "Give a guy chance to get his breath. Don't you realize we just crashed?"

"Realize!" echoed the spidery man, and waved his hand about. "You see what you have done? When you decided to land, was it necessary to pick out Headquarters? You've demolished it!"

"Keep your shirt on," recommended McGill. "Nobody decided to land. We had a short circuit or something and the motor sang a swan song and took a snooze at five-thousand feet."

"We're certainly sorry," put in Gales, forking the cockpit, "that we broke up your Headquarters." He landed beside the spidery man and kept wiping blood from his face. "It was an accident. We were bound for Manila—from Shanghai. McGill's my partner's name. I'm Gales."

There was a noticeable stir throughout the gathering, and the spidery man, preening his hint of a mustache, flexed his legs at the knees and cocked one eye shrewdly.

"Ah, ye-es!" he purred, expanding his chest. "Gales and McGill! So-so! Gales and McGill! Flyers for our enemies, the Shantung Army! So-so!"

"Your error," shot back Gales, light-

ing a cigarette. "Flying for nobody. Intended to leave this rotten country and go to Manila."

The spidery man chuckled hollowly, derisively, then abruptly snapped out of the mood and became erect, military and dark. "General Kwang Hung will see to this." He pivoted in a complete circle, looking for General Kwang Hung, who did not seem to be among those present. The spidery man spoke curtly, in Cantonese, but received only shrugs.

Then there was a groan nearby, and anxious hands reached out to extricate the embarrassed General from beneath the landing gear of the monoplane. He was heaved to his feet. It took five men to heave him, for the General was both large in height and breadth—roughly, about two hundred and thirty pounds, with most of it in the midriff. He also had several chins, and was quite bald. Mud, grime, covered his uniform and medals and his overlapping face.

"Who—what—who—what?" he kept spluttering, in passable English.

The spidery man explained briefly, rapidly, dexterously, repeating time and time again the vital fact that the men were Gales and McGill—*the* Gales and McGill.

Finally General Kwang Hung sat down heavily on a chair and for a moment watched the rain fall past the open side of the house, while half a dozen orderlies scraped the mud from his uniform.

"Spies!" he exploded at length, and his brows bent over gimlet eyes.

"Spies my eye!" sang out McGill, now down beside his partner.

The spidery man snapped, "You are addressing General Kwang Hung!"

"See if I care," replied McGill. "If I am, then *you* keep your oar out of it!"

"*I*," clipped the spidery man, "am Captain Wolrabe."

"You're," said McGill, "a lot of applesauce."

Gales thought it high time to come to the fore. Mike was a good old soul, but too free with his tongue. Gales was the tactician of the partnership—lean and bronzed, blue-eyed, capable.

"Now look here, gentlemen," he broke in. "I've said we're mighty sorry we smashed into your Headquarters. The storm brought us down, and it's lucky no one was killed. Accidents happen. Now why hew and haw about it? If you'll lend me some men we can back the plane out and start repairing it."

"You forget," replied Captain Wolrabe, "that you are notorious not only as free lances, but as flyers for our enemy the Shantung Army. Not so long ago you destroyed forts of ours, supply trains— So-so! We do not forget."

"But," argued Gales, "that was long ago. It was fair—we killed no men—it was more than fair. It was war. But we've severed all connections. We're leaving the country."

"No, not yet," smiled Wolrabe, wickedly, and turned to speak with General Kwang Hung in Cantonese. The outcome of this extended conversation, during which Wolrabe talked most and General Kwang grunted, seemed satisfactory to the captain. He turned on the partners, beaming satanically.

"We will adjourn to another room," he said.

A moment later the two partners found themselves in a small room comfortably furnished. Captain Wolrabe and General Kwang Hung were the only others present. The general deposited his enormous bulk in a chair that groaned even as the Captain Wolrobe lit a perfumed cigarette. McGill lit a straight Virginia.

Wolrabe said, "We shall be happy to have you fly for the Cantonese Army—so-so!" His teeth shone in a mirthless grin.

"Strike me!" McGill uncorked. "I'll be swiggled."

Gales was serious. Ignoring his partner's characteristic outburst, he cut Wolrabe with a hard stare. "You've got us wrong," he said. "As I said before, we're flying for nobody. Our one

and only aim in life right now is to get out of China."

"Uh-rump!" coughed General Kwang. "My Chief-of-Staff the Captain Wolrabe is most correct. You will fly for me. Captain, explain at length. My nerves still require contentment, it is so."

"There'll be no use in going into detail," persisted Gales. "We are not going to fly for anybody, least of all the Cantonese."

"Attend!" snapped Wolrabe, his eyes glittering, his nostrils twitching. "Enough of your confounded American insolence! General Kwang has decreed that you will fly."

"To the devil with General Kwang!" exploded McGill.

Captain Wolrabe sucked in a breath. General Kwang waved a beefy hand. "Proceed, Captain. The Irishman talks much but says little."

Gales had kicked McGill in the shins as recommendation for silence. McGill gnawed his lip and choked on his temper.

Wolrabe, tilting his chin on high, looked down along his nose with a superior air.

"You will fly," he said, quietly but acridly. "I shall tell you a few things. Unwittingly or otherwise you have landed in a secret and camouflaged camp. There are here six planes, four of which are bombers. All are two-seaters. We have but five experienced pilots, and one of them is at present seriously ill. We are planning an air raid to the northward and you men will fly two of our planes."

McGill was incorrigible. "Another Aesop fable!" he cracked.

"Silence!" bit off Captain Wolrabe. "Comprehend? You will fly—both of you! Hereafter, perhaps, you will choose other landing places besides a hidden Cantonese camp. That is final. Each of you will drive a plane from the forward cockpit. Behind you will sit a man who will drop bombs and blow off your head if either of you moves the wrong way."

Gales' blue eyes snapped. "By George, Captain, you can't do that! We'll not go in for any wholesale slaughter. No, sir! By jingoes, no!"

"But yes," smirked Wolrabe. "Meanwhile your plane will be repaired. When the flight is over, you will be permitted to leave. Now you will be placed in separate rooms." He rang a bell and four guards trooped in. In a trice the partners were marched off to individual rooms.

MORNING came, and Gales looked out of a small window and saw the sun flame in the east. He saw six planes arranged beneath canvas painted to match the ground. There were several small buildings and a few tents. There was an aerial suspended above one of the smaller buildings, and Gales assumed that this was the wireless station. Nearby was a small waterway.

An orderly brought in breakfast. Gales ate in silence. He was not permitted to see McGill. Later Captain Wolrabe entered.

"You have decided to acquiesce?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it," said Gales. "I'll not go on any bombing flight."

"Your companion is no less stubborn," replied Wolrabe. "Time will tell, however."

He went out and at noon showed up again, with the same question. Again Gales shook his head. Twice during the afternoon Wolrabe paid his visits, urging, threatening, wheedling—but to no avail. At dusk Wolrabe came again, and this time he looked mean.

"We have come to a decision," he said. "Your companion will remain behind as hostage. You will fly. We have just thrown him into a dungeon, and there he will remain with the rats until you return. If you refuse now—one of our men found a poisonous snake this afternoon." He grinned. "We may drop it into the dungeon."

"You pups!" snapped Gales.

"You will fly—now?"

Gales cracked fist into palm.

"Your companion's life hangs in the balance," resumed Wolrabe. "You fly or he dies. I hope I am clear."

"You blasted renegade!" Gales hurled at him.

"No matter. You will fly?"

"You've got me cornered," nodded Gales grimly. "I'll fly."

"So-so," grinned Wolrabe. "Such is the penalty of fidelity."

"A thing you know nothing about."

"Quite true. War is a business with me. Much loot. So-so!" He flexed his legs. "At eleven tonight you take off." He stalked to the door, opened it, smiled thinly. "Until then, ta-ta!"

"Wait. Where's the flight going?"

Wolrabe arched an eyebrow. "We intend bombing Shanghai." With that he went out.

Gales sank to a chair. Shanghai! White people there! They were going to bomb Shanghai in the dark!

"Oh, Lord!" he breathed.

AT five minutes to eleven Gales walked out of the room like a man in a trance. Beside him walked Captain Wolrabe. Six planes squatted in the gloom of the broad field. One or two motors were already warming up. Gales was led to the second plane from the left, a big, twelve-cylinder biplane. A man stood there idly smoking a cigarette.

"This is Sergeant Seong," said Wolrabe. "He will ride behind you."

"With pleasure," grinned Sergeant Seong, tapping his pistol.

The plane bristled with machine guns. A pair of them for the front cockpit, and one for the rear. Another man came over—a short, square white man.

"This," said Wolrabe, "is the flight commander, Lieutenant Skone."

Skone gave out brief instructions, and then looked at his strap watch. "Ready, now. Six planes. Good. We can fight any combat unit that may cross our path." He strode off briskly.

Divested of every weapon, even down to a small pocket knife, Gales was ordered into the front cockpit. Once in, Sergeant Seong came up to lean over the coaming. Quickly he strapped the safety belt about Gales, but instead of the customary buckle there were two brass rings. With a grin, Seong connected these with a heavy lock and snapped it shut.

"Captain Wolrabe has the key," he leered. "When you get back, it will be opened."

"Suppose we crash," ventured Gales.

"I have a parachute," said Seong. "I will jump."

"And I'll just flop, eh?" gritted Gales. "All right, pile in. Six planes, eh?"

"Yes," nodded Seong. "Our pilot who was ill has offered to fly."

Six planes in a dark row, all motors roaring. Gales warmed his motor, watched the dials on the dash. The plane was new, and a beauty, air-cooled and powerful. It was a dual control affair. Above, the stars shone, but no moon.

Captain Skone's plane bumped forward. Gales received a prod in the back. He roared his motor, depressed the elevators on the tail. Then his crate rocked forward. Skone was already on the wing. Gales was next. He cleared a small patch of forest, yanked back on his stick and zoomed. Up into the night sky he climbed. The others followed, and at fifteen hundred feet they fell into flight formation.

Gales settled back, looked around. Skone was on his left. A bright blue plane was on his right. Somehow, way down inside him, Gales felt that he never could go through with this, that he could not bring himself to join in the bombing of Shanghai. Even before starting he had looked forward to pulling some stunt and getting out of it. But the belt that held him in the cockpit, fastened with a padlock, had sealed those ardent hopes.

He looked around, saw dimly the hooded face of the bomber in the rear

cockpit, the teeth that bared in a smirk. Seong had a 'chute. In a pinch he could jump. Gales had no 'chute. He was trapped—trapped in the sky.

He swore softly, to himself, and his eyes glared at the dials on the dash. His ear listened to the sweet rhythm of the motor. The wind hooted through the struts, twanged off the guy wires. Below, far below, the dark wilderness slept. Overhead the stars winked at him, it seemed mockingly.

He looked across to the left and saw Skone's signal. Skone was rising higher. Gales passed along the signal and then drew back on his stick. They went up to five thousand feet, and Gales soon saw the reason why. Far below were the lights of a city. That was probably Foochow. Foochow slept on all ignorant of the six planes that passed above.

Then Foochow was behind, a dim pale blur in the darkness. But Skone remained high. Other towns were below constantly, but the mists from rivers and rice fields were rising and obscuring them.

Gales moved impatiently. He wondered about Mike. This was not the first time Mike was a pawn in yellow hands. It might be the last. Gales shuddered. Reckless, red-haired Mike. Gales tried to visualize a man fighting a poisonous snake in a dark dungeon, and got a bad taste in his mouth.

That belt. If only they had not locked it on. Without it, he might stand a chance. But now—trapped—trapped in the cockpit, with a man behind him ready to kill—with five other hostile planes if he should attempt a trick.

"But," he muttered behind clenched teeth, "I can't bomb Shanghai! Think of the people there—white and yellow alike." He thought of them. War and fighting for one's country was different. Yet there was McGill, his life in the balance.

Gales writhed in his seat. He looked to the stars for help. It was foolish, of course. The stars only kept on winking. The plane jolted over a series of air bumps, and the wires creaked, the wings rocked lazily. The motor roared steadily, superbly. The pointers on the dials vibrated.

Looking backward, Gales only saw the smirking teeth of the sergeant; the rest of his face was a shadow; the tight-fitting helmet gave the head a skull-like appearance. Gales looked off to his right. There was the blue plane, and beyond it the other three. Despite the racket of his own plane, there was about this flight something like the dread serenity of death. Six ghosts wheeling through the night.

What time was it? Gales felt inside his cover-alls, pulled out a big watch made of gun-metal—cheap but made for hard-knocks. The illuminated dial showed the hour to be two a.m. More than half-way. Something had to be done! . . .

His hand closed over the watch. Could he spin down upon the next town and wireless ahead to Shanghai to beware? His heart leaped, but it was too much to hope for. But he was coming to the point where he knew that he never would join in the bombing of that city. He would take a long chance. . . .

He unscrewed the dial from his watch and broke the glass disk in two. It took time, but he succeeded. Using the ragged edge of one piece, he started sawing at his safety belt. Fifteen minutes passed before the belt parted.

Gales leaned back, taking a long breath. He looked around at Seong, and again saw the crooked grin. He set his jaw, turned his eyes to the fore, looked at Skone sailing on his left, at the blue plane on his right.

Then he turned again to Seong, and pointed downward. Seong did not understand, but Gales kept pointing downward nevertheless. After a while Seong took his binoculars and craned his neck over the coaming, apparently wondering what it was that Gales saw below.

As a matter of fact, Gales hadn't seen a thing. His stick was set. He was all primed. He twisted up quickly, gently,

leaned over and crashed his fist against Seong's face. Seong went limp, lost his binoculars. Gales frantically unbuckled the safety-belt, hauled Seong to the coaming, took the man's revolver. Seong was coming to, and by this time Gales was planted in the after cockpit.

"Jump!" he shouted at the Chinese. "Now use your 'chute!"

HE gave Seong a shove. The man slipped overside, slid along the lower wing and popped off into space. A few seconds later his 'chute opened.

Gales meanwhile had buckled on the safety belt. He now had the plane to himself, and a machine-gun to boot. But there was trouble apparent in the flight. He did not wait to make sure. He gave her the gun hard and yanked back on the stick. There were clouds up above, and maybe he could lose himself in them.

The flight formation immediately went to pot. Skone zoomed and chased Gales up the air, and the latter bored into the area of cloud banks. He made a bank and left turn and shot out into the starlight. For a brief interval he was alone, but then two planes came screaming out of the clouds and opened fire. They had seen the parachute open, and were determined to annihilate the man who had tricked them.

Gales zoomed and pulled his crate into an Immelmann, and in so doing almost smashed head-on with a third plane that seemed to have come from nowhere. This plane opened fire, but missed completely, and like the eagle he was Gales swooped for that plane and caught it broadside with his first machine-gun fire. A sheet of livid, ghastly flame billowed in the night, and the plane hurtled earthward.

Gales wheeled off on his ear, screaming down the wind. His gun hammered at one plane coming on his left flank. Another plane was coming up on his right flank. Bullets slammed along the fuselage. Gales saw the starboard coaming of the front cockpit torn off by a row of bullets, and thanked his stars he wasn't sitting there. The next instant the right corner of his windshield was lifted away, and a stray shot, whanging by his ear, crashed the turn-and-bank indicator on the dashboard.

It was much too hot for comfort. Gales had to dive. He did. His stick went forward, the tail came up and the plane swooped. But not far. Gales sideslipped recklessly, dug into the air and tore along almost on his neck. Righted, he howled for altitude, and saw, above and on the left, two guns spitting at each other. He almost chuckled. They were getting mixed up in regards to the plane they were after. Maybe, he mused, if he played a crafty game, they might eventually shoot one another down, all of them.

His teeth clicked as another part of his windshield was lifted away. Another plane coming down on his quarter again. Gales zoomed mightily, turned a somersault, twisted out of it and then swung around and was promptly on that plane's tail. His machine-gun drummed viciously as he drew nearer. He thought he saw the man in the rear cockpit wilt. He drove on, drawing abreast of the plane. The man in the front cockpit was sitting erect, his head back, as though he were peacefully dozing. The posture seemed absurd in a situation such as this. Then the plane wobbled and suddenly flopped over, tumbled crazily into the gloom below.

Two gone.

Gales swung off and found himself face to face with two others. He saw the flashing of their guns, heard the bullets rip and tear through the fuselage and along the coaming. He pumped his own gun furiously, and saw one of the planes drop off. One of its men was wounded apparently, but the other got control of the stick after the plane had lost a thousand feet of altitude.

However, Gales had no time to watch that one, since the other was still very much in the fight, and trying to get on top of him. But Gales was just as de-

termined to have it the other way, and they fought higher and higher, the two of them, up to ten thousand feet and beyond, and as they passed close by Gales say by the plane's markings that it was Skone's. Skone, the flight commander.

A ripping fusillade of machine-gun fire removed what remained of Gales' windshield, and one slug left a raw red streak on his chin. It numbed, almost paralyzed his jaw. That was Skone's work, all right. Gales tipped and skittered off, then banked and turned sharply and drove for Skone's flank. His gun rattled violently. Skone banked. swooped beneath him, then turned over in an Immelmann and came back for more.

He got it. Gales hit him squarely. In a terrific exchange of gunfire, Skone's plane suddenly blew up. Gales hurtled over the burst of flame and pounded for altitude. High up, he circled. There were, he remembered, two more plains to finish, and he wondered if he could stretch his phenomenal luck and down them also.

But he saw no sign of them. He circled once more and then shot off toward the south. It struck him that perhaps they had dropped out of the fight and were now winging back to the camp to report what had happened. In that case, McGill would get his. Or maybe they were hiding behind the clouds far above and waiting to catch him unawares. This made him fling a look upward. But he saw nothing.

Driving southward, he kept looking backward and upward continually. He steered by his compass, and figured that if he could place Foochow he then could hunt around for the camp at dawn. He dropped lower, and finally flew over a city that seemed familiar. Lower, still, he recognized it. He had been in Foochow several times. Satisfied, he pulled up for altitude and headed a little west of south. An hour later dawn came on, and the mists smoked in the marshes.

Then the sun rose, a huge red ball of fire. Gales flew low, using the binoculars which Seong had dropped. He zigzagged back and forth, searching for a place that resembled the camp as he remembered it. Presently he saw too high poles and a wireless aerial, and the surrounding buildings looked familiar. Yes, that was that camp, and that was the landing field, and there was the broken-down *Redwing*.

But the place looked deserted. He saw no one. Perplexed, he circled once and got into the wind. Then he eased up on the gun and slanted downward—cut the gun entirely just before his wheels touched. He bounded along the field and pulled up near the building which he and Mike had crashed through.

HE pulled his revolver as he climbed out. The sun shone down upon several dead men lying on the ground. Empty cartridge shells lay at intervals.

"There's been a scrap here," Gales mused.

He crossed to the Headquarters building, saw many hoofprints on the wet ground. He entered the building, stepped over a corpse. The late Captain Wolrabe, and near him the late General Kwang. Gales reasoned that a roving band of Shantung cavalry had cleaned out and gone blithely on its way.

But where was Mike? Wolrabe had said something about a dungeon. Could Mike still be locked up there? Gales searched the ground floor of the building for a trapdoor. Finding none, he went out and searched the next building. Then he shouted McGill's name, listened eagerly for an answer, heard none.

There were three other shacks, and he searched these carefully, but found nothing except a bottle of Dewar's which he shoved in his pocket. Again he stood out in the open, cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled Mike's name. But only his echo came back.

A sound like the droning of a bee reached his ear. He looked up. Far away he saw a speck in the sky that was growing larger. He ran to his plane,

jumped in and reloaded the machine gun and waited, ready for further trouble.

The drone grew to a roar, and presently a biplane circled overhead, then throttled down and skimmed for the field. It struck at the farther end, came bounding down toward Gales, who was ready at the first sign of hostility to let fly with his gun.

