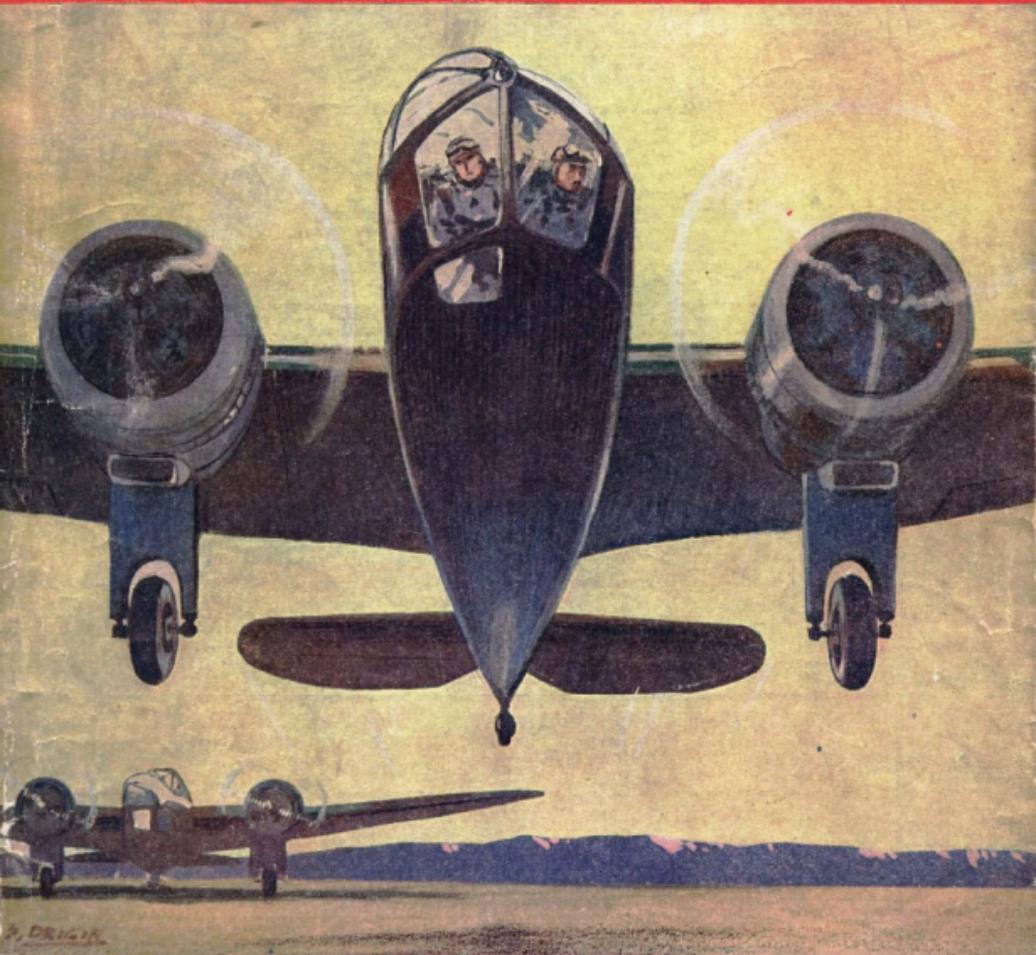


**FOOL OF THE FLIGHT**: By Capt. J.E. Doyle, D.F.C.

# AIR <sup>9<sup>D</sup></sup> STORIES



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IN FACT AND FICTION

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Cover painting of Bristol Blenheim Mark II, by S. R. DRIGIN

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# FOOL OF THE FLIGHT

*While he was still  
tumbling, Alec was  
on his tail. . . .*



## CHAPTER I

### No Ordinary Pilot

**A**LEC MARSTON tightened the strap of his fur collar with bare fingers that went dead cold in those few seconds, and then restored two gloves and a gauntlet to his left hand. That was better. He raised the gauntlet to the sun, and examined the dazzle of the sky. It was empty, and he settled more comfortably in his seat and lowered his eyes. He glanced along the lower plane of his right wing; one of the forward pair of knife-edged flying-wires was a bit slack, so that its outline was a vibrating blur; he must remember to tell his rigger about it.

He inspected his instrument board. The altimeter said 18,000, the air speed indicator 80, and the rev. counter 1,850, rather unsteadily, Alec noticed, and made an adjustment to the compensator which reduced the petrol feed to suit the lowered air density. The needle became steady as the Hispano engine abandoned

a slight jumpiness and was smooth as silk. It was a good war.

It was good to be a flight-commander on S.E.'s, and better still to be on a quiet sector where one could choose combat when combat offered. It was in this matter of choice, of judgment, that the expert triumphed, and Alec Marston was an expert.

He knew it. Everyone else in the Squadron from the C.O. downwards also knew it; but only he, perhaps, knew just how expert he was. He had always excelled in those pursuits where brain

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By CAPTAIN J. E. DOYLE, D.F.C.

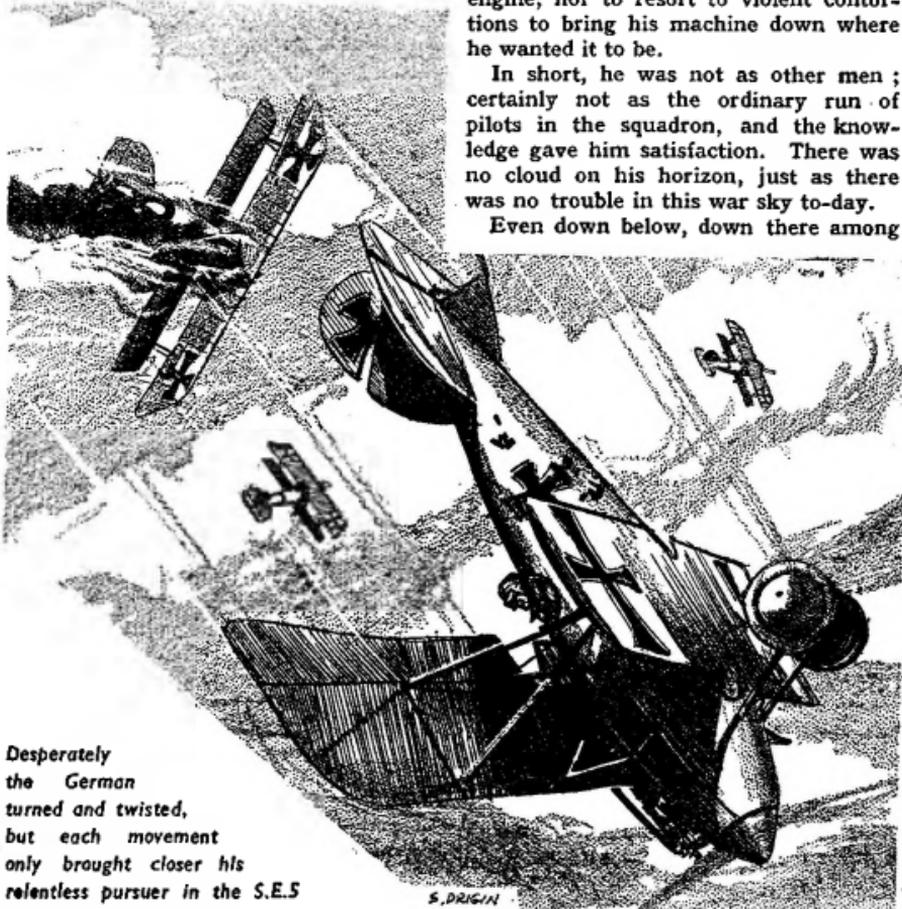
and muscle were co-ordinated, so it was but natural that he should excel at the game of flying. At cricket he had been the best bat his school had ever known, or, he imagined, would ever know. When he faced the bowling with those clean, perfectly timed yet indolent strokes, it seemed that the ball supplied the energy with which to flash to the boundaries. And so with flying.

Coming in to land, for instance—that

acid test of a pilot's ability—the aeroplane appeared to do all the work there was to do when Alec Marston was in the cockpit. Others might overshoot, and have to come round again; or under-shoot, rumble, bounce badly, and sometimes crash. They might struggle with "S" turns and sideslips in order to correct errors. But not Alec Marston. Having once throttled back, he had never been known again to open his engine, nor to resort to violent contortions to bring his machine down where he wanted it to be.

In short, he was not as other men; certainly not as the ordinary run of pilots in the squadron, and the knowledge gave him satisfaction. There was no cloud on his horizon, just as there was no trouble in this war sky to-day.

Even down below, down there among



*Desperately  
the German  
turned and twisted,  
but each movement  
only brought closer his  
relentless pursuer in the S.E.S*

S. DRIGAN

## AIR STORIES

the flies, the heat and the dirt, it seemed almost a place of peace. True that an occasional puff of dust marked the explosion of a long-range shell at the cross-roads south of Epinoy, and that an R.E.8 flying patiently to and fro was evidently spotting for the distant battery. But that was all. There was no flicker of movement in the brown desolation of No-Man's-Land, no sign of any life in the German trenches that could be detected from such a height. Behind the lines also, where a green mantle covered the brown earth, there was the same dead placidity. Indifferently Alec Marston surveyed the scene.

**S**UDDENLY his eye was caught and held by a peculiar mark on the ground at the edge of a wood, where three lines converged and met to form a broad arrow such as convicts once wore. The arrow pointed westward, and Marston speculated as to the cause of this phenomenon, then dismissed it as an illusion due to height. Why, the arrow must be enormous, nearly the entire width of the wood itself. And the pattern, being defined only by a deeper shade of green than the surrounding grass, would probably be invisible from a lesser altitude. Alec looked away.

"Ah!"

To the north, a little bunch of aeroplanes at a lower level moved westward. They would be the Fokkers from Epinoy—the only Hun scout squadron active in the sector. Alec swung slowly to a northerly course, still maintaining his climb. There might be a chance safely to intercept them, though he had no intention of giving up his height advantage. Now they were turning. Perhaps they had spotted the S.E.'s? Yet no, it did not seem they had, for they had assumed an easterly course that was bringing the two formations quickly nearer to one another . . . and then they suddenly swerved away to the north-east. Alec Marston frowned.

Still, he decided, he might yet get in a quick burst if he acted at once. He rocked his machine, closed the radiator shutter to maintain engine heat, set the

tail adjustment for a dive, and held the stick hard back until the moment came to pounce. He looked back.

On his right were Jack Reeves, grinning his enjoyment, and Featherstonhaugh; to the left there was Capel, perhaps the best of the bunch, with Paul Askins behind him. Paul was a newcomer and an unknown quantity. All was set, and as Alec relaxed his hold on the stick the flight plunged as one machine. The wind screamed shrilly, the engine note rose as the rev. counter needle soared. Alec eased his throttle. No need to take risks, especially as there was to be no fight.

For the Huns, five of them, had promptly changed formation to a close circle in which each guarded the other's tail, and challenged combat. Which Alec was not fool enough to accept; not he! Never mind, they could go their way. He loosed off at long range with both guns in the direction of the formation. Then, back with the tail-trim, forward with the throttle, and he was roaring skywards again. On top of the zoom he flattened out and peered over the side—and got a shock.

The circle below had broken up to a shapeless swarm that was now composed of six machines. One of them, with red, white and blue circles on its wing-tips, was darting in and out among the rest. Alec looked behind him.

Two machines were on his right, Capel on his left. Askins was missing. The damned fool! Did he think he could take on that lot by himself? Did he think he was going to be extricated from that mess? No, of course, he didn't, Alec told himself. In his inexperience Askins had imagined that the scrap was on and would be fought to a finish. In his excitement he had not noticed his leader's change of tactics. Infernal idiot! Again Alec looked below.

He saw a Fokker doing a slow spin which left a spiral of smoke in the sky. And that, to Alec Marston, put an entirely different complexion on things; there might be a picking of glory to be had here. He went into a quick dive . . . and as quickly came out. For in

## FOOL OF THE FLIGHT

that instant the single S.E. vanished in a ball of fire, which in turn vanished beneath a cloud of dense black smoke.

Ugh! Alec shut his eyes for an instant. What a fool Askins was—or rather what a fool he had been. For now he was dead. That was just the trouble. What did the men behind him think? Alec wondered. An episode like that was enough to wreck a leader's reputation, to kill his popularity in a day. For the first time, there was a cloud on Alec Marston's horizon.

Never mind, he thought, when they got back he would get the first word in—tell them what he thought of such conduct. By throwing all blame instantly on Askins, he would distract attention from himself; if this were necessary. Which was not very probable.

After all, the others had a great respect for him as their leader, and would be the first to agree that Askins was at fault. They would make out their reports accordingly, and all would be well. It was quite true, in fact, that men like Askins were a menace to take over the lines. It was not as if they risked their own lives alone, which would not matter. They placed better fighters in danger; even their leader, who was best of all. The Squadron could not afford to lose a pilot like Marston, he told himself.

Into these channels he forced his thoughts, and as he did so the cloud on his horizon faded and disappeared. His apprehension gave place to indignation; forced, perhaps, but satisfying enough. So that by the time he had landed, with his usual grace and precision, he found himself pleasantly elated. But he was entirely unprepared for the turn events took.

### CHAPTER II

#### Alec Marston's Namesake

ALEC MARSTON had no sooner got out of his machine and was still removing helmet and gloves with hurried and jerky movements, intended to convey an anger he was far from feeling, than

Jack Reeves, the second man down, came trotting up.

"Congrat's on a slick bit of shooting, Skipper," said Jack with enthusiasm. "I'd give something for that eye of yours!"

"Nonsense!" said Marston, before he had time to grasp the import of those words. Then he found himself regretting he had not had the wit to make the claim. Perhaps there was yet time to do so. But was it possible that Reeves had really not seen what happened? Yes, of course it was. For only after they had zoomed had the Hun gone down, and by that time they would all have been busy avoiding collisions. At first they would not have missed Askins. Yes, of course it was possible. "I didn't do it," he had been going to add, but now he changed the words. "Hold your fire till the last moment and you can't go far wrong," he said instead.

Featherstonhaugh and Capel now came up.

"Poor old Paul!" said "Feathers."  
"One of the very best."

"Quick job, that's one thing," Capel put in.

"He should have kept out of the way," objected Reeves, who idolised Marston. "Then the Skipper might have got a second."

Alec, watching the other two closely, saw their looks of surprise, and then saw surprise change to sudden comprehension. Now he knew he could safely claim a victory, that they would all confirm his claim.

"Better come and report," he said casually.

It was a good war.

But there was a worse shock in store for Alec Marston. With the others he strolled, chatting brightly, to the office that stood behind the line of hangars; and while they wrote reports in the outer room he tapped at the inner door and entered without waiting for an answer. He was a privileged person.

Major Norris, prematurely grey at the temples and with a lined forehead that spoke of a worrying disposition, reclined in his chair. He looked more than

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usually irritated, and the cause was not far to seek.

Before him stood a gawky, overgrown young man whose dark, coarse and dreadfully untidy hair protruded at all angles from beneath an R.F.C. cap to form an unpleasant halo to an exceptionally stupid face. The rest of this apparition was in keeping with the head.

His tunic was no sort of a fit, and his sleeves were inches too short for an ungainly pair of arms which hung stupidly in front of him. His breeches sagged badly in an apparent attempt to make ends meet with an inadequate pair of puttees. He seemed aware of his deficiencies, for he looked self-conscious and unhappy.

Alec was acutely aware of the contrast between his own neatness and good looks, his well-fitting uniform with the two coloured ribbons beneath the wings on the tunic breast, his athletic yet graceful figure—and this uncouth creature.

The Major seemed aware of it also, as he glanced from one to the other.

"Oh . . . er, Marston," he said, a trifle apologetically, "here is a namesake of yours; you might take charge of him. You know one another, then?"

The question was prompted by an obvious recognition by both men.

"I used to know Marston, sir, a long time ago," Alec said, in a curious tone, "but I never knew he'd joined the R.F.C."

"Well, now that you have renewed the acquaintance you will be able to show him the ropes," the Major summed up, with a meaning glance at the newcomer's disreputable attire. "I want a word with you before you go," he added.

The other Marston had the wit to take the hint and leave.

"**A**NYTHING to report?" enquired the Major as the door closed.

Alec's face brightened. "Yes, sir, there is. We got mixed up in a fight with some Fokkers, and I am sorry to say I lost Askins."

The Major shook his head slowly.

"I'm sorry, too—nice fellow and promising. No chance, I suppose?"

"No, sir; flames." Though I expect he was already dead."

"Anything in return?"

"Yes, sir; I managed to shoot a Hun off his tail—also a flamer—but it was already too late. I could have got more had I been alone, but one has to keep such a close eye on one's own chaps."

The Major made a note on a pad, and then looked up. "Army seem worried," he said. "Of course they always are. When they are getting it in the neck, so to speak, it's understandable. The funny thing is that now that everything is so quiet they are just as nervy."

"Yes, sir," said Alec, but he spoke absently, for his thoughts were far away. Five intervening years had vanished, and he was again a junior at Albrighton. He was walking down the long passage that passed the prefects' studies. One of those doors was open, and he peeped in. The room was empty. On the table was a little heap of coins—some silver, with a sovereign on top. Alec Marston hesitated, then went in and took the money.

He soon learned that he had sprung a trap for himself; that the coins had been marked and left for a purpose. There had, it seemed, been other thefts, and this was bait set to catch the culprit.

In a state near panic he went to the fifth form dormitory and thrust the coins beneath the pillow of his namesake—Tom Marston. Afterwards he told himself that his choice of this man as scapegoat had been a matter of chance, but at heart he knew that there was a method behind his action. For he had always resented the presence of Tom in the school, and was jealous of this man who answered to the same name.

At cricket, Alec feared no rival, and during the summer term was supreme; but for the rest of the year he was not outstanding, while the other Marston held a reputation at football that earned him popularity. And since somebody had to take the blame for Alec's action, that somebody might as well be Tom.

To this day Alec was uncertain whether

## FOOL OF THE FLIGHT

Tom had ever guessed the truth. Tom had denied all knowledge of the money, but in such a halting, uncertain manner that had itself seemed incriminating. He had been expelled. Later, it became known that his father had sent him abroad.

With the passing of the years Alec had been able to still the twinges of conscience, until, finally, he could almost believe there had never been another Marston at Albrighton. In any case, he argued, what he had done had been for the best; if he had been expelled the school would have lost its most brilliant bat, whereas by Tom's departure it suffered no great loss.

But now that Tom had so surprisingly turned up again, the whole sordid business seemed to have happened but yesterday. Here was the logical sequence to a crime which had formed the plot to hundreds of school yarns. It must be revenge that had brought him here, thought Alec, and feared for the future.

"AN attack is expected from some quarter," the Major was saying. "Which is a reasonable enough thing to suppose. But that this sector should be equally suspect with the others seems rather absurd to me. What are your views?"

Alec Marston made a hurried effort to concentrate.

"I agree with you, sir," he replied, his confidence returning.

"Your reasons?"

"The complete absence of activity, sir: why, I don't believe there's an 'Archie' gun from Arras to Bapaume. In my view, the line is only held by machine-gun posts, so as to release troops and artillery for some other point."

"Just as I thought," nodded the Major. "By the way, get that new man to smarten himself up! His appearance is a scandal. I don't know how he got past the A.P.M. I suppose there's nothing actually, er-wrong with him?"

"We happened to be at the same school, sir," said Alec slowly, weighing his words. "I've not seen him since he

left, under something of a cloud—that's in confidence, of course."

"You don't mean he was expelled?" said Norris, in horrified tones. "Well, well! It must have been a great shock for you to find him here. Of course it shall go no further, and I shall find some excuse to get rid of him."

"Please, at least give him a chance, sir," begged Alec, in sudden alarm at the turn of events.

"Very well," said the Major reluctantly, and gave a nod of dismissal.

Alec discovered Tom in his own hangar, deep in conversation with Trent, a fitter, whose work he was interrupting. They were at the far side of the hangar; but the distance lent no enchantment to the scene. There was Trent, erect and trim in his overalls, patiently explaining some point connected with the S.E. by which he stood, without for one moment relaxing the attitude demanded from non-commissioned to commissioned rank. But what must the man be thinking? fumed Alec. Across the hangar two younger men were nudging one another and giggling in evident appreciation of the scene. Tom's appearance, Alec decided, grew worse the more it was studied.

An inch of bare leg showed between the folds of his puttees; the cross-strap of his Sam Browne, though let out to the last hole, was so inadequate that the belt proper was drawn up several inches from the tunic waistline. Alec shuddered.

"Marston," he shouted.

Tom approached unwillingly. "What is it?" he asked. "I can't stop because this man's explaining something to me."

Alec hesitated. He looked at the heavy, stupid face beneath the forage cap that was perched exactly on the centre of the head, and was at a loss for the right words. He wanted to tick this fool off well and truly, to give him a lesson in manners if not in discipline. But he suppressed his anger. There must be no suggestion of a breach until he found out whether Tom knew. If the worst came to the worst, he must act, and there were surely ways by which

## AIR STORIES

a brilliant and popular flight-commander could keep a fool like this silent.

"I just wanted to tip you the wink," he said, "put you wise to the ropes and that sort of thing . . . er, just as I'd do for anyone . . . but especially, of course, for an old schoolfellow." He forced a smile.

Tom smiled back. At least he made a face in which the heavy lips formed a smile, but the eyes belied them. Alec became more uneasy.

"Good of you," Tom said, "but you mustn't. You must treat me just as you would anyone else—no favouritism. I've got to make my way like other chaps."

"All right," Alec said. "I'll treat you as any other member of my flight. In the first place, ask me what you want to know; these chaps are busy, not to be interrupted. Of course, when you have your own fitter and rigger and your own machine it makes a difference. I'll tell you what: I'll fix you up with a machine right away; come over here."

ALEC MARSTON led the way to a quiet corner of the hangar where stood a brand new S.E. They looked into the cockpit.

"How's that?" Alec enquired.

Tom ignored the question. He fingered the lever that was beside the throttle.

"This," he said, "what is it? I was just asking that man when you called me."

"You mean the fitter, Trent," Alec corrected. "We don't allude to them as 'that man' out here. That's the compensator. It cuts down the petrol supply, but don't touch it under five thousand. When opened, it produces a partial vacuum in the float chamber which causes the needle to close earlier. The higher you go the less air there is and the richer the mixture would get but for that. But didn't they tell you all that in England?"

"Yes, oh, yes," Tom affirmed; "but I forget—I've an awful memory!"

"You know now, at any rate," said Alec. "Don't forget again."

That his confidence was returning was

evidenced by a marked impatience of tone. "After lunch you can take her up—and see whether you've forgotten to fly."

"I hope not," said Tom earnestly.

"And before lunch you had better smarten yourself up a bit. Get your hair cut for a start—my batman will fix that for you. Perhaps he might even produce a uniform that would be some sort of a fit. Where on earth did you get that outfit?"

The authority in Alec's voice was becoming more and more marked, and there was indignation in the last sentence. He was more himself, the efficient self who could not tolerate the shortcomings of others. Perhaps Tom's "awful memory" had something to do with this recovery, or perhaps it was the meekness with which he received each order, suggesting as it did that he might respond best to harsh treatment.

"In . . . what's the name . . . ? In Regent Street," Tom replied. "About half way up on the left."

"Not Teakers!" Alec exclaimed. "Why, that's where I get my kit." He glanced down at his immaculate form.

"Yes, that's it. Perhaps I got someone else's."

"So I should imagine, though I can't understand it. Can you remember where you learnt to fly?"

"Yes, Netheravon."

"Really. And was my friend, Judd, there still?"

Tom's reply came after due deliberation.

"Judd, oh, yes, Captain Judd was my instructor, but he's gone now."

"You don't seem very sure of anything. Where's he gone?"

"I don't know. You see, he was court-martialled; he was mess treasurer, and there was a shortage of cash so he had to go. And," continued Tom, suddenly looking Alec full in the face. "and I sympathised with him."

Alec's heart seemed to get up and turn over. "Why?" he breathed.

"Because I am sure he was not responsible." Tom's eyes began to

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smoulder. "Someone was using him as a scapegoat!"

Alec gasped audibly. For the first time he noticed how powerful was this man's build; he could see the shoulder muscles ripple beneath the straining tunic, imagine the expansion of that restricted chest, and he was frightened.

"Oh, well," he said, in a queer, dry voice, "we've got enough troubles of our own. Come on and I'll see about that haircut." He led the way from the hangar to the two rows of tents that were in the orchard behind. "Taffy!" he bawled. "Taffy!"

"Sir?" came a distant call.

"Taffy'll see to you," he told Tom. "You'll be late for lunch, but no matter." He hurried from the orchard as though to a suddenly remembered duty.

But the moment he was out of sight he paused, irresolute. He felt certain now that this man's arrival at the squadron was no accident. The reference to Judd's misfortune and the unsuspected depths of those smouldering eyes put that possibility out of court. For what then had he come? It was hardly necessary to ask the question.

Tom, he decided, had come to exact revenge for a past wrong, just as he himself, similarly situated, would have done. That being the case, prompt counter-measures would have to be applied. Alec returned to the hangar and gazed at the machine he had assigned the new man. What could he do? That was the question.

To cross the aileron controls would be just the thing. The ailerons would not come into play until the machine was off the ground, when the discovery would be made too late—if it was ever made at all. Alec could picture the slow-witted man's reaction to such a situation.

Tom would take-off clumsily—it was impossible to imagine him doing anything otherwise than clumsily—but the S.E. was stable enough to get him off the ground. Only when he came to make his first turn, or to correct a bump, would he get into difficulty. For his action would merely increase the bank until the machine was on its back; then a

brief dive into the deck would complete the work.

But to change the controls meant that the cable ends must be unspliced—or whatever they called it—reversed and spliced afresh. Which involved a skill Alec did not possess. Now to set the tail-plane falsely for the take-off was something that could leave no tell-tale clue. On the other hand, it would not be so certain in the result.

Still wrestling with the problem, Alec departed for the mess and a before-lunch appetiser. That something must be done was certain; otherwise the whole ordered excellence of the war was threatened. He could not carry on his efficient work in close proximity to a man determined on revenge. His nerve would crack under the strain.

### CHAPTER III

#### Tom Marston's First Victory

SILENCE fell on the ante-room as Alec Marston entered; a silence more eloquent than the preceding babble of idle conversation. They wanted to hear from their flight-commander's own lips what he thought of the new arrival, did they? Then they would be disappointed.

Alec ordered a champagne cocktail, tossed it off, and then made for the adjoining mess marquee, seating himself by the Major's chair at the head of the long table. The others followed. Deft waiters got busy. Soon there was only one vacant place at the lower end. The unusually subdued murmur of talk voiced the general air of expectancy, but Alec kept silent; and when there came a sudden hush he knew the cause without looking.

When he did raise his eyes he hardly recognised Tom Marston, so completely had Taffy transformed him. For Tom's head had been clipped close all over, and the contrast was astounding. Now came an awkward moment when Tom strode straight to the head of the table.