The plane jounced to a stop on a dead stick, no more than thirty yards away. A solitary figure in the front cockpit waved.

"Get away from that pop-gun, Bill!" shouted McGill, pulling off his goggles and helmet.

"Mike!" exclaimed Gales. He leaped from the plane and sped over to grasp his partner's hand. McGill looked haggard and worn, but the brazen old grin was still there.

"Gimme a butt, Bill," he said. "I been strapped in this here cockpit since eleven last night. It's padlocked on me."

"You mean to say, Mike, you were in that flight all the while!"

"Sure. The pups said they would kill you, if I didn't consent to fly."

"Told me the same thing if *I* didn't fly," said Gales. "Pretty slick, eh? Padlocked me, too."

McGill lit up and puffed. "It was tough, Bill. There I was flying along, strapped in like this, with a cross-eyed bum behind me ready to spread my brains over the dashboard first time I moved out of turn. When the flight first got balled, I didn't know what the cripes 'd happened, and neither did this pup sitting behind me. But when I saw guns going, and a plane—your plane—zooming to beat the band, I figgered you guys were doing something else besides playing hide-and-go-seek.

"Maybe you saw how the flight formation got tangled up. I slapped off to get a brass ring on the merry-go-round. It just started to percolate through my dome that I'd been tricked and that you were acting pilot just like me. Anyhow, I knew something had gone wrong. I started to yell and the guy behind me got sore and socked me on the knob with the barrel of his gun. I saw that one plane was going to have a big scrap on his hands, and I wanted to help that plane.

"So I took a chance. I made believe I was hit by a stray shot. I kinda wilted down and let the old crate flip-flop for a thousand feet. The guy behind me got scared and popped off with his 'chute. Then I got control of her and looked for trouble. But a plane, a blue one, headed me off, and got me in a bad way. I had to run for it, and, Bill, it seemed like we covered most of China. At last I turned to get nasty and we had it out, and I smacked him down.

"When I looked around for the rest again, no one was in sight. Then I saw a plane heading south, and went after it. But I lost it after a while, and kept staggering on all night, because this crate ain't so hot on speed, and you left me behind. Anyhow, I'm here. How come all the stiffs, and how come you started that fight?"

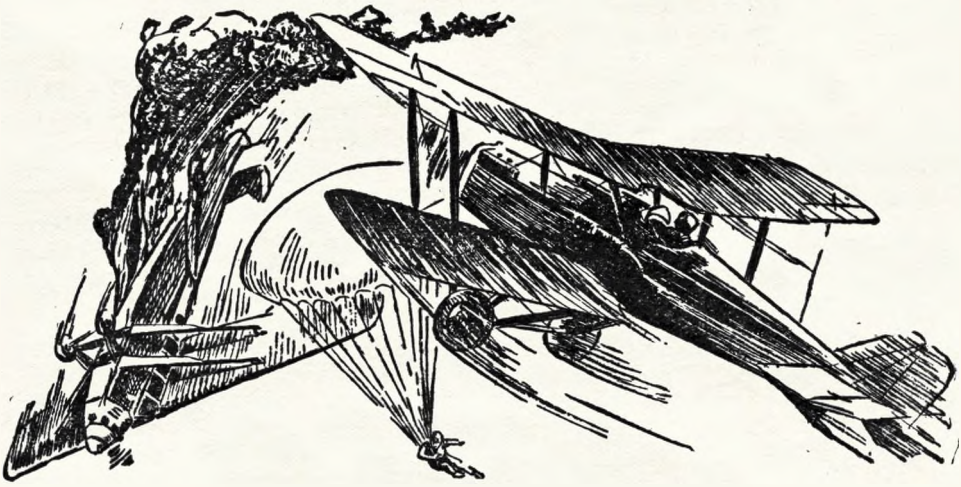
Gales explained briefly while he cut McGill out of the padlocked safety-belt.

"Ah-r-r, Bill," groaned Mike, "every-time I see the brainy stunts you pull I get mis'rable."

"Look here, you Mick!" grinned Gales. "You keep on talking that way and I'll break a bottle of Dewar's over your head."

"You know, Bill, China ain't so bad after all. I been thinking it over. Suppose we forget about Manila. China's all right. I mean, it might be dull in Manila now. Here we've just pulled a stunt that will make the whole Cantonese shebang sore as a bull. I got a hunch, Bill, China will prove entertaining."

The Cloud Tamer



By Hubert Roussel

Author of "The Canvas Cow"

Masked men rode the air-trails, leaving a crimson path behind. Then Britt Silver, free-lance pilot, followed them into the waiting storm on a sky-mission that dared not fail!

OUTSIDE a norther swished and slashed, with spatters of cold rain, but in the cabin of the little yellow-winged monoplane it was still cozy. Although their faces retained the whiteness that had come over them when the storm struck from the rear, the two Chicago brokers who sat in wicker chairs behind the pilot had relaxed their death-grip on the edges of the seats. For half an hour they had watched Britt Silver hold his plane steady in the gusts. They had learned to trust him. But their hearts bumped now and their flesh turned clammy when they thought of the approach of night.

Already there was heavy dusk in the cabin; they saw Britt Silver's head blackly outlined, against the glow of the instrument board. There were glass-covered windows beside the brokers, but neither had felt any desire to look out since the blue cloud rolled over the tail of the ship. Their last glimpse had shown them ranges of jagged, barren hills being swallowed by clouds of dust three thousand feet below. Since then they had been increasingly sorry that they hadn't taken a train south.

Suddenly the ship jerked and dipped. Their breath caught. The roar of the engine sank to a murmur; the pilot turned, his face grim, expressionless. But as they stared they saw a slow, reassuring smile form on his lips.

"Well, there she is," he called.

The brokers continued to stare straight ahead.

"Hold tight. I'm going to make a quick landing."

Britt faced forward again. As if a giant's hand had flicked it, the tail of the ship turned up and it streaked downwind with a wild, hysterical whistling. The brokers hung on again. A long gray blur rushed past the windows, then suddenly it was cut by streaks of white and yellow light. There was a faint

jar, and one of the brokers looked out of the window and murmured his thanks to heaven.

Britt had made a three-point landing on one of two great macadamized runways that criss-crossed a brown Texas prairie. He taxied the ship smoothly along and came to a stop in front of a white hangar blazing with lights. He cut the switch, looked at his wrist-watch and turned with a grin.

"Six o'clock to the dot," he informed his passengers. "Fifteen hours from Chicago, allowing for the stops we made in St. Louis and Dallas. Some better than a train ride, eh?"

The elder broker still clutched his seat. "Do you mean the trip's really over?" he asked hopefully.

Britt nodded. "Sure. Unless you want to go somewhere else."

"No thank you." The broker turned to his companion. "Come on, Hilton; let's get out before something happens."

Britt opened the little triangular door opposite his seat, crawled out and helped his passengers to the ground. Then he unlashed their luggage and passed it to them.

"When you get ready to go home I'd be glad to run you up," he offered.

The senior broker shook his head as he extracted four one-hundred dollar bills from his wallet and handed them to Britt.

"We're going back on the train," he said. "But if we were traveling any more by air I think you'd get the business. I suppose it wasn't such a bad trip."

The passengers gathered up their bags and made away. As Britt was pocketing the money, a big man wearing coveralls and smoking a cigar came out of the building. He was Strut Hogan, hangar boss and half owner of the airport. His red face split in a wide grin as he advanced.

"Howdy an' welcome, kid," he rumbled, slapping Britt's shoulder. "Sure glad t' see you around again. An' boy, lookit our new buggy. Smart and sassy, eh? How does she flop?"

Britt grinned. "Like a million dollars, Strut. She's a real little cloud-tamer. Came through that norther like it wasn't there. She's worth all of the ten thousand berries I sank in her, even if it did take my last one. I made a little of it back. Caught a couple of passengers from Chicago here."

"So I see," said Strut. "An' what's more, your luck ain't over yet, kid. I got a real job for you if you're ready to go right now."

Britt shook his head. "Couldn't do that, Strut. Only had eight hours sleep out of the last forty-eight. Got to get a little rest now."

Say, listen, boy, I said *real* job. There's two thousand dollars in it for you—an' maybe five hours flyin'. Does that wake you up any?"

Britt hesitated, then shook his head again. "No, I couldn't do it, Strut. 'Twouldn't be sane. Windy night, brand new ship, an' me so fagged I'm seein' double. I'll have t' wait for th' next one, I guess."

Strut champed his cigar and swore. "Won't be any next one like this," he lamented. "Leaves me in a devil of a fix. We ain't got a ship in now that'll fly. Four of 'em torn down, an' Gilbert washed out his old Jenny yesterday. 'Spose you wouldn't trust another pilot in yours?"

" 'Fraid not, Strut."

With a shrug Hogan started away, then turned back. "Oh, here's somethin' that come for you—couple of hours ago." He handed Britt a yellow telegraph envelope.

Thirty seconds later Britt Silver's ruddy young face went white. He read the brief message through for the second time, swallowed, then shouted after Hogan, a note of terror in his voice.

"Hey, Strut, Strut! Gimme a couple of mechanics quick. I gotta go."

Strut stopped and turned his face blank. He hurried back.

"You what?" he demanded. "Didn't you just tell me you wouldn't go any-

where—not even for two thousand berries?"

"Yeh, yeh, I know, but this is different." Britt's voice was still unsteady. "It's my dad, Strut—old Tom Silver. Only person I ever had to give a hang for. He's sick. Look here. This telegram's from the doctor. It says he may be—may be dyin', Strut; so I've got t' go. Old Tom needs me—he hasn't anybody else."

Strut's face was serious. He ran his eye over the message. "Tough luck, kid, tough luck," he muttered. "Be careful, though, don't let it get you." He looked up at the black sky. "I dunno that I'd let a man go out tonight for anything, after all. Remember the night Jimmy Wesley washed out? It was just like this. He was goin' to sick folks too. They dug him out of a mesquite thicket with his hand froze on the rip cord. You ain't even carryin' a chute, are you?"

Britt shook his head.

"Your pa lives in Carrolton, don't he? Three hundred miles dead against that wind. It's risky, kid—too risky. Better wait till mornin'."

"I tell you I can't, Strut. I'd fly through hell on a celluloid collar if old Tom was on th' other side an' needed me. I'll telegraph a couple of friends to drive out an' throw the lights of their cars on th' field I use at home. Let's get her around, Strut."

WHILE two mechanics cranked the little plane, turned it and taxied it onto the runway that pointed north, Britt gulped a cup of coffee and scribbled a telegram for Strut to send. Five minutes later he crawled into the ship and gave her the gun. With a thunder of perfectly timed explosions she leaped along the runway and zoomed off on a puff of the wind.

Below, the yellow lights ran together like broken egg yolks, glowed dimly for a few moments and were gone. The earth was lost. Britt volleyed and ricked through impenetrable blackness. His teeth were set; his heart, so buoyant when he landed, beat now with a strange heaviness. A cold fear prowled his mind. He was not concerned because the darkness beneath hid jagged hills and treacherous soft sand, because the ship flew with sudden nauseous sinkings. The thoughts that made him quake were thoughts of old Tom Silver. That telegram had said come at once. And Strut had held it two hours.

Yet somewhere in Britt there remained a trace of the happy pride that had warmed him all the way from New York to Texas. It stirred whenever he felt his little ship cut through the black rushes of the north wind. She was airworthy—tight as they made 'em She was worth the five years of neck-risking and grim privation that it had taken to get her. Two weeks ago Britt had flown to New York in an outworn Standard with a draft for ten thousand dollars in his pocket. And he had ridden back south on a shining dream.

The cabin where he sat was as comfortable as a closed motor car. Beside him was a passenger's seat; behind were four more and a space for luggage. Glassed windows gave him a clear view in every direction, and through the blackness he could glimpse the rim of the radial motor that whirled the prop. With that little ship he had dreamed of piling up profits that would take old Tom Silver forever from the watchman's tower at the railroad crossing in Carrolton. Old Tom had always been willing to wait, though he grew a little whiter every year. And now, before any profits had accumulated, a hand colder than the wind outside was reaching for Tom.—Maybe he had waited too long.

Britt opened the throttle wider. The airspeed registered a hundred and ten miles an hour. He searched for a light below that would show him his compass course was true. There were no lights. On and on he flew blindly. Hours passed. Then he looked

up and there were a few stars; and ten minutes after that he saw beneath him a sparse scattering of yellow dots. They spelled something to his mind. He dived lower, switching on the landing lights set in the wing tips, and almost at the same instant four thin beams appeared in the darkness at the edge of the town. They were beams from the lamps of automobiles, and Britt knew he was home.

He nosed down, circled the rough field. It hurt his soul to risk the little ship, but with a sudden pressure on the stick he sent her gliding toward the lighted spot. She swayed in the wind; trees leaped from the blackness with sharp limbs upthrust. Suddenly an air-pocket dropped him; he hauled back desperately to flatten out, and a moment later he was bouncing over the uneven ground.

As the ship stopped and he crawled out, two figures came running through the gloom. Good old Joe Sturgis and Lee Bascom—they'd done as he asked. Britt's eyes searched their faces.

"'Lo, Joe. Howdy, Lee. Sure do thank you. Everything all right?"

"Yeah, I guess so, Britt," said Sturgis. "Doc Bronson says your dad's pretty sick, though. We'll take you on over to the house if you're ready."

Britt nodded, shut off the lights and they started for the cars. The wind soughed through the bare trees beside them.

"You must've wanted to see him bad, Britt," said Bascom, "to fly like it is tonight."

Britt nodded again. "I reckon I did, Lee."

HE came out of the room still on tiptoe, with a strange tightness in his throat and before his eyes a picture of the drawn face he had seen in the chipped iron bed. Tom Silver hadn't said much—just a few words in a whisper. But back in the depths of his sunken eyes had been a gratitude that had put the tightness in Britt's throat. He had held Tom Silver's hand and listened to his heavy breathing. And he had told old Tom that everything was going to be all right.

Doc Bronson was waiting for him in the hall, and Britt went straight to the gray-haired man, unashamed of the tears in his eyes.

"Doc, do you think there's a chance, if I could do what you told me to do before I went in there?"

Doc Bronson put his hand on Britt's shoulder. "Son, there's always a chance for anybody that can fight like old Tom Silver. If you can get him to the city hospital for the operation, it'll be a fine thing to do—whether he makes it or not. But he oughtn't to wait more than a couple of days."

"He won't have to," said Britt. "You take him to town on tomorrow morning's train. Put 'im in the hospital an' arrange everything for the next mornin'. I'll be there with all the money he needs. Will you do that for me, Doc—for me an' old Tom?"

The doctor hesitated, a puzzled look on his face. "You know I haven't got anything myself, Britt. If I had, old Tom could have it. It's a low-down thing to mention, Britt, but this business is goin' to cost like fury. Are you sure, son—"

"Absolutely sure, doc. I'll be there by tomorrow night with all we need. Will you meet me?"

The doctor looked at Britt as though at his own son. He was tall and broad-shouldered and slim-waisted, as a man would want his son to be, with the blue eyes and the reddish hair that had once been old Tom Silver's.

"Why, Britt, son—" Doc's voice seemed to fail. He swallowed. "Why, I started you off in this world, Britt, an' I'm not goin' to begin failin' you now. Yes, you know I'll be there."

The only service car in the village chugged Britt back to his plane through the eleven o'clock stillness. He had taken a cup of coffee and a hasty sandwich—there was no time for anything

else. The driver helped him crank the ship and get her turned into the wind. Britt closed the cabin door and opened the throttle. The plane went bounding and careening over the rough ground, threatening to smash its wing tips, then gathered flying speed, and Britt zoomed over a line of scrub-oaks that burst from the blackness.

Once off, he banked sharply and turned south. Now he had a tail wind, and he flew with a full gun. A half moon rose from a cloud bank, its thin light showing him the cold earth below. Two and a half hours after he took off, Britt swooped down, landed on a runway, and a minute later cut the switch in front of the hangar where he had parted from Strut Hogan.

Strut slept in a room upstairs. The roar of Britt's motor brought him clattering down the steps in a bathrobe.

"Jumpin' jellyfish!" he shouted as Britt climbed out. "You back a'ready? What's the matter, couldn't you land?"

"Sure I landed, Strut," said Britt. "I had my visit an' I'm back. I want that job you was tellin' me about."

"What job?"

"You know. The one you said was good for two thousand."

"Oh, that." Strut hesitated and then spoke slowly. "Well, I dunno, kid. Come on up an' I'll tell you about it."

They mounted to Strut's room. The big man turned on an electric stove and started a percolator. Then he sat down on a couch with Britt.

"Well, here's what it was, kid," he said. "You know th' Central Bond Bank downtown—it's where we do our bankin'. Well, they got a branch out in Grand Valley to take care of the sheep ranchers, an' somethin' happened there yesterday. Best I could gather it, one of the tellers went west with about seventy-five thousand dollars, but th' stories made it a lot worse an' a flock of depositors got panicky an' started a run. It pretty near cleaned the place of cash an' they was still goin' strong at quittin' time. Well, about five-thirty yesterday afternoon old Harvey Garrett, president of the Central Bond here, telephoned me an' told me about an idea he had to save the Grand Valley joint. He said he'd decided to send a hundred thousand dollars in currency to Grand Valley by airplane before opening time today. He figured it'd be a stunt that would impress all the sheep boys and cut the run short, an' he offered us the job of ferryin' the money, provided I could furnish a bond for th' pilot. Well, as I told you, we didn't have a ship an' I couldn't think of but one other free-lance pilot I'd recommend, an' his boat was jimmed up. Then you come breezin' in. But you said you wouldn't take it, so—"

"You didn't throw it up, did you?" cut in Britt almost angrily.

"Well, no, not exactly. I called old Garrett an' told 'im we didn't have anyone available now, but might have before mornin'. If he hasn't dug up a pilot somewhere else I guess the job's still open."

Britt's face lighted. "Call 'im up, Strut."

"Look here, kid, its one forty-five in the mornin'."

"What of that? He's probably anxious to know. An' I got to find out right away, Strut. Right away. Don't you understand?"

Britt's voice had gone sharp. Strut noted his reddened eyes, the grim set of his mouth. After a moment he nodded.

"Yeh, I kinda believe I do, kid," he said simply. He got up. "Help yourself to some coffee while I go downstairs an' telephone."

Fifteen minutes later Strut Hogan came back into the room grinning.

"Well, boy, I fixed it," he chortled. "Garrett jumped at it. He'd tried a couple of other places but couldn't find anybody that suited. Th' only trouble now is gettin' to Grand Valley in time. I told him you could fly it in four hours. We rigged it up for me to sign the bond an' receive the money here at the

hangar, in time for you to get off at five o'clock. Garrett'll turn over two thousand when they telegraph him that the big jack's been delivered in Grand Valley. I don't want any commission, except you can pay for the bond."

Britt got up and caught Strut's hand. "Say, but you'll have to take some, Strut. It was decent as the devil to get me the job. You know I'd fly my head off for you."

"Sure I know it, kid," said Strut, "else I wouldn't let you park here. About the rest—fergit it."

TWO mechanics were gassing the little monoplane inside the hangar when Britt half stumbled down the steps from Strut's room. He had snatched three hours of uneasy sleep on the couch; but the nap had only made him feel his crying need for real rest. Every bone in his body ached with fatigue.

He looked down dully from the landing. Strut had been up half an hour. He now stood talking to four men who had driven into the hangar in a big sedan with every curtain closely drawn. One of the men had a gray beard; Britt recognized him as the eccentric banker Garrett. The others he had never seen before. He turned and looked through a window. The wind had died while he slept. The sky was clear and the moon still shone faintly.

Pulling on a heavy coat over his sweater, Britt walked to the automobile. Strut introduced him to the banker, then to two of the others. They were insurance men who were preparing the bond. As they turned back to their work, Garrett motioned to the fourth man who stood at the rear door of the car. He was a tall, powerful man with a scar on his left cheek, who wore a green mackinaw.

"Silver, this is Jack Grice," said the banker. "Grice is a guard at my bank. He's going with you to look after the money."

Britt shook hands. "I think you'll find my little ship pretty easy riding, Mr. Grice."

The big guard smiled. "Good enough. I can stand a little of that. Been up nearly all night."

"Grice and I both think it would be advisable for you to follow the railroad to Grand Valley," said Garrett. "Then in case of a forced landing Grice would be where he could easily get to a train and protection."

Britt nodded. "I'd do that anyway, sir."

The mechanics called to him and he went to help start the engine. When that had been done he taxied the ship through the big doors to the flying line and left it there to warm up. As he reentered the hangar, Garrett took from the rear of the sedan a small black satchel and handed it to Grice.

"There you are, Grice, and be careful," he said. "There are one thousand hundred-dollar bills inside. Tell Keating in Grand Valley to let those fool depositors see 'em."

Grice laughed shortly. "All right, sir. I'll wait there till I get further orders from you. That correct?"

The banker nodded and Grice turned to Britt.

"That makes me ready as soon as I get my own luggage."

He drew a suitcase from the car, grunted a good-by to the little group, and followed Britt to the plane. Britt climbed in, and taking Grice's suitcase stowed it in the luggage compartment. Holding to the money satchel, Grice crawled through the little door and looked around. He selected the second chair on the right hand side, placing the satchel on the seat in front.

"This all right?"

Britt nodded. "My seat's on the left, so we'll balance."

"Well, then, let's get off."

Britt closed the cabin door and opened the throttle to try the engine. It accelerated perfectly. After two minutes of that he throttled down and signalled for the chocks to be pulled away. He

gave her the gun. Down the long runway the ship spun like an eager spirit, and half way to the end it floated off on the soft air.

For an hour they flew so smoothly that it seemed there was no motion. Darkness gave way to the gray pallor of dawn, then to full daylight; and now the red sun was breaking over the horizon. It cast out a long beam, and the earth, two thousand feet below the plane, became a dazzling carpet of silver. Britt looked over his shoulder. Grice was sitting hunched down in his mackinaw, his eyes half closed. He grinned sleepily.

At first it had been unpleasantly cold in the cabin, but now it began to be cozy. The sun mounted higher and its warmth could be felt through the side of the ship. Britt settled down in his seat, and for the first time in more than twelve hours he relaxed. The facts that crowded his mind seemed to melt away in the benign glow . . . Old Tom Silver could fight . . . could still fight . . . he would fight his way through this time, too. . . . Far below a little town floated by, the buildings like sugar-cubes beside the diamond-bright steel of the railroad tracks. . . . Yes, old Tom could get well. Two thousand dollars would buy the city's best surgeon. He would get well and ride in this very ship. . . . Never heard a sweeter motor. Always more power than you called for. Doing a hundred and ten now. And smooth as soap. . . . Warm. Comfortable . . . Old Tom would like . . .

Suddenly Britt sat up with a great jerk, strangling, his mouth open. Roaring like a mad thing the ship was in a wild dive. The left wing was low in a perilous list; the earth rocked beneath. His shoulder was against the side of the cabin. His chin was on his chest. Both hands hung between his legs. He had been asleep!

With a stab of panic he seized the stick and throttle; shut down speed and levelled the ship. For a moment he sat limp, cold perspiration on his face. How long had he slept? There was no telling. He still had fifteen hundred feet. But Lord, if that dive had been steeper— He shook himself, blushing and grinning, and turned toward Grice's seat.

The next second Britt's grin was gone. His face was white, his whole body cold. There was no one else in the ship! Every seat behind him yawned empty. And as he stared and blinked, another shock, drove on his consciousness. The little black satchel was gone too. It was not on the chair where he had seen it last; neither was it in the aisle.

"Good God!" he gasped. "What— what—"

At a strange scent he turned his head slightly. The cabin door was unlatched. It hung half open. Then he gave a choked cry; went stiff. Just behind the door white coils of smoke suddenly crawled upward. They were coming from under the first right hand seat. He stared down. Beneath the seat lay an eight-inch length of pipe, with a white fuse protruding from its sealed end. A short trail of gray ash was in front of it; the burning end of the fuse was now less than an inch from the pipe.

Britt had seen a pipe-bomb before. With another cry he lunged to the side, reached for the machine and jerked it out. He hurled it through the open door, and six seconds later there was a dull explosion that jarred the air.

Bewildered, he looked down the row of seats again. Under the third there was more smoke; as he stared red serpents of flame licked into the aisle. Britt forgot everything else. Letting go the stick he crawled down the aisle. Beneath the seat was a burning ball of soaked waste. He ran his right arm through the flame, groped with searing, cooking fingers until he found the heart of the fire-ball. With a scream of anguish he pulled it out, lunged back and flung it through the door.

The ship was listing. He caught the stick and sat down. His right hand was black; he was sick with pain. Had he been in time? He looked back again. The wicker seat smoked, but it was evident that the waste-ball had not had time to fire the ship.

Britt's stiff, charred fingers reached out and closed the door. That cut off some of the dangerous draft. Then as nausea swept him he nosed down, banked and looked for a landing place.

He had dropped now to seven hundred feet. Below him the gleam of the railroad tracks was almost dazzling. On either side of the tracks were hills covered with brush and trees, but suddenly they were left behind and he saw a broad, level prairie. His heart leaped. Landing room! The ship whistled down-wind, and he banked for the last glide.

Then another hoarse cry rose from Britt's throat. He could see the earth directly beneath him, and he caught a glimpse of a gray ship standing on the ground. And a little distance away, a great white mushroom was settling toward the prairie. Britt saw it only for a split second, but in that flash he recognized it. A chute.

Through the haze in his mind a clear thought burned. He flung a glance to the luggage space at the back of the cabin. The suitcase he had stowed there was open—open and empty.

"You—you polecat!" he gasped. "You yellow-livered, sheep-killin' coyote!"

A spasm of pain from his hand all but blinded him. Then he fought off his dizziness, the tops of trees were flashing by. The gray earth rushed up to meet him. He flattened out, settled with a jar and went bounding across the hard prairie.

Britt closed the throttle and kicked the door open. The ship was still speeding when he flung himself through. He struck the ground on hands and knees, and as he did so a gasp and groan broke from him. In his cooked and bleeding hand something had snapped with a blinding flash of pain. He leaped up clutching the raw flesh, but the next instant he forgot the anguish, for now he saw the parachute again. It dropped from a tree at the edge of the woods, two hundred yards away and fifty yards from the gray plane. As Britt stared, a man unhooked himself from the harness and ran toward the other ship. In his hand he carried a black satchel; and Britt recognized his green mackinaw and his big frame.

A sob of fury shook Britt's body. He raced for the gray ship, a low biplane whose wings he could see had been clipped for speed. It was a two-seater, and a man appeared from the other side and was cranking it.

"Don't start, don't start, you lousy trash wagon," Britt prayed. "Hold 'em there! Hold 'em for me!" But the next second smoke burst from the plane's exhaust; the prop was spinning. The man who cranked it scrambled into the forward cockpit.

Britt was still a hundred yards from the ship. Grice was twenty-five. In giant bounds the man in the mackinaw ate up the space. He was beside the plane. He hurled the black satchel into the rear cockpit and climbed in himself. The motor roared; The ship was moving. Straight toward Britt it came, gathering speed. Ten miles, twenty miles, forty miles an hour. It could rise now, but it stuck to the earth. It was aimed for Britt—a roaring juggernaut that would clip a man's head from his body like a guillotine. Britt leaped to the side; the plane followed. It was on him! Fifty feet away! He flung himself to the ground as the wing-edge whistled over his head.

As the ship bellowed on there was a sharp crack. Britt raised his head, then ducked again as sand flew up into his eyes. Grice was standing in the rear cockpit, a flaming pistol in his hand. Three more faint cracks came out of the din and bullets thudded on the ground. Then Britt sprang up.

The gray plane had taken the air, and the pilot zoomed and headed south.

Dazedly Britt stared after it, trying to realize all that happened. Grice a crook—and away with a good start! Garrett's money gone; old Tom Silver's gone—

"They can't, they can't!" he shouted.

His eyes went to the ship. The prop still turned slowly. Suddenly Britt was racing back, fighting the nausea that swept up from his throbbing arm.

He stumbled alongside; flung himself into the cabin; crawled behind the controls. A maddening twilight, shot with flashes of red and yellow, whirled before his eyes. He groped for the stick, and when he had it he opened the throttle. With a startled roar the ship began to move. It gathered speed, and Britt's head cleared. He could see now. He pulled off and zoomed over the trees.

A half turn headed him south. He looked ahead and up. The gray plane was a shrinking speck against a screen of milky clouds. From Britt's throat rose a sound that was neither sob nor laugh, but a mingling of both. He shoved the throttle the ultimate fraction of an inch. The motor gave back a deafening thunder and the little ship vibrated like a harp-string.

In half a minute the airspeed showed 120 miles an hour. Britt's face set in a grim mask. He tried to form a plan, but his brain, afire with fury, would give him none. For the moment he knew only that he must overtake the speeding plane ahead.

As he raced he climbed in long stretches. The gray ship was climbing too; its pilot evidently trying to hide among the cloud vapors. But gradually the speck became larger as Britt watched. He knew he was gaining, and with that knowledge his lips twisted in a thin, crooked smile.

Higher and higher he forced his throbbing ship. Three thousand feet. Thirty-five hundred. He squinted at the gray plane. He was on a level with it now, and he judged it was not more than two miles away. Another minute and he could overhaul it. A grim thrill went through him as he realized he could outfly and outclimb the man ahead. He pulled back on the stick again; his ship zoomed farther into heaven. Four thousand feet now. He thought of Grice, of the gray plane's unknown pilot who had tried to cut him down. Fury pounded through him till his vision blurred, his whole pain-racked body trembled, his lip gave blood from the pressure of his teeth. Polecats! Let 'em try to lose him now. He'd follow 'em from above like a hawk trailing a sparrow. They couldn't fly forever. Somewhere they'd have to come down, and when they did, he'd come down too. And then—.

Rage swept reason from Britt's mind. His right hand gripped the stick as though it were a human throat, and as the cooked fingers bent he gave a scream. Something slipped inside the battered, blackened hand. That fierce, sudden pressure drove through the flesh the jagged end of a broken bone, and the shock of pain that rushed up through Britt's arm struck like a paralytic seizure. His whole right side stiffened and froze with agony. His eyes seemed to burst from his tortured head. Shuddering sobs were wrung from his throat. And then he was violently sick.

His taut muscles convulsed and he was powerless to control them. They doubled his body forward over the stick, like that of a man with a bullet in his middle. Then dizziness came—dizziness beside which all former attacks were as nothing. A great spinning disk of blackness rose from the floor, and Britt's head seemed to whirl on his neck as on a spindle. He felt his body strike the side of the cabin—the ship was listing.

He sobbed. "No!" He was young—and this ship was his child.

With a desperate wrench he tried to straighten his body. That was the end. The blackness smote him like a blow. He seemed to go spinning into space—

and then there was nothing but the dark and a dull buzzing sound. . . .

Suddenly the sound grew louder; it tore through the murk that hemmed him in. The roar of his motor! Get up, get up! He had to get up! His left hand found his head; by the hair he shook it as though it were another man's. Slowly the blackness faded to a pulsing gray mist. Then Britt saw again.

Pain stabbed through him as from a dozen shattered bones, but he forced his cramped body erect in the seat. Dully he realized where he was—why he was here. His broken hand was still clamped around the stick as though it could never relax; the ship flew evenly. He looked through the window in front of him. A thousand feet below, and well ahead, the gray plane still raced on its course. It had gained—he must have been out for a minute or more! Britt's eyes turned to the throttle on which his left hand rested. Somehow during his unconsciousness he had closed it a third of the way.

The agony that pounded him was too great to bear. His raw nerves shrieked. He felt dizziness rushing toward him again—and he knew that would be the last time. Luck had taken him through once; it wouldn't hold again. This time his wild-flying ship would go crashing down, and the gray plane would go on—on with Grice's rotten hulk, with Garrett's money—and when he had lost the pirate ship there would be no one else to find it.

"You can't do it!" Britt shrieked at the plane below. Rage surged up from his laboring heart, and for a moment it cleared his head, steadied his nerves. He had a picture of Grice' smirking face, of old Tom's face, pain-whitened but always proud—and in that flash Britt made his plan. He didn't stop to think of it. Nothing mattered now—nothing but that old Tom should know he went down fighting.

Britt took a long breath and his teeth bit into his lip in the effort to hold to consciousness. "Just a little while," he prayed. He caught the buckle of the safety belt and snapped it. Now he was ready. With a sudden thrust he put the stick forward. The plane's tail rose to the blue sky. And as it did so, Britt opened the throttle to the limit.

There was a hollow roar and he dived. A hundred, two hundred miles an hour showed on the airspeed. His eyes, narrowed to slits, followed the gray plane.

Half the distance was gone! He saw at last with a terrible clearness—saw every mark of the ship below—the black dots that were the heads of its passengers. He was getting on it, getting on it! . . . Now! But in the same instant the gray ship dived, spun once and swerved to the side. Wildly Brett risked frame and fabric; they held and he followed. He was still on the tail of the biplane—still on it if he didn't overshoot.

But as he aimed again the gray ship zoomed, flashed past his wing-end, chandelled and shot away to the left. Above him! He'd missed! Despair stabbed his heart. There was one thing left. Furiously Britt hauled back on the stick. For a moment his ship continued its mad dive unchecked. Then its joints seemed to wrench apart as it answered, flattened, turned its nose to the sky. Up! Straight up! Dizziness. On and on, like an arrow to heaven, then over in a gigantic loop. The earth whirling crazily below. And five hundred feet away, directly beneath him, the gray plane!

Britt's lips cracked open to emit a shrieking laugh. God! He had 'em now! No time to get away—no time! Straight down he roared—straight for the gray ship. Faster, faster! He saw Grice turn in his seat, waving his arms, firing with a pistol. The gray plane took a dive.

With another shriek Britt centered on its tail. For an instant the two planes rushed downward a hundred feet apart. The faster motor told. Like an eager hawk Britt's ship dropped on the biplane. He lost sight of it for a sec-

ond, then a gray blur obscured the earth. He had it! His left hand jammed the throttle open. He saw his prop clip the end from the gray tail, then there was a dull jar as it ate through the other ship's vertical and horizontal rudder, scattering their pieces through the trembling air.

A splintering report. The motor stopped. Britt's ship shuddered, poised an instant and crashed across the biplane. He unhooked the belt but he was trapped. The cabin was crushed. Upside down in a little space like a coffin he was choking as the locked ships plunged for the earth. From outside he heard a long, hoarse scream.

"Scared, you skunks?" he shouted. "It'll teach you to gyp old Tom; to try—"

He couldn't get another breath. He was strangling and blind. Air! The window. Break it. He hit his fist against a pane of glass, but in the same instant a mighty spinning motion hurled him aside. He groped for something to hold to. . . . Tom! . . . Then a great dark wave rushed over him, and there was nothing but blackness and silence.

AN odor reached him first—the strong, clean odor of antiseptic. Suddenly he remembered. Crash! He tried to open his eyes, but something held them shut. He sank back. Soundless ages seemed to pass, then he heard a voice say:

"Well, I guess I'll have to let you see him now, or kill you. Go on."

Britt felt a firm pressure on his left arm. "Kid! It's me—Strut. D' you hear?"

"Yeh, I hear you. Where am I, Strut?" whispered Britt.

"You cracked up largely and successfully, kid. You're in th' hospital in Treadleton, an' Strut's here to see that they treat you right."

"But Strut—my eyes . . . Am I—are they—"

"Naw, fergit it. I just talked to th' doctor. Your whole face got torn up, but he says your eyes are o. k. You've got a smashed hand, nicely fried, a long list of broken ribs an' a few other injuries not yet tabulated, but you'll be cloud-bustin' again inside a month or two, the doc says. You got a lotta luck, kid; you picked a fine grove of oak trees an' you had that other ship under like you like a shock absorber."

"What became of the two in that other ship, Strut? Were they killed?"

"Naw," said Strut; "the pilot had a chute an' he jumped. He's all right. That other one—the guy they call Grice—stayed with the works an' got about everything busted. He'll check out, they say."

"Strut, d' you know why I did it?"

"Well, I should hope I *do*! So does everybody else that can read a newspaper by this time. You're just about the little hero of the hour, kid."

"Don't spoof me, Strut—I'm out. Out everything."

"Who's out? You? Say, ain't these sponge-wringers in here told you yet? Listen, boy, that baby's name wasn't any more Grice than mine's Napoleon. When they told him he was through he got soft an' kicked in. For five years he's been wanted all over Europe for bank crackin' an' a murder or two, under his right name of Montell. They've checked that yarn up through N' York an' it's straight. He told 'em how he tried to get you, too."

"He nearly did, Strut."

"Yeh, I know. He had a pack chute, some waste an' kerosene an' a bomb in that suitcase of his. He'd already fixed it for that other boat to meet 'im. When he got near it, he figured he'd slip into his chute an' start the bomb, then put a neat bullet through your back, add a little fire an' jump. There wouldn't of been any wreckage to speak of. Everybody'd think the ship exploded an' the money burnt up with you, an' that Grice had fallen out on the way down. By the time they got through searchin'

the brush for his body he'd of been many a sweet mile into Mexico—if it ever dawned on 'em that he was a crook. When you went t' sleep you saved him the trouble of shootin' you . . . A farmer happened t' see that little dog-fight later and watched the crash. He dug you-all out an' brought you here."

The words sounded far away to Britt. "I'm out, though, out just th' same," he muttered. "I was needin' that two thousand. Old Tom Silver—he's in th' hospital in th' city, Strut. He—"

"He's gettin' along fine, that's what. Doc Bronson just telephoned about you, an' he told me that. They ain't worryin' about that bill down there, either. It seems like there was ten thousand dollars reward out for Mr. Montell, an' everybody figures you get it, kid. Say listen—"

But Britt interrupted.

"Not now, Strut; I've heard enough. I'm tired—want t' go to sleep an' forget . . . forget a lot of stuff. Funny how things happen sometimes, ain't it. Strut? . . . Funny . . . Tell old Tom I'm all right, will you? An' tell 'im that little ship—his and mine . . . tell 'im she was a real cloud-tamer, Strut."

SEAPLANE ENDURANCE RECORD BROKEN

THE world's flight duration record for seaplanes was broken on May 5 when a Lieutenants Gavin and Soucek took off Thursday afternoon, May 3, at and Lieut. Zeus Soucek flying a Navy PN-12 seaplane powered with two Wright Cyclone engines, each developing 525 hp. The old record, which was 28 hr. 35 min. 27 sec., was set by Lieuts. C. H. Schildhauer and J. R. Kyle in a PN-9 plane May 1-2, 1925.

Lieutenants Gavin and Soucek took off Thursday afternoon, May 3, at 2:50:16 from the Philadelphia Navy Yard. J. C. Proley, mechanic, and H. F. Dayton, Wright engine expert, accompanied the fliers, thus bringing the record breaking crew to four. At 7:25:54 P.M. Friday the old mark was passed, and at 2:51:30 A.M. Saturday the fliers landed at the Yard, fuel gone and new record set.

Preparations for the flight were begun early Thusrday morning, but heavy weather delayed the take off until 9 A.M. A second take off was necessary, however, for after 30 min, of the first flight Gavin and Soucek were forced to land on account of oil trouble. Once in the air following repairs, the plane flew up and down the Delaware River at an average altitude of 300 ft. until late Friday night. At this time, the fliers went to a higher altitude to land later in a glide when their gasoline was gone.