"You can't sit there," said Alec. "It's the Major's."

"Then which is my chair?"

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"Down at the far end."

It was a rigid rule of the mess that the most junior man sat at the bottom of the table, and when Tom had taken his appointed place, seemingly quite ignorant of the sensation he caused, Alec got up and left.

He returned to his hangar, had Tom's machine brought out and started up, and, when the engine had warmed, took it into the air. When he dropped down to one of his polished landings a number of men had drifted out to watch, Tom among them.

In spite of the heat, Tom was arrayed in a Sidcot suit, fur-lined boots, helmet and gloves, as though to patrol at high altitude. When he had climbed into the cockpit, Alec came close and leaned over the side.

"You remember about the compensator?" he shouted above the engine's clatter.

"Yes, I think so."

"And about the tail-control?"

Tom nodded uncertainly.

"Very well then, if you know we won't waste time. I'll set the tail for the take-off." Alec fiddled with the wheel, and finally set it—right back. In that position the S.E. would surely stall and spin unless the stick were held determinedly forward. "Off you go then. It's a foul aerodrome, but if you come in as I did you can't go far wrong."

The Hispano roared and the machine moved away from the hangars. It was running a little out of wind, but not enough to matter.

"My hat!" exclaimed Reeves. "He's keeping his tail well down." He edged close to Alec Marston. "Poor old Skipper, I know how you must be feeling. Tough luck!"

But he did not know. He had no idea of Marston's tormented mind. Nor had Alec even heard his words. He stood there, gazing out over the grass, fists clenched and beads of sweat breaking out all over his body. He saw the brand-new S.E. stagger into the air and climb slowly, drunkenly, evidently within an ace of stalling. Yet it did not fall, for it was kept straight. When the man

banked to turn—then the end would be swift. The machine would fall like a stone.

Now it was turning, in the slow flat turn of the extreme novice, which was, incidentally, the only manoeuvre that would not produce instant disaster in such a situation. As it was, it only postponed the inevitable crash, for the machine still staggered through the air with its nose held high. At any moment it might drop a wing.

The Squadron followed the course of the disaster in spell-bound immobility, except for the Major, who unconsciously expressed his feelings by a toe-dance on the tarmac.

"My God!" gasped Knight, commanding "C" Flight, "he's pulled the tail-wheel right back, poor boob! I expect he's sitting up there as pleased as Punch . . . unconscious as a babe of what's coming . . . well, I'll be . . .!"

Tom had continued his semi-stalled flight and his flat turn until, once more facing the aerodrome from behind the hangars, his engine suddenly died away. The S.E. promptly dipped its nose and picked up a gliding angle of sorts. The immediate crisis had passed, though Tom was not yet out of the wood. Whether he could clear the hangars was a question that not even the most expert witness cared to answer. The machine was sinking rather than gliding.

It came lower and lower, nearer and nearer to the ridge of one of the Bessoneaux . . . and then was clear. A sigh went up from the onlookers. Knight afterwards swore that the wheels actually touched the canvas, but it may have been the down-draught from the wings that caused the fabric to flutter. On went the S.E. in the same straight line to the grass. Its tail was half down all the time, but at the last moment it dropped further and the machine sat down in a perfect three-pointer, ran a short way and stopped.

**W**HOOOPS and cat-calls were eloquent of relaxed tension as the new man turned, taxied in and switched off. He pushed up his goggles, smiling con-

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tentedly. The Major and Alec bore down on him, one on either side. But Tom got in the first word.

"There's something not quite right about this 'bus; she'll only do fifty, flat out."

For answer the Major thrust his hand down in the cockpit and felt the wheel.

"When did you pull this back?" he demanded.

"That, sir. I didn't touch it."

"But . . ." the Major looked at Alec. "You set it?"

"Of course, sir. He must have forgotten—his memory's not too good." Alec's face was yellow beneath the tan.

"Well, don't forget again!" the Major told Tom, and turned to Alec. "See that he understands the controls," he said. "Hullo, what's this?"

An unfamiliar aeroplane was gliding in.

"It's a Froggy," said Reeves, a master of silhouette. "A Breguet two-seater."

The two-seater landed, and the Major walked out to meet it while the rest formed an interested audience at a respectful distance. All except Tom Marston, who stood close by, hands in pockets and head uncovered—a much too-conspicuous example of the British fighting pilot.

**T**WO men resplendent in uniforms of the French Air Force got out of the Breguet and shook hands with the Major. Evidently they could not speak English, for presently the interpreter arrived. While the Breguet was being filled up, an indirect conversation took place, during which the French officers kept looking at the prominent Tom. Once the Major turned to see what distracted them, and frowned.

It was obviously up to Alec to do something.

"Look here, old chap, don't stand about," he said, edging him towards the hangar. "You're not properly dressed. Where's your cap?"

Tom touched his head. "I thought I had it on. Thanks for the tip. Er . . .

would it be all right if I went up for more practice?"

Alec hesitated, then nodded. He beckoned to Jack Reeves.

"I say, Jack, set the tail for him, there's a good chap—I'm not taking the responsibility."

"O.K.," replied Reeves, "leave him to me."

A few moments after Tom's S.E. had taken-off the Major said good-bye to the Frenchmen and watched the Breguet as it moved away. Then he joined Alec.

"Charming fellows," he said. "Most courteous. They're air attachés to the Belgian Army, now carrying urgent despatches to French H.Q. Apparently the Belgian staff expect a formidable attack on them, and hope to convince the Generalissimo. They want help, of course. I shall myself drop a hint to Wing, for it's ridiculous that troops should be idle on this sector when they are urgently needed elsewhere."

Alec nodded absently. Tom's S.E. was now but a speck to southward, followed by the Breguet, and Alec wished it would continue on that course until it ran out of petrol, crashed and killed its pilot. What a relief it would be! But as he watched the diminishing speck he had a deep conviction that Tom would not be quite so easily disposed of.

At his side the Major chattered away, but what it was about Alec neither knew nor cared. The S.E. had suddenly grown distinct—it was turning at last, steeply banked, so that its wings showed clearly against the sky. Tom could bank when he chose, then.

Now the wings levelled to mere slits again; he had turned right round and was headed back for the aerodrome. He should pass the Breguet quite close. Yes, now the Breguet had obliterated the S.E., now it was banked, and the other visible . . . they were circling each other as though in combat. Was this illusion, or was he going mad, Alec asked himself?

Instinctively, he turned to listen, but the distance was too great for sounds of firing to carry, especially with the Major

## AIR STORIES

still blathering. Why couldn't the old fool shut up?

"I don't believe you are listening," complained the Major.

Alec opened his mouth, but no words followed. For in the distance something had fallen, leaving a patch of smoke in the sky, yes, now there was only one machine left! Its wings were two slits, showing that it was flying either due north or due south—coming back or going away. . . . It was an S.E., and it was coming.

"WHAT'S the matter with you?" asked the Major irritably. "What are you staring at?"

"That man!" gasped Alec. "I th . . . think he's shot down the Breguet!"

"Nonsense, Marston. You're seeing things." The Major's voice was quiet, soothing. He reached out a hand to give Marston a pat of encouragement. But Alec made no response, neither did his tension relax. And so in silence the pair of them watched the S.E. grow and grow till it curved in for the landing and touched down safely, if a trifle clumsily.

It taxied up. Tom raised his goggles—he was grinning contentedly. He switched off and stood up.

"Got a Hun!" he announced for all to hear.

It was the signal for shouts of laughter, at which Tom's smile promptly faded and he scowled in sudden anger. Then the laughter stopped as the Major pushed through the semicircle of spectators.

"What's that, Marston?" he enquired coldly.

Tom's scowl changed to a beaming smile.

"I was just saying, sir, that I got a Hun, a two-seater. That makes me really one of the Squadron now, doesn't it?"

A dawning comprehension showed on the Major's face as he nodded a quiet assent. This man was obviously mad. He must be humoured.

"Tell me all about it," he invited.

And in a silence so intense that every syllable reached to the farthest member

of the audience, Tom Marston described his victory.

"I flew to the lines, sir, and straight over, keeping a good look-out. There was nothing to be seen, and after a while I turned. Then came my chance. A two-seater was coming towards me, evidently on its way home, and I determined it shouldn't get through. I knew I must be careful of the rear gun—we were told about that at Netheravon—but while I was wondering what to do about it I got a sudden burst from the front gun. It was good shooting—look!" he pointed to a neat hole in the wind-screen.

The Major solemnly inspected it. "And then?"

"Then I dived and came up beneath. They banked and got their rear gun on me but I went over the other way. They followed me, and so it went on. I thought I was for it, but I hung on; all the time I was getting closer, and then came my chance. They were on an even keel and I was only a few yards beneath them when I let fly. Down they went, smoking, straight to the ground—and these chaps just laugh!"

Tom Marston looked round angrily.

But no one was laughing now.

"It's no laughing matter," agreed the Major, and coughed nervously. "Er . . . congratulations, Marston. And now I think you should have a little rest after all that excitement."

He turned, raised a finger to his lips by way of enjoining silence, and strode to his office.

"My car," he told the orderly, "at once." "Wing," he told the driver, when the car arrived, "and hurry."

He sank back against the cushions as though exhausted. There were some things that could not be trusted to the 'phone. This responsibility must be transferred to other shoulders.

### CHAPTER IV

#### The Dawn Patrol

**B**UT when the Major returned, some two hours later, the worry was still with him. He sent for Alec Marston.

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"You know, I thought you were imagining things for the moment, old chap," he said. "I'm sorry."

"But what's to be done, sir?" asked Alec, who agreed with the rest of the flight that it was high time Tom Marston was placed under close arrest.

"Nothing for the moment—that's the trouble," complained the Major. "I've seen the Colonel. He's been on to Brigade, and the Brigadier's been through to Army, but the General's on leave. They all take so serious a view of the matter that until the General's return we are to behave as though nothing had happened: we are to be ignorant of the whole thing. The man claimed a Hun, and that's the stand we've got to take. Damned nonsense, if you ask me. Why, he never went near the lines! Flew due south, must have been seen by hundreds, and any attempt at concealment will be fatal. However, the responsibility's off my shoulders, thank God!"

"Suppose he repeats the performance, sir?"

"Ah, yes, I'd forgotten one thing. He's not to fly alone again, which means you must take him on patrol at once. Most irregular, but it's not my pigeon. If I were the Brigadier I'd go to French Headquarters and get it off my chest. It wouldn't be pleasant, but, after all, they couldn't do anything about it. When I was at St. Omer in 'fifteen something similar happened, though, of course . . ."

Here Alec's thoughts strayed. The Major was blathering again, and the sound of his voice was enough to drive a chap crazy. He was nearly crazy as it was—crazy with fear.

To think that all these years Tom had known the truth about that theft; to think that all that time he had been brooding over his grievance and awaiting an opportunity of revenge! Slow-witted he might be, and slow of movement, but his very slowness emphasized his tenacity of purpose. Nothing would deter him.

Alec escaped from the office at the first opportunity, but his fears he could not escape. After dinner, a party was formed to take a tender to Amiens.

They would want to discuss the absorbing topic of the latest arrival on the way down, so Alec did not join the party. Instead, he passed the evening in the mess in more sedate company—the half-dozen men who had chosen to remain, and Tom Marston. There he meant to stay until after Tom had retired to bed; unless the others retired first—for he shrank from being alone with him.

TOM sprawled in a chair with a magazine on his knees, a glass at his elbow, and his eyes closed. The others settled down to read. Such evenings were generally devoted to conversation; to the discussion of narrow squeaks or outstanding victories. But to-night the arrival of Marston the Second, and his immediate exhibition of lunacy was obviously of far greater interest than such matters; and since it was impossible to air these topics now, the mess was silent. Even Alec picked up a magazine.

But he saw nothing on the printed page, except Tom's face. If he looked up, there was Tom in person, apparently asleep. He wished now that he had gone to Amiens, or that some poker players had stayed behind. This silence was becoming unnerving.

At last Wright broke the spell by calling for drinks, and when they had been brought the tension relaxed. He was in "C" Flight, a reliable, though not a brilliant pilot. His age was above the average, and he had travelled widely, so that his opinion on any subject was valued.

"Happy landings," said Capel, taking a gulp of whisky. "By the way, Wright, why's the war so quiet? Is it petering out? Shall we be home by harvest?"

"Don't think there's much hope of that," Wright replied. "The war's never quiet, actually, though at times it seems to be. It is like Atlantic rollers hurling themselves against Cornish rocks—after the smash of each breaker there's a lull, while the following wave builds itself up. Generally speaking, the longer the lull the bigger the crash to come."

"Don't be so damned cheerful!" said Roydon, of "A" Flight, ironically.

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"According to that argument there's a mighty attack coming soon; but the mistake in your simile is that during the lull you can see the next wave forming."

"Not at night time, and we are pretty much in the dark, although we are supposed to be the eyes of the Army."

CAPEL tossed off his whisky and called for another round.

"Cheer up, you blighters," he said. "Personally I'd welcome some action; it would waken things up a bit, and it's got to come before the end. But it will be up north; you know what those Frenchmen said . . ." He broke off abruptly, realising he had got on to an awkward subject, and stole a glance at Tom Marston, now apparently asleep in his chair.

"It beats me that you want a scrap here," said Roydon, jumping into the breach. "Isn't an occasional scrap enough for your blood lust? We'd be the first to get it in the neck, and anyway I don't trust Froggies."

"That's a point," said Franklin, the Equipment Officer. "They're spies, as likely as not . . ."

"Were, you mean," said Capel, with a meaning look at the sleeping Tom.

Franklin nodded with a grin.

"Yes, I'd forgotten for the moment. Of course, I was only giving a random example. What I mean is that the Hun has every sort of advantage over us in that way. He has spies everywhere. What can you expect with English, French and Belgians all on the same front? What's easier than for a German Alsatian disguised as a Frenchman to visit any of our 'dromes? We can't return the compliment."

"Don't you believe it," said Wright. "We've spies all right; fewer than Jerry, perhaps, but a good deal better."

"Which is why we are so well-informed!" scoffed Roydon.

"An unseen war every bit as fierce as the one we know about is being continually waged," persisted Wright. "The war for information, which includes throwing dust in the other fellow's eyes. We don't always win, of course, but on

an average I believe we are about twice as efficient as anyone else. It's a war with no quarter given or expected, and it calls for a sort of bravery I certainly don't possess."

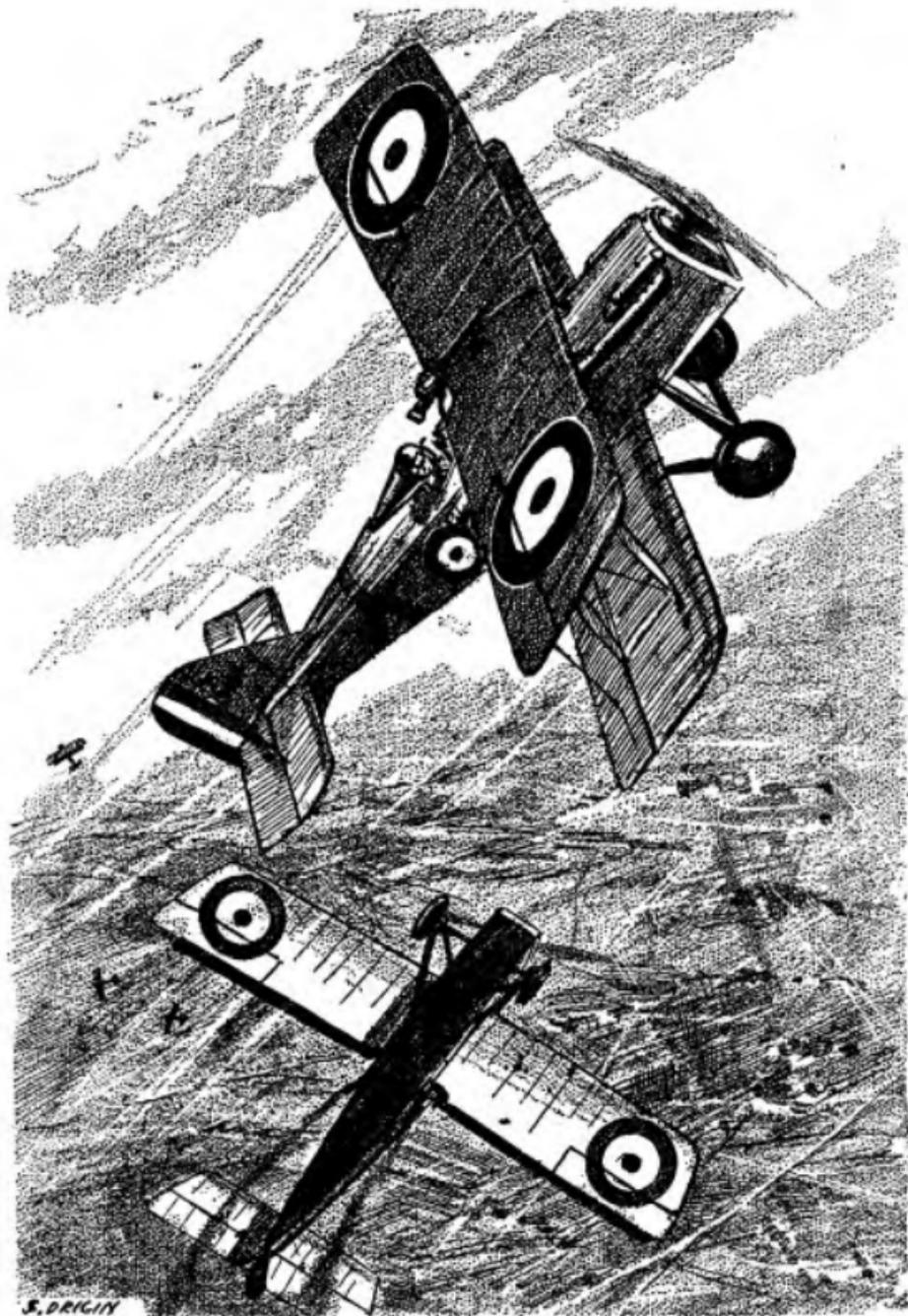
"Sounds as if you could spin a good yarn if you chose," said Roydon, evidently impressed by Wright's quiet confidence.

But Wright shook his head. "Sorry, wish I could. I've a friend very much in a position to know, but he's an oyster when it comes to details. Just as well, I suppose. I did at least drag out of him. . . ." The speaker dropped his voice and glanced at the sleeping form of Tom Marston—"that we have a few supermen who move about as if by magic. They may be in Berlin to-day, in London on Saturday, out here on Monday and on the other side again the next morning. They get caught now and again, of course, and are put against the wall; but others take their places and the game goes on. The German Secret Service has its hands pretty full trying to track them down; one in particular who's an absolute wizard. He's been at it since before the War; known as Q.4, I believe, and they speak of him in London with bated breath. Jerry's supposed to have put the Lord knows what fabulous figure on his head . . . wonder if it will be dud to-morrow."

The appearance of an orderly with a notice for the mess-room board was responsible for the sudden change of subject. Alec got up and went over to read it. He saw he was to lead the dawn patrol, with Lieutenants Reeves, Featherstonhaugh, Capel and Second Lieutenant T. Marston. It was to be a defensive patrol, which meant that he need not cross the lines; but he decided to disregard that part of it. His one preoccupation was to escape the intolerable position Tom Marston's arrival had placed him in, and though he had no clear plan, it was just possible that it might solve itself on the other side of the lines.

Tom Marston was moving now. He got up slowly, looked stupidly round the marquee as though wondering where he might be and then, with a muttered

**FOOL OF THE FLIGHT**



*S. DRIGLY*

He saw the S.E. lift its nose, topple on to its back and go tumbling into a spin

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"Good-night," lumbered outside. From the ante-room window Alec Marston watched the light in Tom's tent till it went out and then, after a last drink, he turned in himself. In a few hours he would be up again. . . .

IT was still dark when Alec Marston returned to the mess. Half-drugged with sleep he sat down, drank some coffee and ate an egg. One by one the other members of the patrol rolled up. The Major was out on the aerodrome in gumboots and with a British Warm over his pyjamas. Lucky man, thought the patrol, he could go back to bed.

They took-off in formation. The eastern sky was a dull red that threatened a change in the weather, and it brightened as they flew. Tom was keeping pretty well in his place on Alec's right with Reeves behind and the other two out on the left. They came to the line, where an occasional flash showed that the war, though dormant, still smouldered. They held their course. The ground was visible now, a shadowy patchwork suffused with the morning glow, while in the sky there formed cumulus monsters splashed with red, that grew and grew. The clouds might furnish the opportunity he wanted, Alec thought, and swerved towards one. Here he might lose Tom once and for all.

So engrossed was he with his thoughts that he failed to see a warning "Archie" burst blossom beyond the cloud, and a crash of bullets was his first intimation of trouble. He dipped his nose, banked left and plunged into damp vapour. He had been caught napping, yet his reaction was one of triumph. Tom would get more than he bargained for.

He circled, as well as he could judge, until he shot out into the sunlight. Below, several machines turned and twisted like excited ants, farther down a speck was falling. Alec took stock of his position. There was nothing above him. Good! He could watch developments.

He saw a machine detach itself from the *mêlée* and begin to climb. He wondered if he could claim a victory,

and who it was who now came climbing up. Presently he knew, and with the knowledge fear gripped him again. It was Tom's machine that came ever closer—Tom, the fool who would not be disposed of. Well . . . this time the result might be different. Alec searched the sky . . . they were alone. He must bide his time—wait for the exact moment—and then use all his skycraft for this, his most important victory. He was very cool as he prepared and waited . . . now!

He dropped a wing and plunged, steadied, took careful aim and fired, zoomed up and looked below. He saw the S.E. lift its nose, topple on to its back and go tumbling in a convulsive, jerky spin. He watched its course till he could watch it no longer, and then headed west. With the reaction, his coolness had gone, so that his feet were unsteady on the rudder-bar. Reeves formed up presently, and then Capel, and three machines returned to the aerodrome. Alec made his first bad landing.

"GOOD stunt, turning into the cloud," Reeves told him, as they clambered out of their cockpits and lit up. "Suppose you plunged through and caught the Huns napping?"

Alec nodded vaguely and turned as the Major came up.

"Feathers missing?" he enquired.

"'Fraid so, sir," said Capel. "I saw him go down."

"And what did we do?" the Major asked.

"I got one, subject to confirmation," Capel replied. "He was smoking when I lost him."

"That was a cert.," agreed Reeves. "I watched it. I believe I got one, too, but there was no smoke about it."

The Major turned to his flight-commander.

"And what about you, Marston?"

"He got one, too, sir," Reeves broke in. "I saw it falling against the sky from miles away, and it spun to the ground."

"You're sure of that?" Alec said sharply.

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"Absolutely."

"Capital! A probable three to two," said the Major, making the first indirect reference to the loss of Tom Marston. "I'll get on to the batteries. Good work, Marston."

He took Alec's arm and led him away to the office. "What happened to him?" he enquired.

"I was too busy to see, sir," was the reply.

"Quite. Well, perhaps it's for the best. He was obviously as mad as a hatter, and at least he can't be questioned about the Breguet now!"

"True, sir," agreed Alec. "But I'm glad I avenged him. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll make out my report."

He wanted to think. For his own peace he must repeat and repeat that Tom's death was not his affair, until he believed it. The truth could never be faced.

But when he had blown out his candle that night the old fear assailed him. Suppose Tom was not dead, after all? Suppose he was a prisoner, waiting for the War's end; for revenge! Alec Marston cursed himself for a fool, and with an effort settled down to a troubled sleep.

### CHAPTER V

#### The Return of Private Struben

TOM MARSTON had indeed spun to the very ground, as Reeves had testified, flattening out only at the very last moment. But he had flown east, not west, until he had come to an isolated field. For though his aeroplane had been riddled, he had not been hit. Now he put down in the narrow space with a skill that would have surprised the Squadron. He got out and stood listening intently to the rustle of the trees in the summer breeze, then stepped quickly towards a spinney that fringed the ground. But when still a dozen paces distant he came to an abrupt halt. Two grey-uniformed soldiers had emerged from the wood.

Evidently they had seen or heard the aeroplane and come running towards it,

for they were panting. Now they, too, stopped in evident surprise, then hurried forward. They were both big fellows, the taller being as big as Tom, and since they were unarmed it seemed they must be from some nearby camp.

"You, prisoner, me," said the tall one triumphantly, pointing first at Tom and then at himself.

Tom shrugged his shoulders in a slow movement of resignation, then like a flash his fist shot out to the man's chin, and he closed with the other. The man he had struck collapsed in a heap, and now with his great strength Tom forced the other to the ground. His hands found the man's throat and tightened till their victim relaxed. At once Tom let go. Then he turned to look at the other, and his body froze to immobility.

The other man had disappeared.

Tom's inaction lasted only a second, and then he peered quickly in all directions. There was no questioning the truth of this calamity; the second German had completely vanished. He might have gone for help, perhaps, to some nearby camp, in which case the countryside would soon be filled with searching troops. Yet Tom hoped he had, for the alternative was worse. The man might be lurking close by, with the object of following the Englishman wherever he went.

Tom, however, did not long ponder the matter, but hurried under cover. He traversed the copse, paused to turn and listen, and then struck off across open country to the further shelter of a wood. He pressed on for a while, without hesitation as to direction, until he came to falling ground. Ahead, a wisp of blue smoke curled lazily into the air, and presently a farmhouse came into view. Cautiously he reconnoitered the place. Having seen that the garden was empty, he went into the yard, quietly lifted the latch of the kitchen door and entered. As the door closed behind him a figure in a blue-grey uniform dodged from behind a tree to one which gave a closer vantage point.

"*Bonjour, Marthe,*" said Tom to a woman who was in the kitchen.

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"*Bonjour, Monsieur*, so you have returned," said Marthe. "I was expecting you. Your battalion moved up through here three nights ago, but you probably know that."

"I guessed it," said Tom, "and now I must join them quickly. Unfortunately I may be followed, so you should go out by the front door and remain outside for fifteen minutes. Then work your way round to the back and show yourself there so that it will appear as if you were not here when I came in."

When the woman had gone Tom Marston went to a small room at the end of the passage, and with a poker prised up one of the stone flags that formed the floor. From the cavity it revealed he withdrew a bundle of uniform; and within a few minutes he was dressed as a private soldier of a German labour battalion. Having stored away his British uniform, he replaced the slab, and sprinkled the cracks with some ashes from the grate. Then, complete with pack and equipment, he left by the front door.

OPENLY following the lane that ran west from Cambrai, Tom Marston soon came upon a halted lorry. Seated by the roadside were a dozen or so soldiers of different regiments, including two with the badges he himself displayed.

"It seems I'm in luck, comrades," he announced in easy German of Saxon dialect. "I expected to have to tramp all the way."

"You're only just in luck," said the driver, getting to his feet. "A moment later and you would have seen nothing but our dust. Come on, lads."