Official recognition was given the record by Carl F. Schory of the National Aeronautic Association who arrived Friday evening to be on hand to certify the new mark. The international code for such record attempts stipulates that when a flight is more than 48 hours in length the old mark must be surpassed by at least one hour. When the flight is from 24 to 48 hours, the flier must exceed the old mark by but one-half hour.

Lieutenant Gavin won the Schiff Trophy last year when he flew a total of 847 hours without mishap. The award is given for carefulness and safety in flying. Lieutenant Soucek is aviation superintendent of the aeronautical section of the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

The Light Airplane

By
E. Weston Farmer, N. A.

EVERYBODY these days knows what a longeron is, what the word "fuselage" means and all that sort of prattle which used to fill the aeronautical textbooks of a dozen years ago. Everybody, or very nearly everybody, is air-minded these days and when talk swings to performances and motors and parts at least the coming generation of airmen are wise to what it's all about. They have a serious belief in the importance of doing things for fun. They know their theory of flight, their ships, their history—they want to get into the air!

Realizing that the light airplane would be the means of giving many young men their wings, the editor of *Air Stories* decided that information concerning the recently new type of airplane known as the 'light plane" ought to be given to the readers of air stories in this magazine. Nothing of the old dry textbook junk like some of the fortunates who were given wings in the recent Big Parade had to plough through, but just a few notes and observations from the present firing line of aeronautical engineering. So, assuming that when we say welded steel tubing you know we don't mean brazed plough castings, and that you know aeronautical anatomy, here goes!

The term "light airplane" dates in usage from about 1923. After the war, great attention was given to the development of gliders which would soar for a great length of time, using ascending currents of air as motive power. The idea was to learn why birds could fly for hours at a time without spending a cent for gas. The planes which were built to simulate the conditions under which birds flew very naturally looked a lot like birds. Their wings were shaped pointedly, swept back a great deal, and the machines themselves were extremely light, seldom weighing more than a hundred pounds without the pilot.

Gradually it was learned that span was pretty important. The spread the wings had seemed to have a great deal to do with the efficiency, and so, between the time the war ended and 1923 this lesson and various others were seen in the airplanes gathered at Lympne, in England, for what were termed "The Light Airplane Races."

DRAWN up at the starting line at Lympne were planes which completely knocked previous aeronautical theory into a cocked hat. One ship, the Wren, was powered with but three horsepower, yet it carried a 165 lb. pilot and won the duration flight. You see, it was a machine with a great deal of wing spread and area, and consequently the light loading per square foot of

wing surface enabled it to act half like a glider, which uses ascending air currents for flight, and half like a small airplane, since the power was enough to get the ship off the ground with her large area. The Wren was the transitional ship from the glider to the light plane. It proved that small power, if coupled with the right pair of wings, was enough to give flight. The Wren, together with other lightly built, low powered planes, started world wide interest in the development of airplanes which would be small, which would fly well with low power, and firmly fixed the term "light plane" as meaning a small, useful ship of that type.

In the past five years development in the light plane field has been just as rapid as it has in every other branch of engineering connected with aeronautics.

Today a light airplane is understood to mean a small plane of exceptional sturdiness of around five hundred pounds loaded weight, and which is designed around theories derived from the past ten years' experimentation in making small wings and small powers carry greater loads with far greater safety. The light plane pilot of today worries less about the safety of his plane than the bicycle rider worries about the strength of his wheel. His take off is just as rapid as the ordinary three place commercial ship, his flying hazards far less, and his climb, ceiling and maneuverability about on a par with the bigger ship. Added to that is the fact that he can set his ship down in almost any cabbage patch and get it out again, so that his danger from crashing is less.

We believe it was Bert Hinkler, famous British test pilot, who said that only with a light plane was cross country flying interesting. Low altitude flying is never monotonous, whereas the man with the large ship, poorer gliding angle and greater landing speed must keep height for emergency landing, which means that distances covered with heavier ships become monotonous, even boring. When in the air at any great height there is no sensation of speed—the country seems to creep by and you seem never to overtake the horizon.

Physically, the proposition which makes a light plane fall in a class by itself is one of design: weight is the whole story.

A designer may start out, listing the weight of pilot 165 lbs., weight of fuselage with controls at 100 lbs., weight of wings at 75 lbs., weight of motor at 100 lbs., including propeller, etc.; fuel at 25 lbs., and come out with a weight between 465 and say, 500 lbs., allowing for miscellaneous items. A ship which will, with this power (20-30 H. P.) perform well, like an orthodox airplane, is what designers term a "natural." The weight of the pilot, in a ship of certain size areas to efficiently lift the whole, can be carried by a motor which weighs no more than the margin left by the other weights.

Suppose, though, the designer wants to carry two people. Aye, there's the rub! If he increases his weight, or useful load, as it is called, he will start with 330 lbs., and before he has put enough wing area and corresponding fuselage to carry it, he will have such greatly increased weight that he will need a large motor to carry the whole thing, and about the way the ship will turn out is in the 1,000 lb. class (which is not exactly light) with about 60-90 H. P. before he will find it will fly.

That is the difference between a light plane and the previously familiar ordinary airplane.

There have been many light planes built, both in Europe and in America. At present American light planes are the more thoroughly worked out and inexpensive. There are several types which have been worked out and commercialized with which the writer is familiar and which we have had opportunity to inspect and fly. In these the idea of bird-plan wings and all the other glider lore has been merged to conform pretty close to precedent in the matter

of layout. They look for all the world like pint size aeros, and that is just what they are. Miniature airplanes! Their designers have followed the development of the light plane, and having built and flown their ships, standardizing them, they are available to all light plane fans at low prices and are very highly perfected.

There is the Heath Parasol, built by the Heath Airplane Company of Chicago, Ill., whose factory is located at 2856 Broadway. This ship was designed by C. E. Lonsdale in November, 1926, and about eighteen of them have been built at the factory, while any number have been bought in parts and assembled by amateurs throughout the country.

The Parasol has the following characteristics:

Span .....23 ft.
Chord ..... 4 ft. 4 ins.
Length, over all.....16 ft. 9 ins.
Power, Henderson 4 cyl....23 H. P.

The whole job is exceedingly sweet to fly, and her high speed is 70 m. p. h. with the above power plant. Cruising radius equal to 120 miles is provided for in a high wing-section tank. Built entirely of steel with the exception of wings, which are of U. S. A. 4 section, and are war surplus, she will take off with a load of 225 lbs. Her factor of safety is 11 to 1, which means she is eleven times stronger than the worst shock she can encounter in normal flying. She can be flown hands off and will bank and turn by having pilot lean out of the cockpit, which is saying much for her flying qualities.

Another extensively raced and built little ship is a biplane of extremely simple design known as the Irwin Meteorplane. This ship is built by the Irwin Aircraft works at Sacramento, Cal., and like the Parasol, can be bought knockdown or completed with motor. She was designed by Irwin himself, who is an aeronautical engineer and pilot of long standing.

Here are her dimensions:

Span .....19 ft.
Chord .....37 ins.
Length, over all.....13 ft. 9 ins.
Power, any motorcycle motor
of over .....15 H. P.

THE Meteorplane is the smallest of the light planes on the market. She will lift any weight up to 200 lbs. Being built of stick and wire construction, she can be easily built by any one, and repairs are simple. Her speed with an ordinary motorcycle motor, being low in power, is naturally not very high —about 60 m. p. h. However, the Meteor Motor, made by Irwin, develops 20 snappy h.p. on the phenomenally low weight of 60 lbs. and delivers a good 90 miles, so we are told.

The builders of the good old Lincoln Standard, that war horse of the war's training schools, and which has so often figured in yarns by *Air Stories'* writing aces, have recently designed and are offering on the market a small baby brother to the old Standard. This is known as the Lincoln Sportplane. As with the other two, parts can be purchased from the factory at Lincoln, Nebraska, at nominal prices and the plane built at home. Here, for the sake of comparison, are the characteristics of the Lincoln ship:

Span .....20 ft.
Chord .....38 ins.
Length, over all.....14 ft. 6 ins.
Power, Lawrence .....28 H. P.

Costs? The average light plane costs about two hundred dollars for materials if bought knocked down, ready to build. Some are much less, others more, but that figure is a fair average for the above three planes. There are those beside the ones just described, for nearly every airplane factory has its midget ship about, though to the present writing the above are the only ships generally known about, or marketed.

The motor, if it is a reliable job, will

cost about the same. Of course, war surplus Lawrences can be bought for less, and so can used motorcycle engines, and on that subject we shall have frank words to say later. Usually a Henderson 4 cylinder 4 cycle motor is the one selected on account of its smoothness and all round satisfaction. These vary in price, and some can be bought cheaply. They all have to be converted, so there is a certain amount of machine work done on them anyway, which of course mounts the cost.

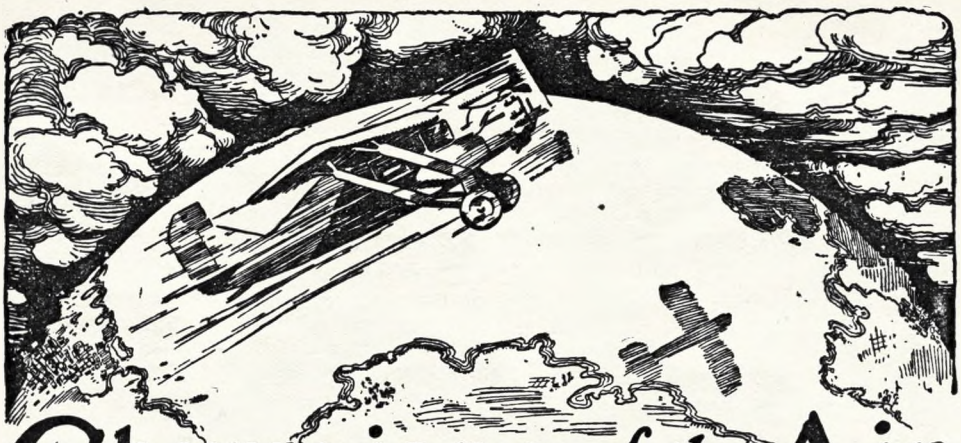
All in all, then, a light plane complete can be built for from two hundred dollars to five hundred, depending upon equipment chosen, motor picked out, and so on. If the ships are purchased at the factories, the prices range from six hundred to fourteen hundred, "fly away."

It is suggested the reader who is interested in light planes read the further articles in this series, which will further acquaint him with the subject. It is intended that the question of motors be taken up next, as it is the motor which determines the usefulness and scope of operation of the ship it is installed in. Then, in talking about the considerations for a good light seaplane, and finally for a good light landplane, it is believed that a summary of what knowledge would be of interest to an embryo airman bent on owning his own ship will have been covered.

So this flight here has covered a general view of the light plane—why it is called "light," how it evolved, what the present types are that can be purchased without a great outlay of cash, where they can be had, some of their outstanding advantages, and about what they'd cost. Next month we'll wade into the motor question, and since it is a smaller field of argument, we'll go into it in greater detail. Until then we'll cut our engine and glide down to the end of this sentence with a dead stick.

So long!

E. Weston Farmer, N. A. has written this article especially for readers of AIR STORIES and WINGS who are interested in purchasing or building a light airplane. His next article, "The Light Airplane Motor," will appear in the August issue of Wings, on the stands July 15. Watch for it!



Champions of the Air

Air Stories, the pioneer fiction magazine for air-minded readers, presents the following list of air pioneers of the world. In accordance with our policy of keeping our readers up to date on air conquests, we will make additions and changes in this list as new records are hung up by the sky men. Only records from official sources will be published.

Pioneer Records

M. Clement Adler. First flight in a powered plane. Distance 300 meters. 1896.

Wilbur Wright. Kitty Hawk, N. C., Dec. 17, 1903. First actual flight by man in an airplane with power and full control of the plane. Duration 59 seconds. Distance 852 feet.

Orville Wright. September 15th, 1904. First turn ever attempted by man in the air. September 20, 1904. First complete circle ever made by man.

H. Farman. Oct. 30, 1908. First town to town flight. Bouy to Rheims.

L. Bleriot. Oct. 31, 1908. Distance flight, Toury to Artenay to Poinville.

Orville Wright. September 9, 1908. First continuous flight for one hour. Fort Meyer, Va.

L. Bleriot. July 25, 1909. First flight across the English Channel, Bleriot monoplane, 37 minutes.

Hubert Latham. June 5, 1909. First continuous one-hour flight by monoplane. Chalons, France.

Henry Farman. August 27, 1909. First continuous flight of three hours. Made in Farman biplane.

Rene Labouchere. July 9, 1910. First continuous flight of two hundred miles. Four hours 37 min. Rheims, France.

Archie Hoxie. December 26, 1910. Altitude Record. 10,575 feet. Los Angeles, Cal, Wright Biplane.

Latest Records

Eddie Stinson & George Haldeman. Flight Endurance Record. 53 hrs. 36 min. 30 secs. Stinson-Detroiter monoplane.

Charles A. Lindbergh. First Trans-Atlantic Solo Flight. New York to Paris. 33 hrs. 29½ mins. 3,600 miles.

Clarence Chamberlin. Non-stop flight. New York to Eisleben, Germany. 42 hrs. 45½ mins. 3,923 miles.

L. J. Maitland & A. F. Hegenberger. Non-stop all-water flight. Oakland to Hawaii. 25 hrs. 50 mins.

Hawthorne C. Gray. Altitude Record, all types aircraft. Balloon ascension. 44,470 feet.

John A. MacCready. Airplane Altitude Record. Douglass Biplane. 38,704 feet.

C. C. Champion. Seaplane Altitude Record. 37,995 feet. Wright Apache.

Russell L. Maughan. Cross-continent flight. New York to San Francisco. Curtiss Hawk.

M. de Bernardi. Seaplane Speed Record. 318 miles per hour. Macchi Seaplane.

R. L. Bonnett. Airplane Speed Record. 278.48 miles per hour. Bernard Monoplane.

E. Descamps. Glider Altitude Record. 1,788 feet. De Woitine Glider.

Roof of the Jungle

By

Fred McLaughlin

Author of "Falcon of Obregon," "The Falcon Strikes," etc.

Below lay Yalian—ghost city of a forgotten race. The jaws of the jungle guarded it; native knives kept it holy under the winking eyes of the idol's spell. "Hate to take a nose-dive down there!" he thought—and then Pinkie Dillard's engine conked!

I RECKON you have never been to Yalian. No? You're right you haven't—and you're lucky at that. Penny and Gehring and I are the only white men who ever saw that ancient city. Penny is dead, and what happened to Gehring is beyond me. Whether he died or not I don't know, and what's more I don't care a heluva lot. He was one yellow hombre—take it from me!

Maybe the white spirits of Yalian got 'im, or, like the wandering Jew, he may still be roaming around in the jungle. Believe me though, the jungle isn't any playground. If you can live without food and don't mind the heat neither hell nor the jungle will bother you any, but I'm peculiar—I gotta eat. Sometimes I wonder if it's not a dream, but when I look around and see all the things that the pearls of Oti-oti have bought for me I sure don't care if I never wake up. If you've got half an hour to blow I'll tell you about it.

I'm pushing the old crate across a dimpled green sea of jungle that looks pretty enough from the roof, with a wisp of trade-wind behind me and the oil camp of Frontera and a square meal two hours ahead. San Benito, which overlooks the soft, quiet blue of the Pacific, had offered a breakfast of frijole beans and corn tortillas and stewed papaya instead of the ham and eggs and toast and coffee that every husky American wants, no matter where he is. But the red-tiled roofs of San Benito were a hundred and fifty miles behind

me now and I'm half way across the Isthmus—and flying high!

It's not a bad idea to stay up around ten thousand feet for cross country flying, especially if the terrain is new to you. If something goes wrong with the ship you've got a coupla minutes to find it. If you don't find it you still have a few miles to pick out a soft place to land. Besides, you will need, in a pinch, about a thousand feet for your parachute.

Oh yeah—me for the higher levels every time, even if it does take a little more gas. I got in the habit of that on the Western Front. Ever watch a hawk? No? Try it some time. *He* never zooms to catch a little birdie; not much—he dives every time.

East of me the flat jungle sea reaches to Guatemala, west it fades to a dim blue line of cordilleras that probably mean Oaxaca. The prop is eating up the tropical sky, and pushing it past my face at about seventy-five miles an hour, for the bus—though old and given to moods—is a good one, and the whistling throb of the engine is sweet music to my ears. I've been in swifter ships than this—and prettier, shinier ones—but that ancient biplane, with the second-hand Hispano motor, the curved struts, and the creaking ailerons still has a place of honor in my memory.

I'm sitting kinda pretty, for there's not a thing in the sky but me and a coppery sun. Tropical birds—never migratory—flit only from tree to tree in the jungle, rarely taking long flights. I'm alone, but it's never lonesome in the air because you can see so much. Besides, men who take to the air want to be alone; they're a different breed, I guess. You put a flyer on the ground and he acts like an eagle in a cage; he's restless, nervous, his eyes on the clouds and his mind on wings. Ever notice a boat at anchor? Always it is pulling, tugging, anxious to be away. That's your airman.

Yeah, I'm sitting pretty, for Frontera is a booming American oil camp, and those well-rigging bozos pull down twenty pesos a day. They'll be glad to give ten plunks for five minutes in the air. Cantinas and the soft-eyed Señoritas get it all anyway, so they might as well pay me for a buggy ride.

That's what I'm figuring, and I sing a little Spanish song that I learned in Trinidad—sing it in Spanish because in English it might make the hardened old bus fold up her wings in embarrassment. And she does at that—bless her old heart; for if she hadn't developed that sudden attack of heaves Id never have found the pearls of Oti-oti—and I'd still be working for a living today instead of driving a fancy silver bird for the fun of it.

She coughs a coupla times and the prop begins to talk in dog-Latin. I play with the spark and give her the gun and she spits out a machine-gun volley of explosions. Ignition, that's all—but that's enough to bring the best of 'em down. The gas and oil gauges look okay, and I ease along the throttle bar, but the prop has forgotten the feed. for it dies away from that deep, resonant, sustained roar that your flyer loves to hear, and begins a soft sort of whisper that wouldn't lift the hat off your head.

I loosened the broad belt across my lap and leaned forward to make sure the precious chute on my back was clear, then I studied the dimpled green of jungle for a place to land. I couldn't light in a tree—like a crow—nor in a lot of trees and hope to get the ship in the air again. To get out of that steaming wilderness alive without the ship would take more jungle lore than I possessed; and even to come down with anything less than a broken back would be a piece of luck that I could hardly count on.

Believe me, no buzzard ever searched the earth with any more care than I did as I came down in as flat a line as the wide wings and the weight of the air permitted. I made many a mile in that curving descent, and I offered up

a little prayer for a piece of Sahara as big as a ball park—or even half as big. I'd have lit on a thing the size of an elephant if I could have found it.

The jungle sea came up toward me pretty fast. I don't believe it was a hundred and fifty feet away, and I was all braced for the scraping lunge, when the spark caught and the prop took hold with a roar that must have shaken the monkeys out of the trees. I jerked the joystick up against my chest and the old bus pointed her nose at the sun.

My spirits went up with that sturdy old crate—up and up in a sweet, delicious soul-satisfying climb that, so far as I was concerned, need never stop; but she coughed again and I pushed the stick ahead so we'd straighten out before the engine died.