He swung the engine to life and climbed into the cab, while the others, with Tom among them, scrambled into the body of the vehicle. The driver was just letting in the clutch when one of the soldiers shouted to him to stop. A man was running down the lane.

If Tom recognised that hurrying figure for the man he had knocked out, he gave no sign of the fact. He lolled back against one of the side-boards with an elbow on his kit-bag, and maintained a rapid conversation. He had been away

from his unit a month, he said, for at the end of his week's leave he had gone down with 'flu.

"Some have all the luck," said a soldier dryly. "That sort of thing doesn't happen to me."

"Evidently you have not had 'flu,'" Tom replied lightly.

"Jump aboard and look sharp," shouted the driver.

The latest arrival had paused on reaching the lorry, and was now gazing in evident perplexity at the men who crowded it. "An English airman landed back there," he said, with a wave of the hand across the hill. "I saw him go into a farmhouse, and I saw him come out in our uniform and make for this road. Did anyone get aboard here?"

"Sure thing," said Tom, before anyone else could reply. "I came aboard myself here, and if you must know, I came out of the farmhouse. But I saw no Englishman there, nor Marthe, or she would have told me. She's an old friend of mine. You missed the boat, old chap; I expect your Englishman is still hiding there—if you really saw one, that is. But I am afraid you've been drinking; do you know your face is all black and blue where you have been tumbling about?"

There was a shout of laughter at that, and the man in the road flushed angrily and raised a hand to his jaw.

"Been drinking, have I?" he exploded. "That swine struck me like a kick from a mule, and then strangled my pal, Heiner. I'm going to get him even if I risk being shot for a deserter!" He stared fixedly at Tom while talking, and suddenly pointed a finger. "You struck me!"

This dramatic statement was followed by a silence, broken only by the lorry's engine. All eyes were turned on Tom.

Then Tom laughed. He laughed with a helpless laughter that shook his body and brought tears to his eyes, and made the others laugh, too. Even his accuser seemed shaken.

"What's this?" bawled the driver, peering round the cab. "A circus? Come on!"

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He disappeared, raced his engine, and the lorry started with a jerk. The man in the road ran forward and jumped aboard.

**A**FTER half an hour the lorry stopped. "Out you get," said the driver. "I don't go any farther."

Grabbing his kit, Tom set out across country with the two others from the pioneer battalion. Though he did not look back, he knew he was being followed; and the persistence of his pursuer had become a dangerous menace. It seemed there was no shaking the man off.

But if Tom was anxious he gave no sign of his feelings, and treated his companions to a constant stream of banter. They took advantage of every bit of cover that offered, and when British aircraft were flying near they remained quietly hidden. For orders were that the countryside should present a deserted appearance from above.

By mid-day they were climbing the wooded slopes of a hill that afforded shelter to thousands of troops, many guns and much ammunition. Presently they reached their destination—the encampment of the 40th Pioneer Battalion. Tom reported to his sergeant.

"You're under arrest, Struben, my lad," said the sergeant. "You've overstayed your leave by fourteen days, and you're being posted as a deserter."

"But, Sergeant, I've been sick!" protested Struben. "For three weeks in Dresden General Hospital."

"You can tell that to the Colonel," the sergeant retorted. He called two men as escort and marched Struben off; his pursuer following at a discreet distance.

Presently the sergeant became aware of the follower, halted his party and swung suddenly round.

"What are you doing here? Why aren't you with your battalion? What's your name?"

"Leitner, Sergeant," replied the man briskly. "My unit is back in rest billets, and I've been following this man because . . ."

"See here, Leitner," exploded the

sergeant, "I don't want your life history, and you get out of here while the going's good, or I'll clap you under arrest as well. Quick march!" he ordered his squad in thunderous tones that drowned Leitner's further explanations and drew a sigh of relief from Struben.

But Struben guessed this was only a temporary respite: the man Leitner was too persistent a sleuth to be so easily shaken off. And when they were halted before a tent of green canvas a backward glance assured him he was right. Leitner lurked behind an oak tree only a short distance away.

The sergeant entered the tent and, after an interval, reappeared in the company of a tall man with cold eyes whose severity a monocle only emphasized, and a clipped moustache too small to hide the cruelty of the thin lips beneath.

"This is the prisoner, Herr Kolonel," said the sergeant.

"You know the penalty for desertion in the face of the Fatherland's enemies?" The colonel spoke quietly and very slowly, as though his words were music to his ears and must not be hurried.

"But I have been very ill, my Colonel," said Struben, "very ill with influenza. And when I was discharged from hospital at Dresden I only took two days of my sick leave."

The colonel's tight lips curved down in a sneer. "Had you been ill at Dresden we should have been advised."

Struben fumbled some papers from a pocket.

"Indeed, Colonel, you should have had the doctor's report."

The colonel took the papers, and his look of anticipation faded. His power to administer punishment gave him pleasure. Unfortunately these documents knocked the whole idea on the head—assuming they were genuine. Might not a man get hold of such a form and forge a signature? He wished he knew that doctor in Dresden. It was, however, clear to him that he could not keep this man prisoner. He turned on the sergeant with fury for not having ascertained all

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the facts, and ordered Struben's release. He would, he decided, make enquiries.

"Prisoner and escort, dismiss," shouted the sergeant, who had made a mental resolution to get even with Struben for this.

WHEN the colonel and the escort had departed, Struben wandered off unhurriedly through the wood to where the men of his battalion were taking their mid-day meal. He walked with bowed head as though tired, but he was not too tired to observe that Leitner, having dodged the sergeant, was now approaching the colonel's tent. It was easy to guess what would follow. Yet Struben did not hurry.

He found his own company, took his mess-tin from his kit and collected food from the field-kitchen. Then he selected a space on the ground between two soldiers.

"Well, if it isn't old Struben!" exclaimed one of them. "The artful old dog. Get's leave before his turn, and stays away a month; while we've been worked off our feet. How's it done, Struben, old boy?"

Struben began to make short work of his meal, and while he ate he kept one eye on the colonel's tent, just visible in the distance through the trees.

"It manages itself, Hans," he said, "when you're very ill. Of course, I'm sorry to have been away because my energy would have made all the difference. But what have you been so busy about?"

"Ah!" said Hans, "that's just the joke. While you've been away we've won the War. Outside this wood, at the foot of the hill, begins a tunnel. That tunnel goes deep beneath our trenches and comes up close to Tommy's front line. Our job's been to carry down the stuff—thousands of cases of explosives. Now, the biggest cracker ever known is ready to blow the English sky-high. We've worked only at night because of the need for secrecy. From outside, or from the air, this place looks like a deserted country, but between you and me there's at least three divisions within a

couple of miles. Why, they've been so strict about this secrecy business that we've even had to approach the tunnel from different directions so as not to wear the grass out!"

"I'm not surprised—with feet like yours," Struben laughed, and stood erect. So this was the explanation of that peculiar arrow mark he had seen from the air. It confirmed his own theory as to its meaning. But at that moment Private Struben found a more pressing interest.

Both the colonel and Leitner had just emerged from the tent, and the officer was shouting imperiously for his subordinates.

"I think," said Struben, yawning prodigiously and reaching for his kit-bag, "that if you gentlemen will excuse me I'll seek a quiet spot for a much needed sleep."

"Anything wrong with us?" enquired Hans. "We shall all be having forty winks. Heavens!" He looked through the trees to where the colonel was yelling commands to a group of officers and men who surrounded him. "What's the matter with him now?"

"Can't imagine," Struben drawled in sleepy accents, "but whatever it is, his voice annoys me and I'm moving well out of range." Then, stifling a yawn, he wandered slowly away.

He maintained his leisurely gait through the crowded wood until he came to its edge and was alone. Here, facing an empty countryside, he tipped out his kit-bag in the shelter of a bramble bush, and his lethargy changed to swift action. He discarded his uniform and donned another, that of a lieutenant of the German Air Force. Then he kicked everything else out of sight beneath the bush and set out across open country.

Not until he had gained the shelter of a lane did he pause to look back. What he then saw told him he had been none too soon. The sound of distant shouting indicated that a vigorous search was in progress, and furthermore, a man whose figure strongly resembled that of the indefatigable Leitner was making his way towards the lane. All these things

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Struben took in at a glance, and decided he had seen enough.

### CHAPTER VI

#### M.12 Makes His Report

WHEN the sun was westering, ex-Private Struben came to an aerodrome that flanked the Cambrai road. He was hot and weary with the speed he had made and, of far greater moment, he was by no means sure he had thrown off the persistent Leitner.

After a backward look, which did not enlighten him, he crossed the aerodrome towards the row of hangars. There were no machines out in the open, but within the buildings they were close-packed, and and every now and then the figure of a mechanic was to be seen moving among them.

Struben passed on and entered a long building which was the officers' mess.

There were two men in the room, and they looked up with surprised greetings. But with a wave of his hand Struben crossed the floor and went out by another door into a passage. An orderly appeared.

"Is the Major in, Strauss?" Struben enquired.

"Yes, Herr Kapitan Reuss, but he is not to be disturbed," replied the orderly.

In total disregard of this instruction the man called Reuss entered a door on the right without even pausing to knock. At a table within sat a major of the Air Service in close consultation with an officer whose uniform and tabs showed that he was a colonel on the general staff.

The major swung round with an impatient gesture, and then smiled.

"Ah! the good M.12 at last," he said. "The very man."

"Yes, indeed," agreed the Colonel. "What news, M.12?"

"The very best, sir," M.12 replied. "The British have no suspicion of where the attack is to be made, but it would be well not to delay too long."

"I'm indeed glad to hear it," said the colonel. "For in that case nothing can go wrong this time. Zero hour is at dawn to-morrow, though none of the

units concerned are yet aware of it. There is no possibility of leakage. But what of your main mission? Somehow or other we must get our hands on that infernal Q.4. Oh, and another matter. I sent M.8 across the lines yesterday in a French Breguet piloted by Frisch. M.8 assures me that he knows the English spy, Q.4, by sight. Have you seen anything of these two?"

"I have indeed, sir; they are both dead," Reuss replied.

The two Germans gave a start of surprise.

"They came to the S.E. squadron at Auxi to which I had proceeded in accordance with instructions," Reuss continued. "I recognised them, of course, but not openly. Their death was due to a million-to-one chance. A very new pilot was flying in the vicinity, and in his inexperience he mistook the Breguet for a German machine and shot it down."

"You see, Hans," said the major angrily, "what happens when you take my excellent pilots and send them on your wild-goose chases. Now, I suppose you'll want another?"

"I can at least give you news of Q.4," interposed M.12.

The colonel instantly became excited.

"If you can lay that Englishman by the heels, Captain Reuss, you could name your own reward!"

"Q.4 was with the 40th Pioneers at Morlais Wood at mid-day," M.12 calmly announced. "I saw him there myself. I came over in a British S.E., and landed on the far side of the wood where the unit is encamped. In passing that wood on my way here I stopped to look around, and there I recognised him. As he did not see me, I thought it best to come straight on here and report. I . . ."

There was a knock at the door, and the orderly entered.

"A . . . a man asks for you urgently, sir," he said nervously.

"Did I not tell you I was not to be disturbed?" the major demanded wrathfully. "A man, indeed! Get out!"

The orderly hesitated.

"I was to say, sir, that he comes

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from the Morlais Wood with news of great importance."

"Morlais Wood!" repeated the colonel. "Then, at least find out what he has to say."

"Most decidedly," agreed M.12. "This may have some bearing on what I have just told you. But"—he dropped his voice—"dismiss your orderly; I will get this man in."

"You may go," snapped the major, and the orderly hurriedly departed.

M.12 followed close on the orderly's heels, and outside he came face to face with Leitner. The noise of the orderly's footsteps faded, no sound came from within the room, and the momentary silence was broken only by the grumble of a Mercedes engine that was ticking over at the hangars.

There was a gleam of triumph in Leitner's eyes as M.12 held the door open for him.

"Enter," he said.

"After you!" insisted Leitner.

"Do as you are told!" snapped M.12.

And Leitner, responding blindly to the influence of training, moved to obey; but on the threshold he stopped dead. "I go in after you," he stated obstinately.

With lightning speed M.12 raised a foot and propelled the reluctant man into the room at the run. Then he slammed the door, turned the key and pocketed it. A moment later he had walked down the passage and passed through another door into the open.

Only a vivid tip of the setting sun was visible to westward, and the sky was suffused with a lurid, fiery glow. But over at the hangar the Mercedes engine still rumbled, and M.12 hurried towards it. He knew it would be too dangerous to run; yet he knew, too, that this was a race with time. The locked door and Leitner's sudden entry into the room might delay pursuit for about three minutes; hardly more. It was indeed a small start.

A mechanic was sitting in the Fokker's cockpit as M.12 approached and slapped him on the shoulder. The man looked up in surprise.

"Hullo, sir," he shouted and slowed the engine to lessen its noise.

"I want to take this machine up for a few minutes."

"Sorry, sir, but it's the Major's, and the tanks are not filled."

"Then tip in a couple of cans, and look sharp!"

Again a man's features recorded a struggle between discipline and reason, but he climbed out and disappeared within the hangar. For a seeming eternity nothing happened, but fortunately the distant mess building still showed no sign of life. M.12 went into the hangar.

The mechanic was arguing and gesticulating with the flight sergeant, who turned and saluted.

"What's all the trouble, sir?"

"The trouble, Sergeant, is that I must fly at once."

"Very well, sir, I'll have a machine run out."

"There's no time for that," said M.12 impatiently. Then he lowered his voice. "Have you not realised I am on secret service work? At this very moment I am on an urgent mission that might even decide the outcome of the whole war."

"I'm sorry, sir," said the awed sergeant, and gave hurried orders. Quickly two mechanics were set to work refuelling the Fokker; but before they had finished, men could be seen running across from the distant side of the aerodrome.

The mechanic who stood filling the tank paused in his work.

"The Major himself!" gasped the sergeant.

"And in a pretty foul rage, it seems," added M.12. "Small wonder, with me loitering about on the ground in this way. Now come on, Sergeant! At least get me into the air before he arrives."

The sergeant cast an anxious glance at the oncoming figures.

"Very good, sir," he said, and at once proceeded to make up for lost time. "Close the tank and look slippy, Max," he bawled. "Here, Fritz, swing the tail about . . . away with those chocks." His parade-ground voice completely

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drowned the shouts of the fast-approaching major ; but the danger was not yet past.

For no sooner had his orders been obeyed than the sergeant subsided. His work was done. And though M.12, who was already in the cockpit, had opened the throttle, the engine's clamour was not now sufficient to hide the major's intentions. In a flash the sergeant grasped the situation and flung himself forward at the fuselage of the moving Fokker. He missed it, but one hand caught the leading edge of the tail-plane and held it fast.

The weight of his body as it was dragged along the grass effectively damped the machine's acceleration, so that the running mechanics now began to overhaul it. Their weight would decide the issue. At the same time the major was running obliquely towards them, but he was soon outdistanced by the taller figure of Leitner. They headed to intercept the Fokker, and Leitner, coming close, made a sudden spurt and dived for a wing strut.

He missed, stumbled and fell, and at the same instant the sergeant's hold failed. At once the Fokker's tail rose, passed over the recumbent man, and a moment later M.12 was in the air.

### CHAPTER VII

#### The Man who was Q.4

**F**LYING low, M.12 headed for the fading sunset, and when he looked back he could see that several machines were being run out for the pursuit. He smiled grimly. They could not hope to catch him.

"Too damned close," he muttered. "Too damned close by far."

He crossed the lines as dusk fell, held his westward course for a while, and then shut off. Below, there seemed to be a park with a big house and many trees dotted about. Lower and lower he came, seeking a clear space, then bounced and touched again, ran fast along the ground, fouled a trunk with a wing, slewed round and finished on his nose.

The sudden silence that followed was broken by the shouts of running men.

M.12 climbed out, and a torch was flashed in his face.

"Blimey, Bert ! 'Ere's a blinkin' 'Un," said a voice from behind the beam.

"'Ands up, Jerry."

"'Strewth !" said someone else.

"Trying to bomb the Old Man, I should reckon. What an 'aul for us ! Come along, Jerry."

They took him to a guard-room, and, presently, through the main entrance to the big house which was the headquarters of the 6th British Army in the Field. M.12, blinking in the sudden glare, saw a group of officers emerge from the dining-room on the left of the spacious hall. Among them was General McTaggart, commanding, and beside him Colonel Soames, his Intelligence Officer.

"Prisoner and escort, 'alt !" barked the sergeant of the guard, and there was a ring of proud achievement in his voice. He stepped forward smartly and saluted the general. "We apprehended accused, sir, when he crashed in the park."

"Dismiss the escort, Sergeant," Soames ordered.

"Escort, dismiss," said the sergeant, in a voice that registered baffled indignation and sorrow at the ingratitude of great men.

"Come in here," said Soames to M.12, and indicated a door. "Will you come, too, sir ?" he asked the general. "This is Q.4," he added when they were inside.

"'Pon me soul !" said the general. "You don't mean it ?"

In a comfortable armchair, with a drink at his elbow, Q.4 gave his warning.

"The sector fronting Morlais Wood is mined on a considerable frontage," he explained. "Zero hour was to have been dawn to-morrow, but may now be advanced, since the enemy knows I have this information."

After a brief discussion, the general left to arrange for the withdrawal of certain units to support trenches, so that Soames and Q.4 were left alone.

"Now," said Soames, "tell me the rest."

"I've had a roughish trip," began Q.4 reminiscently. "Made mistakes

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that would have shamed a novice. As I told you last time, Jerry has been getting on my tracks lately—or, at any rate, one of my tracks. You see, I'm always at least two people when on the other side, so that I can lose myself if I'm closely pressed. For a month I've been Private Struben of the Pioneers, as well as a flying officer and Secret Service agent M.12.

"As M.12 I learned that certain clues must soon expose Struben, also that it is no longer safe for spies to be dropped at night. The countryside is well covered with troops specially detailed to watch for that sort of thing. But by day, if you know your way about, it is fairly easy to be 'shot down' just where you want to be.

"That, as you know, was why I decided to join that S.E. squadron as a junior officer, and that was where I made my first mistake. I omitted to find out the names of the men who were serving with it—and the senior flight commander happened to be a namesake of mine whom I was at school with!"

Q.4 paused to take a pull at his whisky. Soames uttered a low whistle.

"At least he won't give you away then?" he said.

"Unfortunately, and for reasons I'd rather not discuss, he and I don't get on any too well together. In fact, he disliked me so much that he made two or three attempts on my life, one of which nearly came off."

Soames made a gesture of incredulity, but said nothing.

"Another sign that I am becoming careless was the name I took—Tom Marston, my own. I've not used it for many years, but the choice turned out to be a lucky accident. Which reminds me—that uniform you let me have was about three sizes too small. Though that, too, was rather a help, for it enabled me to pose as a mentally deficient scarecrow and I was so unpopular that no one questioned me about my past. In fact, it even enabled me to shoot down two German agents and get away with it."

Soames grinned.

"Yes, we heard all about that!"

"Whether they were looking for me or not, I'm damned if I know, but they certainly recognised me, so there was nothing else for it."

"And how did you get down on the other side and pick up this information?" asked Soames.

Q.4 told the remainder of his story.

"Time you had a good rest," said Soames when he had finished. "What about a month's leave?"

Q.4 seemed tempted for a moment, then he shook his head.

"No, there can be no rest for me," he said. "I shouldn't know where to go or what to do. Besides, I'd lose touch with the job and might never get it back. No, a square meal and a good rest are all I need, and I'll get back to the Squadron in the morning. The sooner I'm on the other side again the better; I want to lose a few old aliases and establish a new identity."

"You know best," said Soames reluctantly. "Who's it to be now?"

"A French peasant, I think. How about Marcel Descault? On his way down from occupied Belgium to find his mother in Alsace. Will you prepare the necessary papers?"

"I can at least do that," said Soames. "And I can frank them with the official stamps of all the commands you passed through on your way down," he added, not without pride. "Your clothes will be ready for you in the morning. Now come and feed."

"Thanks," said Q.4, getting up. "But I'll take the precaution of trying those clothes on this time!"

SOON after breakfast the next day a Scar from Headquarters dropped Tom Marston at a discreet distance from the Squadron.

"I was shot down just this side," he reminded himself as he completed the journey on foot, "and the guns made short work of the 'bus.'"

A few minutes later he was repeating his story to Major Norris, who did not seem particularly pleased at his re-appearance. He was out on the aerodrome as a patrol was expected back, and

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presently the machines were sighted. The formation split up and landed one by one. The last to put down was Alec Marston, and the major advanced towards his machine as it was taxied up.

"What luck?" he enquired when Alec jumped to the ground.

"None, sir," was the reply. "The sky's lousy with Huns—can't imagine where they've all come from—and there's heavy shelling all along the line. Big attack evidently going on."

Norris nodded.

"Yes, Wing seemed to be expecting something of the sort. Have any fighting?"

"No, sir. Under the circumstances I thought it wise to keep clear. Of course, if I had been alone. . . ." Alec came to an abrupt halt.

The major finished the sentence for him. "Had you been alone I've no doubt you would have given a good account of yourself," he said, with a smile for his favourite. "But I'm glad you were not alone; the odds might have been too great even for you—why, what on earth's the matter?"

There was good cause for the question. Alec Marston was staring open-mouthed and wild-eyed towards the hangars, and now the major followed his gaze.

"Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you he'd returned," he began a little awkwardly. "But there's nothing to be alarmed about, man—he's no ghost, you know. He was shot down just this side, and seems to have been remarkably lucky."

"Yes," said Alec in a barely audible whisper. "Yes."

"I must get back to the office," went on Norris, not a little perplexed at such a display of feeling. "See you presently in the office?"

Alec made no reply, but remained as though transfixed while his superior walked away. He could not take his eyes off Tom. He saw him come towards him with his awkward gait, and he wanted to run and keep on running. Yet he seemed unable to move.

"I'd like a word with you in private," said Tom, and the spell was broken.

"Yes, of course," Alec replied with

an effort. "I must go to the office to report, then I'll meet you in my tent."

He hurried after the major, but changed his direction as soon as he was out of sight, and approached his own hangar from the back.

"Fill up my machine immediately," he ordered.

Ten minutes later he was in the air.

### CHAPTER VIII

#### The Price of Victory

WHEN Alec Marston took-off he had no clear idea of his purpose, except that one obsession to get away. By force of habit he flew to the lines, and over. The quiet sector was quiet no longer. Below was pandemonium, with long lines of smoke curtaining the tortured ground, and flashing points of fire telling of an intense bombardment. It was evident that the long-prepared attack had so far failed.

In the air, too, there was great activity. To the north, a squadron of Camels were scrapping with a like number of scouts, while southward, two flights of Bristols were trying to hold their own against a circus of Albatros and Fokkers. Opposite Alec, at a little distance, another enemy squadron patrolled, while he was unsupported by any British machines in the immediate vicinity. There might be more Huns up in the sun, waiting an opportunity to pounce.

Alec summed up the position mechanically and without interest, for the horror that had unnerved him left no room for other fears. He saw five Albatros in tight formation passing some way below, and knew in that moment there must be Huns up in the sun. It was the old familiar trap; very well, he would play up to it. He did not doubt he could give a good account of himself, and for once inaction was out of the question.

He waited his time, flying on as though he had not seen the bait. Then, when the formation was lost to view behind his leading edge, he fell out of the sky in a vertical power drive. The suddenness of the manoeuvre was not to be denied. The Albatros began to dive away;

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Alec Marston laughed. They would now learn it was dangerous to play with fire. Gusts of laughter shook him. They could not hope to escape the speed of his pursuit. In a matter of seconds he would be on them . . . now he was within range.

The formation opened out: two left and two right, while the leader pulled vertically up as though to loop. Alec swerved right and closed to point-blank range, mastered his laughter while he concentrated, and let drive. He did not pause to watch for the result, and as the cockpit of that doomed machine became a sudden furnace his speed had brought him to the next Albatros.

This one was steeply banked in a desperate attempt to escape; and Alec Marston laughed again. This was child's play to him. He banked more steeply, on a smaller circle, and concentrated on the sight. And then a second 'plane was tumbling. Alec, roaring with laughter, was looking for the leader.

Ah! There he was, just falling out of his loop. The poor fool had lost height on that fatuous manoeuvre—and his life as well. For while he was still tumbling, and before he had fully regained control of his machine, Alec was on his tail. Desperately the German turned and twisted, but each movement only brought his foe closer; and then, his nerve failing, he went into a straight dive. In a moment he was a falling beacon of fire.

Alec was laughing again, uncontrollably. It was a nuisance, this laughter that had started and would not be stopped. He wanted the other two Albatros—they were some way off but were now returning. It was like their cheek! Or perhaps it was that support had arrived? What about those fellows up in the sun? Alec looked up.

Five diving Fokkers were close upon him!

Six muzzles began to flash, and bullets cracked in an almost unbroken tornado of sound. Alec felt a sudden sharp pain in his right shoulder, that at least had the desired effect of stilling his laughter. But it also caused his arm to hang limp

and useless. What did that matter? He could fly as well with his left, and if it was difficult to press two gun-trips with one thumb—well one gun would serve his purpose.

Already he was swinging round to meet the new threat, and to such purpose that a Fokker quickly went spinning to earth. But there were still four Fokkers to reckon with, as well as those two returning Albatros, and if he was a difficult target it did not mean that he altogether escaped those converging lead streams. Far from it.

A bullet passed through his left thigh, and another cut his chin. His engine began violently to vibrate, yet still he fought, and when another Fokker went smoking down in a wide spiral the situation suddenly changed. For the Albatros now turned away from this madman who seemed invincible, and the two Fokkers made as though to follow them. The third put in a final burst and then also made off.

Alec sagged forward till his head touched the instrument panel—a bullet had entered the small of his back, passed clean through and lodged itself, spent, between the fingers of the hand on the stick. This, then, was the end.

Then he rallied, and, lifting his nose, sent a long burst after his beaten foes. If they wanted more they had but to turn and they would get it—for just a little while longer.

But there was no reply, and Alec, struggling against the pain that wracked him, turned west. He came to the aerodrome almost by instinct, for he was by then barely conscious. He rallied for a second time. His last landing must be true to form. It was.

**T**HE major came running out to meet his favourite.

"What luck did . . .?" he began, then broke off at the sight of the man in the cockpit.

"Five, sir," said Alec proudly, and then fell back coughing.

They lifted him from the cockpit and laid him upon a bed inside a tent while the M.O. tended him. The major stood

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outside in case he should be wanted, but it was for Tom Marston that Alec presently asked.

"I never thought you knew," he said when Tom had come, "until you came here. Then I knew you knew."

"Knew what, old man?" asked Tom, mystified.

"A . . . about the money at school . . . that I . . . I planted it on you."

Tom's eyes blazed suddenly.

"You! You did it! I never knew; never even guessed. Why, you—" He broke off, suddenly remembering the man's condition and alarmed by the look in his eyes.

"Then, then it was all for nothing," Alec gasped. "It need not have been!" His voice died away into silence.

"He's gone," said the M.O. with a glance at the still face, on which a look of horror remained.

Norris, who had heard something of the commotion, lifted the tent flap and looked in.

"He's gone," repeated the M.O.

The major's self-control suddenly failed him.

"You're responsible for this!" he snarled, turning upon Tom. "You've worried him to death. Since you came he's been a changed man. He was ashamed to have you in his flight; ashamed of your record, your appearance and your uselessness. Now I've lost the best leader, the most capable fighter and the best friend I ever had. And in exchange I get you!"

Tom's anger blazed up at the bitter

attack, but he gave no sign of it as he looked at the major. He understood something of the man's grief in that moment, and his anger subsided.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "As far as I am concerned I'll do my best to remedy the matter."

He left the tent and made for the hangar, to find the new machine that had been allotted to him. Now was the time to make his second exit. The Squadron would know nothing more of Second Lieutenant Marston. . . .

IT was about a fortnight later that Colonel Soames, in his office at Army Headquarters, picked up a week-old copy of the "Times" that had just come in. He turned to the Honours List and his mouth grew grim as he read:

*"Bar to the D.S.O., Captain A. L. Marston, D.S.O., M.C. For exceptional gallantry and devotion to his duty, in that he . . ."*

Then he turned to the Casualty Lists and ran his eye down the columns. Under "Died of Wounds," he found recorded:

*"Captain A. L. Marston, D.S.O., M.C., and under "Missing," there was the entry: "Second Lieutenant T. G. Marston."*

The Colonel gazed out of the window on to the sunlit park, where a row of poplars barred his view to the east.

"Exit Second Lieutenant Marston," he muttered, "but good luck to Marcel Descault."

## NEW COMPOSITE AIRCRAFT WILL CRUISE AT 270 M.P.H.

Landplane Version of the Short Mayo—Two New British Aero Engines—Alvis takes to the Air.

WORK has already begun on the construction of a new landplane version of the Short-Mayo composite aircraft, which is planned to cruise at 270 m.p.h. and to carry letters overnight between London and Montreal or New York. This fast mail-carrier will be launched from the back of an Armstrong-Whitworth Ensign air-liner suitably adapted for the work.

### New British Aero-Engine

SPEAKING at a recent meeting of the Napier aero-engine company, Sir Harold Snagge, the chairman, referred to "the design and development of a new engine believed to be in advance of anything now in the air." Production of this engine he described as "the main preoccupation" of the company at present to ensure its emergence

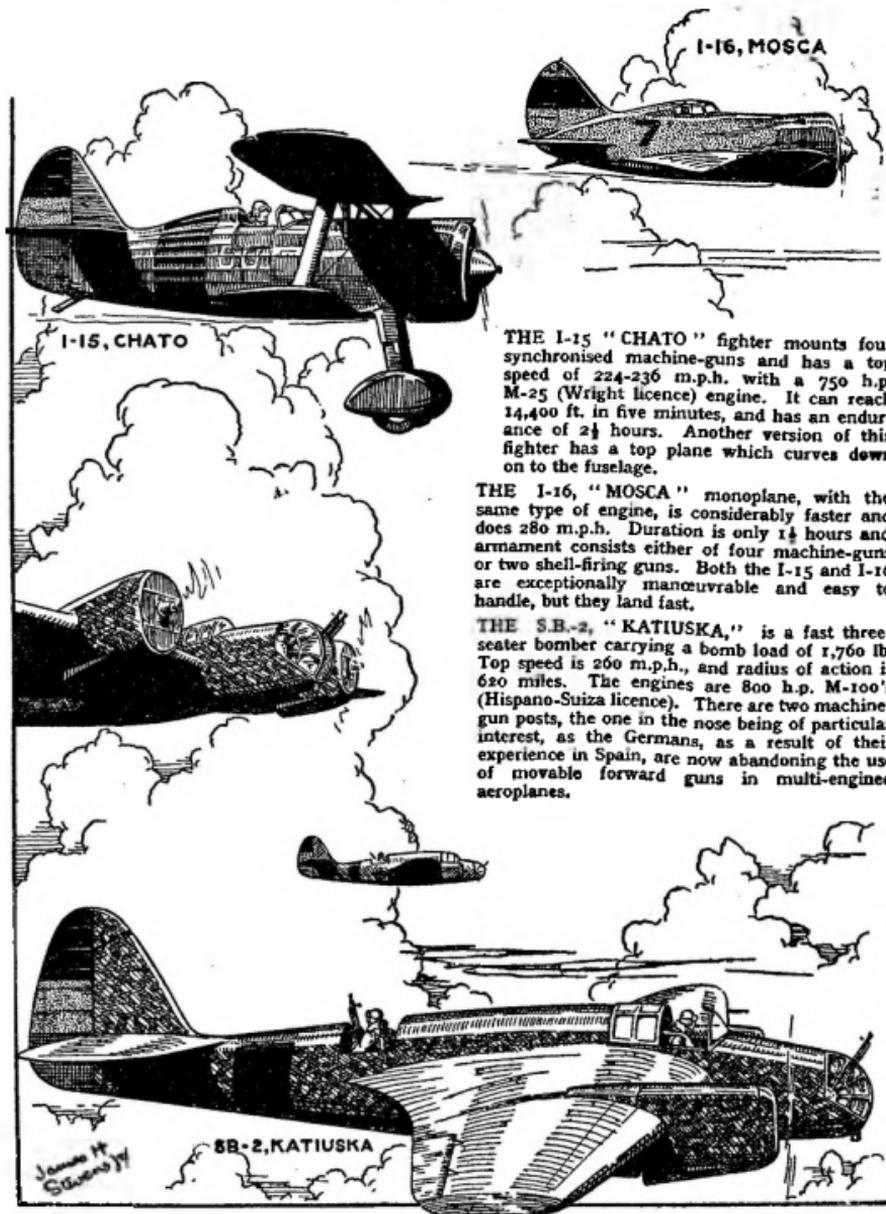
at an early date. Guarded reference was also made to rumours about the construction of an aeroplane, to be equipped with a new type Napier engine, in which an attempt may be made to set a new world's absolute speed record. Speeds of more than 500 m.p.h. have been repeatedly mentioned in connection with this "mystery" machine.

### An Alvis of the Air

SUCCESSFUL first flights have recently been made by a Bristol Bulldog powered with the new Alvis Leonides 9-cylinder radial air-cooled engine. Rated output is 415/435 h.p. at 8,250 feet and maximum output of 445 h.p. is reached at 8,750 feet with the engine turning at 3,100 revolutions a minute.

# THESE AIRCRAFT WAGED WAR—

Now that the Spanish War is nearly over, it becomes possible to publish details of the Military Aircraft latterly employed by both sides. Among the types most used by the Republican forces were these three aircraft, all of Russian design and of high performance.



I-15, CHATO

I-16, MOSCA

THE I-15 "CHATO" fighter mounts four synchronised machine-guns and has a top speed of 224-236 m.p.h. with a 750 h.p. M-25 (Wright licence) engine. It can reach 14,400 ft. in five minutes, and has an endurance of 2½ hours. Another version of this fighter has a top plane which curves down on to the fuselage.

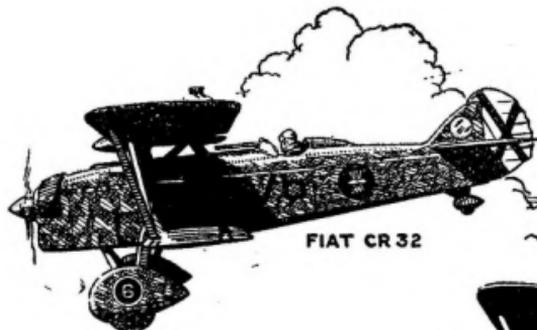
THE I-16, "MOSCA" monoplane, with the same type of engine, is considerably faster and does 280 m.p.h. Duration is only 1½ hours and armament consists either of four machine-guns or two shell-firing guns. Both the I-15 and I-16 are exceptionally manoeuvrable and easy to handle, but they land fast.

THE SB-2, "KATIUSKA," is a fast three-seater bomber carrying a bomb load of 1,760 lb. Top speed is 260 m.p.h., and radius of action is 620 miles. The engines are 800 h.p. M-100's (Hispano-Suiza licence). There are two machine-gun posts, the one in the nose being of particular interest, as the Germans, as a result of their experience in Spain, are now abandoning the use of movable forward guns in multi-engined aeroplanes.

SB-2, KATIUSKA

# —IN THE SKIES OF SPAIN

In the Nationalist Air Force, under General Franco, the brunt of the work during the past year fell to the three machines depicted on this page. Two are Italian and one German, and all three have, for some time, been standard types in the air forces of their respective countries.



FIAT CR 32

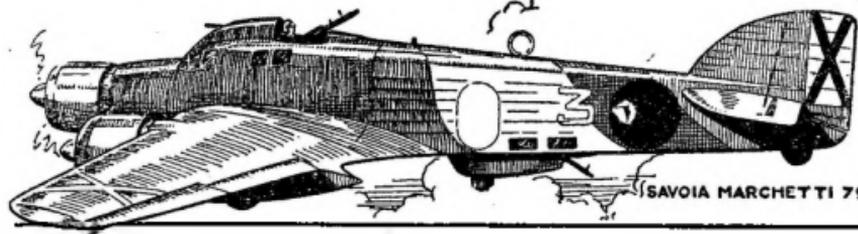
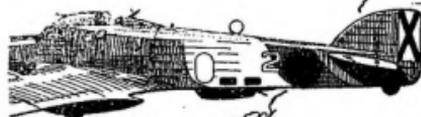
THE FIAT C.R.32 is a standard type of Italian fighter with a 550 h.p. Fiat engine and a top speed of 230 m.p.h. at 9,180 ft. Armament consists of two or four machine-guns and normal endurance is 2½ hours.

THE HEINKEL 51, a former standard fighter of the German Luftwaffe, does 205 m.p.h., climbs to 20,000 ft. in sixteen minutes, and has a range of 242 miles, cruising at 174 m.p.h. It mounts two synchronised guns and has a 750 h.p. B.M.W. engine. Towards the closing stages of the war in Spain, it was being replaced by the faster Messerschmitt Bf. 109.

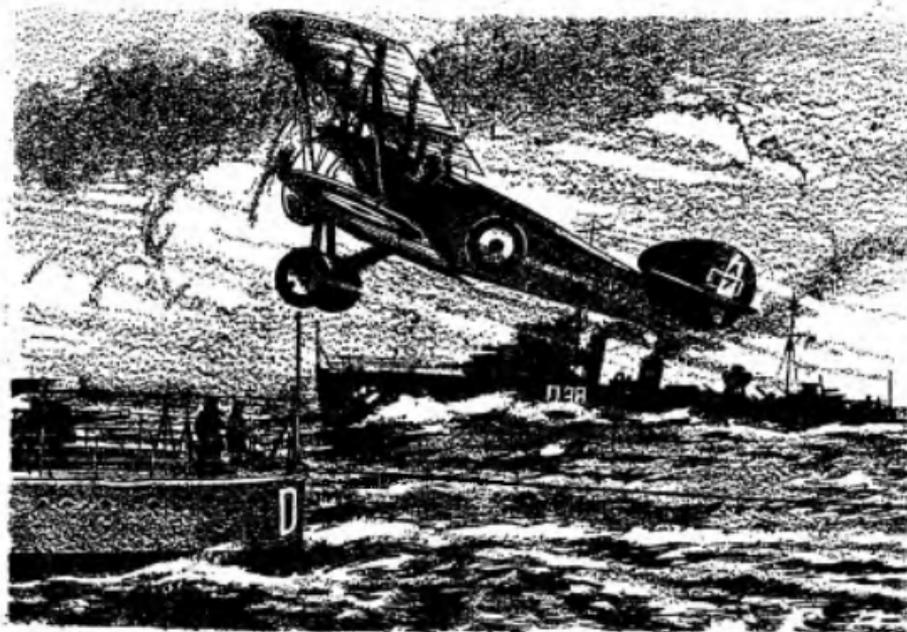
THE SAVOIA-MARCHETTI 79 is a medium-sized Italian bomber which, with three 750 h.p. Alfa-Romeos, does 270 m.p.h., cruises at 248 m.p.h., and has a ceiling of 28,000 ft. It has two movable guns and a fixed forward gun. When fitted with three 1,000 h.p. Piaggio engines, a top speed of 295 m.p.h. is claimed.



HEINKEL 51



SAVOIA MARCHETTI 79



*As the signal was hoisted close up, George slipped his quick-release and took-off . . .*

## ORDEAL BY ORATORY

**Into the Icy Waters of the North Sea Plunged a Lone Camel, Bearing a National Hero to whom almost any Fate in Sea or Sky was Preferable to Paying the Penalty of his Fame**

### CHAPTER I

#### Sentenced to Speak

"**C**OMMANDING Officer wants to see you in his office at once, sir," reported the messenger, standing in the open doorway of Squadron Commander George Warriner's hut.

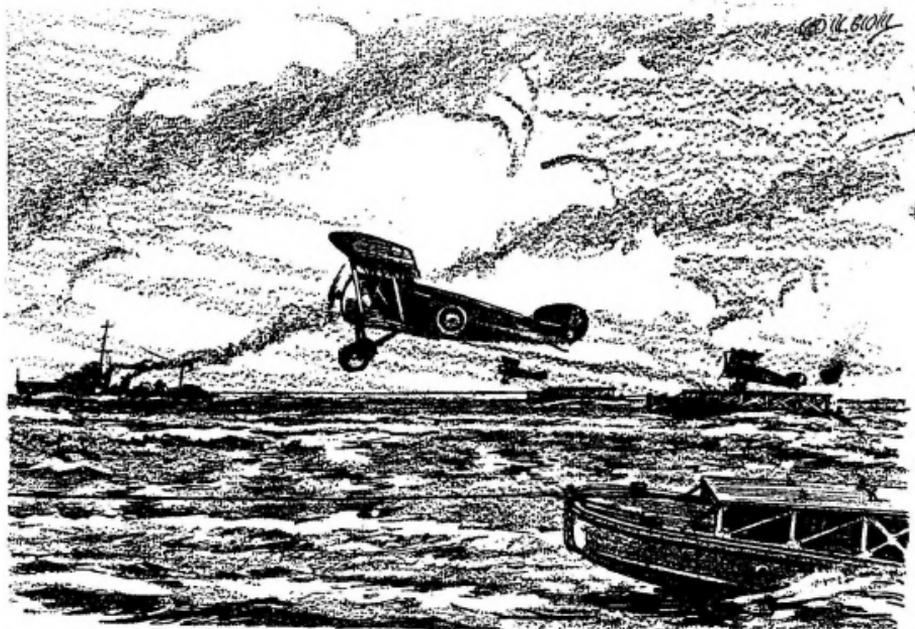
"Righto," answered George, and, picking up his cap, he prepared to follow the messenger back to the office.

He was not particularly troubled by the summons. A little while ago, he might have been, but since he had won his D.S.O. by bringing down that Zeppelin he felt that he was in pretty good standing and no longer trembled when he

approached the Presence. Besides, Captain Allport, C.O. of the R.N.A.S. aerodrome at Kelham, was a pretty good sort, particularly in his intense loyalty to his officers, and so far as George was concerned he could send for him any time he liked, preferably not, though, in the middle of the dog-watches and after a hard day's anti-submarine patrolling off the coast of Essex.

"Something about that raid on Houttave to-morrow," thought George as he walked across the aerodrome, his keen blue eyes peering into the rain-swept darkness. "Can't be anything worse than that."

But George was wrong. It was some-



... followed at short intervals by the rest of the Camel squadron

## *A War-Flying Adventure of the Royal Naval Air Service*

**By Lt. Cmdr. M. O. W. MILLER, R.N.**

thing considerably worse than that, worse even than he could have imagined in his wildest and most depressed moments. And an hour later, as he stood in front of his mirror practising, he cursed the day that he had attacked that damned Zeppelin, cursed the Germans for sending it over and even went so far as to curse old Count von Zeppelin for having invented the damn' things, thereby finding himself in unexpected agreement with the authorities in London who had awarded him his D.S.O.

"Oh well," thought George, "there's one bright spot on the horizon. We've got that blinkin' raid on Houttave to-morrow, and if I come back from that in one piece, I'll eat my perishing hat! Curse that damned old woman!"

Having got which off his chest, he settled down to his practising again.

"Er-er—Ladies and gentlemen," he began. "This old—no, I can't say that—er—Lady Balchester has—er—asked—er requested me to—er—Hell! That's no damn' good. Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking. . . ."

He broke off and walked feverishly round the room. The trouble was that when he had walked into the C.O.'s office just now, so carefree and jaunty, the last thing he had expected to meet was a woman, and, particularly, a terrifying old girl who stood about five-foot-ten in her socks and who glared at him through lorgnettes held across a nose obviously sharpened by being poked into other people's business.

It wouldn't have been so bad, thought George, if she hadn't been so extraordinarily like his Aunt Alice, of whom he had always stood in considerable awe.

## Conference of War

So that when she had given tongue and asked him—no, not asked him, dammit ! told him—to make a speech next Sunday afternoon at her meeting in Balchester village hall to raise funds for War charities the likeness had been so vivid that he had had to pinch himself to make sure that he was not still a little boy being told to go upstairs and wash his hands.

Not that pinching himself had done much good, because the vision was still there, and through his speechless confusion George had heard his C.O. step into the breach.

"Of course, Lady Balchester, Squadron Commander Warriner will be delighted to come and speak on behalf of your charities. That's all, Warriner, thank you," he had said, and next moment George had found himself outside the door with a very much revised opinion of Captain Allport's loyalty to his officers.

George gave an involuntary shudder. Here it was Wednesday evening and by Sunday afternoon he had to be prepared to speak to the local populace on the subject of dipping into their pockets for Lady Balchester's charities. The prospect was so appalling that something would have to be done about it.

Of course, he could ask to be transferred to another squadron, but there were only four days left to wangle that and three of those were going to be spent on this Houttave business, so that seemed a wash-out. Go sick ? He could hardly do that with a raid in prospect.

"Hell !" said George to himself, and began again. "Er—er—Ladies and gentlemen—Come in !"

He sprang away from the mirror as a knock sounded on the door.

"Captain wants to see you, sir," reported the orderly.

"What again ? Is that old — I mean is Lady Balchester still there ?"

"No, sir," grinned the messenger. "All your squadron wanted, sir. I think it's something to do with this 'ere raid."

With a sigh of relief, George followed the orderly out into the night.

"HOIST away handsomely," ordered George nautically, the following forenoon, as he stood on the jetty at Eastmouth, putting his squadron on board lighters. He was rather pleased with the order and repeated it. It went well with the pointed beard which he had nursed assiduously for the past month and which was now beginning to be visible to the naked eye.

"Handsomely, you ham-handed son of Nod ! You'll have the slings out of her if you play about like that ! Handsomely, I said ! All right. Lift her up slowly, if you prefer it, you jelly-bellied no-sailor ! That's the way. Hold on that tail-line ! Ease away the nose-line ! Now turn out your crane. Stand by in the lighter. Well ! Lower away slow. 'Vast lowering ! All right, Tubby ? Lower away slow. Get the quick-release hook on as soon as you can, Tubby, and lash her down. Keep that dam' lighter steady ! How the hell d'you expect me to lower a machine square if you keep the lighter moving. I don't give a damn about the tide, keep the lighter still. All right, Tubby ? Unhooked the crane ? Righto, crane. Hoist away and hook on the last machine."

George was not at his best in the early morning, and this morning he was in his most sulphurous mood. The trouble was that his nerve had completely gone and he was taking it out of the airmen and sailors in consequence. On his return from the C.O.'s conference the previous night, he had done something that he had never done in his life before. He had opened a bottle of whisky he kept in his cabin for visitors and indulged in a little secret and solitary drinking, jumping up every now and then to stand before his mirror and start practising his speech.

Even now, as he stood superintending the hoisting of the last machine onto the lighter, he knew that his mind was not entirely on his job and, do what he would to occupy himself, he could not escape

## ORDEAL BY ORATORY

the feeling that some dreaded doom was overhanging him.

"Messenger!" he shouted, venting his irritation on his unfortunate orderly. "What the blazes are you doing running about over there instead of keeping near me? Here, go and tell all the pilots I want to speak to them in the 'Messalina's' wardroom as soon as they've finished securing their machines."

He walked along the jetty and made his way up the brow to the "Messalina's" quarterdeck, saluting as he stepped on board.

"Captain down below?" he asked the officer of the watch.

"Yes, down in the wardroom. Won't you go down? He's expecting you. Are your other pilots coming? Righto, I'll send them down as they come. You'll find the captains of all the towing destroyers down there. Captain (D)'s down there as well."

"Thanks," said George, stepping over the hatch-coaming and climbing down the vertical steel ladder to the "Messalina's" wardroom.

"GOOD morning, Warriner," said Commander Corcoran, the captain of the "Messalina" and an old friend of George's. "This is Captain Rogers. He's our Captain (D) in the 'Byron,' the flotilla leader. Captain Rogers is going to tell you about the naval side of the raid as soon as all your chaps are here."

"Good morning, sir," said George gloomily. "The rest of my pilots are coming along. We've met before, haven't we, sir? Didn't I meet you at dinner in the old 'Melpomene' one night? It was the last time she was in harbour before she was sunk."

"I believe you did," replied Rogers. "I was dining with her captain, old 'Daddy' Johnson."

"That's right, sir," George agreed, anxious to make conversation and keep his mind off Lady Balchester and her infernal charities. "What's happened to him?"

"He's up at Rosyth nowadays, in

command of another destroyer, the 'Troubridge.' At least, he must be at sea at the moment. The destroyers and battle-cruisers from the Forth are covering this little show of ours. Just to make certain the Huns don't send any big ships out after us. They must have left harbour this morning."

"Old 'Daddy' Johnson got the 'Troubridge!'" exclaimed Corcoran. "Poor beggar! How he must hate her!"

"Why?" asked George. He wasn't very well up in this ship talk, but, since he was a guest, he felt that he ought to keep the conversation going.

"Ugliest destroyer in the Navy," said Corcoran. "And 'Daddy's' very keen on his ships. You can tell the old 'Troubridge' a mile off. One of the old four-funnellers, only she's got three funnels for'd, then a gap, and the fourth funnel looks as if it's been stuck on as an afterthought. Gave me the botts the only time I saw her! Hullo! Here come your chaps. We'll be able to get on with our palaver now."

"Is that the lot?" asked Captain Rogers, as the last pilot stepped down into the wardroom and found a seat on the Gunner's bunk against the outboard bulkhead. "Right. Well, Warriner, what's your side of it?"

"Nothing much, sir," gloomed George. "We've put our machines aboard the lighters, and whenever you say the word, we'll take-off. If our engines will start, that is. Don't expect they will, though, after a night in the North Sea. However, when we take-off, we've got to bomb the airship sheds they're supposed to be building at Houttave—if we ever manage to find the place. When we've finished we fly back to Eastmouth if we've enough juice left, or land alongside a ship if we haven't."

"Don't sound very cheerful about it," commented Rogers. "However, that's your pidgin. Here's our side. We sail just before dark and tow you as far as the Ischilling Lightship and then send you off. I've been told you're not to go unless there's a tail wind to blow you home again. That's all right by me because that'll be an off-shore wind and

we want a lee to give you some smooth water to take-off in."

"That's right, sir," agreed George. "They're frightened to death of our machines being lost unnecessarily. We're a bit short of aircraft at the moment, I fancy. Anyway, they've told us not to fight unless we can't avoid it."

"I see," went on Rogers. "Now, about ships. The Hun destroyers are pretty busy round this part of the coast, so there's just a chance we mightn't get as far as the Ischilling and might have to turn back. However, the Dover Patrol are sending out a force to protect us from the south and Admiral Tyrwhitt's coming out with all his ships from Harwich to keep an eye on us from the north. The Hun destroyers have a habit of trying to slip down the coast from Cuxhaven to Zeebrugge during the night and, if they escape the Harwich Force, we might run into them towards morning."

"What do we do then, sir?" enquired George. "Our lighters aren't much good against a destroyer."

"Don't worry about that. I don't expect we shall meet them, but if we do, we'll see you get off the lighters before we try any fighting. Anyway, fighting's not our job this trip, any more than it is yours."

"Are destroyers all we're likely to meet?" asked Corcoran.

"Yes, I should imagine so. But, as I told Warriner just now, a covering force of battle-cruisers and destroyers is going to operate from Rosyth to keep the Hun's main forces engaged, just in case they should feel like coming out."

"What are you going to do when we've flown off?" asked George, who was not in the habit of leaving anything to chance. "I mean, supposing one of us wants to forced-land or something. We're only just going to have enough petrol to get back to Eastmouth even with a following wind."

"That's all right," Rogers reassured him. "The towing destroyers are going straight back to Eastmouth at thirty knots, so, if you see them, they'll be showing you the way home. I'm going to hang about by the lightship with the

rest of the flotilla and then, of course, there'll be the Dover Patrol to the south and the others to the northward, all of them ready to help if you need it."

"I see, sir. Now, what about this wind? What happens if it's blowing the wrong way to-morrow morning?"

"It all depends on the naval situation. If there are no enemy ships about, we'll hang about a bit and see if there's any chance of its going round to the east. We won't send you off later than about 2 p.m. in any case, and that ought to give you plenty of time to get back to Eastmouth in daylight. By the way, I'll give you a naval signalman with flags and a flashing lamp in each lighter; but take care he doesn't try to use his lamp in the dark. We'll all be darkened and we don't want to give ourselves away."

"Righto, sir," agreed George. "Is that all? We've got food for two days in the lighters; will that be enough?"

"Yes, that'll be enough. All right, Corcoran?" Rogers turned to the captain of the "Messalina." "You got all that?"

"Yes, sir. It's all clear now," replied Corcoran. "Warriner, you and your chaps will stay to lunch, won't you? Will you stay, sir? No? Hi, steward! Six guests to lunch."

### CHAPTER III

#### The Zeppelin Raiders

AT four o'clock that evening the tugs came alongside the lighters and took them out into mid-stream, where they were picked up by their respective destroyers. George stood on the deck of his lighter, superintending the hauling of the heavy manila tow rope from the "Messalina's" quarter, his crew working with difficulty on the forward-sloping deck.

"All fast," shouted George through his megaphone as the rope was belayed round the towing bollards and racked down. Shivering with cold, he turned to his crew. "All right, you men. Two of you keep watch on the tow and the remainder go down aft into the cabin.

## ORDEAL BY ORATORY

It's going to be colder than this when we get outside."

He sat down on deck and pulled his greatcoat about his ears, while the "Messalina" got under way. Outside the harbour the sea was a flat calm, with a light southerly breeze that caused hardly a ripple on the water. George crouched down in the lee of his machine and watched the towing destroyers take up station in single line abreast, while the covering force wheeled into line ahead and astern.