After a while you get so you don't care. The bus was just kidding me—that's all. I eased her down as gently as I could, and quit looking for a place to land. I knew the limbs would strip the wings and smash the trucks. The top of one tree was just as good—or as bad—as another. I was neither a bird nor a monkey, and I wasn't made for trees. In fact I think I had shut my eyes and waited for the crash—there was no use trying to make a fancy landing in the trees—when the combined yell of a hundred madmen gave me the jolt of my life.

I was over an Indian village—with houses, and green fields and everything. I knew then how old Columbus must have felt when he saw the western world. There was a crowd assembled in a great, smooth clearing—a fiesta, I supposed—and when I swooped along above it they spread out in two brown waves. I came down in the narrow channel between the two lines of Indians, touched the ground in a lucky three-point, and ran a hundred yards or more.

Ococinco—that's where I was—and there, not a hundred feet away, was Penny. Old Penny, with his stooped shoulders, and his gray vandyke, and his deep childlike eyes. At Columbia, where he lectured occasionally on Mayan archaeology, he was Doctor Ambrose Pennybacker, with more degrees than a thermometer, but from Colon to Mexico City, and from Vera Cruz to Mazatlan, he was Penny.

Can you beat it? There wasn't another white man in a hundred miles, no matter which way you might have gone, yet here he was, leaning against the straight, slim trunk of a coco-palm. "Penny!" I yelled.

"Well—Mister Dillard," he said, in a high, quavering voice.

I guess he was the only white man on the Isthmus who didn't call me Pinkie—a heluva nickname for a two-hundred-pound brute with a face like a nightmare and a fist like a ham. Even without a look at the blood on his jacket and dungarees I could see with half an eye that Penny was done. A piece of twisted hennequin went around his narrow chest and held him to the tree.

I started to loosen the hennequin rope and an Indian made for me with a machete, the four-foot knife they use for everything from picking their teeth to digging graves. I laid a bunch of knuckles under his ear and he went over and over like a pinwheel. The rest of them that hadn't been hypnotized by the ship just stood and stared at me—a being who had come down on the wings of thunder, and who had only to stretch forth his hand to knock a man twenty feet. Oh yeah—you gotta pack a punch if you're playing around the edges of the world.

Penny spoke to them in the Popoluco dialect, a lot of which I had picked up in Sayula the year before:

"This man is my friend; he has come to help me."

Then they opened up their faces in friendly grins. What Penny didn't know about the jungle and its strange half-savage people has been torn out. He had spent twenty years in the Maya area; he was as much at home in the jungle as the monkey and the parrot and

the shy little creatures that slip silently through the brush.

I cut him down and eased him to the grass, with his shoulders against the tree. "The natives," he explained in a weak voice, "believe that if a man dies standing up he will be a great warrior in the next world."

"We gotta have *some* thinkers in the next world," I said. "How come?"

"Gehring shot me."

"That big—?" I knew Gehring, a huge, beefy blond, a character with a record in the Isthmian country. Murder and robbery would be about his speed.

"He followed me from Frontera up the Usumacinta," Penny continued "—asked to go along. Said he was coming across the Isthmus, and I couldn't refuse, though I didn't trust him. I was on the way to Yalian to get the pearls of Oti-oti." He smiled at the expression on my face. "I'm not crazy, Mister Dillard, I have seen the pearls. They will be worth a great fortune. On one of the walls of a ruined palice in Yalian I found an engraved account of the building of the shrine of Oti-oti, winged god of the Maya, and the pearls that are his eyes. He is poised on a beautiful obelisk ninety feet high, a fine stone bird with wings outstretched, and his pearl eyes gleam in the setting sun."

He stopped to rest, and to pant a while. "You don't have to tell me, Penny," I said, "if it tires you."

He tried to smile again, but he was going pretty fast. "I want to tell you, for Gehring has gone back after the pearls. He stole my maps of the jungle, and of Yalian—stole everything I had. You see I couldn't trust him, so I missed Yalian—went south of it. Intended to go there alone. As I couldn't climb the obelisk I had brought along a lot of dynamite to shoot it down. When Gehring found out we had passed the ancient city he was wild. He shot me and left me to die in the jungle."

With a good deal of trouble, and some help from me, the old fellow got his thin fingers into a jacket pocket and brought out two rock marbles the size of guinea eggs, but round and shiny and very smooth.

"Rock salt," he said; "I made them for an emergency, for I know the ways of men. Wrap them up carefully and take them along with you—they might help you."

More to humor him than for any other reason I made a neat package of the pellets with a bandana handkerchief and slipped it into a breeches pocket. Penny's eyes had closed and he was laying too still to last long. "Where is Yalian?" I said.

"East," he gasped, "almost due east —a little north. Sixty miles—a pyramid, with a bare ridge north of it. With the airplane you might find it; all the rest is jungle."

"But the people of Yalian, Penny; what—?"

"No people—an ancient city—ruined, deserted; great capital of the Maya a thousand years ago." He was quiet so long I thought he'd gone, but he started again in a faint whisper: "There is a race of Indians—probably come at intervals for religious ceremonies. The simple people of Ococinco call them the white spirits . . . afraid of them. The white spirits never come out of the jungle. I—I saw them once, but I can't remember whether I was dreaming or not. Mister Dillard, in the jungle are many wonderful—and—unexplainable things—"

I stood up, and the Ococinco Indians crowded around and studied the still form of the strange little man of the jungle. Was he crazy, and was his raving about an ancient city with palaces and a great stone bird with pearl eyes a sort of bughouse dream?

Yet that hard-headed crook, Gehring, had gone back to search for it.

On a pretty knoll that overlooked the village we buried Penny under a graceful ceiba tree and placed a slanting slab of limestone at his head. The silent

Indians filled the space behind the narrow seat of the cockpit with cocos and choice fruits and billtong—a dried meat—while I went over the motor and found a broken commutator spring, which didn't take me five minutes to fix. Then I pulled the old prop a couple times and climbed in. They stood, awed and kinda fearful, while I gave it the gun and went off with a terrible clatter—tail high. Sixty feet from the dark line of trees I pulled the joystick back as far as it would go and bored a hole in the sky.

It was two-thirty when I turned the ship toward the east. "Almost due east," he had said "—a little north." Sixty miles would take an hour because I'd have to fly low, and slow enough to watch the roof of the jungle.

Needle in the haystack—huh! Wait till you have tried to find anything in a wilderness of crowded trees as flat as a Dutch playground a hundred miles across. You could have lost a handful of New England states in that sweep of timber.

I went all the way across. I knew I had because the silver ribbon of the Usumacinat River showed up to the east. I banked and sent the old crate south for a quarter of an hour and then cut west again. I made up my mind to grid the jungle from east to west and from north to south until I had found Yalian or until I ran out of gas and came spraddling down in the treetops.

I think I had forgotten the lure of the pearls. The more I thought of the fine, gentle, kindly old fellow who lay under the ceiba tree the more I wanted to hunt out Gehring and get my fingers around his throat. Even the motor seemed to be singing a song of hate. I pictured all the ways I'd like to kill him, and I decided that the best would be to half kill him and leave him in the jungle—just as he had done Penny.

Funny how that blood-lust gets you. I'm burning up with it, my eyes on the green sea that pours along under me—just looking with my eyes and not my mind, for my mind is full of the things I'm going to do the big blond coward. I'm thinking so hard I don't quite realize that a flash has come from the dimpled sea to the east of me. Just the kind of a flash a window in some house on a hill will shoot at you when you get it at a proper angle with the sun.

It takes about a minute for that flash to get into my head—but when it does! I come around on a pinhead turn and go back for it. I do loops and figure eights and Immelmans, and a falling leap or two. You'd think I was chasing a sunbeam—which I was. Old Oti-oti had winked at me—and I had missed it because my mind was full of the brutal joys of man in the raw.

That bird wouldn't wink again, and I came down lower and lower and made circles smaller and smaller until I could almost count the leaves on the trees. All at once the great pyramid stuck up in front of me and I leaned over the stick and pushed the ship down upon a bare, narrow ridge, stopping less than twenty feet from the back door of one of those big sacrificial mounds the Maya used to build.

It was a hundred feet high and half as big as a city block, shaped exactly like the pyramids of Egypt, and built of two-foot blocks of limestone. A pretty nifty piece of architecture, I'm telling you, and it must have taken many a year and many a poor slave to build it. Broad steps led up the middle of the north face—up the middle of each face, I found out later.

I pushed the bus out of sight in the shelter of brush and small trees and started around the west side of the pyramid. I was out to see the city. So this was Yalian. The jungle had taken over a great metropolis. I found ruins of wide rock buildings that must 'a' been mansions, and mounds that probably meant houses of abode. Roots had grown under walls and pushed 'em over, and heavy, snake-like vines curled into gaping holes that must 'a' been windows out of which some spiffy Maya maiden

had peeped at a dusky drugstore cowboy with a mandolin and a tenor voice. Oh yeah—people don't change any.

Silent and lonesome — take it from me! A million spirits of long dead and gone Maya people seemed to fill the air —coming back to hang around the old town again. I got a kinda feeling that I was the last man on earth and that all other animal life had disappeared. Scared? You can tell 'em I was scared —scared of nothing. When a rabbit hopped out of a richly carved doorway and beat it across what was once the Avenue I had to catch hold of a tree to keep from falling, my knees were so weak.

But I went pretty careful at that. Gehring was abroad and I didn't want him to catch me off guard; and as for the white spirits . . . well, I didn't see anything to gain in making a racket. Penny had seen 'em, and the people of Ococinco were afraid of 'em.

So I was going along easy, slipping from one ruined wall to another, and using the big trees for shelter, when a funny sound came to me. It might have been the wind, or—if you've got a good imagination—the voice of spirits. It seemed to come from a long way off but not from any particular direction.

Fear took told of me, and the hair lifted on the back of my head. "What the hell—?" I said to myself, just to make sure I was real. I peeped around a tree and saw 'em coming. A long line of men, moving slow, like a funeral, and singing a weird march that made my blood run cold. They went along, two by two, each with gaudy shouldering coverings of red and black and yellow, each swaying his lean body back and forth and mouthing that doleful dirge.

They were white—that's what hit me hardest. White Indians in a land where every native was as dark as the inside of a cow. Penny said he'd seen 'em, but he wasn't sure whether he was dreaming or not. I pinched myself—no dream. Suddenly my heart jumped into my throat for, stumbling along in the midst of the writhing, chanting jungle people was Gehring, the big blond coward that I had planned to kill! So he had found Yalian after all.

Green — he was green with terror. They pretty near had to carry him. It gave me a laugh at first, but when I remembered that sacrificial pyramid I knew why he looked so scared, I knew where they were going. Hard luck, but he had it coming to him.

After they had passed I thought it over. I think I could have strangled Gehring and enjoyed it, or I could have turned him over to the State of Chiapas to stand trial for murder, but I didn't like the idea of that bunch of jungle savages making a fiesta out of him. After all he was a white man. Crazy? Maybe—but you never can tell.

I made a wide circle to the west and came around on the north side of the pyramid, for the Indians approached it from the south. Out of the hidden ship I got a dozen landing flares and started up the north face of the big rock pile. A landing flare is a cross between a skyrocket and sparkler; believe me, it makes a light you can't miss. I hid behind the circular wall on top of the pyramid and waited.

Westward the sun, a dull red ball, stood just above the trees. My perch let me look over the roof of the jungle, which seemed like a wide, green-brown ocean. To the east the leafy sea stretched away to a dim blue haze. Less than a mile from me a big brown bird—wings outspread for flight—stood above the jungle, and his eyes reflected the rays of the setting sun.

Hot dog! There he was—Oti-oti—with the pearl eyes that old Penny had said were worth a fortune. If I hadn't gone to the top of the pyramid to help that dog, Gehring, I might never have found the bird at all.

So I sat and waited, listening to the tolling of the tom-tom and the rise and fall of the weird Indian melody. The sun went down and a fine golden moon came up out of the jungle ocean. For

half a minute the graceful outline of Oti-oti stood out against the face of the moon. "Right toward the moon," I kept saying over and over, setting the direction in my mind.

Finally they started up the long flight of stone steps. They walked very slowly, giving me time to wear down my nervousness and to think up a surprise attack for them, because no one man—not even a big one—can hope to lick a hundred Indians. Just before they reached the top a thick blanket of cloud moved over the face of the moon, and the gloom was pretty heavy. They set up a moan that gave me the creeps.

The big husky in the lead—some high-priest, I suppose—climbed to the top of the cap-rock, a long knife in his hand, and a bunch of them pushed the form of Gehring up beside him. The high-priest started a long palaver — knife above his head. Hiding behind the wall I lighted a flare and sent it spinning and hissing into the air. It gave out a blinding white light, falling right at the feet of the executioner, whose chalky-white face sure had the look of a scared hombre.

Then I tossed another flare. Over and over it went, a high arc, spinning and twisting and sputtering, bathing the pyramid and the assembled Indians in a ghostly glare. I threw them faster, and the air was full of incandescent shooting stars that fell amongst 'em and scorched their bare feet and set their brilliant mantillas afire, and put a moving fear into their hearts.

Oh yeah—it was a shame to take the money. Down the south face of the pyramid they went, some running, some sliding, some just rolling, but all letting out frantic yells that told the wide world that they were scared and on the way.

Gehring took the east face of the big rock mound for his race track and did a hundred yards in nothing flat, and I took the north; back to the ship again, where I got a coil of thin rope, turned my face toward the moon, and gave myself over to the business of swift and silent running. "Now for the pearls of Oti-oti," I told myself, "and the world is mine!"

What I had to do must be done in a hurry, for I knew the Indians would comb the town of Yalian before the night was over. For a deserted city it was doing pretty well; it was certainly too crowded for my business.

I never turned from a direct line toward the moon, keeping a watch for open spaces through the trees, where Oti-oti might show. It may have been ten minutes, or even less, when I broke from the underbrush into a small clearing, where I stood in amazement—or awe, or worship—for the graceful body of the giant bird stood out clearly against the sky.

I wrapped the lariat around my waist and grabbed a tree, which I intended to climb, and from which I expected to throw a loop over a wing, or the head, and pull myself up. I wasted forty precious minutes on that tree and found, after I'd reached the top, that another tree intervened, so I came sliding down in a hurry. The moon was out again as I reached the ground and turned to face Gehring, who held a gleaming pistol in his hand.

He was grinning broadly. "Well—Pinkie Dillard," he said, "how's the monkey business?"

A wild spasm of rage went over me, my mad desire to kill him came back. I forgot the weapon he held and made a lunge for him, but he swung the heavy gun against the side of my head and the trees began to dance a jig and the moon winked out, and I went down for the count.

By the time the world looked normal again he had tied me most securely with my lariat. He searched my pockets and found the two foolish pellets of salt that Penny had made. With a rasping oath of joy he held them up to the moon. "Pretty quick work, Pinkie. They're a little rough, old son, but they've been out in the weather a long time." He let out a husky laugh. "A skilled lapidary

will skin 'em and make 'em new again. Two pearls the size of these, Pinkie—and matched as well as these—are worth a quarter of a million."

That's how I learned that the moon is a poor light for testing pearls. I could hardly keep from grinning. Those salt marbles were beyond the skill of any lapidary; it would take at least an alchemist.

"You didn't know I had mined the obelisk, did you?"

"Of course not," I answered, "but I do know that I saved your worthless life."

He chuckled. "I was all ready to shoot the damned thing down when those wild Indians gimme the bum's rush. If you'd seen the mine you might have saved yourself that imitation of a squirrel." He thought a half minute. "You know too much, Pinkie, you've seen too much. Both of us can't go back to the Coast." He studied me anxiously. "Maybe you saw Penny—?"

"Sure," I said, letting my madness get the best of my judgment; "I know you murdered him—you dog!"

He drew the pistol again, and for a second I thought he was going to shoot me, but he raised it in the air and fired twice. "That'll bring 'em, Pinkie, and when they see that ugly mug of yours maybe they will think you're some new kind of god—but I doubt it. Give my regards to that big sucker with the knife. Adios."

"I hope nothing bites you in the jungle," I growled.

"Have no fears—I know the jungle."

Can you beat it? After I'd saved his life too. Can you imagine how a white man could do a thing like that? It was by me. Maybe something *did* bite 'im in the jungle after all, for that was the last any one ever head of Gehring.

I was twisting around on the ground a quarter of an hour later, trying to loosen my hands, when the white Indians broke from the brush and tumbled on top of me. I got a look at 'em while they untied me. They were a fine looking bunch of huskies, I can say that much for them. Must 'a' had good blood in them. And they weren't spirits either. The big high-priest caught me by the shoulder in a grip of iron and jerked me to my feet.

They backed me up against the wide base of the stone obelisk and started that infernal chant again. I counted about forty in the moonlight. Most of 'em had machetes, and all of them had expressions on their faces that made me feel pretty sure I was n't going to enjoy their little party.

I got a hunch that they did not intend to waste another trip to the sacrificial mound, they were going to do their sacrificing right where we were. I wondered if they suspected that I was the cause of the falling stars that had scared them off the pyramid; anyhow, they couldn't have loved me any less.

They lined up in front of me and pulled a lot of chest notes and raised their eyes to the giant bird and bent their bodies backward and forward and groaned and wailed while I looked around for a way out of it, but couldn't see a thing but that gleaming knife in the high-priest's muscular hand.

Believe me, I wished that I was in the old ship again, pushing a hole in a cloud. You're free up there, where the only problem is yourself and the motor, and anything that happens to you happens quick. Oh well—we all gotta crash *some* day.

I looked down at my feet, and there, like a slim black snake on the freshly turned earth, lay a yard of fuse! Sweet papa! A flame of joy scorched me, for I remembered that Gehring had mined the obelisk. I bent over, struck a match, and held it to the fuse. I held my breath too, until the fuse broke into vari-colored light, then I raised my arm and yelled, "Oti-oti!"

It must 'a' given 'em quite a kick for me to call on the name of their deity, for they broke into a loud chorus of "Oti-oti!" while I eased away from the mine toward the trunk of a wide tree

that looked like it might be safe. They paid little attention to me, the flaring fireworks of the fuse kinda held them.

I had just reached my tree and hid behind it when an orange jet of flame shot skyward; the trees bent suddenly away from the clearing in a blasting rush of air, and the roar of about a million zooming ships beat out over the jungle. The huge stone obelisk teetered like a drunk on the curb, balanced a second that seemed to me like a thousand years, and then fell eastward with a crash that must have reached to the moon.

Shrill cries filled the jungle and lean bodies, riding the wings of fear, raced through the brush. They forgot me in this new terror. I grabbed up a machete and ran toward the fallen shrine. Oti-oti, badly busted, lay before me. The great hooded head had broken off and the pearl eyes were gleaming in the moonlight. Took me less than two minutes to dig 'em out. For just one reverent second I put my hand on the fragment of a graceful wing. "Good-bye, Oti-oti," I whispered.

Back across the ruined city of Yalian I went, and around the pyramid to the ship again. I trundled it out into the clearing and dragged down the prop while a wave of white Indians poured over the narrow ridge. I hopped into the cockpit and made the contact as they swarmed around me. The backwash of that clattering propeller blew some of them over, but a few even held to the lower wings as I took off, dropping only after I had left the ground.

It was pretty sweet to point the old bus at the sky again, to straighten out, to turn back upon the blazing Southern Cross and give her the gun for home. Oh yeah!

MAJOR LUTZ WINS TROPHY

Major Charles A. Lutz, commanding officer of Brown Field, Quantico, Va., won the Curtiss Marine Trophy Race held at Washington recently by flying his Curtiss Hawk (D-12 engine) over the 100 miles distance at an average speed of 157.60 m.p.h. Major Lutz received keen competition from two other planes, both of which were Hawks equipped with the Pratt & Whitney Wasp engines. These were piloted to second and third place, respectively, by Lieutenant-Commander A. C. Miles of the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, at a speed of 154.10 m.p.h. and Captain Harold C. Major, U.S.M.C., of the Bureau of Aeronautics, at a speed of 151.72 m.p.h.