As soon as he was satisfied that his lighter was towing easily, he inspected the waterproof coverings of his machine and then went down to the cabin aft, where he found a cup of hot cocoa awaiting him. It was freezing cold on the open sea and the sweating steel bulkheads of the lighter dripped icy drops of water. But George was impervious to cold, and, having finished his meal, he went on deck and paced up and down, muttering to himself.

"Er—er—Ladies and—er—gentlemen—How's she towing forrard? All right?—er—ladies and, oh damn! I've got past that bit—er—unaccustomed as I am to—er—public—er—speaking. . . ." In his imagination, George was already at Lady Balchester's party, addressing the expectant villagers, and, in spite of the freezing North Sea air, a sweat of sheer panic began to form on his worried brow.

Endlessly practising his speech, oblivious of time, he walked up and down the sloping deck of the lighter until the first streaks of the false dawn appeared in the eastern sky, and an airman came up from below with a comforting cup of steaming cocoa.

"Better have this, sir," suggested the airman solicitously. "Must be cold after bein' up 'ere all night."

". . . to help the great cause of charities," George concluded. "Eh, what's that? Cold? No, I'm not cold. What's the time?"

"Gettin' on for six o'clock, sir."

**G**EORGE looked around him. Ahead, about six hundred yards away, he could just make out the dark stern of

the "Messalina" beginning to stand out against the greying eastern horizon. To starboard and port the North Sea morning mist completely hid the other destroyers and George wondered if they had been able to keep in company during the night. An oily swell stretched all round him, and though he searched anxiously for indications of wind, not a ripple marred the smooth surface of the sea. George sent for the naval signalman.

"When can you start signalling?" he asked.

"In about half an hour's time, sir," replied the signalman, well used to North Sea conditions.

"All right. Get through as soon as you can and ask for a weather report. Tell the aircraft's crew to uncover the machine and start work on her."

He waited anxiously until the signalman was able to get his signal through to the "Messalina."

"Weather report from the Admiralty, sir," reported the signalman eventually.

"Wind slight, north. Expected to veer to east later. Weather will remain fine. 'Messalina's' added a message, sir. 'Will have to wait until wind veers. Will stop engines at 0800 hours.'"

"All right," said George. "Go and get your breakfast. I'll let you know if the ship signals."

He turned to the aircraft's crew, working about the machine.

"Get her run up and then switch off," he ordered. "We'll probably have to wait some time."

He looked over the sea. It was beginning to become lighter and the early morning mist had begun to clear away. He could see the lighters on each beam now and wondered if his fellow pilots had had as miserable a night as he had. "Probably not," he thought bitterly. "Lucky blighters! They never had the cursed, infernal ill-luck to pot a damned Zepp! They can sleep in their hammocks in peace, the lucky swine!"

Presently he heard his engine splutter and he walked along the deck to replace the fitter in the cockpit. He ran up his engine until he was satisfied that she was warmed through. Then he switched off

## AIR STORIES

and had the engine covers replaced to keep out the cold.

By now the towing destroyers had stopped, and George could see the remainder of the flotilla patrolling endlessly round and round them. Occasionally, a glimpse of a lean, grey shape in the distance made him catch his breath in suspense, until a flashing signal from her bridge reassured him that it was a British cruiser from one of the protecting forces.

At midday, the wind began to increase and the towing destroyers got under way, steaming slowly round in circles to keep their tows clear. It was blowing gently from the north-east now, and George breathed a sigh of relief when he realised that it was beginning to veer and that he would soon be able to take-off.

He went down to the tiny cabin and thawed in the fug while he ate his sandwich lunch. As he was finishing, a messenger ran down to report that a signal was coming through from the "Messalina."

"From 'Messalina,' sir," announced the signalman as George appeared at his elbow. "'Do you consider wind suitable now?'"

George looked round at the sea and climbed into his cockpit to glance at his compass.

"Yes," he called out to the signalman. "It's due east. Tell them to signal to the other machines to start up and that we'll take-off as soon as possible."

His aircraft's crew came running up on deck to remove the engine covers and restart the engine.

"TELL the ship we're ready," ordered George, a quarter of an hour later.

The message was quickly transmitted and, sitting in his cockpit with the engine ticking over, he soon felt the lighter begin to surge forward through the water. As the speed increased, the bows began to lift out of the water until the deck became horizontal, and George realised that they were now being towed at thirty knots. He peered round the

side of his cockpit, waiting for the signal from the "Messalina" that would tell him to take-off.

Presently the signal went up and fluttered, for a moment or two, halfway up the "Messalina's" halliards until all the towing destroyers had answered it. Then, as the signal flags were hoisted close up to the yard-arm, George opened up his engine, slipped his quick release and took-off. Turning slightly to avoid the destroyer's masts, he climbed to a height of nearly a thousand feet and waited for the remainder of his squadron to join him.

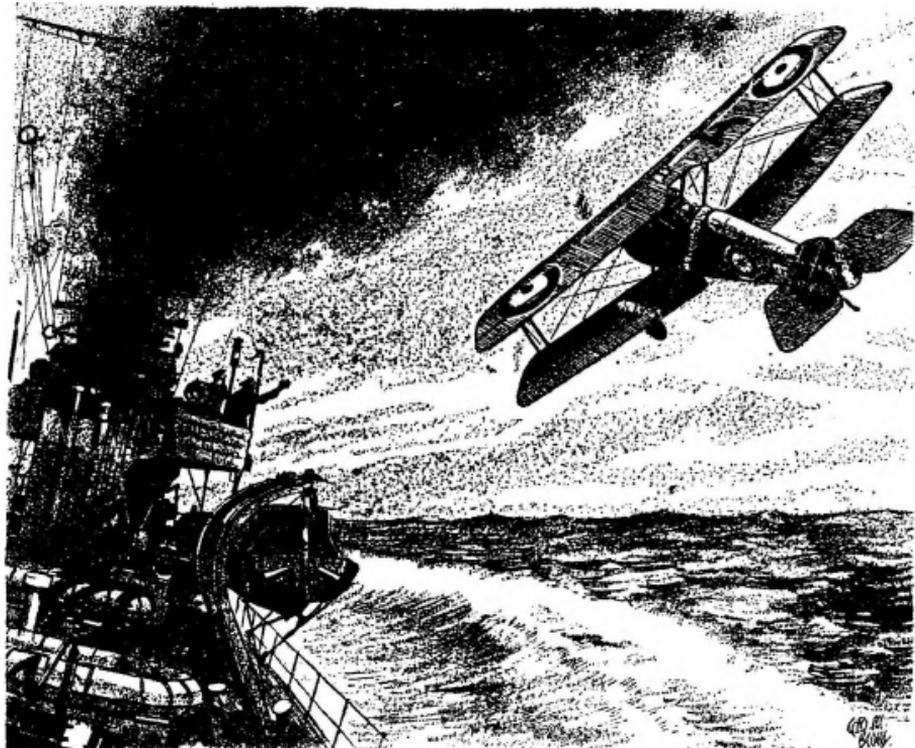
As soon as the other machines had formed up, George led them off in the direction of Houttave and the Zeppelin sheds, climbing as he went to get above the patchy clouds and take advantage of whatever cover he could find. He crossed the coast eight thousand feet high and managed to catch a glimpse of a coastal town to give him his bearings. A few minutes later he saw, to his dismay, that the cloud was thinning out over the land.

Before he could alter course a white puff of smoke blossomed ahead of him, and he realised that his squadron had been sighted. There was nothing he could do now but press on, maintaining his formation and keeping a weather-eye open for enemy aircraft. The white puffs came steadily closer, and George put the nose of his machine down to increase his speed and get out of range.

Approaching Houttave, he searched anxiously for the airship field and sighted it at last through a gap in the clouds, over on his port beam. Waving to the formation to split up, he turned to port and dived. Then hell seemed to break loose.

Smoke puffs appeared from nowhere all round his machine. Shells, close at hand, were bursting with ear-splitting reports and he steepened his dive, watching the great hangars grow larger and larger as he plunged towards them. For a moment his eye was distracted by something that moved rapidly across the far end of the field, and he realised that when the bombing was over they would

## ORDEAL BY ORATORY



*He flew alongside the destroyer's bridge, pointing down at the water as he passed*

have to fight their way back to the coast against heavy opposition.

Lower and lower he came, and when it seemed that another second would plunge him to destruction on the hangar roof, he jerked his bomb release and zoomed up, watching over his tail for the result. A spurt of flame sprang up in front of the door of a hangar, and George cursed as he saw that he had missed.

He swung his machine round, and was diving on the hangars again when a flaming mass hurtled past him, missing his machine by inches. He saw the target on the wing of the doomed machine and wondered whether it had been brought down from the ground or whether the enemy aircraft were now in the air.

With his last bomb under his wing he dived for a final desperate attempt on the hangars. Closer and closer he came,

until he felt that his wheels must touch the roof before he could wrench the nose up. Surely he couldn't miss now!

A low rumbling drowned the noise of his engine and his machine was tossed like a leaf through the air as a blinding flash and deafening roar told him that he had hit his target fair and square. One Zeppelin, at least, would never take the air again. Half-stunned by the explosion, he struggled to keep right side up in the battering gusts, until, gaining the less turbulent air at a higher level, he got the machine under full control once more and prepared to fight his way to the coast.

Looking round, he saw a dog-fight in progress over the airship field, and fired a few rounds to test his guns. Keeping well away from the fight, he put the nose of his machine up, circling round to the south as he climbed. As far as he could

make out, of the eight machines taking part in the fight, five were Huns, and by climbing above the clouds he planned to add surprise to the reinforcement he was bringing.

Through a gap in the cloud he could see that he was above the manoeuvring machines. Then, with the light of battle in his eyes, he eased the stick forward and came hurtling down with full engine to join his hard-pressed companions.

*Tacca, tacca, tacca* . . . went his guns, and two streams of lead poured into the cockpit of the Hun beneath him. Pulling out of his dive below the enemy, he swung round to avoid one of his own machines and climbed again for another attack.

"Take that for your war charities," he muttered, and wished that it had been Lady Balchester whom his dive had sent hurtling to the ground. He turned to see one of his own machines hard-pressed by two Huns and climbed again to come to the rescue.

As he steadied his machine to take aim on his chosen victim, a hail of lead spluttered through his wing and he looked up to see a flight of enemy fighters diving in formation to the attack, their leader a thousand feet in the lead.

THE sight of these unexpected reinforcements pulled George up short. Air fighting was definitely against his orders and his machines were using up valuable fuel which they would need to get them back to England. With odds of five to four against them he had not been able to resist the temptation to give battle, but with six more of the enemy now in the field the odds against him were too great to offer any hope of success, and it was his duty to try to collect his squadron and take them home.

Looking round, he saw his remaining three machines below him and to port. He dived down on them, waving his right hand in the air. As soon as he saw they had spotted his signal, he put his nose up and led them up through the safety of the protecting clouds. Emerging into the clear sky above, he sighted the enemy

fighters again and, signalling to his flight to disperse and make their own way home, he plunged back into the cloudbank and set an easterly course.

Diving in and out of the clouds in a state of constant alarm lest he should run into one of his own machines, whose pilots, he knew, would be following the same tactics, George made his way towards the sea. A gap in the cloudbank gave him a momentary glimpse of low-lying land near the coast and he came down to get his bearings. Finding himself about fifty miles north of the point he had struck the coast on his approach, he set a course south of west and headed for home.

As his mind turned once more to England, there came to him, for the first time that afternoon, a feeling of fear—sheer, stark fear—and, with a haunted look in his eyes, he started muttering to himself.

"Er—er—Ladies and—er—gentlemen," he began. "Now, what the hell was it I was going to say?"

Feverishly he searched his mind for the words of the speech he had practised the previous night while pacing the sloping deck of the lighter. He *must* remember it. Here it was, Friday afternoon, and there was every prospect that he would be back at Kelham aerodrome before dark. And what with the inevitable rest he would be ordered on the Saturday, there seemed no hope of escaping from his ordeal on Sunday afternoon.

He looked at his petrol gauge. No, not a hope there. He had plenty of petrol to get home on. He listened to his engine. Everything all right. He looked at the water below him. Over to the westward was the silhouette of a destroyer and she seemed vaguely familiar to him. Surely he had seen those four funnels before—three together forward, just abaft the bridge, then a gap, and then a fourth funnel stuck on as an afterthought.

Then he remembered. It must be the "Troubridge," the destroyer that Commander Corcoran had been talking about in the "Messalina" on the previous afternoon. Where was it he said she

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come from? Rosyth? She must be a dam' long way south, thought George. Or else he was a long way north of where he thought he was. A long way north, thought George. Why, Rosyth was a long way north; a long way north of Kelham and it would take the "Troubridge" at least two days to get back to her base. That would be Saturday, Sunday, even Monday before she got home.

"Gosh!" thought George enviously. "If only I were in her instead of being due to reach that damned Kelham in an hour and a half's time!"

Suddenly he swung his machine round to starboard, his mind made up. He was damned if he was going to speak at that accursed meeting! He dived on the "Troubridge" and flew alongside her bridge, pointing down at the water as he passed. As soon as he saw that his signal was understood, he switched off his petrol to make his engine backfire, turned up wind and pancaked into the sea as near to the ship as he could manage.

Ten minutes later he was in the "Troubridge's" wardroom, drinking hot rum and water and changing into a naval uniform provided by one of her officers.

"What made you come down?" asked Commander Johnson, his weather-beaten, moon-like face beaming good-naturedly at George.

"Something went wrong with my engine," replied George, establishing his alibi. "Didn't you hear it backfiring?"

"There you are, Number One! I told you it was his engine that had gone wrong," said Johnson triumphantly, turning to his first lieutenant, while George breathed a sigh of relief. "Pretty cold in the water, wasn't it? Have another hot rum. Nothing like rum to cheer you up! As a matter of fact, we've been sent south because the Admiralty have news that a Hun flotilla is moving down to Zeebrugge to-night and we're reinforcing the destroyers that towed you out. That's why we're so far south. I'm afraid you won't get back to the beach for a couple of days. Where is it you come from? Eastmouth?"

"Well, Eastmouth's the nearest port,

but our aerodrome is actually at Kelham. Why, sir?"

"I thought I might be able to get a signal through to say you're safe, but I don't think I'd better. I don't want to give my position away."

"No, no!" said George hurriedly. "That'll be quite all right. I don't mind being at sea for two or three days in the least. Like it, in fact."

"That's all right, then," boomed "Daddy" Johnson. "You must be tired, young feller. Better get your head down on that settee and have a caulk. If you hear any firing during the night, come up on the bridge."

George closed his eyes and sat back on the settee, sipping his hot toddy and relishing to the full the blessed relief of a horrible menace suddenly removed.

## CHAPTER IV

### Action in the North Sea

NINE hours later George turned over drowsily on his settee.

"Mr. Warriner, sir," he heard a voice saying.

George sat up, and saw a sailor standing by his side.

"What is it?" he asked sleepily. "Time to get up?"

"No, sir. It's only 2 a.m., sir. But the Captain told me to tell you there's fightin' goin' on on the 'orizon, sir, and we might be in h'action at any minute. 'E said 'e thought you might prefer to be on the bridge."

"Eh, what's that!" exclaimed George. "Fighting? Righto, I'll come up with you."

He jammed his feet into his shoes and, taking a lammy coat that the Captain had sent down for him, followed the sailor up on deck.

The night was pitch dark and George grasped the life-line stretched along the deck while he stumbled after the messenger.

"Hullo, Warriner," greeted "Daddy" Johnson in a whisper. "Thought you'd prefer to be up here if it came to any fighting. Destroyers don't last long at

night. Depends on luck and on which nights the other first."

"Yes, sir," said George. "Can I do anything?"

"Yes. Keep a look-out. You airmen have eyes like sanguinary hawks. Take the starboard bow. We saw some firing just now and I'm heading straight for it. It died down about five minutes ago."

George glued himself to the starboard side of the wheelhouse and peered out into the inky darkness. Black shapes kept creeping over the sea and several times he was about to give the alarm when he realised that his imagination was playing him tricks.

Suddenly a finger of light stabbed the darkness and a dazzling glare lit up the "Troubridge's" upper deck, followed by a blinding explosion that seemed only a few feet away.

"Hard-a-port," ordered "Daddy" quietly. Then he leaned over the bridge and shouted. "Open fire starboard! Stand by to ram!"

The "Troubridge" swung round to starboard as the enemy shells screeched over her. A star shell silhouetted her momentarily against the horizon and a hail of shells poured into her from the Hun destroyers only a few cables' lengths away.

A deafening roar filled the air and George felt himself flung to the deck as a shell exploded against the destroyer's foremost funnel, sending splinters flying and bringing down the foremast in a tangle of broken wood and crippled rigging.

"All right?" asked "Daddy's" voice quietly.

George felt himself all over. "Yes, sir," he replied. "Are you?"

"Yes, I'm all right, and I'm going to look for those beggars. Keep your eyes skinned. Helm amidships, cox'n. HELM amidships, cox'n! Oh, I see. Here, messenger, take the wheel. Cox'n's dead."

"All right on the bridge, sir?" hailed a voice from the fo'c'sle.

"Daddy" grasped the brass binnacle cover from its stowage on the bulkhead and, putting it on his head, leaned out

of the wheelhouse.

"All right, lads," he shouted, as the glare from a searchlight lit up the brass bowl on his head. "Daddy's all right. He's got his tin hat on!"

A roar of laughter broke the tension on the fo'c'sle and the half-stunned gun's-crew sprang to life and began hacking away the wreckage of the mast.

FOR nearly an hour George stood on the bridge staring into the inky blackness before him.

"Looks as if they've escaped us, sir," he suggested to "Daddy" at last.

"Never know at night," replied the Captain. "They might have had to alter course for someone else. What's that! Make the challenge."

The signalman's lamp began to flash. "Can't wait for that," said "Daddy." "Hard-a-starboard. Open fire port beam."

The roar of the guns filled the air as both sides opened fire together and shell after shell screamed over the sea. The sky seemed to open out before George's eyes and a tearing, roaring flash deafened and half-stunned him.

"That was the after-magazine blowin' up," George heard a voice saying close beside him a few moments later as he lay on the deck of the wheelhouse trying to collect his scattered wits. "Stern's blown off."

He lifted himself cautiously and peered at the speaker. "What do we do now?" he asked tentatively.

"There's a raft on the fo'c'sle, sir; we can try to launch that and jump in after it. If it's still there, that is. I saw a shell burst on the foremost gun's-crew just before we blew up, so I don't expect they've any use for a raft."

George heard a groan coming from the other side of the bridge and crept towards the noise on hands and knees.

"Are you all right, sir?" he asked, recognising the enormous bulk of "Daddy" Johnson.

"Is that you, Warriner?" asked the Captain. "Anyone else alive?"

"Only the signalman and me, sir," replied George.

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"Well, never mind about me," whispered "Daddy" hoarsely. "Ship will go down in a few minutes, what's left of it. Save yourselves."

Faced by the new emergency, George's brain cleared and he took charge of the situation. "Here, Signalman," he ordered. "Take the Captain's feet."

"Just a moment, sir," said the signalman. "Got to ditch the confidential books." He dragged up a heavy iron chest and threw it into the night, and then went to George's aid.

Together, they took Johnson out of the wheelhouse and lowered him onto the fo'c'sle deck.

"Have to hurry up, sir," said the signalman. "Ship's nearly down to the water now."

"Where's that raft of yours?" asked George.

Leaving "Daddy" Johnson lying on the deck, the signalman led George to the raft and together they cast off the lashings that secured it to the superstructure. Hurriedly they pushed it to the ship's side and lifted the groaning Johnson onto it.

As the ship rolled to the North Sea swell, they lifted the inboard end of the raft and launched it with a splash, following it into the icy water.

"Didn't know we were as close to the water as that," said George as he climbed onto the raft after giving the signalman a hand. "There goes the ship."

They looked round and saw the remaining part of the "Troubridge's" fo'c'sle disappear under the waves, and, a moment later, were clinging to the raft for dear life as it spun madly round and round in the suction created by the sinking structure.

"Don't go much on this, sir," said the signalman a few minutes later when the raft had settled down again.

"I do," said George, his teeth chattering with the cold. "I won't have to give that blasted speech now, that's one thing that's certain, thank God!"

"What's that, sir?" said the signalman.

"Nothing, nothing," said George. "I was only speaking to myself."

As the watery sun rose over the horizon the signalman clutched George's arm.

"Funnel over there, sir," he said, pointing to the southward.

George picked up the coat with which he had been protecting the wounded Johnson and waved it wildly in the air. Presently the upperworks of a destroyer came into view and George saw with satisfaction that the ship was making straight for them.

Half an hour later he stepped onto the deck of the rescuing ship.

"Why, it's George Warriner!" exclaimed a voice behind him. "What the hell are you doing on a raft in the middle of the North Sea? Never mind, we'll have you back at Eastmouth in time to spend a nice Sunday morning in bed. We've been told to go home full speed, and we'll be in to-night."

"What's that?" shouted George as he jumped round and recognised Commander Corcoran. "Hell's bells! Do you mean to say I've been through all this only to be picked up by a blasted ship that's going to take me straight back to Eastmouth!"

"What are you drivelling about?" said the Captain of the "Messalina." "You're jolly lucky we saw you. If we hadn't been sent out again immediately we got back with your lighters yesterday you'd have been dead by to-morrow morning."

"And a damn good thing too!" said George bitterly.

## CHAPTER V

### For Services Rendered

SOME twenty-four hours later George sat on the platform in Balchester's village hall with a supporting caste of county worthies grouped round him. Every now and then he put his chin up and passed perspiring fingers inside his collar which seemed suddenly to have become two sizes too small for him. In front of him a hazy sea of faces surged to left and to right as he tried to focus his eyes on the terrifying phantasmagoria in front of him.

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"And now, Squadron Commander Warriner, D.S.O., who brought down the Zeppelin over Eastmouth . . ." he heard Lady Balchester's voice saying; then his brain went numb as a powerful hand gripped him by the arm and pushed him to the front of the platform.

"Ladies and gentlemen," gabbled George amidst a storm of clapping and hoarse cheering that nearly lifted the roof off the hall. "Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I want to . . ." His brain stopped but his mouth kept on working.

"Hooray!" shouted the enthusiastic audience, cheering madly.

"Oy!" shouted a man at the back of the hall during a slight lull, conscious of the fact that he had paid his entrance fee and wasn't getting his money's worth. "Speak up! Haven't heard a word!"

George suddenly found his voice again as his moving lips came to the end of a sentence.

". . . *War charities!*" he shouted at the top of his lungs and sat down abruptly in his chair.

The cheering redoubled and George, completely at ease now that his ordeal was over, stood up to take his bow.

"GOT those reports typed out yet?" G asked Captain Allport as he sat in his office later that evening. "We've got to get them off to the Admiralty to-night."

"Yes, sir. They're all here," replied his Adjutant. "Warriner seems to have done very well again. There seems to be no doubt it was his bomb that hit the Zeppelin hangar and he brought down one E.A. as well."

"Good chap, Warriner," agreed the C.O. "I've been talking to Commander Johnson about him in the hospital this afternoon, and he seemed to have behaved very well in the 'Troubridge' night before last, after he was picked up. There aren't many chaps who have accounted for two Zepps. As modest as they make 'em, too."

"Yes," agreed the Adjutant. "I've never met such a modest chap in my life."

"I like them modest," went on Captain Allport. "I'm going to recommend him for the V.C. By the way, is he back from Lady Balchester's yet? Right. Send a messenger for him. We'll have him in and tell him."

Five minutes later George saluted as he stepped into the office.

"Evening, Warriner," said Captain Allport. "I've sent for you to congratulate you on the magnificent show you put up."

"Yes, sir," agreed George cordially. "It was pretty good, wasn't it. I don't think anyone could have done better."

Captain Allport's eyebrows lifted slightly and a frown of distaste creased his forehead.

"I'm glad you're so pleased with yourself," he said acidly. "I had been thinking of recommending you for a high decoration."

"Oh, yes," said George casually, his eyes fixed in the distance. He was silent for a moment, and then he could contain himself no longer and burst out: "But I always knew I could do it. As a matter of fact, the old girl's so pleased with my speech that I've had to promise to make another one for her next week!"

## PROVERBS FOR PILOTS

*Method may take time, but—  
It's better to be late, Mr. Airman, than the late  
Mr. Airman.*

*Often enough it's what the eye doesn't see that  
the heart has to grieve over.*

*If the weather is very thick it is better not to  
leave than to be the dear departed.*

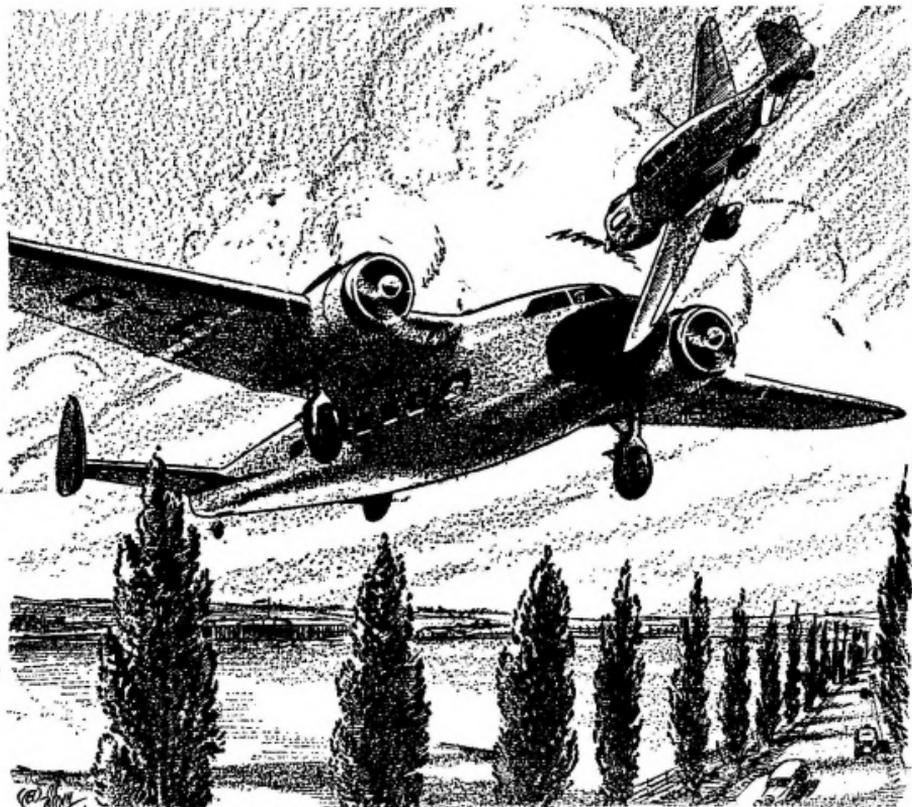
*If you kill yourself it is sad, but if you hit an  
air liner it might be forty-two times sadder  
still.*

*Your arrival should be merely the finish of a  
journey, and not the end of everything.*

*It's better to be an old pilot than a bold pilot.*

From "Air Sense," published by the  
National "Safety First" Association.