The group winners were: Lieutenant W. G. Tomlinson of the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, training planes, average speed 92.38 m.p.h.; Lieutenant-Commander W. K. Harrill, aid to Mr. Warner, fleet spotter class, 149.61 m.p.h.; Lieutenant B. E. Grow of the Aircraft Squadrons, Scouting Fleet, Amphibian class, 116.90 m.p.h.; Lieutenant D. V. Gallery, also from the Fleet, Torpedo and Bombing class 105.62 m.p.h. and Major Lutz as victor of the fighting plane group.

Ranking next in speed to the single seaters were the Vought Corsair fleet spotters. Lieutenant-Commander Harrill was fourth in the order of finish and Lieutenant-Commander Ralph Davison, of the Navy Department, was fifth, with a speed of 145.43 m.p.h.

Lieutenant Grow, with a Packard-engined amphibian, was sixth; Lieutenant-Commander George Chapline, Bureau of Aeronautics, was seventh, at 115.54 m.p.h.; and Lieutenant De Long Mills of the Naval Air Station, Lakehurst, N. J., was eighth at 115.40 m.p.h The latter two had Wasp-engined Loening Amphibians. The fourth entrant in this class, Lieutenant H. C. Busby, U.S.M.C., of Brown Field, Quantico, Va., flying a Liberty-engined Loening Amphibian, left the race on the third lap with engine trouble.

Air Adventurers is a band of men, all of them interested in flying, grouped for the purpose of boosting aviation in America; whose meeting place is this department of *Air Stories*.

To be a member you must be air-minded! That is the one and only requirement set. You must be interested in flying, and you must boost aviation in America. To carry on the work where it has been left off by the pioneers of the air, that is the real aim of every *Air Adventurer*, and we want you with us.

Being an *Air Adventurer* entitles you to all of the benefits of our service department. In this department all *Air Adventurers* will be enabled to establish contact with others who have what they need or want what they have! If you are thinking of buying a plane or if you have one to sell, write us and we will give notice of it under our department free of charge. If you are a pilot and are looking for a professional connection we'll help you through this department. Perhaps you've lost a buddy and are trying to make "contact" again, let us know and we'll try to help you find him. All of these services are free of charge to *Air Adventurers*.

To be an *Air Adventurer*, fill out the coupon below and mail it in with your membership fee. Upon being accepted you will be mailed a sterling silver pair of wings as shown in the coupon below and a membership card which identifies you as a member of the American Society for the Promotion of Aviation, a national organization devoted to boosting aviation in America. This card will give you entry to any of the civilian flying fields in the country. Membership fee is one dollar. No other fees are collected. Members of *Air Adventurers* are entitled to become staff correspondents at the regular space rates.

With this issue of *Air Stories*, we begin our second year! For one year we have presented to air-minded citizens the best aeronautical fiction the story world offers—and for one year you Air Adventurers have stood behind us in our efforts to promote aviation in America.

And now, as we go on into our second year we're going to double our efforts toward giving you readers the best fiction, written by the best authors in the game. A year ago we began with the slogan, "Real air stories by real airmen." And for the years to come, our slogan will still be the same. We pledge you our best efforts and we ask you to be the judges.

Look at the August line-up! Bruce, that war-bird author whose stories have made you zoom to sky-high thrills with the greatest pilots of them all. He's leading the line-up—and he will continue to write for *Air Stories* and its brother magazine *Wings*, in the coming year. Joel Townsley Rogers, another airman author, a top-hand in the fiction game—he'll have more stories coming. Then there's Frederick C. Davis, the man who gave you "Haunted Hangars"; Frederick L. Nebel, with his two flyers of fortune, Gales and McGill; Eustace L. Adams, the ex-naval aviator! Bob Travers, with his inimitable Hangar Yarns! That's a corking line-up. Top-

notch authors—every one of them a master in the fiction game and a majority actual pilots.

That's the sort of line-up you're going to have in every issue of *Air Stories* in the coming year. Only men who know the air game are writing for *Air Stories*—and they're all masters of the fiction game too!

Mitt the Newcomer!

Eustace L. Adams, author of "Let's Go!" is a newcomer to Fiction House. He's done a pile of writing, however, and has a background of many flying hours with the United States Naval Air Service. Adams knows his ships, and he's a top-hand ink-slinger, too! Watch for some of his stuff in future issues of *Air Stories*.

We asked Adams to tell you fellows something of his experiences in the air and here's the result:

While looking up an old buddy, in February, 1915, I learned that he was in some sort of an ambulance service in France. I learned the details and sailed three days later. I was in the first American Ambulance section that actually went to the front. When we had a few hard words with Mexico, I joined the N. Y. National Guard, forgetting to tell them that I was already a member of the N. Y. Naval Militia. Fumbled the ball in trying to ease out of the Naval Militia and was fired out of both.

Getting bored with the easy monotony of life, left again for France on three days notice, this time with the Norton-Harjes Unit. Batted around on the Somme, but by far the most thrilling experience was the piloting, in a big Mercedes staff car, of a party of women *journalistes*, including Elinor Glyn. Took them from one end of the French front to the other. You should have read her articles about it! When U. S. entered war, I returned to hook up with U. S. Naval Aviation. Flew a year and a half, or so, and only wrecked (that is, completely!) one $25,000 ship. What ho, it was quite a war!

EUSTACE L. ADAMS.

WHOOPEE!

Dear Editor:

Your "mags" are both wows! Nuff sed!

BOB DUNCAN,
Atlanta, Ga.

Air Adventurers department has always been set aside as a meeting place for air-minded readers of *Air Stories*. It has been the hangar into which *Air Adventurers* who wanted to voice their opinions would come. It has been the contact point between the promoters of aviation and their friends of other states and countries.

It is in accordance with the policy of *Air Stories* then, that we set aside a corner of the old hangar in which the representatives of various aero clubs in the United States can meet and chat. In this particular corner of the *Air Adventurers'* department we want the members of aero clubs throughout the country to exchange ideas, arrange co-ordination of activities, and establish communication with the other clubs which are working toward the promotion of civilian aviation.

We want you to write to us and let us know through this department what you are doing in your own communities. We want you to submit your ideas of organization. And we want you to tell us of the experiments or suggestions which would be of any assistance to the other clubs throughout the nation which are organized for the purpose of establishing civilian aviation in America.

NORFOLK UNIT IN

Early this month a meeting for the formation of the Norfolk A. S. P. A. unit was called by Mr. Earl White and associates. Lt. P. O'Brien, Jr., formerly of the U. S. Air Service, was elected Squadron Commander. The officers of this unit have been put in touch with Charles C. Townsend, Jr., a former Naval Air Service Man, who also is interested in organizing a unit in Norfolk and it is hoped that the effort of these two groups will produce, in Norfolk, one of the outstanding units of the East.

FROM OHIO

Mr. Robert V. Hubbard of Ashtabula, Ohio, has started a drive for members in his city from which he hopes to form an Ashtabula Aero Club, in conjunction with the A. S. P. A.

GLEN COVE CLUB ACTIVE

One of the most active units of the A. S. P. A. is the Gren Cove Aero Club of Glen Cove, L. I. Each week sees a great many new members enrolled and the club officials are optimistic as to their future. They expect to have a plane in service within the next few months.

MORE OHIO ACTIVITIES

Bucyrus, Ohio, will shortly have an active A. S. P. A. unit, owing to the effort of Robert L. Haspelagh and associates, who have called the first organization meeting and have enlisted the aid of the mayor and city officials in the project.

EMPIRE STATE ACTIVE

Mr. Edwin Leys of Lynbrook, N. Y., has interested members in his community in the organizing of an aero club. Literature and assistance has been offered by the A. S. P. A. and we expect to hear more of this unit shortly.

FROM THE WEST

Mr. Matthew Armstrong, Jr., an active A. S. P. A. worker of Great Falls, Montana, writes that the first organization meeting of the Great Falls, Montana Aero Club was held recently.

BIG DOIN'S!

An attempt to mold the many A. S. P. A. members in Chicago into a unit to be known as the Illinois Flying Club has been undertaken by Mr.

Frank G. Coon, 7633 Bosworth Ave., Chicago, Ill. A list of A. S. P. A. members in and about Chicago has been forwarded to Mr. Coon and it is expected that very shortly a real unit will be organized in Chicago.

CLUB PLANS PLANE PURCHASE

One of the most active A. S. P. A. units in New Jersey is the Mountain Lakes Aero Club, organized under the leadership of Major George A. Reeder. The Club has plans under way for the purchase of a Travelair plane and one of the members has already purchased a Challenger through the local agent.

MORE COMING, TOO!

An effort is under way in Englewood, N. J., to organize the Englewood Aero Club in conjunction with the A. S. P. A. A flying field has been secured by Mr. Wm. C. Graham and Mr. Thomas Gray, who will operate as the Bergen Airway Co. Members of the Englewood Aero Club, as organized, will be given special privileges on the field.

ORGANIZER ADDRESSES CLUB

The Elizabeth Aero Club name has been changed to the name "Rail and Harbor City Aero Club" by Victor Granberg and associates. Captain John E. Heywang of the A. S. P. A. visited with this unit recently and gave a very interesting talk from the local radio station.

A. S. P. A. PRESIDENT SPEAKS

Mr. Thomas L. Hill, President of the A. S. P. A., visited with the Rockaway Aero Club at one of its meetings held early this month. The club, organized a short time ago has successfully held its first social entertainment and is rapidly developing a surplus in the treasury, which will go toward the purchase of a plane. Commander Jack Isemann of the Rockaway Air Station is to be the speaker at their next meeting.

FROM NEW ENGLAND STATE

Mr. Prosper M. Marcotte, of Pawtucket, R. I., writes of the interest being shown in his community in the development of an air organization. We expect that shortly the Pawtucket Aero Club will be organized under his sponsorship and in cooperation with the A. S. P. A.

NATIONWIDE!

From Maine to California became a reality at the office of the A. S. P. A. this month when on the same day notice came to the society of the organization of the Aroostook Aero Club in Caribou, Maine, under the sponsorship of Kenneth McLaughlin and the organization of the Berkeley California unit under the direction of Mr. Lewis Telbury.

MORE COMING!

Aviation interest is catching on to such an extent in New England that practically every Boston suburb now has an aero unit under way. Although there is a Tri City Aero Club embracing Medford, Malden and Somerville in operation, there has been some effort on the part of Mr. J. Sumner Adams and others of Medford, Mass., to organize a Medford Aero Club.

A NEW ONE

Mr. Merton J. Clark of New Britain, Conn., announces the development of the Norman Prince Aeronautical Society, whose object will be to promote aviation through the building and piloting of gliders and models. Members of the A. S. P. A. in New Britain and vicinity will work with Mr. Clark in building up his unit.

FROM THE SPEED CITY

An effort is under way by Harold L. Smith and associates of Indianapolis to organize an A. S. P. A. unit in that city. The first meeting was held with an attendance of thirty.

NEW ENGLAND AGAIN!

At the first meeting of the Little Rhody Aero Club at Providence, R. I., Richard N. Ballard was appointed Chairman of the Organization Committee of the club. About thirty-two persons interested in aeronautics were present, twenty of whom were enrolled as members of the A. S. P. A. An invitation was presented to Thomas L. Hill, president of the A. S. P. A., to address the club at an early date.

GOOD WORK!

Under the able leadership of J. M. Litty, president; J. M. Acierno, vice-president; I. Gats, secretary, and G. F. Nadeau, treasurer, the Flatbush Aero Club of Brooklyn, N. Y., is rapidly forging ahead. Plans for a dance to be held are under way. Inasmuch as the new New York City Airport is located in the Flatbush District big doings are expected this summer.

AIRMEN SPEAK

The Jersey City Flying Club, recently held a community gathering in People's Palace, Jersey City, where thirty new members were added to the club roster. Captain Philip Dickson, formerly of the R. A. F., and Lt. James Butler of the United States Air Service Reserve, spoke before the gathering, and Lt. Butler, a resident of Jersey City, has offered to affiliate with the club as ground instructor. The club is making an effort to secure park property for flying purposes and President R. D. Stewart has had a number of aircraft sales agents demonstrate their ships inasmuch as the club will buy a plane within the next few weeks. Mr. L. A. Breault and Thomas J. Flanagan, officers of the club, have purchased a "Camel" machine for their individual flying.

WAY DOWN SOUTH

Mr. Kenneth E. Benson, of Tampa, Florida, announces that an effort is being made to organize an aviation unit in the Tampa High School, as he feels that with the background of the A. S. P. A. a real live organization could be put over.

WATCH 'EM GROW!

The ASPA has forwarded to John L. Scherer, of Glendale, L. I., names of A. S. P. A. members in his vicinity. Mr. Scherer will shortly call a meeting with the idea of organizing the Glendale Aero Club in conjunction with the A. S. P. A.

FROM THE COAST

The West Coast, which has responded so actively to the call of aviation, will add another aero club to its roster through the efforts of Frank C. Barber and others who have organized the McKenna Aero Club of McKenna, Washington, in conjunction with the A. S. P. A. Mr. Barber is formerly of the Marine Aviation Service and would like to hear from someone who has a good serviceable second-hand machine for sale.

FRISCO ACTION!

Mr. R. M. McClary of San Francisco has forwarded to the A. S. P. A. outlines for the organization of a San Francisco unit. The names of others interested in San Francisco have been sent to Mr. McClary, and more news of the development of this organization will be had shortly.

VISITORS FROM HEADQUARTERS

Captain J. E. Heywang and Captain Philip Dickson visited with the Rutherford Aero Club of Rutherford, N. J., on April 25th. Over forty members attended, and the local papers have given the organization of this new club splendid publicity.

THANK YOU!

Dear Editor:

During the past year an interest has been shown in aviation that has never been known before; and, believe me, *Air Stories* and *Wings* have certainly done their part to boost aviation. Both books shall have all the support that I am able to give them.

Enclosed is my dollar for membership in the A. S. P. A.

ADRIAN SAVAGE,
Durham, Kans.

FROM LINDY'S WAY!

Dear Editor:

I have read *Air Stories* and find it is a real red-blooded magazine, and I am telling my friends about it. I have been a booster of aviation for a long time, although I am not a pilot. I am one of the many hundreds who think St. Louis is going to be the aviation center.

There are several airplane factories going to locate here. We are going to have the finest airport in the country when completed, and we look for it to be the hub of all airways, thanks to Col. Chas. Lindbergh, who started his wonderful adventure from here. Anybody who reads *Air Stories* magazine cannot help from being an aviation bug.

I think your magazine is going to be a wonderful help to aviation. I have been an automobile mechanic for 18 years, but I am going to be an airplane mechanic at our field before long.

I am sending $1 and coupon for membership in the ASPA. I can hardly wait for the pin and card.

ROY E. DAVIS,
St. Louis, Mo.

MAYBE—!

Dear Editor:

Enclosed is my buck.

I've been a reader of your books for the past three months and sure look forward to each future issue with expectation. You could not have assembled a greater bunch of writers if you paid each one of them a million a week. They sure know their props.

Yours for *Air Stories* and *Wings* each twice-a-month!

W. C. MUELLER,
Bogota, N. J.

WANTS MORE GALES-McGILL

Dear Editor:

Just a word as to my opinion of *Air Stories*.

I've just finished reading the latest issue of the magazine and I can truthfully say that it contains the best group of stories I've ever read. I like particularly those Gales-McGill yarns, written by Frederick L. Nebel. I sure hope you keep on publishing those stories in the future.

Best wishes.

J. FRANK GROAT,
Garrettsville, Ohio.

ANOTHER A. A.!

Dear Editor:

Here is where I get the air so sign me up in the A. A's. You will find my "buck" enclosed.

I haven't missed a single copy of *Air Stories* or *Wings* ever since they have been out. I had to wait a long time between each copy of *Air Stories* and I thought that *Wings* would eat 'em up whole.

Hurry up with that Carter dope. Here's to the next issues of *Air Stories* and *Wings*.

ROSS J. SEDITA,
Birmingham, Ala.

YOU BET!

Dear Editor:

Boy you've got two hot mags in *Wings* and *Air Stories*. I like both mags and read them in no time after they're out. I'm just a kiwi, but not proud of it, never having been in a plane. Am I eligible for the A.S.P.A.?

Yours,
"PINKY" STAHL,
Ansonia, Conn.

FROM FAR AUSTRALIA

Dear Editor:

Ever since I was a kid I have always been frightfully interested in things that go up or try to go up in the old atmos. I once made a glider out of flattened petrol cans, then people said I was dingbats, it was a long time ago. Since then I have found out a thing or two. Anyway after reading your, *Air Stories* I reckon they are tophole. In the Oct. issue, the yarn "Horizon Hoppers," the way they got their bus "Black Hawk" was great, wish I could find a "total wreck" like that.

I would like to be a member of the A.S.P.A. If possible so tell me how I can wangle that dollar over, and I will get Hinkler to hop over with it, he is a great cobber of mine, but he does not know it.

So I will up with the stick, shut off engines, and go to earth.

GERALD R. BLOWES,
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

HAPPY LANDINGS!

Dear Editor:

Switch off, Contact! Watch my sky-writing for a while. I'm 14 and going to take up a flying course as soon as I can scrape together 50 shekles and my Mom thinks of my learning to fly is O.K. as long as I keep my "Jenny" on her horizontal axis. Well I've been writing the history of my life long enough. Now for a word about *Wings* and *Air Stories*. I have never seen a washout story in either of your mags. The "Ghost Ship" and "Flaming Dawns" by George Bruce has the world's altitude record.

Tell all the Air Adventurers to write and tell me all they know about this landing problem, for I don't want to bust up the first "Jennie" I wiggle controls on.

Tell that nut twister in the hangar to come out and spin my "Prop" and I'll take up a little bit of tarmac trying to coax "Jennie" into the sky.

JUNIOR DAPPES,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

CONTACT

This department will publish, free of all charge, notices from readers. All members who wish to make contact with others interested in aviation or who wish to get in touch with lost pals of the air service are invited to enter their ad in this department. This service is free to *Air Adventurers*. Replies to the notices will be forwarded through *Air Stories*.

CARTOONIST, specializing in aeronautical cartoons for advertising purposes, wishes connection with the industry. Address Manley Mills.

INTERESTED IN FLYING and wants to learn to pilot a ship. D. D. Skelton, of Texas, wants to get a job with a pilot, doing most anything, in return for lessons in flying and expenses.

ADVERTISING WRITER, publicity director and press correspondent, who understands practical aviation, desires connection with aviation firm, flying school, flying circus, etc.—Can write anything. Frank E. Ross.

WING-WALKER seeks connection with flying circus or movie company. Dare-Devil Dolan, racer, stunt man, is open for engagements. Transfer from plane, auto, train or motorcycle to another plane. Address Donald Dolan.

WANTS PICTURES—Particularly pictures of light planes and sport type ships. Please address Walter Smith.

DEAN AND HENRY NELSON, last heard of with the flying forces of the A.E.F. in 1917, please communicate with their cousin, Mary News.

WINGS, two upper wings for a D. H. Can be used for building a monoplane. In A number 1 condition, ailerons uncovered. Address Pilot C. K. Rodgers.

AIR-MINDED civilian is willing to undertake expeditions of any sort which will assist in the progress of aviation in America. Address L. Seconde.

TWO PALS want to hear from Air Adventurers. Any one with experience and actual flying knowledge can write to A. J. Kummer and M. G. Polardi.

YOUNG, ATTRACTIVE girl stunt flyer is anxious to become connected with some air circus. Her experience in flying and knowledge of the air will prove a valuable asset to any advertising firm which can use a flyer. Address Miss Mae Trombley.

SEAGULL, equipped with a K-6 motor, wanted by a pilot. If you have anything to offer in this line address J. W. Harvey.

AIRPLANE MECHANIC, graduate of the United States Army mechanics' school, is seeking an opening in an airplane manufacturing corporation or with a private party. F. A. Eiserborth.

STUNT FLYER. Experienced wing walker and jumper is looking for a connection with a good pilot who has a plane. Bob Bailie.

KNOWS MOTORS. Wants field job as mechanic near San Francisco. Elbert E. Miller.

PUBLICITY DIRECTOR and press correspondent desires connection with flying school or circus where his services may be exchanged for a training in flying. Earle M. Holden.

AIR ENTHUSIAST wishes pictures of planes and any views of planes while flying. Is making a collection of airplane pictures and aerial views. Any one who has pictures to send please address Bob Lynn.

FLYER wishes connection with flying circus. Stunt pilot with one thousand hours to his credit. Will fly any type of plane. Address Tom Morse.

NEW AND REBUILT JENNYS. This air adventurer has several Jennys on hand that can be bought at greatly reduced figures. If you're interested, address Ira Coleman.

GLIDER DESIGNER would like to secure data on glider design and glider meets. Is attempting to build a record-breaking glider to bring the record to America. Address Robert (Bob) Rankin.

WILL JOSEPH ANDERSON AND JAMES P. RICHARDSON, formerly of the 657th Aero Squadron, RFC, communicate with this department at once? Any one having any information please address H. Sullivan. Last heard from at Kidbrook, Blackheath, London, England. Richardson last seen at Cleveland, Ohio.

Roussel Spins a Yarn

Once again we find that a fiction story has its foundation built on actual fact. Hubert Roussel, author of "The Cloud-Tamer," tells us that his story has pictured a character out of life. Here's his tale:

San Antonio is the meeting place of some of the most colorful figures in the free-lance and military flying games, and in a couple of hours a man good at listening can gather more yarns of strange doings in the air than you would have room to print in this department in quite a few issues.

"Cloud-Tamer" has one character in it drawn from life—Strut Hogan. Before he went into the business of buying and selling ships around here Strut used to fly payrolls and such things about Mexico, and the old Jenny he used still shows a few bullet notches in its hide. The idea of flying the money to the bank which I have used in the story is adapted from one of his experiences, but what really happened to him was that a wheel came off the ship in the air, and when he tried to land he cracked up pretty badly. What he carried away in the form of broken bones and torn muscles has kept him on the ground more or less since that time, but he'll still take you for a hop if you want to go—and then you're lucky if you've got a good strong stomach and calm nerves.

Down at Ellington Field during the war I watched a crash similar to the one described in the story—though of course not intentional. One of the pilots did better than I've allowed Britt to do, for he crawled out of his demolished Jenny after a 2,500 foot plunge, walked calmly to the flight surgeon's office, which was only a hundred yards away, and asked for a piece of court-plaster for his only injury—a slight cut on the forehead.

HUBERT ROUSSEL.

WELCOME, CANUCK!

Dear Editor:

Air Stories is good; so is *Wings*. Have had all copies so far, but wish they were published more often, as do all the rest of your readers. I take it that America in the sense you use it also includes Canada, so am enclosing my buck for the A. S. P. A. wings and card.

K. P. MCLEOD,
Windsor, Ont., Can.

FIGHTING OVER US!

Howdy, Editor:

Here I come, with my little two-penny bit about how good your mags are!

Every time I sit down to read your *Wings* books, something from the living-room spots the cover on it and immediately I get chased all around the house with cries of "Gimme, I wanna read the *Air Adventurers,*" and "Gimme, I want to see how Nick Royce made out this time," etc., etc. I just don't get any peace at all. Finally, I go out and sit in a rowboat on the lake and finish the book. Then I can come back home again and watch the others fight over it!

I hope you can keep on publishing the good stuff you do, and some day, p'raps we who are doing all of our flying with you now, can get to doing some real flying on our own, with real crates under us and a powerful Hisso up ahead singing its sky-song. For the present, *Wings* makes some real flights with plenty enjoyment!

DON KEELER,
Essington, Pa.

ANOTHER COMMUNITY ENLISTS

The Worcester Aero Club, of Worcester, Mass., has changed its name to the Worcester Society for the Promotion of Aviation, and will conduct its meeting under the A.S.P.A. banner in the future.

The club has secured an unusually large membership in a short time, and it is understood that its activities have been largely responsible for the establishment of the new Worcester airport. Plans are being made for the purchase of a number of planes in the spring, whereupon flying activities will be begun.

The officers of the Worcester chapter are: Wm. C. Sylvester, president, and James Dickinson, secretary Among their prominent members who are owners of planes is Mr. Whittall, of the Whittall Carpet Company, who now owns and operates a Fairchild and a Waco plane.

ANOTHER BOOSTER

Dear Editor:

Three cheers for *Wings!*

I've been reading it since it first came on the stands, and I haven't stopped yet. I think *Death's Head for Luck,* by George Bruce, was the best air novel you've ever published. It was every bit as good as *Flaming Dawns* in *Air Stories!*

I like Frederick Davis' newsreel series of stories, too. They're all fine stuff, with great air action running all the way through. Please see what you can do about getting *Air Stories* and *Wings* both twice-a-month books, won't you?

GENE WEYMAN,
Glens Falls, N. Y.

Warren Wheeler, Washington, D. C.

Q. What insignia was used on the wings of the American fighting plane during the World War?

A. All Allied planes used the same insignia on their wings during the late war, the red, white and blue circles. At the beginning of the scrap, before America's entry, the red and white circles were used on some planes.

Albert Foth, Newton, Kans.

Q. I would like to know whether there are any companies selling gliders that are knocked down so that the purchasers may build it himself?

A. Sorry, we have not been able to find any American manufacturer of gliders. There are a few which will be imported from Europe soon, but just now most gliders in America are homemade.

William Hansen, Milwaukee, Wis.

Q. Where can I get information concerning the Citizens' Military Training Camps?

A. Apply to the Army Information Bureau of your local army base.

Bob O'Day, Meriden, Conn.

Q. What is the address of the Irwin Meteorplane Company? Where can I get in touch with the Heath Airplane Company?

A. The Irwin Meteorplane Company, Sacramento, California. The Heath Airplane and Supply Company is at 2856 Broadway, Chicago, Illinois.

Robert S. Carraway, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Q. Where can I get plans for building a practical glider?

A. Apply to Major Vergne Chappelle, at the Flatbush Aero Club, Brooklyn, N. Y. This club is taking up the building and flying of gliders seriously, and should be able to help you.

John Wilshusen, Floral Park, N. Y.

Q. Where can I get application blanks for entry to the army air service?

A. For application to the army air service as a flying cadet, apply to the Adjutant Gen-

eral, United States Army, Washington, D. C. You must be between the ages of twenty and twenty-seven, and a college student for at least two years, before you will be considered. If you are not able to meet these primary qualifications, you will be wasting your time in applying.

NEWS FROM THE ARMY!

Dear Editor:

Have a heart will you! Ever since your *Wings* and *Air Stories* were put on the stands I have been reading them from cover to cover. I have noticed that from about the second issue on, there has been a continual kick about, "why not every week?" Is it any wonder there are so many book worms when they can feed on such fine stories as *Wings* and *Air Stories* furnish?

I for one have about two good book meals a month, then I have to starve myself until you make up your mind to let out another. I am telling you out and out Mr. Editor, that something must be done. It would not surprise me in the least if there would be a big book strike one of these fine days. I wish there would be, then it might enter your mind to give us *Wings* and *Air Stories* once a week.

Yep, when I'm not pounding the key I have my face pushed into one of your books. I'm not a pilot, even though I do fly, just a lowly operator, but just the same here is my Iron Man for enrollment in the A.S.P.A.

Hope to struggle with the old joy stick in a plane of my own one of these days, am taking the ground end of the game now, so here's to the best and only books, may *Wings* and *Air Stories* never fail us poor book worms. Let them continue to zoom, then we will get them once a week.

Got a lot more ideas running about the field that I am sure we can get to join up. Can you give me the dope on how to go about it? I am sure that we can form a club here; we want that million.

Contact!

PVT. RICHARD F. DEFORD,
Communication Sction,
Chanute Field, Ill.

CANADIAN COUSIN SAYS "BRAVO!"

Dear Editor:

I have taken a great interest in your magazines since reading the first numbers, your stories are all fine.

Due to a bum washed-out heart, it will be quite impossible for me to take up flying, but that can't be helped. The reason I write is to congratulate you and George Bruce for that soul-stirring yarn, "Death's Head for Luck." That man sure has a style to his writing. I've read a lot but never anything that brought out the brain-searing fighting of the great war pilots as well as his story.

R. H. RITCHIE,
Ottawa, Canada.

FROM THE FROZEN NORTH!

Dear Editor:

I began reading *Air Stories* one day in August, 1927. Since then I have been reading this great and exciting magazine. Truly, I was glad to see you publish *Wings*, as good as *Air Stories* in every way.

Far in Alaska I am, but signs of aviation can be seen here. It might be of interest to you to know of how aviation is progressing here. I am sending you a cut from a paper that tells of the goings on in Alaska with aeroplanes.

I will be glad when that pilot, Hornberger, arrives at Sitka with his small Alexander-Eaglerock plane. For then I will try and get acquainted with him and maybe take my first ride in an aeroplane.

I am sort of a Russian myself, Chernoff used to be my mother's name, and I love to read Alexis Rossoff's stories, they are great!

VICTOR HANLON,
Sitka, Alaska.

ANOTHER ONE!

DEAR EDITOR:

I am very interested in aviation and am also a regular reader of *Wings, Air Stories* and *Air Adventurers*. Please find enclosed $1 for which please send me my identification card. I thank you.

J. WHITE DILLARD,
Memphis, Tenn.

GREATER BROOKLYN AERO CLUB

A number of war-birds who are actively interested in promoting aviation in the nation have formed what is known as the "Greater Brooklyn Aero Club."

At present the activities of the club are being guided by Lieut. R. Noble Estey, Lieut. Joseph Aimee, Frank Flors, Harry Johanson and Edward Cox.

Much is to be expected of this club, as it has been formed as the result of repeated requests on the part of Brooklynites that A.S.P.A. work be organized in such a manner as to enable the formation of a Greater Brooklyn unit.

FICTION TREATS FROM FICTION HOUSE

FICTION fare to suit every taste! That's the policy of the Fiction House magazines. Rousing stories of he-Yanks the world over, in cow-camp, on battlefield, in the frozen North or the romantic and adventurous South Seas, of aviators who dare a thousand deaths against enemy guns or who risk their necks in dangers of peacetime adventures, of fighters of the prize-ring, professional or amateur—all these and more are the ingredients of this group of drama-packed publications. "It's a FICTION HOUSE magazine"—the sterling-silver hall-mark of action-adventure stories!

ACTION STORIES for August features a thrilling complete Western novel by Walt Coburn, *The Gun Highway*, the dramatic story of a man with a price on his head who fought back at the Border band that framed him. T. W. Ford comes through with a Mexican novelet, *Shells for a Gambler*, that packs a wallop in every page. Albert Richard Wetjen concludes his famous Shark Gotch series with *Death of the Shark*, in which the doughty little gunman-king of the South Seas met his doom like the scrapper he was. *Conflict* is a tensely dramatic war-air story by George Bruce; other yarns by Jack Byrne, Arthur J. Burks and C. A. Freeman. *Action Stories* on the newsstands the first of the month.

FIGHT STORIES for August leads off with *Bare Fists*, complete novel by Jack Byrne, a punch-packed drama of college boxers and how the bitter rivalry of two cousins brought forth the greatest scrap the Conference bouts ever had seen. Arthur J. Burks contributes another of his rousing fight yarns of the Marines in *The Fight before Christmas*. J. C. Kofoed continues his memorable life-story of Battling Nelson, *The Durable Dane*, while T. W. Ford, John D. Swain, George Bruce, Theodore Roscoe and Miles Overholt are other contributors. Jimmy de Forest, noted trainer of champions, conducts his regular department, *Keeping Fit*, which is proving one of the most popular features of the magazine. *Fight Stories* out the tenth of the month.

WINGS for August! Another corking issue chockful of air adventure yarns! Frederick L. Nebel brings *Wolves of the Wind*, a story of high adventure over the broad Pacific, and the struggle for an airway. There's another Stubby and Sam air-detective story by George Bruce, *Mystery of the Sky-Trails*. Eustace L. Adams, ex-naval aviator, brings *Dizzy Wings*, a yarn of the navy flying service; Carson W. Mowre presents another Red and Doug story, *Courage of the Sky*. Then there are the final story of the newsreel series by Frederick C. Davis, *Showdown in the Sky;* a Hangar Yarn by Bob Travers, and a story of an American War Bird's experiences Over There! *Wings* taxies to your stands on the fifteenth!

NORTH•WEST STORIES, first August issue, is featured by Tom Roan's complete western novel, *The Rider from Texas*—an amazing story of wanted men and the Law Hawks of the range. DeHerries Smith tells a tale of *Winged Wolves*, Eli Colter is back with another saga of Tonapah Lee, and Guy Fowler, Harry Laughy, Evan Slyter and others are represented, too. In the Second August *North•West* you'll find a complete novelet of that irrepressible liar Ananias Jones; Hal Leslie spins a glamorous tale of the border country, *Bandit of the Stars;* W. C. Tuttle, Guy Fowler, George Cory Franklin and the rest tell stirring tales of our adventure frontiers. *North•West Stories* on the stands the 8th and 22nd.

LARIAT STORY MAGAZINE for August presents another all-star line-up of gripping, action-crammed cowboy fiction. Leading the spread is Jack Smalley, with his latest complete novel, *Trigger Fingers*, a swift-moving, breath-taking yarn of the Southwest border country—and of a band of tight-lipped men who rode the twisting trails of night with tied-down holsters. *Guns of the Circle-B*, Rogers Terrill's complete cowboy novelet, is the story of one of the strangest mysteries of the range. Jack Byrne comes through with a cracking good short, *Stepsons of Fortune*. And there's a flock of other bang-up yarns by such well-known authors as T. W. Ford, Frederick C. Davis, Eugene Cunningham, Carson W. Mowre, George Cory Franklin, Guy Weadick and —the daddy of them all—Walt Coburn! *Lariat* on the stands the fifteenth.

"How I Licked Wretched Old Age at 63"

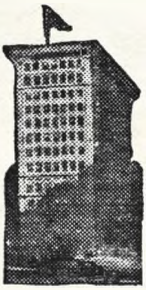
I Quit Getting Up Nights—Banished Foot and Leg Pains . Got Rid of Rheumatic Pains and Constipation . . Improved Embarrassing Health Faults. . . . Found Renewed Vitality.

"At 61, I thought I was through. I blamed old age, but it never occurred to me to actually fight back. I was only half-living, getting up nights . . . embarrassed in my own home . . . constipated . . . constantly tormented by aches and pains. At 62 my condition became almost intolerable. I had about given up hope when a doctor recommended your treatment. Then at 63, it seemed that I shook off 20 years almost overnight."

Forty—The Danger Age

These are the facts, just as I learned them. In 65% of all men, the vital prostate gland slows up soon after 40. No pain is experienced, but as this distressing condition continues, sciatica, backache, severe bladder weakness, constipation, etc., often develop.

PROSTATE TROUBLE



These are frequently the signs of prostate trouble. Now thousands suffer these handicaps needlessly! For a prominent American Scientist after seven years of research, discovered a new, safe way to stimulate the prostate gland to normal health and activity in many cases. This new hygiene is worthy to be called a notable achievement of the age.

A NATIONAL INSTITUTION FOR MEN PAST 40

Its success has been startling, its growth rapid. This new hygiene is rapidly gaining in national prominence. The institution in Steubenville has now reached large proportions. Scores and even hundreds of letters pour in every day, and in many cases reported results have been little short of amazing. In case after case, men have reported that they have felt ten years younger in six days. Now physicians in every part of the country are using and recommending this treatment.

Quick as is the response to this new hygiene, it is actually a pleasant, natural relaxation, involving no drugs, medicine, or electric rays whatever. The scientist explains this discovery and tells why many men are old at forty in a new book now sent free, in 24-page, illustrated form. Send for it. Every man past forty should know the true meaning of those frank facts. No cost or obligation is incurred. But act at once before this free edition is exhausted. Simply fill in your name below, tear off and mail.

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Walter Hinton

Trail-blazer, pioneer, explorer, instructor. AVIATOR. First to pilot a plane across the Atlantic—the famous NC-4—and first to fly from North to South America. First, too, to explore the upper Amazon jungles. The man who was a crack flying instructor for the Navy during the War; who today is training far-sighted men for Aviation. His Book is yours FREE for the coupon below.

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Sell from Actual Sample Garments. Finest lingerie, shirts, collars, underwear, etc. Million-dollar factory furnishes complete equipment worth $53.00. Make $47 to $115 weekly. Commissions advanced daily. Write Tellsor Mills, Inc., Suite G, 1107 Broadway, New York.

Big Money. Full or Spare Time. Take orders direct for guaranteed Boys' and Youths' Clothing. Cash commissions and bonuses. Experience unnecessary. Sample outfit free. Write Kraige-Wilson, 719 Broadway, N. Y.

New invention prevents shoulder straps slipping. Earn $60 up weekly. Selling experience unnecessary. Women adore this amazing comfort chain. Free sample offer. Lingerie "Y" Co., 98 Oak St., North Windham, Conn.

Agents—New Lines Just Out. Everything in hosiery, lingerie and underwear for men, women, children. Beautiful irresistible Catalog and Samples now ready. Two new special big-money plans. Cash bonus, service awards. No capital needed. Choice territories going. Write quick. World's Best Knitting Company, 141 Lake St., Bay City, Mich.

High Grade Specialty Salesmen. To call on beauty shops, druggists, etc. $50 to $125 commission weekly. Side line or full time. L'Biebou, B-7, Wheaton, Ill.

America's Greatest Tailoring Line Free! 130 large Swatch Samples—All Wool—Tailored to Order—Union Made—Sensational low price. Get outfit at once. Address Dept. 601, Goodwear, 844 W. Adams, Chicago.

I'll start you without a dollar. You'll make $85 weekly, taking orders for finest-tailored shirts and ties. Free Outfit. Dan Reilly, 1237 Broadway, New York.

If I show you an all Virgin Wool Suit, tailored-to-order, valued at $35, that you can sell for $22.50, make $4.00 yourself, give you absolutely Free, Complete selling outfit, will you give my proposition a trial? P. C. King, 2238 South La Salle, Chicago, Ill.

Stenographer Earned $1066 in Lunch hours selling Christmas Cards. Full or spare time. Weekly pay, $10. Sample Book Free. Exper. unnec. Get details. John Hertel Co., 320 Washington, Chicago.

Make $12 a day and liberal bonus selling Pioneer $23.50 and $33.50 all-wool tailoring. Commissions paid daily. 100 extra large cloth samples furnished. We train the inexperienced. Write Pioneer Tailoring Co., Congress & Throop, Dept. V1272, Chicago.

Own a roadside Bar-B-Q. We start you in this profitable business with small investment. Peerless Stove Company, Scott and Darby Sts., Columbus, Ohio.

Sensational tailoring offer. $100 weekly! $5 commission paid on $23.50 suits or o'coats Tailored to measure. Materials, style, fit, guaranteed. Big selling outfit free. Oliver D Woods, 515 S Franklin, Chicago.

$16.00 Daily Easy! We start you in auto accessory business. No investment, no experience necessary. Exclusive Territory. Motor Products, MC, 1760 Lunt, Chicago.