# THE DEVIL'S GOT WINGS



*For one infinitesimal fraction of time it seemed as though the two might miss*

**It was a Strange Task to Fall to the Lot of a Personal Pilot to the British Cabinet—to Avenge in Secret a Murder which, Revealed, would Plunge Europe into the Throes of War**

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

## CHAPTER I

### The Shadow of Death

**B**ECAUSE the British statesmen were tired, and wished to escape excited crowds, they decided at the last moment to avoid Le Bourget and fly home from a convenient private landing-ground belonging to a prominent French industrialist. It was, therefore, only on the night before the party was due to

leave that Dallas received orders to take their machine over from the airport to the magnate's estate beyond the northern outskirts of Paris.

On the arrival of Dallas and MacMahon, his second-in-command, the millionaire not only offered, but pressed, hospitality upon them. The two elected, however, to sleep in the monoplane's cabin, partly on account of several genuine overhaul jobs—which they pleaded by way of

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excuse—but mainly because neither felt in a mood to appreciate social magnificence.

Midnight had passed before the last of their meticulous inspections was over; in silent agreement the two then climbed down to the ground for a final smoke. Sucking at his pipe, MacMahon thoughtfully contemplated the lights which shone through scores of windows in the great house half a mile away.

"One bomb, one bang, one blistering mess," he muttered.

Dallas laughed, and a confetti of tiny scarlet sparks showered down from his cigarette. He stifled a yawn before he spoke.

"Bombs be blowed. I'm going to bed."

The big Scot grunted, frowning up at the long, slim wing which shone like misted silver in the starlight. Although both knew that vigilant watchers kept guard around the aerodrome, the night seemed deserted except for their two selves, and the only sounds that broke the stillness came from the shunting of trucks in a distant goods-yard.

"I don't like it," said MacMahon suddenly.

There was harshness in his voice. Halfway through the cabin door Dallas stopped.

"Don't like what?"

"To-morrow's trip—or to-day's, to be more precise, since it's getting on for half-past twelve."

"Why don't you like it? Worrying about that boundary road with the poplars? You needn't. It looks a lot closer than it really is. I've got the take-off taped to an inch, and there's bags of room."

"I know there is." MacMahon sounded irritated. "I took the precaution of pacing it out myself. No. It's nothing to do with roads or poplars. It's—it's just—"

He broke off abruptly as though some subtle thought eluded capture. Leaning down from the door, Dallas peered at him curiously through the darkness.

"Go on," he prompted. "It's—what?"

MacMahon shrugged broad shoulders.

"Can't put it into words. It's just a feeling that I shall be mighty glad to get our passengers home. Here we are, in charge of Britain's three most important men—the men with the keenest brains, the soundest judgment, and the greatest all-round influence. If anything happens to Massingham, Usher and Dryce, may God help Europe. And once they're in the air it's you and I—you and I alone, mark you—who are primarily and solely responsible for their safety."

"What about it? Someone's got to take the responsibility. If they go home by train and boat it'll be the blokes on the footplate and bridge. So why not us?"

"Oh, I know, I know. There never is a ha'porth of reason in these damned glooms of mine. I get 'em sometimes, and it usually means that I'm due for a hell of a crack from someone. Most probably there's a stinker from the Income Tax people waiting for me at home."

"Scottish second-sight, eh?"

"Call it liver," growled MacMahon. "Aren't you ever going to get into that blasted cabin? For the last ten minutes you've been dithering in the doorway like an old woman trying to cross the Strand!"

They settled down for the night in silence; and although Dallas neither believed nor disbelieved in the reputed powers of prophecy possessed by many Gaels, he none the less assured himself that caution should be doubly cautious concerning every imaginable detail of the morning's flight.

BEING still on the sunny side of thirty, and also in perfect training of mind as well as body, Dallas fell asleep within a few minutes of registering his resolve for superlative care. MacMahon, on the contrary, lay uneasily awake, cursing the vague yet nagging premonitions that disturbed his peace, and envying his companion's powers of detachment.

It would have been natural if this envy included the fact that Dallas commanded the machine which was always used by

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the Cabinet, for he himself, at forty-two, could remember leading his own squadron into bitter battles above the German lines. Envy of that kind, however, could find no place in the generous soul of Alan MacMahon, and it never even occurred to him to begrudge the senior position the younger man had won by his outstanding ability as pilot and navigator.

Listening to the quiet breathing, he chuckled noiselessly.

"Just like a kid," he decided, and then himself fell into unrestful slumber.

Dawn broke coldly cheerless, bringing fog and fine drizzle, but a telephone message from Le Bourget to the hangar promised reasonably good conditions by eight o'clock, the hour which the Ministers had chosen for their departure.

By a quarter-past seven the engines were warm, the cabin speckless, and everything in readiness. Also it seemed certain that the weather would clear. A car arrived from the house bringing a couple of menservants with a sumptuous English breakfast, served steaming hot. Two efficient-looking detectives from the *Sûreté* materialised out of the mist, and started a conversation in excellent English. They had been on duty since midnight, they explained, and—yes—it was very good of *messieurs* to suggest sharing rolls, butter, and coffee.

Dallas nodded in the direction of the road which ran along the south-west boundary. Its poplars were beginning to gleam like spectral spearheads in the watery sunshine that was driving away the rain.

"Sounds as if there's plenty of traffic," he observed.

One of the policemen nodded, champing vigorously.

"There is always much traffic, yes. It is a main road into Paris. At this hour the traffic is more than ever. The workers, you see, go to their factories." Apparently the thought of the time recalled him to his official duties. Still masticating, he glanced at his watch, clicked his tongue, brushed the crumbs from his moustache, and tapped his colleague's arm. "It is time we return," he announced. "*Au voir, messieurs*, and thank you."

Dallas raised a hand in friendly response, then turned to MacMahon.

"Feeling better now you've got outside a pound of haddock, twelve rashers of bacon, and half a dozen eggs?"

"It wasn't a bad little snack," allowed MacMahon.

"And how's the oracle this morning? Still prophesying plague, pestilence and sudden death?"

The Scot laughed, but the smile had died out of his eyes.

"As I told you last night, it was liver," he answered shortly. "At your age, you don't know you've got one. At mine, you do. Hence the occasional difference in our respective optimisms. . . . Hello! . . . That looks like an Embassy Rolls. Trust Old Man Massingham to turn up on the tick."

## CHAPTER II

### Out of the Blue

AS the two airmen hurried towards the car it glided to a standstill in front of the hangar, and three figures emerged. Two mechanics, who had been busily polishing one of the millionaire's gleaming tourers, straightened their backs, casually touching their berets. A second car, small and noisy, bustled up with a screech of tyres, and disclosed a pair of detectives. Of one accord, Dallas and MacMahon slackened speed.

"False alarm," murmured Dallas. "It's only the advance guard—our elegant Benson, our excellent Rudd, and our altogether charming Patricia."

Of the three private secretaries who strolled to meet them, he knew Rudd best, and cherished a most whole-hearted respect for the dour little half-crippled Yorkshireman who had fought his way up from the pit to the position where Massingham trusted him more than any other man, and where Cabinet rank itself lay close ahead. Victor Benson he liked as a thoroughly sound fellow, although he secretly laughed at the extreme refinements of dress and speech which Viscount Usher's secretary thought fit to observe.

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The girl, also, he had known for some years before she won her confidential post with that grim old tyrant Dryce, filling an uncommonly pretty head with safely-guarded national secrets; and he admired her brains and vitality all the more for the fact that their association had never been anything but a frank and mutual friendship.

Dallas welcomed the three with a salute of his own devising, a hybrid affair that might have been derived from swastika, sickle, or both.

"Greetings, comrades," he said. "We are pleased to see you. But where are the Mighty Ones? Still rustling in the straw?"

The immaculate Benson frowned, as though deploring such levity, then his irrepressible good spirits asserted themselves and he grinned like a schoolboy.

"The Ush doesn't rustle—it snorts," he announced.

Rudd broke in testily. As ever, he was anxious to get down to business. Also, the raw morning air was making his damaged hip ache abominably.

"At the urgent request of the French Government, Mr. Massingham has postponed his departure in order to attend a final conference at the Quai d'Orsay this morning. Viscount Usher and Sir Garnet Dryce will do likewise. Mr. Massingham has, therefore, instructed Miss Denton, Mr. Benson and myself to proceed at once to London by air. He wishes Captain MacMahon to pilot the machine, while you yourself await another 'plane which is being sent here from Le Bourget. You will then hold yourself in readiness for Mr. Massingham's arrival, which will probably be in the neighbourhood of noon."

"Spoken like a statesman," Dallas approved. "When you let yourself go like that, Jonathan Rudd, I can positively see you thumping a despatch box on the Treasury Bench."

A smile lit up the Yorkshireman's pinched features. It was bleak and it was fleeting, but it proved the warm humanity he was at such pains to hide from the world.

Dallas turned to Patricia Denton, who

stood snuggling her chin into the softness of a particularly becoming fur. A rakish little hat with a blue feather perched ridiculously on one side of her head, and she wore the indefinable air of a woman thoroughly and justly pleased with her appearance.

"Pat," he said severely, "you've been shoplifting again. I'll swear the rabbit and toque are new."

She sighed happily.

"Futuristically new," she confessed. "I've spent so much that I shall be in debt for the rest of the year. Isn't it fun?"

**P**ATRICIA DENTON looked over her shoulder, aware that someone stood close behind her. It was the chauffeur, and he carried a large oblong box covered with waterproofed material.

"What," demanded Dallas, "is that sepulchral object?"

"Look!"

Peering beneath the cover as she lifted it, he found himself fixed by two unwinking pairs of yellow-rimmed eyes, which glared from behind a thin wire grille. Between the eyes were savagely curving beaks. The bodies of the birds were bluish-black with creamy breasts marked by ebony bars.

Dallas ventured a finger between the wires, and whipped it away just in time to save the nail from being torn out.

"Pets of yours?" he asked.

The girl laughed.

"No thank you! I'm friend to most fur and feather, but I draw the line at fondling peregrine falcons. They're Sir Garnet's. He's crazy about birds, you know, and he's just acquired this winsome married couple. With extreme reluctance and deep misgivings I am taking them home for him. Do you think they'll be airsick?"

"Poor devils! Poor cooped-up devils!" MacMahon was talking to himself as he gently shouldered Dallas aside. "Poor devils!" he repeated. "What's he going to do with them? Train them to falconry?"

"Falconry? Odds bodikins, no! He'll just clip their wings and let them flap

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about a nice little aviary of their own."

The Scot made a strange inarticulate sound of anger.

"Then he ought to be shot! It's wicked! It's a crime! Birds like that need all the sky to breathe in—and a clod like Dryce wants to clip their wings."

Abruptly he turned and strode away, leaving the group struck silent by his vehemence.

"Caledonia stern and wild," breathed Patricia.

Dallas did not reply. Head cocked slightly to one side, he was listening to the buzz of an engine somewhere up in the sun-drenched haze overhead. It was a peculiarly high-pitched rasping buzz, and it set his teeth on edge.

"Wonder what that fellow's doing," he mused aloud. "I've heard him on and off for the past half hour."

A sudden snarl that dwindled to a purr cut short his thoughts. MacMahon was already in his control cabin, running up the engines.

"We can't stay here talking all day," snapped Rudd. "There is work to do."

He began purposefully limping towards the machine, thumping the ground with his rubber-shod stick. Dallas followed with Benson and the girl, all three talking at the same time, each in happy disregard of the others. Twice he glanced up at the sky, but the rumble of MacMahon's engines drowned any sound that the clouds may have held.

As the girl stepped up into the 'plane he held out his hand.

"Join me for a bun and a glass of milk at eight to-night?"

"I'll try. Give me a ring when you get over."

"It shall be done. Happy journey. G'bye, Benson."

As he watched MacMahon taxiing out to get the longest possible run, Dallas was joined by the mechanics and the two plain-clothes men. With the diminishing note of MacMahon's engines the rough buzz overhead rasped the air once more. Sudden misgiving seized Dallas. He swung round on the four by his side.

"Who's that? What's he doing?"

Why hasn't the air been cleared?"

None replied, though all were peering intently up at the wrack. One of the mechanics, he noticed, had a queer way of wrinkling his freckled nose and drawing back his lip to expose a gold-filled tooth.

The crackle of engines out on the ground deepened and steadied to a thunderous roar. The big machine gathered speed gluttonously, as though greedy for air. Dallas could see faces at the windows.

It was almost level with the poplars when the small winged shadow darted down from the clouds. For one infinitesimal fraction of time it seemed as though the two might miss. Somewhere behind Dallas a man whimpered like a child in agony, then plane cut plane with a queer dry crackle.

The locked wreckage struck along the line of trees in hollow crashes that seemed to go on and on for ever, before they ended in one metallic boom, a woman's piercing shriek, a babel of voices and silence.

### CHAPTER III

#### Ordeal by Fire

WHEN the police car stormed up to the scene, and Dallas leapt out, the huddled heap had already settled down, filling the road from verge to verge, and enshrouded in the leafy tangle of a poplar which had snapped off half way up its trunk.

Nuzzling under the fringe of the chaos, the buckled hulk of a black limousine lay on its side. Beyond it, a long line of cars and lorries was screaming to a halt, figures dropping from their sides and running. One of the policemen raced to intercept the crowd, and halted them with the strangely burning mastery of a Frenchman rising to a tragic crisis. Aided by a huge man with a beard, the other wrenched at the limousine's jammed door.

Dallas saw that the windscreen of the car was starred, and webbed, and opaque, and ruddled on the inside with a reddish stain that glistened. A voice within his

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brain linked the stain with the woman who had shrieked. Roughly he brushed past an urchin with a bicycle, and plunged into the foliage.

Someone sobbed, "No fire, thank God!" and an inner voice told him that he himself had spoken. A jagged fang of wood tore open the flesh beneath one eyebrow, and he swore when the blood blinded him.

Rearing high above the broken boughs, MacMahon's control cabin shone in the sunshine, miraculously intact. The fuselage from the tail forward was all but hidden beneath the tree, for the back had broken abaft the wing. Behind him, Dallas could hear heavy breathing, and the bite of metal on wood as men followed with axes.

He reached the side of the machine and beat with his knuckles on a window. At first no sound responded, then, from somewhere overhead, two words were horribly repeated:

"They're dead . . . They're dead . . ."

A scarlet mask of a face was staring down at him through a side panel in the towering bows.

"Mac——"

"They're dead," said MacMahon. "And so is he—damn him!"

The air was filled with the clamour of axes and the swishing of leaves. By common consent the rescuers stood aside for Dallas when the smashed door burst open. He crawled inside.

It was greenly dark in the cabin and very still.

A shaft of sunshine picked out the gay blue feather in a rakish little hat. Benson's wide-open eyes seemed filled with a vague wonder. A crimson trickle had stained his glossy collar, but the immaculate trousers were as knife-edged as ever.

Dallas glanced at Rudd, then looked hastily away.

His eyes fell upon the oblong box, up-ended in a corner of the cabin. The waterproofed covering had vanished, but the walls and wires were still unbroken. Behind the bars, glittering yellow-rimmed eyes glared and moved. A hooked beak gripped and tugged at the cage door.

Heavy sounds broke the silence. MacMahon had wrenched aside the partition doors of his cockpit, and was kneeling in the opening.

"They're dead," he said once more.

Dallas looked again at the bright blue feather.

"Yes."

"I knew it last night," said MacMahon.

**W**HEN they had helped to get the bodies clear of the wreckage, and had laid them upon stretchers and covered them with blankets, Dallas and MacMahon sat side by side on the running-board of a car while a doctor sewed up their gashes. Two stitches closed the cut above Dallas' eye, but MacMahon's split scalp required seven. The blood that caked his face had cracked with speech, and it was scored with little winding deltas by rivulets of sweat.

"It doesn't hurt too much?" The doctor's tones were anxious.

"It doesn't hurt at all," replied MacMahon.

Dallas rose stiffly to his feet. He felt that he wanted to ring up Patricia and tell her that he would not be able to keep their date for a bun and a glass of milk at eight o'clock.

"Where's the nearest telephone?" he mumbled.

The doctor gave him one quick appraising glance.

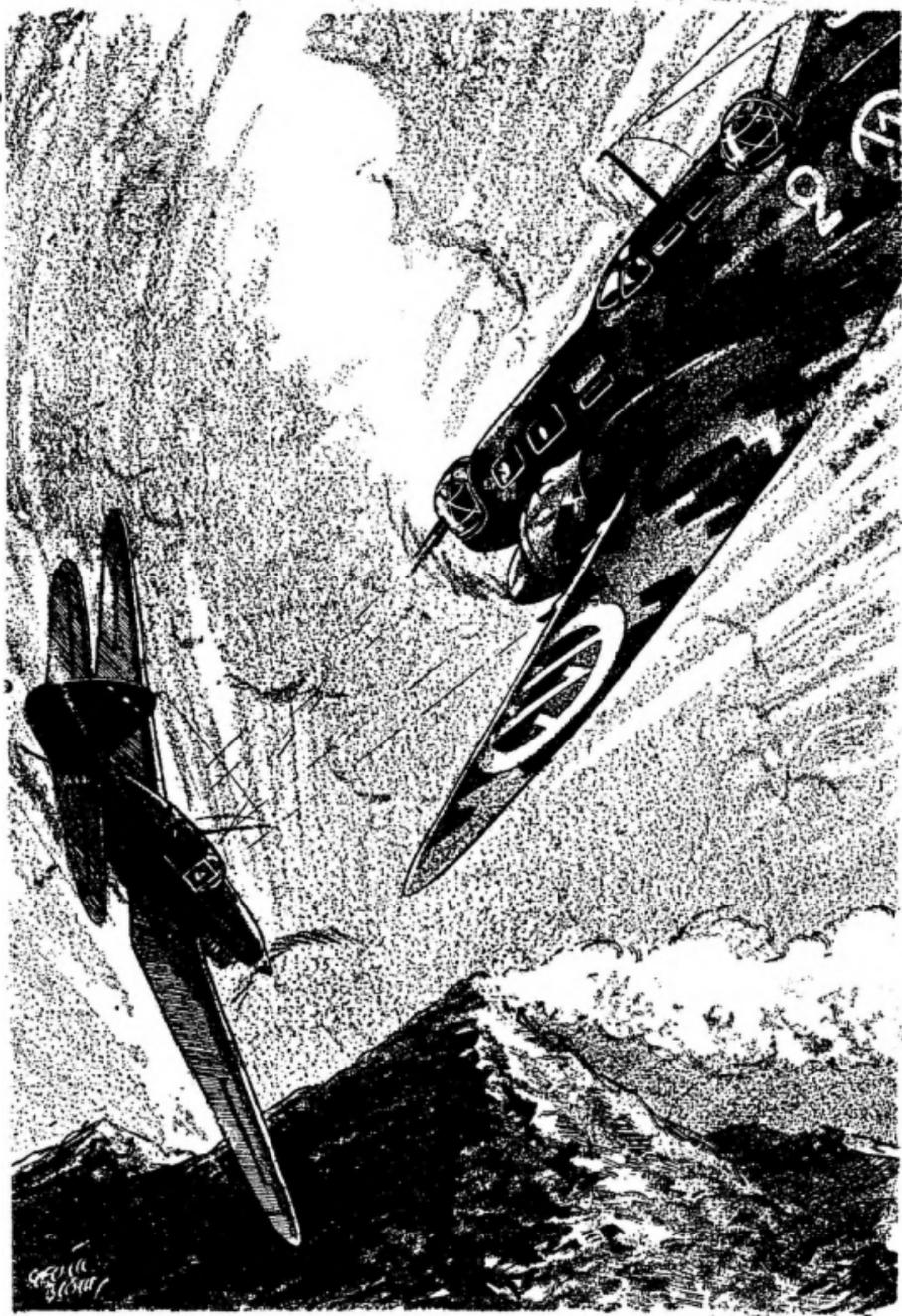
"In my house," he answered. "I will take you there—soon."

The brain fog cleared like the rising of a curtain and Dallas saw very coldly and clearly.

"It doesn't matter," he said.

The policeman and the big man with the beard had only then succeeded in freeing the woman who had screamed from the wreckage of the black limousine. Her white face glistened like porcelain, and her mouth was mauve. When they carried her to the side of the road her arms swung loosely to and fro, and a wig of tight yellow curls fell off to reveal straggling strands of russet grey hair. As impersonally as though he were

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*The machine dived screaming, with the big bomber thundering down in pursuit*

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watching a play, Dallas watched the bearded man stoop and gently straighten one of her legs. It was broken between knee and ankle, and the leg bent outwards oddly, like half of the letter K. He felt sorry for the woman then. She was really quite old, and it seemed such a hard fate to be killed by crashing aeroplanes.

The doctor was arguing with a man in uniform who clearly wished to question MacMahon. Dallas heard him say "*Pas encore . . . après . . .*" The words became jumbled in meaningless eloquence. He turned to MacMahon, who was still sitting on the running-board.

"Glad you got out of it all right," he said.

MacMahon looked up at him. An ambulance man had sponged his face clean, and the skin looked tight and pale, like a drum-head. He spoke slowly.

"I'm not glad."

"Hell, it wasn't your fault. I saw it all. You hadn't an earthly. The fool flew slap into you."

"Yes," said MacMahon. "He flew slap into me."

An earwig crawled out into the road from the shadow of the wheel. MacMahon raised one foot and brought the heel down viciously.

"And now he's smashed like that," he ended. "Smashed flat with all the rest of us on top of him!"

They fell silent, but the air all around them was vibrant with voices. Someone had cuffed the urchin with the bicycle and he was blubbing noisily. A chalky-cheeked blonde from one of the cars caught sight of the woman with the wig and began punctuating the babel with shrill yelps of hysterical laughter. Her escort fussed around her with a cut-glass bottle of smelling-salts, patting her hands and imploring her to sniff.

"Smack her lily-white mug, you sap, and smack it hard!" MacMahon growled.

Dallas held out his cigarette-case.

"Smoke," he advised. "There's plenty of trouble ahead of us."

With a shake of his head, MacMahon pulled out his pipe. His fingers were

clumsy as he began feeding tobacco into the bowl.

"Pat gone, Rudd gone, Benson gone," he muttered. "I'm still here though. I'm the sole survivor. Funny, when you come to think of it. Queer things happen in crashes."

"They do." Suddenly Dallas remembered the cage, up-ended in a corner of the cabin, and the fierce eyes and beaks that fought behind the bars. "Those birds, for example. You'd think they'd have died of shock, if nothing else. But they didn't. They're still very much alive."

A match burned uselessly, an inch away from the bowl, while MacMahon stared at him.

"The devil they are! I must fetch 'em out."

He stood up, cramming the pipe into his pocket, and it was then that the first cry of "Fire!" stilled all tongues.

WITH the sudden quenching of speech other sounds burst through the silence like water through a broken dyke. Pennants of flame were already fluttering high above the fallen poplar. Its leaves hissed as they shrivelled, and the sap bubbled in the cells of its wood.

MacMahon snarled, plunging forward. His arm, lashing like a snapped steel hawser, caught Dallas across the chest and sent him staggering. Shouts and screams rang out as he raced for the furnace. Hands clutched at his clothes, but he tore through all who would stop him, as once he had torn through the England defence at Murrayfield.

"Mac!" yelled Dallas.

A policeman hooked his legs from under him. As he struggled to his feet others seized his wrists.

"Non! . . . non! . . . monsieur! . . . non! . . . impossible . . .!"

Above the thudding of the pulse in his ears as he fought, Dallas heard their entreating cries.

"Non, non, monsieur! . . . impossible! . . . trop tard . . .!"

"Let me go, blast and damn you, let me go!"

Still they held him, and of a sudden he stood rigid. A deep animal murmur

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rumbled from the throats of the crowd. It ended in a cut sigh of quickly caught breath.

Where the bows of the monoplane still towered over the flames, the head and shoulders of a man appeared, rising waist high through the roof hatch. The figure seemed black except for flickering fringes and tassels of fire around neck and shoulders.

"Oh Mac," groaned Dallas, "you fool—you utter fool!" He felt his lips moving but could hear no words above the eager, noisy, licking inferno. "You utter fool!" he said again.

A swathe of smoke, spangled with swirling embers, swung across the blackened silhouette. When it writhed away, MacMahon could be seen again crouched above a thing which rested on the roof.

"The cage!" Dallas told himself. "He's got the cage!"

Around the margin of the fire silent shapes moved jerkily, spraying the red tide with chemical extinguishers. Where the liquid met the heat it changed to a sooty froth that seethed and simmered.

"Let me go!" panted Dallas, but the restraining fingers gripped tighter.

MacMahon straightened himself then and dashed the smouldering box to the ground, but the falcons were free and shot skywards on frantically beating wings.

Another sigh, like a moan, rippled through the crowd.

"He's done it!" said Dallas.

His gaze followed the birds as their slim lines drew together into specks. When he looked back at the fire the flames were lapping the bows and MacMahon had vanished.

The blackened, stumbling figure materialised incredibly against the dancing wall of red, after an eternity had passed. It seemed ablaze from head to foot, and it groped with scorched limbs. Water from a hose sizzled as it drenched the bowed shadow, and men sprang forward with dripping blankets.

The hands fell from Dallas's wrists.

He was first among those who rolled MacMahon on the ground, where he lay

weakly kicking, and thrashing his arms. From the waist upwards only charred shreds of clothing clung to his body. He looked as though he were trying to grin, and thin raw cracks peeped and winked in the wrinkles and creases of his skin. The queer crowing noises did not seem to come from his open mouth.

Dallas knelt by his side, but he could not speak. The doctor plunged a hypodermic needle deep. In time the crowing ceased.

An ambulance carried him away, and Dallas went with him.

### CHAPTER IV

#### The Fire that Failed

IF Anton Chevreau had not been uncommonly shrewd he could never have become Chief of Intelligence; if he had not also been excessively unorthodox, both in his views and in his methods, the grim business of the crash must inevitably have remained for ever a matter of stark and unrelieved tragedy.

The little bald-headed man regarded Dallas across his office table, and thoroughly approved of what he saw.

"Captain MacMahon is a very brave man," he said. "I was delighted to hear from the hospital that his life can undoubtedly be saved."

Dallas nodded, but did not speak. He had only just left the great surgeon who had staked his reputation on MacMahon's recovery, and his relief was still too profound to find expression. Silence fell, while Chevreau's plump white hands played with a paper knife.

"Your other friends though," he continued softly. "They and the poor lady in the auto. Ah, but that is sad! Believe me, you have my deepest sympathy. If I had lost three friends like that, I do not know what I should do."

"There is nothing I can do," retorted Dallas. "The criminal lunatic who killed them is also dead. If he weren't—"

He broke off abruptly, and Chevreau smiled as though contemplating a pleasant thought.

"There were several criminals," he

murmured. "Three, to be exact."

Dallas stared, then shook his head.

"You are mistaken. It was a single-seater. I'll swear to that."

The Chief of Intelligence placed his finger-tips together and thoughtfully regarded the ceiling.

"No, no, *monsieur*. The machine which killed your friends was not a 'seater' of any sort. It was empty."

"What?"

"Empty, *monsieur*—controlled by radio, like the target 'planes used by your own Royal Air Force."

"Then—then—you mean——?"

Dallas sought words in vain. Chevreau leaned forward, and his voice dropped to a whisper.

"I mean that your friends were murdered," he said.

THE Chief of Intelligence pushed back his chair, rose, and padded noiselessly up and down the thick pile carpet. "Listen, *monsieur*," he said, turning to Dallas, "I talk to you as one man of honour to another. It is irregular—it is most irregular—but"—he shrugged with magnificent disdain—"that is my funeral. I have your word that everything I say shall never be repeated?"

"Go on," muttered Dallas.

"*Bien*. It is understood. I continue. . . . First, *monsieur*, I must point out that there are many chances in this affair. It is by chance, for example, that our distinguished visitors and yourself are not among the dead. If they had not—quite unexpectedly—postponed the hour of their departure, both they and you would also have been killed. And that would have ended the matter."

"It would," Dallas grunted.

"Quite so. But now for another chance. . . . If Sir Garnet had not bought the falcons, and if the Captain had not so heroically risked his life to rescue them, we might never have found—this!"

As he spoke he slid open a drawer in his desk, extracted a squat, revolver-like object, and dramatically threw it down on a pile of papers. Dallas picked it up and examined it curiously. The weapon

was unlike any gun that he had ever seen.

"What is it?" he asked.

Chevreau tapped the ugly barrel with a polished nail.

"It is a fire-pistol—a miniature flame-thrower—the devilish tool of the incendiary. We found it in the hip pocket of Captain MacMahon. He no doubt saw it and picked it up from somewhere when he returned to the burning cabin—an action which proves him to be as quick-witted as he is brave."

"He is both," said Dallas.

"Undoubtedly. . . . And so, *monsieur*, you now begin to understand the plot. Let me put it thus—there are certain Powers in Europe who find their plans threatened to the point of frustration by Monsieur Massingham, le Vicomte Usher, and Sir Garnet. If these gentlemen were removed—so these Powers argue—they would have a free hand. They therefore decide to remove them. But how? The answer is simple. A collision in the air, effected by the radio machine—an accomplice to mix with the crowd round the wreckage and discharge this fire-pistol, unseen in all the tumult, then—*pfui!*—all goes up in flames, all evidence is destroyed, and all is over but the weeping!"

The little man paused, obviously moved by his own eloquence, and much enjoying his command of English.

"All is over but the weeping," he repeated with relish. "But here chance steps in again. Observe that rusty stain upon the barrel, from the muzzle back to the butt. That, *monsieur*, was caused by fire. When the pistol was discharged some of the burning liquid blew back and scorched the hand of the villain who held it. In his pain, he flung it aside—and our gallant Captain MacMahon brought the evidence back to damn him."

He ended with a gesture worthy of Cyrano. Gripping the arms of his chair, Dallas watched him through narrowed eyes.

"It is not easy to obtain a wireless-controlled machine," he observed slowly. "You must know who these people are."

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"We do."

"Then you have arrested them?"

Sadly, Chevreau shook his head.

"Alas—no!"

FOR a moment Dallas stared incredulously at the Chief of Intelligence.

"Good God!" he exploded. "Why not? You've got proof that they murdered four people, yet you——"

Chevreau held up his hand.

"One moment, I beg. Monsieur Massingham and his colleagues returned to London by Imperial Airways several hours ago. Possibly you have yourself telephoned Whitehall for further instructions since their arrival?"

With a frown, Dallas inclined his head.

"Yes," he admitted, "I have. As a matter of fact I couldn't in the least understand our official attitude. I was as good as told to keep my mouth shut and do nothing except hold myself at your disposal."

"Precisely, *monsieur*, precisely. At my disposal. And I—*moi qui vous parle*—assure you that I am unable to make the arrest. Why? Because I am forbidden to do so. Why again? Because the scoundrels who perpetrated this outrage are members of the official Air Mission, which—as no doubt you are already aware—has been sent to this country by a—ah—friendly foreign Power. Oh yes, we know all about both them and their crime. We know that the radio machine was part of their equipment, though hitherto always flown by a human pilot. We know that this morning it was operated from one of their autos patrolling the aerodrome road. We know that they relied upon the fire to consume the bodies so completely that it could never be proved that the colliding machine was empty. We know all that. But our hands are tied. To arrest these most exalted visitors—to bring a charge of murder against them—that would inevitably mean war. And our Governments, *mon vieux*—yours as well as mine—consider that war is even more terrible than the deaths of two good men and two poor women. It means the deaths of millions of good men and thousands

of poor women. You see? You perceive my meaning?"

Dallas drew a deep breath. Before his eyes he saw the blue feather and the pathetic yellow wig.

"I do see," he answered bitterly. "You mean that we must let them go scot free—that there is nothing we can do?"

For a full minute neither spoke, then Chevreau began amazingly.

"I used to have an aunt," he announced, "and she was very pious. When—at the beginning of the War—the last war—I wished to join our air service she was horrified. 'No, no,' she cried, 'you must not! Anything but that! Flying is wicked! Men were not meant to fly! The Devil is Prince of the Air! *The Devil's got wings!*' That was what my aunt said. But I had an answer for her. 'True,' I said. 'But if the Devil's got wings then men must get them, too, in order to fight him.' She saw my reasoning, and she consented. She was very wise."

Dallas waited, dimly yet absorbingly aware that a great adventure was stealing upon him. The Chief of Intelligence sank back into his chair and resumed his contemplation of the ceiling.

"Four innocent people killed," he mused, "and they will still be unavenged when the devils who killed them spread their wings and fly away to North Africa at eight o'clock this evening. I wonder what I would do if I could follow my own wishes—if three of my friends were among the dead—and if I were a famous pilot, such as yourself. It is a problem—a most difficult problem. And yet I think I know what course of action my dear old aunt would have recommended."

Slowly Dallas stood up, then held out his hand.

"If," he said, "you can prove to me that your information is correct, I think I also know what to do."

## CHAPTER V

### Peril of the Pyrenees

OWING to the dossiers which he was able to produce, and the other incon-

## AIR STORIES

trovertible evidence that had been collected by his agents, it did not take Chevreau long to convince Dallas that the three members of the foreign Air Mission actually were solely, jointly and individually guilty of murder. Their guilt, indeed, was as incontestable as the fact that their arrest would inevitably plunge Europe into war.

Much more time, however, was needed for the elaboration of Dallas's plans, since he refused even to consider any suggestion involving a killing without warning, while Chevreau proved equally obstinate in rejecting the idea of a challenge in the air, followed by a fight to the finish.

"*Dieu!*" he snorted, "you propose to fight while our three friends scream for help on their radio, and all the world listens in? No thank you! That would make it appear as if we ourselves are the aggressors. There is, however, a very simple scheme. You must take a leaf out of their own book. You must ram them with your machine, leaping out with your parachute at the last moment."

"Nothing doing. Even though the brutes are killers, I can't just sneak up and blot 'em out in cold blood."

Chevreau shrugged.

"Distasteful, I admit, but what else may one do?"

DALLAS pondered for a while.

"Didn't you say just now," he asked, at last, "that this precious Air Mission is going on to North Africa?"

"It is. Our eminent assassins are about to inspect some of France's Imperial possessions."

"Then they will be crossing the Pyrenees?"

"By dawn to-morrow they will be traversing the mountains near Mont Perdu. The route is decided."

"In that case I may be able to deal with them, if you can provide me with a single-seater fighter with all identification letters and numbers painted out."

Regretfully, Chevreau sighed.

"Alas, my friend, as I have already told you, the one thing that I cannot permit is that these men should be attacked and shot down."

"You needn't worry about that because I intend that even the guns shall be removed from the machine."

"No guns! But how——?"

"Never mind the 'how.' Do I get that machine?"

"It is irregular—most irregular—but—yes—I think that something might be arranged."

"Good. And now for a more difficult matter. I shall be waiting for them at seventeen thousand feet or so in the neighbourhood of Mont Perdu. Can you feed them some fake information that will make them attack me at sight?"

The little man chuckled.

"You sound quite mad," he observed, "but I do not doubt that you have some plan. Perhaps it is as well that I should not know it. Yes, *mon vieux*, in my capacity as Chief of Intelligence I myself can approach them and say that my agents have discovered a dastardly Bolshevik plot——"

"Bolshevik, my boot! I want them to know what's coming and why. I want you to tell them that A. J. Dallas, personal pilot to the British Cabinet, has formed the remarkable opinion that they are responsible for this morning's disaster. Furthermore, A. J. Dallas is so annoyed about it that he proposes to waylay them in a fighter over the Pyrenees. If they're wise, therefore, they'll keep a good look-out, and blow A. J. Dallas to blazes as soon as they see him. Can you fix it that way for me?"

"I could, of course, but it seems to me that this crazy scheme suffers from the same disadvantage as the idea of an open challenge and fight. They will, of course, inform their Government that they are threatened——"

"So much the better if they do. It may make their infernal Government think twice before plotting any similar abominations in the future. The point is that they can't inform anybody else except their Government, because that would set the whole world asking uncommonly awkward questions about how they knew they were threatened, and why they were threatened at all. Nor can they wait until I attack, and then

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start yelling that there's a pirate or a lunatic at large. They can't do that because I'm simply not going to attack—they themselves are going to do that, and if they manage to bag me, well the wreckage will prove that I was unarmed. In fact, there's absolutely nothing that they can do, you see, except keep their mouths shut, go for me baldheaded, and——"

"Kill you," ended Chevreau.

Dallas's reply sounded irrelevant.

"I wonder," he reflected, "if you have ever crossed the Pyrenees by air. It's an interesting trip."

DALLAS watched the lemon light of dawn wash like a tide along the fangs of Pyrenean ice and snow that rose through the mountain mists below him. At a height of seventeen thousand feet, more than six thousand lay between his cockpit and the deadly peak of Mont Perdu. Humming contentedly under his breath he ran an eye over the instruments, mentally converting their metric scales into the more familiar British units.

A sound little machine, he decided, and a sweetly running engine.

Now that the moment of life or death was drawing so close, he felt strangely calm—calmer than at any time since he had watched MacMahon's wing scything the top of the poplars. Casually he glanced at the clock, looked away, then glanced again, scarcely able to believe that only twenty hours had passed since that paralysing instant.

Like the quick running-through of a film, he reviewed the crowded events of those twelve hundred minutes, experiencing again his amazement on hearing Chevreau's revelation, his thrill as the plan for avenging the dead gradually grew in his mind, his impatience during the long night flight as passenger across France, and his triumph when Chevreau showed him the little fighter waiting on the aerodrome near Marseilles.

A good machine, a sweetly running engine—and a peach of a plan!

Inconsequently, he thought of his remark to Chevreau—"I wonder if you have ever crossed the Pyrenees by air.

It's an interesting trip."

Looking down again he saw once more the tuft of wind-blown cloud which tipped the summit of Mont Perdu, like a volcano's feather of smoke; the tuft that he had noticed on scores of Pyrenean flights, and which had been in his mind when he spoke to Chevreau about the interest of the trip: it was that vaporous plume that had dimly begun to inspire his plans from the second of hearing that his enemies were flying to Africa.

"The Devil's got wings," he muttered aloud. "I wonder where——"

As though the Devil himself were answering the unfinished question through the chattering teeth of a skull, the words were drowned by the rending rattle of bullets bursting through the wooden wing of the fighter.

"The above have arrived," breathed Dallas, and slammed on full right rudder backed by opposite bank.

With the wild skidding of the fighter the attacking 'plane shot into view, twin-engined, swift, and formidable, mounting four fixed guns in the leading edge of the wing and movable turrets in nose and tail—three men against one, six guns against none.

Dallas bared his teeth in a grin and spoke aloud.

"So glad you were able to accept my invitation. Stout work, Chevreau. You must have spun a wonderful yarn. . . . Whoops! Down we go!"

The fighter's tail flipped up like the tail of a wren, and the machine dived screaming with the big three-seater thunderously surging in pursuit.

Standing on the rudder-bar, falling feet first, Dallas aimed his dive at Mont Perdu's summit as though he himself were a bomb. Instinctively and incoherently he shouted for the exultation to come. Bullets thudded into his planes and fuselage, smashed the panels of his cabin, and flicked away the tip of one propeller blade, leaving an unbalanced screw that shuddered and screeched; but still, incredibly, he remained untouched, unscathed, gloatingly watching the peak rush to meet him like an upflung javelin.

At fifteen hundred feet above the mountain hunted and hunter were so close together that they seemed to be linked by invisible bonds, the one without guns yet slipping, twisting, and ever escaping by inches, the other intent and relentless, savagely firing; calculating cunning luring the lust for blood.

At a thousand feet, Dallas made the last desperate move of his gamble. Rudder and ailerons combined to send him swinging to windward of the cloud streamer, then out again along its length.

Although he knew of the existence of the terrible downward bump beneath the shredded mist, where the wind blowing over the mountain crest tumbled sheer into the leeward abyss; although he

was ready for the grip of the torrent and his hand on the stick seemed instantaneous in its reaction to the first hammer-like gust, yet still he was all but caught and dashed to destruction along with the pursuing machine, still firing to kill as it plunged helplessly, heedlessly past, drawn and driven into depths from which there could be no returning.

**S**HOARING back to the safety of the heights, Dallas circled the empty sky and found it good. The sun was already strong and the shadows of the peaks lay long and blue upon the clouds.

"The Devil had wings," he said, then laughing at the change of tense, headed homewards into the north.

## HERE'S THE ANSWER

*Readers' Questions are invited and should be addressed to AIR STORIES, Tower House, Southampton Street, London, W.C.2. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany ALL enquiries and no letter should contain more than three separate questions*

**HAWKER HOTSPUR** (K. L. Andrews, Pagham, Sussex). No, the Hotspur two-seater fighter monoplane has not been adopted by the R.A.F. Only a prototype was built and the firm are now too busy turning out Hurricanes and Henleys to produce a third type in quantity.

**A HIGH FLIER** (John Lakeman, London, S.E.15). The Fairey P.C.1 is a new 4-engined 30-seater air-liner now under construction. It will have a "pressure cabin" for high altitude flying, a tricycle undercarriage and a top speed of 275 m.p.h. An order for twelve of these machines was recently given by the Air Ministry.

**MEMBERS WANTED** (R. Trebell, 34 Malpas Road, Brockley, London, S.E.4). We are glad to publish your invitation to readers in the Catford, Beckenham, Bromley and Lewisham districts to join the Aircraft Scale Modellers' Club of which you are the Secretary. No doubt interested readers will write to you direct at the above address.

**TEST PILOTS** (W. H. Cunningham, Bristol). The names of the Chief Test Pilots of the aircraft firms you list are as follows: C. F. Uwins (Bristol Aeroplane Co.); G. R. de Havilland (De Havilland Aircraft Co.); C. S. Staniland (Fairey Aviation Co.); J. H. Cordes (Handley Page Ltd.); P. W. S. Bulman (Hawker Aircraft Ltd.); J. Lankester Parker (Short Bros. Ltd.); J. H. Summers (Vickers-Supermarine Ltd.); A. M. Blake (Blackburn Aircraft Ltd.).

**NOT A SKUA** (P. K. Thornton, Woking, Surrey, and others). The newspaper-cutting you enclose, showing a wrecked machine on the deck of the "Courageous," is not a Blackburn Skua monoplane, as the caption states, but, as you suspected, a Hawker Osprey biplane with the

lower plane dismantled. Incidentally, if all the readers who sent us copies of this cutting also wrote to the editor of the paper concerned, his face must have been red.

**HURRICANE WINGS** (D. E. Mason, Margate, Kent). Yes, a number of Hawker Hurricane fighters have had the undersurfaces of their wings painted black and white as an experiment in camouflage. In such cases the left wing is white and carries a cockade, while the right wing is black with no cockade, but with the machine's serial number in white.

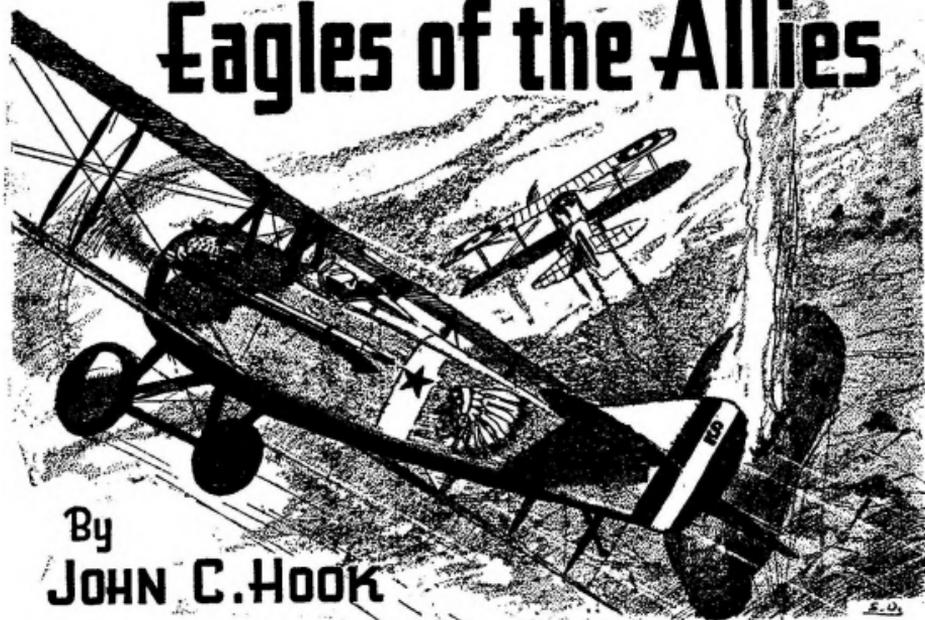
**CIVIL AIR GUARD** (L. O. Preston, Manchester, 8). The paper you want for news of Civil Air Guard activities is "Flying," price 3d., every Friday. A special section of C.A.G. news and reports is a regular weekly feature.

**UNADOPTED** (D. Mellard, Huddersfield). No, neither the Vickers Venom nor the Gloster low-wing monoplane fighter has been adopted by the Royal Air Force. The Fairey P4/34 bomber has been adopted by Denmark for use as a two-seater fighter.

**HIGHEST YET** (L. M. Martin, Liverpool). You lose your bet. The world's aeroplane altitude record of 53,937 ft., set up by the late Flt.-Lieutenant M. J. Adam in June, 1937, has now been beaten by Italy. The new record, set up by Colonel Mario Pezzi in a Caproni, now stands at 55,490 ft., or about 10 miles. World's absolute height record, however, still belongs to the two American balloonists, Captains O. A. Anderson and A. W. Stevens, who reached 72,550 ft. in November, 1935.

(More Replies to Readers on page 458.)

# Eagles of the Allies



By  
**JOHN C. HOOK**

**In the Seven Months of her Flying Service's War-time Existence, America formed Thirty-nine Squadrons and Lost Some Three Hundred Pilots on Active Service. Here is the True Story of the United States' Gallant Part in the Great War in the Air**

**I**N the years that have elapsed since the War, the part played by American pilots on the Western Front has become so obscured by the quantity of fiction woven round their exploits that a brief factual account of the War-time record of their pursuit squadrons may now be of some interest.

America entered the War in April, 1917, but nearly eight months were to pass before her Air Force was officially launched in the skies of France. By then, of course, hundreds of patriotic young Americans had been trained to fly in England and France, and had joined either a French *escadrille* or a British squadron. It was January, 1918, however, before the first two American squadrons, the 94th and 95th, were formed. They were both pursuit squa-

drons, the first of the twenty such scout formations America produced.

**A**LTOGETHER the United States formed thirty-nine squadrons before the end of the War, though not all of these actually saw service at the front. But in those early days of 1918 only two squadrons were in being, and even they had no aircraft. Finally, they were assigned French Nieuports, and it was on these machines that America's first two squadrons took-off on their first front line patrol.

But if the squadrons were new the pilots were, in many cases, seasoned veterans. Raoul Lufberry, with seventeen victories to his credit and a record of three years' service with the French Air Force, was assigned to 94 Squadron

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and he had several other old hands with him. Lufberry, who had already been honoured with French and British decorations, was soon to fall, but at that time he was America's leading "ace."

By March, 94 Squadron had received their Nieuports, but they were still without equipment, a state of affairs which gave rise to a situation which, although humorous, might easily have ended in tragedy.

To help train the new American pilots, several French airmen were detailed to escort them at favourable opportunities over the lines. The consternation of the French pilots can be well imagined when, after several weeks of this work, they discovered that their new allies were calmly flying Nieuports without machine-guns. Their armament had not yet arrived!

Luckily no pilots were lost through this incredible state of affairs, but about this time Captain Miller, of No. 95 Squadron, was shot down in the German lines. Miller's squadron was still awaiting 'planes and equipment and, impatient to get to grips with the enemy, Miller accepted the invitation of a local French Spad squadron to lead one of their flights over the lines in one of their own machines. He was destined never to return from that first patrol. A month later an official German report reached No. 95 Squadron to the effect that their commander had died of wounds received in air combat.

### First American Victories

**M**ARCH of 1918 was a difficult period for the Allies, and the Americans were virtually powerless to help them in the air. On the 30th, the 94th Squadron were sent to Epiez, some thirty miles behind the lines, and here they were joined by a member of the famous Lafayette Escadrille, Captain Norman Hall.

April came, and still the 94th and 95th could not claim to have seen any air fighting. They were still awaiting machine-guns. Then, at last, when their hopes were low, the long-awaited equipment came rolling in, and on the 10th

of April the newly-equipped Nieuports flew to Toul. It was from here that America's first fighting squadron began its War career.

Only a few days later, 94 Squadron were able to open their scoring account, but these victories were gained in a surprisingly easy manner. Two German machines mistook Toul aerodrome for their own, and before they could get away Lieutenants Campbell and Winslow had got above them, and from a low height sent them both down to crash not far from the American aerodrome. The machines were Pfalz single-seaters, both the pilots being captured.

Only a few days later another Pfalz fell to the guns of Lieutenant Rickenbacker. Rickenbacker was already well known to the American public as a racing driver, and had come over to France as General Pershing's personal chauffeur. He soon tired of this work, however, and applied for a transfer to the Air Service, being eventually posted to No. 94 Squadron, to which he was to bring great honour.

But before Rickenbacker could score again No. 94 lost their first pilot in combat, Lieutenant Chapman. Chapman had left his flight to attack a German two-seater beneath him, but as he dived a Pfalz got on his tail. Chapman turned to meet his pursuer and flew right into a burst from the rear gun of the two-seater. A sheet of flame enveloped his machine and the first casualty of the American Army Air Service went crashing to his death in the German lines.

By May, 95 Squadron, which had been sent back to the base for a course of gunnery training, were ordered to Toul, where they joined 94 Squadron, and from that date until the close of the War the two squadrons occupied the same aerodrome.

Amongst the new arrivals at this time was Lieutenant Quentin Roosevelt, son of the famous Theodore Roosevelt. Probably on account of his father's reputation, Roosevelt was immediately made a flight commander and, the day after his arrival, was detailed to lead a flight on his first front-line patrol. That night he

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held a conference with his pilots and wisely asked the most experienced among them to lead his flight the following day. Up to the time of his death, a short while later, Roosevelt never actually led a flight, but always flew under the leadership of one of his own more experienced pilots.

On the same day that Roosevelt made his first patrol, Captain Hall of 94 Squadron made his last flight over the enemy lines. The upper wing of his Nieuport collapsed in mid-air, and although Hall managed to bring his crippled 'plane low down before it eventually crashed, he was on the wrong side of the lines and spent the rest of the War in captivity.

But worse was to follow, for only a few days later Major Lufberry was shot down in flames above his own lines. He had taken-off to attack a two-seater Albatros which had come over on an observation patrol. In full sight of the pilots of 94 Squadron, he attacked the Albatros from behind and fired several short bursts. Then he apparently had trouble with his gun, and flew off to rectify a stoppage.

A few minutes later he turned again to attack his heavier antagonist and the ground watchers awaited his first victim in the Allied lines. Instead, the Nieuport staggered suddenly and a burst of flames came from the machine. It flew right past the German two-seater, and then a figure emerged from the flames, stood poised a moment on the fuselage and then, from a height of about two hundred feet, leaped overboard.

Lufberry's body fell in a peasant's garden and he was instantly killed. The same bullet that had fired his tank had apparently taken away his thumb as it clasped the joy-stick.

When the pilots of 94 Squadron returned to their aerodrome after escorting the body of their "ace" to the local American hospital, they learned that the same Albatros had just sent down another 'plane, this time a Spad from a nearby French *escadrille*, which had gone up to avenge Lufberry. Campbell, of 94 Squadron, thereupon went up to try and find

the Albatros and, although he was unsuccessful in his quest, he managed to bring down a Rumpler in his own lines. The Albatros had not, however, escaped, for later the Squadron learnt that it had been brought down by a Spad, both occupants being taken prisoners.

### The First All-American "Ace"

WHILE many Americans had already scored five or more victories during their service with the French or British air services, the honour of being the first all-American "ace" was to fall to Campbell, who had been American-trained and who flew with an all-American squadron.

Campbell brought down his fifth victim, a Rumpler, on May 1st, having fought the two-seater for a considerable time until at last the enemy observer, having apparently used up all his ammunition, ceased firing. From fifty feet, Campbell saw the enemy gunner standing calmly with folded arms whilst the empty ammunition belt flapped wildly in the wind. The German pilot showed no sign of surrender, but continued to fly eastwards for his lines. It was then that Campbell reluctantly fired another short burst and at once he knew his aim was true. The Rumpler went into a steep dive which soon became a hopeless spin and the two-seater smashed itself to matchwood in the Allied lines.

One more enemy 'plane fell to Campbell, and then, on June 4th, in a fight with another Rumpler, an explosive bullet burst just behind his back, and he was severely wounded. He managed to get back to his own aerodrome, but his War career was over.

Before June closed, the scene of operations changed and the 1st Pursuit Group moved from the Toul sector to the Chateau Thierry salient. The 1st Pursuit Group now comprised four squadrons, 94 and 95 Squadrons having now been joined by two new squadrons, Nos. 27 and 147.

The pilots of these last two units were as yet new to aerial warfare, and several "veterans" of 94 and 95

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Squadrons were detailed to show them the lines.

About this time 94 Squadron received its first Spad, its early arrival being mainly due to some bright work on the part of Rickenbacker. He had been recovering from a bad bout of fever, and just before he left Paris to return to the front he visited Orly aerodrome to find out what chances his squadron had of receiving new machines. To his great delight, he was shown three glistening new Spads which were designated for 94 Squadron. On announcing his identity, Rickenbacker was allowed to fly one of the Spads back to his aerodrome at Touquin, and to deliver in person the first Spad received by an American squadron.