Nimrod's All Year Sellers Pay Agents $15-$25 daily. Guaranteed best values—Dress Shirts, Work Shirts, Overalls, Pants, Sweaters, Underwear, Leather Coats, Leatherlocks, Playsuits. Experience unnecessary. Big Outfit Free! Nimrod Co., Dept. 58, 4922-28 Lincoln Ave., Chicago.

Salesmen to sell Roberts Clothes; virgin wool blue serge and cheviot worsted, cassimeres and all wool top coats and overcoats at $16.75; commission $3.50 plus liberal bonus; send for Free outfit. Roberts Tailoring, 752 Broadway, New York.

Agents $240 Month. Sell Silk Hosiery. Guaranteed 7 months. We furnish auto. Samples furnished. Free silk hosiery for your own use. Write today, state size of hose worn. Betterknit Textile Co., Silk 1635, Greenfield, O.

Storywriters! Poetry and Song Composers. Make real money. My Free book shows you how. Write at once. Richard D. Abbott, 22 E. 12th St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Big Income. Sell Longwear Trousers wherever men work. One Pair $1.95, 3 for $5.50. Outlast two ordinary trousers. Big commissions. Sales outfit free. Dept. L-8, Longwear, 489 Broome Street, New York.

Don't Sell for Others. Employ Agents yourself. Make your own products. Toilet Articles, Household Specialties, etc. 500% profit. Valuable booklet Free. National Scientific Labs., 1929 W Broad, Richmond, Va.

Every headache pays you profit. Millions use Aspirin. Agents can make $500 month on new 5 cent Aspirin Plan. Write Chas. M. Hick, 1018 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago.

Make Money Every Day Selling All manufacturing, business, professional, society people and individuals everywhere our nationally known Stationery, Announcements, etc., also America's finest Monogrammed Personal and Business Christmas Greeting Cards. Large commission paid daily and liberal monthly bonus. For beautiful free sample equipment write Manager, Dept. 19, Process Engraving Company, Troy at 21st Street, Chicago.

Man Wanted Quick—Big Pay as Local representative for $500,000 Kriss-Kross Stropper Corp. $75 a week and up! Our Florida man cleared $5300 last year just demonstrating this amazing shave invention. Get details now! Write M. H. Rhodes, Dept. K-3252, 1418 Pendleton Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

M. H. Rhodes, Dept. K-3252, 1418 Pendleton, St. Louis, Mo.

Am interested in your proposition. Rush Details.

Name. . . . . .

Address. . . . . .

Write for Big Free Outfit showing men's made-to-measure rainproof caps. Also men's hats, mufflers and charming Lovette Hats for women. Show line—take orders everywhere—$15.00 a day easy. Experience unnecessary. Free Caps given. Fits-U Cap Co., Dept. J-105, Cincinnati, Ohio.

World's leading manufacturer of Fire Extinguishers has position open for salesmen in direct selling, capable of earning $3,600 to $6,000 yearly. Prospects everywhere—easy sales. We train you. Rapid promotions to producers. Fyr-Fyter Co., 1720 Fyr-Fyter Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

$100 weekly selling better-quality, all-wool, made-to-measure suits and overcoats at $23.50. Highest commissions. Extra bonus for producers. Large swatch samples free. W. Z. Gibson, Inc., 500 Throop St., Dept. V-672, Chicago, Illinois.

Polmet Polishing Cloth.—Cleans all metals, gets enthusiastic attention, sells fast at 25c; sam-ple 10c. F. C. Gale Co., 99 Edinboro St., Boston, Mass.

Great neckwear line now free! Features finest quality neckwear at factory prices. Collect big commissions daily. Write for FREE tie offer and FREE outfit. Nawco Neckwear, H-125, Covington, Ky.

Selling Simpson's All-Wool, Made-to-measure, Salon label suits and overcoats at $23.50 is easy way to earn $100 a week. Big season starting. Write for exclusive territory; complete equipment, 175 samples Free. J. B. Simpson, 843 Adams, Dep't. 1501, Chicago, Illinois.

Now! $5,000 year easy! Sell Gibraltar Shirts! Finest quality. Lowest prices. Defy competition! Liberal daily commissions. Send today for free outfit containing large assortment shirt samples. Gibraltar Shirt Co., Dept. W-7, 20 West 22nd Street, New York.

Punchboard Salesmen. New fascinating game. Excitement; legal all states; $200 weekly easy; one minute sales talk; pay daily. Cigar-Stores Novelty Co., Dept. P, Peoria, Ill.

$14.85 men's suits or o'coats! Amazing value. 2 for $27.85—Commissions $6.50. Easy sales, quick profits. Large sample outfit free. Wholesale Tailors, 806 B'way, New York.

Something New! Latest Craze—Handsome Colorful, Rubber Art Rugs in attractive patterns and colors. Practical, serviceable, economical. Soft on feet. Men or women buy 3. Agents cleaning up! Make $90 weekly. Also 47 other fast-selling rubber specialties. Free Outfit. Write quick. Kristee Mfg. Co., 85 Bar Street, Akron, Ohio.

Bankrupt and Rummage Sales. Make $50 daily. We start you, furnishing everything. Permanent. Free details. Distributors, Dept. 279, 429 W. Superior, Chicago.

Ties Pay Big! Write for my big Free outfit showing ties styled on Fifth Avenue. $60 Weekly Easy. Berek, 4943-X Hudson Boulevard, North Bergen, N. J.

Men—La Salle can use a limited number of producers to sell Quality Suits, Topcoats, and Overcoats, any two for $27.95 with $6.00 for you on each sale. Free Outfit. La Salle, Department P-8, 327 Broadway, New York.

Get Our Free Sample Cased-Toilet Articles, Perfumes and Specialties. Wonderfully profitable. La Derma Co., Dept. RC, St. Louis, Missouri.

Agents—District Managers! $8.88 (or men's utility suits! Resists sparks, snags, water! No competition! Kit furnished. 888 Company, Dept. H-15, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

$5.00 to $15.00 daily selling Parmode Wash Dresses and Men's Shirts. Best values—highest commissions. Write Parmode Co., 704 N. 9th St., St. Louis.

$12.00 daily easily earned—no experience necessary, selling overcoats. Price $17.50. Commission $4.00. Sample line free. Write to T. Kay Co., 21 W. 3rd St., New York.

Write for Free Soap Sample & Agents terms on Face Creams, Extracts, etc. Make Extra Money during your spare time. Lacasian Co., Dept. 90, St. Louis, Mo.

Men and women wanted. Become Successful. Be independent. My three books explain secrets of successful business men. 750 rare opportunities and money-making plans sent for only 10c. Money back if not satisfied. Frank Bernard, 22 East 12th Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Brand New Plan—Free Suit to Each agent—$48 and up weekly, paid in advance. Take orders for our high-grade tailoring. Handsome overlying case outfit of large real cloth samples—furnished Free. Spencer Mead Company, Harrison and Throop, Dept. V-972, Chicago, Illinois.

We Start You Without A Dollar, Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes—Toilet Goods, experience unnecessary. Carnation Co Dept. 593, St. Louis, Mo.

Agents—We start you in business and help you succeed. No capital or experience needed. Spare or full time. You can earn $50-$100 weekly. Write Madison Products, 566 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Business of your own! Make $68.00 a week and up. We furnish everything. Sell all wool made-to-measure suits direct from factory $23.75. It's easy—real $45.00 values. No experience needed. Advertising and sales training course furnished. Write Fairbanks Tailoring Co., 2304 Wabansia Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Agents earn big money taking orders for our beautiful Dress Goods, Silks, Wash Fabrics, Hosiery, Fancy Goods, 1000 Samples furnished. The National Importing Co., Dept. H89, 573 Broadway, New York City.

I pay my agents $90 a week just to wear and show beautiful New Free Raincoat and give away Free Hats. Write for yours. R. F. King, 230 So. Wells, Chicago.

Marcelwaver Is Taking American Women by storm. Men and women representatives everywhere making biggest profits of years. $279 a week—$57 a day—$17 an hour, spare or full time workers earn such amounts easily. Territories now being allotted. Full information Free. Marcelwaver, Dept. 98K, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sell your spare time to us for $3.50 an hour. Show quality dresses, coats and lingerie. America's greatest values. No experience needed. Liberal advance commissions. Selling equipment Free. Write Harford Frocks, 818 Walnut St., Indianapolis, Ind. (Subsidiary of Famous Real Silk Hosiery Mills.)

Agents—90c an hour to advertise our goods and distribute Free samples to consumers. Write quick for territory and particulars. American Products Co., 1923, Monmouth, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Men! Here's Biggest Seller of 1928—Super Quality Breeches and Pants for outdoor workers and sportsmen. $2.50 on every three pair sale. Business getting Sales Outfit Free. Dept. B-8, Big Bob, 491 Broome Street, New York, N. Y.

New and Going Big—Two Amazing New patented household items. Year 'round sellers. Big profits every sale. Write for unique selling plans and outfit offer. Central States Mfg. Co., Dept. K-2011, 4500 Mary Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

Free Pants: Finest All-Wool, Made-to-measure pants offered free to first man in each community to write us. Agents given all their clothes free. Chicago Tailors Ass'n. Dep't. 837, Station C, Chicago.

Make $1,000 before Xmas selling exclusive personal Xmas Cards in distinctive steel engraved designs. Expensive sample book free. Wetmore, Jane & Sugden, Dept. PCS, Rochester, N.Y.

Agents $360 Month and New Ford Car. Bonus besides. Sell new line guaranteed hosiery. 126 styles, colors. Beats store prices. Guaranteed 6 months or new hose free. Finest line Silk Hosiery you ever saw. Credit given. 30 day's trial. Write for samples. Wilknit Hosiery Co., Dept. 2035, Greenfield, Ohio.

$40.00 Suits for $23.95—All One Price. Unique-made of finest quality virgin wool. You don't have to know anything about selling clothing. We guarantee your success if you are honest and willing to work. Write at once. William C. Bartlett, 850 Adams St., Dept. 101, Chicago, Ill.

No Canvassing from House-to-House—Make $10 daily, full or spare time, acting as our District Sales Manager. A dignified, respectable, good-paying position open to honest, reliable men and women. Write for details. No obligation. Badger Company, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

LEARN WHILE YOU EARN

The National Home Study Council of Washington, D. C. has investigated the Home Study Schools whose ads. marked with a star (★) appear in this column. These schools are recommended on the following grounds: Truthful promises, thoroughness of courses, capable instructors, and reasonable instruction fees. These institutions are worthy of your confidence.

★ **Hotels Need Trained Executives.** Nation-wide demand for trained men and women; past experience unnecessary. We train you by mail and put you in touch with big opportunities. Write at once for particulars. Lewis Hotel Training Schools, Suite AY-W637, Washington, D. C.

Men qualify Forest Ranger Position; start $125 month; cabin and vacation. Patrol the forests; protect the game. Write Mokane Institute, Dept. M-44, Denver, Colo.

Send for Free Catalog describing Music ★ Courses by noted teachers. Diplomas and Degrees awarded by authority State of Illinois. Instruction for Beginners or Advanced Students. University Extension Conservatory 706 E. 41st St., Chicago.

Foreign Positions—Men interested going romantic South America write us. Good pay. Expenses paid. South America Service Bureau, 14,600 Alma, Detroit, Mich.

★ **Factories Demanding Thousands of** Trained shop executives. Big Pay. Train at home in spare time. Employment Assistance. Write at once for details. Lincoln Extension University, Inc. Dept. E-1, Cleveland, Ohio.

Learn innermost secrets of Magic quickly at home and earn big money as a Magician, or make yourself a business and social success with Magic as your hobby. Full details free. Write Tarbell Systems, Inc., 1926 Sunnyside Avenue, Dept C-269, Chicago, Illinois.

Men, get Forest Ranger job; $125-$200 month and home furnished; hunt, fish, trap. For details, write Norton Institute, 1523 Teple Court, Denver, Colo.

Want U. S. Gov't Position; commence $115-$250 month? Men-women, 18-50, trained at home in three weeks. Write Ozment's Institution Bureau, 137, St. Louis, Mo.

★ **Test Your Art Ability Free. Send now** for Art Questionnaire which tests your drawing ability, sense of color, etc. Learn Commercial Art at home in spare time. Federal students make $2,000-$5,000 yearly. Give age, occupation. Federal Schools, Inc., 61 Federal Schools Building, Minneapolis, Minn. (Member National Home Study Council.)

The Latest and completest and most practical BOOK of SEX KNOWLEDGE

By BERNARD BERNARD, Sc. D. (Phys.) M. P. C., Editor "Health and Life"

IGNORANCE of the facts of life is to blame for the majority of human tragedies. This is now acknowledged to be true by all sincere people. Sex and all the problems surrounding it have been shrouded in the darkness of superstition and mystery. In "A Complete Book of Sex Knowledge" there is not a single side of the sex problem, and its application to every stage of human life that has not been fully treated. You cannot afford to be without this book, and no description of it can possibly convey to you its extraordinary value. It tells in non-technical language those things that worry people most.

PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

CHAPTER I—FROM BIRTH TO PUBERTY

The Technique of Healthy Conception.—The Sex Acts of Little Children.—Babies' Habits That Must Be Corrected.—The Seeds of Masturbation.—Parents' Habits to Avoid.—The Dangers of Secret Habits.

CHAPTER II—ADOLESCENCE

Undesirable Sex Habits of Adolescence.—The Facts of Reproduction.—The Connection of the Genital With the Urinary System.—Sexual Anatomy and Physiology.—The Actual Birth of an Offspring.—Horrible Sex Perversions Preceded by Masturbation.—The Precious Vital Fluid.—How a Mother Can Explain Things to Her Daughter.—How Diseases May Be "Picked Up" Without Intercourse.—Correcting Irregularities.—Superstitions Regarding Menstruation.

CHAPTER III—THE YOUNG MAN

Should the Young Man Be Given Birth Control Information?—The Results of Masturbation.—Methods of Self-Disinfection Against Venereal Diseases.—Proper Sex Conduct.—Sex Weakness.—The Nature of Syphilis.—The Nature of Gonorrhea.—How Masturbation Leaves Spermatorrhea.—Sympathy for Victims of Ignorance and Vicious Heredity.—Flirting.—Platonic Friendships.—Falling in Love.—How to Choose a Wife.—The First Love Callings.—The Spirit of Romance.—Subconscious Sex Emotions.—Why There Are Unhappy Marriages.

CHAPTER IV—THE YOUNG WOMAN

Shattered Dreams.—The Facts of Reproduction.—The World's Most Beautiful Story.—The Dangers of Life.—Erotic Feelings.—Sexual Irritation.—The Organs of Reproduction.—"Female" Illnesses.—Painful Menstruation.—Vamps.—Looking for the Best Ideal in Manhood.—A Woman's Maturation.—Bad Habits and Their Serious Consequences.—The Quickening of the Glands.—The Process of Fertilization.—Special Sexual Cells.—Fertilization and Development.—Courtship Part of the Function of Reproduction.—Immoral Intercourse.—Venereal Diseases in Women.—The Necessity of Knowing the Facts of Birth Control.—Sex Perversions Among Women.—The Best Age for Marriage.—Indiscriminate Love-Making.—Initial Sex Weaknesses End in Serious Perversions.—Sexual Health and Efficiency.

CHAPTER V—THE MARRIED MAN

The First Nuptial Experience.—Normal Indulgence.—The Influence of Youthful Habits.—Sex Weakness in Marriage.—Sex a Blessing, Not a Curse, When Used Properly.—Why Women Run Away From Some Men.—The Basic Laws of Sex Conduct.—Ignorant Husbands.—The Technique of Love.—The Husband's Special Part.—Perversions and Weaknesses.—Abnormal Psychology Left by Masturbation.—Free Expressions of the Feelings.—Complete Unity.—Birth Control.—The Benefits of Proper Intercourse.—The Story of a Sex Pervert.—Predispositions Handed Down by Our Ancestors.—How Sex Weaknesses May Lead to Perversions.—Sexual Nerve Irritations.—The Supreme Object of Marriage.—The Peculiarities of Women.—How to Insure the Wife's Satisfaction.

CHAPTER VI—THE MARRIED WOMAN

Surprising Ignorance of Women of the Meaning of Marriage.—Caution in the Acceptance of a Husband.—The Story of an Ignorant Bride.—Bad Habits.—Forewarning.—The Eradication of Erotic Habits.—Sex Weaknesses and Abnormalities.—Union.—The Highest Condition of Human Bliss.—Unnatural Conduct.—The Part of the Wife in Intercourse.—How to Maintain a Husband's Love and Affection.—Helping a Husband in Control.—Female Sexual Anatomy.—Woman Guilty of Excesses.—The Sexual Nerves.—Adaptation to Peculiarities in Men.—Securing the Harmonic Reaction.—Choosing the Right Time and Place for Conception.—Pregnancy.—Sterility and Its Causes.—The Correction of Sterility.

CHAPTER VII—THE BACHELOR

Why There Are Bachelors.—Promiscuous Bachelors.—Pathology in Bachelorhood.—Physiological Dispositions.—The Physical Treatment Which Remedies Sexual Abnormalities.—Diverting Sex Energies.—Disorders Aggravating Sex Weaknesses.—Spermatorrhea.—What Happens to the Sexual Secretions.—Sexual Neurasthenia.—Sex Weaknesses.

CHAPTER VIII—THE SPINSTER

Should Women Propose?—Never Too Late to Wed.—Dangerous Stages of Spinsterhood.—Sexual Anomalies.—The Cause of Melancholia.—Sexual Aggravations.—What Happens to the Secretions.—Sex Weakness Among Spinsters.—Sexual Hygiene.—Sex Fears.—Perversions.—Combating Erotic Feelings.—Leucorrhea.

CHAPTER IX—POST MATURITY IN MAN

Sexual Promptings and Weaknesses That Few Understand.—Prostatitis.—Hypertrophy of the Sexual Glands.—Serious Perversions.—Lurid Stories of Vice.—Men Who Are Sent to Prison for Illnesses. How Old Age Can Be the Happiest Time in Life.—How the Sex Organs Can Be Abnormally Irritated.—The Folly of Frightening Sex Victims with Damnation.—Building Up Depleted Nerve Centers.—The Normal Post Mature Sex Life.

CHAPTER X—POST MATURITY IN WOMAN

"Change of Life."—Superstitions Surrounding Menstruation.—Right Sex Conduct.—The Cessation of Menstruation.—Continued Sex Desires.—A Dangerous Phase of the Menopause.—The Legacies of Youth.—Irritable Passions and How to Govern Them.—Normal Sex Living.—Maintaining Married Happiness.

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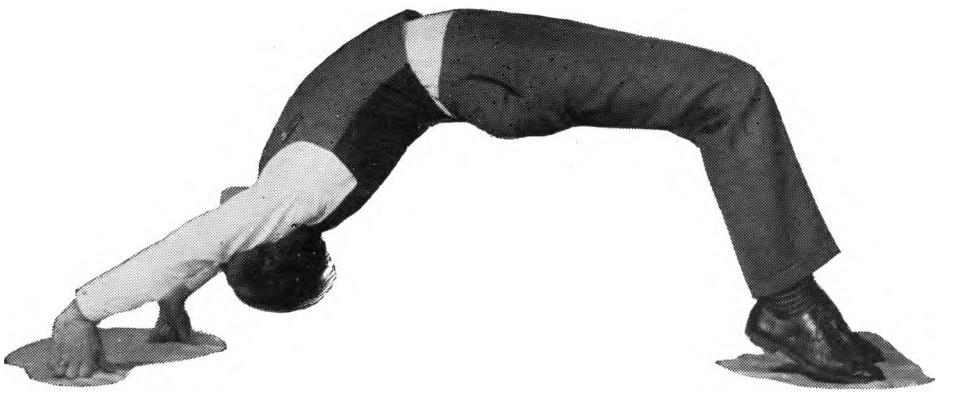

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