The 1st American Pursuit Group were now stationed opposite the famed Richthofen Circus and during Rickenbacker's absence the red Fokkers had claimed two Nieuports. Lieutenant Wanemaker of 27 Squadron was one of the missing pilots, and it later transpired that he had been shot down by the German "ace," Udet, as his fortieth victim. During the weeks that were to follow the Americans were to suffer heavily at the hands of the Richthofen Circus and many pilots were posted as missing.

Included in the casualty list was the name of Lieutenant Roosevelt of 94 Squadron, who a few days before his death, had scored his first victory in most unusual fashion. He later admitted that he had become lost when diving away from his flight to investigate some machines beneath him. He flew around for a while until at last, sighting, as he supposed, his formation, he overtook them and fell in behind to await developments. Suddenly the flight leader began diving with the rest of the 'planes in his wake, and it was then that Roosevelt saw for the first time the Maltese crosses on the wings of the other machines. He had been following an enemy formation! At once he fired at the 'plane nearest him, and as he turned and high-tailed for home he saw it going down in flames. The German pilots were so surprised that they did not even follow him.

A few days later Roosevelt was himself shot down in the German lines. Once again he had strayed away from his companions to attack an enemy formation, but this time his luck was out, and Lieutenant Bulford, his flight commander, saw his Nieuport falling out of control several hundred feet above the American flight. That same night it was announced on the German wireless that he had been shot down by Lieutenant Thom of the Richthofen Circus.

There is some mystery here, for Thom was never a member of the Richthofen group of *staffels*, although he may possibly have been the victor in this case. Credit for shooting down Roosevelt has often been given to Obl. Donhauser of Staffel 11 of the Richthofen Circus but, again, this seems incorrect, for the Circus only claimed one victory that day, a Breguet that fell to the guns of Løwenhardt. Roosevelt, it seems certain, ran into one of the *staffels* from *Jagd. 3*, of which Thom was a member.

Besides Roosevelt, the 1st American Pursuit Group lost thirty-five other pilots killed or missing in the first four weeks of the Chateau Thierry offensive, losses which were hardly counter-balanced by the thirty-eight victories the Group claimed.

### Capture of a German "Ace"

MEANWHILE, the second and third American Pursuit Groups had been formed. The 2nd Group of four squadrons was commanded by Captain Schwaab who scored ten victories, while the 3rd Group, with their Indian's head insignia, included such first-rank pilots as Cassidy, with nine victories, Baer, and Wright, who also brought down nine E.A.

Rickenbacker was now out of action again with painful ear trouble, and it was left to a pilot of 95 Squadron, Lieutenant Avery, to bring fresh credit to the Group.

On July 25th, Avery went on his first front-line patrol. He was an experienced pilot, having served for some time with the Paris Defence Patrol, but this was his first actual trip over the lines. With four

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others of his flight he was apparently flying in a clear sky when, down from the clouds, dropped a formation of German 'planes. The leader's first burst missed Avery and, realising he had been unsuccessful, the German pilot pulled his 'plane up over Avery's, throttled back his engine and waited for the American to appear again in his view.

Avery, however, did exactly the same, keeping right beneath the German machine until at last the German pilot banked sharply to the right and presented Avery with a fleeting target. A long burst spat from his guns, and at once the enemy 'plane staggered and started to go down in the Allied lines. Avery landed in an adjoining field and then, for the first time, he saw his adversary, in the hands of French *poilus*. The *Pour le Merite* hung at the pilot's throat, for he was Obl. Menckhoff, leader of Jagdstaffel 72, with thirty-nine Allied aircraft to his credit.

Menckhoff was the only German "ace" to be shot down and captured by the Allies, and it must have been particularly galling for him to discover that his captor was an American airman on his first front-line patrol.

Six days later came one of the most disastrous days that the 1st Pursuit Group ever experienced, the worst casualties being suffered by 27 Squadron. Early in the morning of July 31st, Lieutenant McArthur led his flight of six 'planes on a "strafing" expedition upon the aerodrome and hangars of the Richthofen Circus at Fismes. They reached their objective but from that expedition only one member of the flight ever returned.

It was some weeks before any news was heard of the missing aviators and then came a letter from a German prison camp. Apparently McArthur's flight had reached their objective and expended all their ammunition on the aerodrome at Fismes, but on the return journey they ran into a forty-mile-an-hour headwind and at once realised that they could never get back to their own aerodrome. McArthur turned the nose of his Nieuport in the direction of the nearest Allied

aerodrome, but before they had even reached the lines they ran into swarms of enemy single-seaters, cutting off their retreat.

Up and down the lines McArthur led his flight, seeking a gap, but it was of no avail. Then, realising the hopelessness of his situation, he decided to run the gauntlet of his enemies, and led his flight straight through the nearest German formation. McArthur fell almost at once, as did another pilot. The four remaining pilots struggled on, but one by one their engines coughed and died, and with empty tanks three of them came down in German territory. Only one pilot crossed the lines.

On that same day fell Lieutenant Winslow of 94 Squadron, the first pilot to score a victory with the American Air Service. He crashed, with a shattered arm, in German territory where he spent the rest of the War, some of the time in hospital where his arm was amputated, and finally in prison camps.

On August 8th the long-awaited Spads arrived, to the great delight of the American pilots who had blamed the inadequate performance of the Nieuport for many of their losses during the past weeks. They were in the thick of the fighting now and were over the lines continuously. Rickenbacker was still out of action, and it was while he was still in hospital that they learned that the 1st Pursuit Group had been sent back to Verdun to take part in the St. Mihiel offensive.

Here, in September, Rickenbacker rejoined them, and it was from this aerodrome in the following month that he was to score most of his victories.

### Luke—the Balloon Buster

SEPTEMBER, however, was to see the amazing Frank Luke sweep like a meteor across the skies of France and disappear in a blaze of glory as dramatically as he had appeared.

Luke, a member of 27 Squadron in the 1st Pursuit Group, had not made himself very popular with his fellow pilots by his boastful and arrogant manner, and when on his third trip over the lines he claimed

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to have brought down an enemy 'plane, a claim he subsequently admitted was false, his popularity did not increase. Only one man seemed to like Luke, a pilot called Wehner, who on account of his German ancestry had always been looked upon with suspicion by the American authorities. A bond of friendship sprang up between the two men, which was only to be broken by Wehner's death on September 18th in a courageous effort to protect Luke from a flight of Fokkers.

Luke first sprang into prominence on September 12th, when he brought down a *drachen* at Marieville. Two days later he destroyed two more balloons at Boinville and on the 15th and 16th he added four more gas-bags to his score, setting the remarkable record of eight balloons in five days.

Then, on the 18th, came his greatest exploit, for on that day, within the space of twenty minutes, he destroyed two balloons and three enemy 'planes. Accompanied by the faithful Wehner, Luke had set out to destroy two German balloons that hung north of Vigneulles. The two Spads took-off at about five in the evening, as it was growing dusk. Arrived over the first balloon, Luke immediately dived to the attack, while Wehner kept height to guard him from surprise attack from the rear. At Luke's third dive, the first balloon burst into flames, and Luke, followed by a barrage of shrapnel and machine-gun fire, soared skywards in search of Wehner. His escort was nowhere to be seen, but instead, Luke sighted a flight of Fokkers rapidly bearing down on him from the east. He thereupon decided to beat a retreat by way of the second balloon, and to have one shot at it before the Fokkers came up with him.

At his first dive, the second gas-bag was destroyed and Luke turned westwards, still scanning the horizon for Wehner. At that moment Wehner's blazing Spad tore past him, while three Fokkers dived on him from the rear. Mad with anger and sorrow at his companion's loss, Luke turned on the nearest Fokker and continued firing as he closed

with it to point-blank range. A trickle of flame sped down the fuselage of the Fokker and, with engine roaring, the enemy 'plane fell headlong in its last dive.

The two other Fokkers were now on his tail, but immediately Luke saw the end of his first opponent he whipped round and fired a long burst at the nearest Fokker, which promptly tumbled earthwards. The third machine at once broke off the combat and before Luke could turn again it had disappeared in the gathering darkness. Luke now searched the sky for the Fokkers he had originally seen, but they had turned about and were flying away from him, apparently under the impression that their three companions were quite capable of taking care of one Spad.

Over towards Verdun, Luke now spotted the shrapnel bursts of A.A. fire, and, hurrying in that direction, he soon sighted an L.V.G. two-seater at a low altitude. He immediately attacked from the rear and his first long burst of fire sent the two-seater plunging down out of control. Within twenty minutes Luke had destroyed two balloons, two Fokkers and an L.V.G. two-seater, all five victories being later confirmed.

### Luke's Last Fight

**L**UKE'S first question upon landing at his aerodrome was for news of Wehner, but he must already have known the answer. Wehner was dead, and a week after the Armistice his father in America received a letter from the enemy pilot who had shot him down. All Luke's enthusiasm vanished when he heard of the death of his best friend, and he became sulky and morose and showed a complete disregard for orders. His score continued to mount, however, with a Fokker on September 26th and yet another balloon on the 27th, the day before his death.

Luke spent the night of the 27th at the aerodrome of the French Cigognes at Toul. On the evening of the next day he flew low over the American balloon headquarters and dropped a note, attached

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to a steamer, at the feet of the watching officers :

*"Look out for enemy balloons at D.2 and D.4 positions—Luke"*

it ran, and even as the officers turned towards where they knew the balloons lay, a great glow lit up the north-western horizon, followed a few seconds later by a second blaze as yet another balloon went down. It was now almost dark, and, full of enthusiasm, the balloon officers telephoned news of Luke's latest victories to his squadron. But Luke never returned from this last raid, and the War was over before the mystery of his end was cleared up.

On January 3rd, 1919, the body of an American airman was exhumed at Murvaux, and from information supplied by the local inhabitants, it became apparent that this was the same man who had brought down several balloons in the district the previous September. It was then learned that Luke had apparently been hit from the ground during his last attack and had landed near a small stream to quench his thirst. As he went towards the stream he sighted a group of German soldiers and at once drew his automatic and opened fire. A brief exchange of shots followed, and the American fell dead with a bullet through his chest. The dead aviator of Murvaux was almost certainly Luke, but proof positive was forthcoming when an Elgin watch was found on his body and proved by its serial number to have been Luke's. The mystery of the "ace's" death was at last cleared up.

### Rickenbacker's Narrow Escape

**A** FEW days before Luke's death, Rickenbacker had been appointed to the command of 94 Squadron, and he showed his appreciation of the honour by destroying a Fokker scout and an L.V.G. on September 25th, as his eighth and ninth victories. Another Fokker fell to his guns on the following day, but this victory nearly ended in disaster for the enemy pilot succeeded in shooting one blade of Rickenbacker's propeller

before he fell, and the American only just managed to cross his lines.

With the beginning of October, 94 Squadron took on a new form of air fighting which necessitated flying at under two thousand feet on all patrols to combat the enemy two-seaters which were continually over the American trenches.

On the second day of the month, Lieutenant Reed Chambers led the first patrol at this low height and Rickenbacker voluntarily joined the flight to observe the new conditions. The flight soon sighted a low-flying Hannover and Rickenbacker managed to get his sights well-trained on the rear gunner before his victim was aware of the Spad formation. The German gunner collapsed in his cockpit at Rickenbacker's first burst, and when Reed Chambers attacked from ahead the Hannover pilot made a hurried landing in the Allied lines, presenting the Americans with a brand new example of German aircraft construction.

On October 10th, a formation of twenty-nine Spads set out to destroy the two enemy balloons at Dun. The Spads were from the 1st Pursuit Group, fourteen coming from 94 Squadron, and the large formation was necessary to protect the pilots who actually attacked the gas-bags from the attentions of the Richthofen Circus, which was now stationed opposite the Americans.

Rickenbacker soon spotted an enemy formation passing above him through a cloud-bank, and, climbing up to attack, he was quickly in position on the tail of the rearmost machine. A short burst from his guns and at once the Fokker burst into flames. The enemy pilot immediately levelled his 'plane off and jumped headlong into space, but he had not fallen far before his parachute opened and checked his fall. This machine was probably piloted by Lieutenant Kohlbach of the *Jasta 10* of the Richthofen Circus, whose parachute escape that day is recorded in the Squadron's official history.

Leaving his adversary to float down to safety in the German lines, Rickenbacker

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turned to see a regular dog-fight proceeding between the Fokker formation and the Spads of 147 Squadron. Even as he watched, he saw the enemy leader on the tail of one Spad whose pilot seemed doomed. Lieutenant White, the leader of the flight, also saw his pilot's predicament and at once charged the enemy leader. At terrific speed Spad and Fokker met head-on, and such was the force of the impact that the two machines were telescoped and their broken fuselages fell swiftly down, still locked together, to crash on the banks of the Meuse. White, who had seven victories to his credit, had deliberately rammed the Fokker to save his pilot's life. The loss of their leader seemed to demoralise the remaining German pilots, who broke off the fight, but they had prevented the Americans from their attack on the Dun balloons.

### Surrender in Mid-air

**RICKENBACKER** went from strength to strength in those last hectic days of October, destroying eight more 'planes to bring his record of E.A. to twenty-six. His last victory was a curious affair and worth retelling. He had surprised a Fokker scout harassing a D.H.4—which, incidentally, was the only American-built 'plane to see service at the front—and before the enemy pilot could turn to meet him he was in a favourable position on his tail. At the first sound of Rickenbacker's guns, the Fokker zoomed, expecting the Spad to pass beneath him. But Rickenbacker was too old a hand to be caught by this trick and he followed the Fokker in an identical zoom.

Then disaster befell the Fokker pilot. He stalled on the top of his loop and hung there, tail down, in a helpless position. To add to his troubles, his engine also stalled and he began slipping into a tail-spin with the watchful Rickenbacker waiting for him to come out on

an even keel. With the American sitting right on his tail, with guns trained on his back, the German pilot was compelled to fly his machine across the lines, after which Rickenbacker shepherded him down on to a convenient field. Unfortunately, Rickenbacker was robbed of his chance of capturing the Fokker intact, for another Spad appeared on the scene just as the German was about to land, and fired on the helpless Fokker, which overshot its mark and crashed in rough ground at the edge of a wood.

### America's Gallant Record

**FOUR** years of warfare were now taking their toll of Germany's morale, and her armies were retreating across France under the terrific pressure of the Allied advance. Up to within twenty-four hours of the Armistice her pilots continued to fly, however, and on November 10th an American pilot brought down a Fokker scout—the last confirmed victory of the War.

In the seven months of her Flying Service's existence, America had lost some 300 pilots, while a similar number had been killed in training. The total number of victories gained has never been fully substantiated, but, without question, the most successful fighting squadron was No. 94, which destroyed sixty-nine enemy aircraft and drove down many more out of control. In October, America had formed a night-flying Camel squadron to combat the German bombers which were raiding French towns, but the War was over before this squadron could prove its worth.

Considering that America had no fighting aircraft of her own but had to rely on equipment, much of which was obsolete, supplied by her Allies, the record of her Air Service must ever constitute a gallant and memorable chapter in the heroic history of the War in the Air.

Remember to Read—

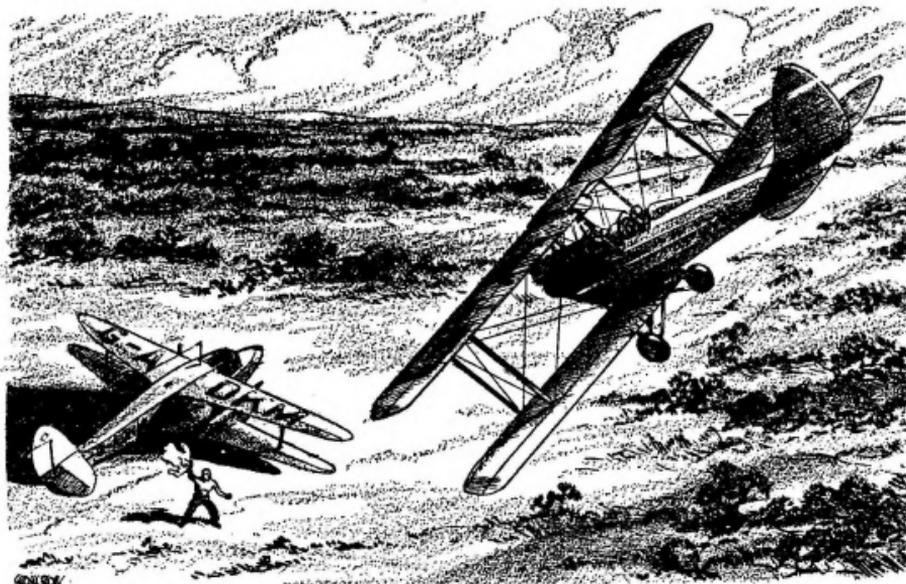
### THE GAS COW

A Grand Adventure of Britain's War-time Airship Service

By G. M. BOWMAN

—In Next Month's Issue

# RETURN TO SENDER



*A man was standing beside a stranded aeroplane, waving his shirt*

**The Short Story of a Man who Staged the Perfect Murder  
by Air and then Found Himself Betrayed by the One Clue  
He Didn't Leave Behind**

**By WILFRID TREMELLEN**

**W**HAT I'm tellin' you, Bright Boy, is this," "Fixer" Calman was saying: "There ain't only enough trade for one aeroplane in this camp—and that's mine. Ain't that so, Fat?"

Fat Fred, the storeman, waved a podgy hand in front of his face in an effort to disperse the clouds of sandflies.

"It's jest as you say, Fixer," he observed with oleaginous loyalty.

Dick Sherald gave a glance round. All the miners had by this time wandered back to the gold-diggings; he was alone with Fat Fred and Calman. His eyes came to rest on his little Moth aeroplane that stood out there in the sweltering sunshine beside Calman's big twin-engined Dragon. He wished, now, he had taken-off before the diggers had gone.

"What's more," Calman supplemented, "we don't want no new fellers hanging round here. Does Bright Boy get that?"

Dick Sherald reddened; he felt his temper beginning to rise.

"Just understand this, Calman," he retorted. "If I set up here, I shan't be selling a single one of the things you sell. I've got my own line, see?" He turned to go.

The partners exchanged covert glances.

"So Bright Boy has discovered something new in the way of stores, hey?"

"Yes, he has!" snapped Dick Sherald and, turning his back, he walked over to his machine.

"Did you hear that, Fat?" Calman's eyes flickered as he watched the young man climbing into his cockpit.

## AIR STORIES

"But what did he mean, Fixer?" The fat man's indignation caused fresh streams of perspiration to roll down his cheeks. "We've got everything 'ere, we 'ave; whisky, Cambridge sausages, lamb an' green peas, 'errings in tomatersauce—everything you can find in a tin. No wonder 'alf the gold dust found in Gilpin's Creek finds its way 'ere!"

"Not so much clap-trap about the profits," snarled Calman. "Do you want every little whipper-snapper with an aeroplane flying over here to set up store?"

"But go and ask 'im, Fixer!" insisted his partner. "Go and ask him what he reckons to do!"

Already the engine of the Moth could be heard ticking over. For a second the big man hesitated, and then, in spite of the grilling heat, he broke into a loping run which brought him alongside the other's cockpit.

"See here, kid!" he began. "D'you know why they call me 'Fixer' Calman? It's because I always fix anyone that gets in my light. Now if you're thinking of coming snooping round here selling things, just look out for yourself. See!"

Dick Sherald grinned.

"I'm not only coming snooping round here selling things, but I'm bringing the girl-friend with me. And what's more, Mister 'Fixer' Calman, we're going to sell better lines than you ever had at your store!"

After which he placed his thumb against the tip of his nose and spread-eagled the fingers. Then, in a cloud of dust, the little machine raced forward and slid smoothly into the air.

THEY had met at the Port Culver Light Aeroplane Club, Dick and Phyllis, and liked each other a great deal. But when it came to talk of marriage, there was the money difficulty; a good round sum was necessary for house and furniture. Phyllis was the brains of the pair.

"Find me," she had commanded, "some mining-camp right out in the bush—a place where everyone is striking it rich, and there's not a bite to eat

except stuff out of tins. Find me that, Dickie, and I promise you we'll collect a small fortune in no time."

"And I've found it," Dick told himself, as he swung the nose of his machine on the compass-course for Port Culver. "But it has its snags."

He kept his eyes on the arid wilderness below in search of some sign of trees or water. But he knew from his experience of the outward journey that there was none. In nearly three hundred miles of scorching sand there was nothing but cactus and scrub. He frowned thoughtfully. He and Phyllis were going to make this trip for the next few weeks twice every day. Supposing they ever had a forced landing? Turning his head right and left in a vain search for water, he was reluctantly forced to admit that a forced landing would spell death for both of them—in one of its most unpleasant forms.

But by the time he reached Port Culver his fears had vanished. As he glided in over the hangars, he spotted Phyllis chatting with Willson, the ground engineer, and waved.

"I've been forgetting old Andy Willson," he murmured. "No machine looked after by old Andy ever did have to forced-land. So what's the worry?"

Phyllis came racing across the aerodrome as the Moth's propeller flickered to a halt.

"What luck, Dickie?" she asked eagerly.

Grinning, Dick elevated two significant thumbs.

"Gilpin's Creek was simply made to try out that scheme of yours," he said. "Every digger in the camp is making his fortune, and all he can buy with his dust is fourth-rate whisky and stuff in tins. You see, Phyllis! In ten trips we'll have bought the furniture! Meanwhile, though, we have got to raise some initial capital. I'll just go over and see if old Andy would like to invest a trifle."

Round-faced Andy Willson chuckled hugely over the project.

"Gosh! That girl of yours is certainly wired for brains, Dick!" he laughed. "Put me down for twenty-five, lad."

## RETURN TO SENDER

But listen!"—he raised an oil-stained hand in warning—"Not a word of this to Calman, mind! We do all his maintenance work—can't afford to lose clients, y'know."

The next few days were spent in telephoning orders, checking invoices and organising the "base."

**C**IRCLING low over Gilpin's Creek so as to display his advertising streamer, Dick Sherald landed on the side of the camp farthest from the store, and jumping down on to the sand, received the parcels that Phyllis handed out to him. Then, while Dick suspended his placards from the wings of the Moth, Phyllis spread oilcloth table-covers over a couple of up-turned sluice-boxes. By the time the miners came straggling up the gully for the noonday rest, they were nearly ready.

"Looks like a children's treat!" chuckled Dick, setting down the last tall vacuum flask. Phyllis was going round with parsley garnishing the sandwiches piled on the *papier-mâché* plates. ("If each man has his own plate, there'll be no grabbing," she had said.)

A bearded giant came striding up, whisked a couple of flasks from the table, and thrust them under his arm.

"Here y'are, Missie; for me and my mate." He shook out a small quantity of gold-dust from a bag and held it out to her. Laughing, Phyllis shook her head. "You pay at the end of the week. Have you read the notice? We only want names now; we trust everybody."

"Good for you, little leddy! That's more than they'll do over at the store yonder." He joined the throng round the placards, which read:

### THE "AIR-WAY" SUBSCRIPTION LUNCH-SERVICE

Iced Beer and Fresh-cut Sandwiches  
Supplied Daily!

Terms of Subscription:

For 1 oz. gold dust we will supply for one week at noon each day:

- (1) One pint-size vacuum flask of Iced Beer.
- (2) Plate of four large Sandwiches; one each of Ham, Cheese, Tongue and Egg.

(All Sandwiches made fresh daily.)

Ten minutes later Calman and Fat Fred, trudging over to find out what had become of their clientele, came upon half the population of Gilpin's Creek standing beneath up-ended vacuum flasks, while the other half were wolfing down sandwiches with a gusto that no man had ever displayed at their store. Phyllis, looking very pretty in a neat white overall, was laughing in the middle of a group clamouring for "double subscriptions," and Dick Sherald was collecting "empties."

"See that, Fixer? See that?" The store-man's voice rose to a squeak of indignation.

For a minute or so Calman watched the scene of festivity, his face dark with anger. Then, with a snarl he turned away.

"Just wait, Bright Boy! Just wait and see what's comin' to you! If I don't fix you and the petticoat, my name ain't 'Fixer' Calman!"

Chancing to glance at his partner's face as they walked back to the store, the fat man felt something like a shiver run down his spine. He knew that mirthless, clenched-tooth grin of Calman's. "Fixer's got an idea," he told himself. "When Fixer grins like that it allus means the nastiest kind o' trouble for someone!"

**T**HE days passed with the "Air-Way" Luncheon Service growing more and more popular. "We shall have to charter Andy's Monospar," Phyllis said, "and take on some of those double subscriptions; I told the men we couldn't manage them for the present."

On Saturday, "settling-up" day, they brought a pair of scales with them to the Creek, and while Dick, notebook in hand, called out the names, Phyllis watched the yellow dust trickle from the leather bags into the pan. There was not a miner among the lot of them but paid up cheerfully.

That afternoon Phyllis smiled happily as the little 'plane, homeward-bound, zoomed over the tall eucalyptus trees and went racing on a compass-course for Port Culver. The gold was safely

## AIR STORIES

hidden under stacks of "empties" behind her seat.

"I saw Fat Fred to-day," Dick chuckled. "He's looking thinner and thinner."

It was over an hour later, when they had covered nearly half the distance to Port Culver, that Phyllis noticed another aeroplane flying in their rear.

"Calman's Dragon," Dick said, with a glance over his shoulder. "Wonder what he's doing here now; he usually goes back long after us."

The other machine overhauled them rapidly, and roaring overhead, disappeared in the heat-haze.

Twenty minutes later Phyllis tugged at Dick's arm and pointed to a small clearing in the scrub away to their right.

"Dickie! That's Calman; he's down!"

"Serves him right," Dick grunted. "But I suppose we've got to land and see what's wrong." He banked the machine round, levelled off, and shutting down the throttle to a tick-over, began gliding down. Below them, a man stripped to the waist, was standing beside a stranded aeroplane, waving his shirt.

"He's lucky," Dick said: "there's nobody but us ever likely to pass within a hundred miles of this God-forsaken spot."

He did not exaggerate; the air route to Gilpin's Creek cut across an impassable fissure in the earth's surface, which land transport had to skirt; the land route lay many miles to the west. The Dragon was stranded in one of the most desolate spots on the face of the globe.

**B**y the time the Moth's wheels came to rest in the clearing, Calman had resumed his shirt and was striding over, a grin of triumph on his face.

"Why, Bright Boy, I never thought you'd be so damned silly!"

"What on earth do you mean?" Dick demanded, standing up in his seat.

"Why, this, Bright Boy!"

A piece of rock, hurled by Calman, shattered the revolving propeller of the Moth into splinters. Furious, Dick leapt to the ground.

"Over there, please, Bright Boy—you, too, Bright Girl!"

Calman had produced a revolver now, and was waving them towards the scrub. The grin on his lean face was diabolical. They watched him climb into their machine and start rummaging. Then the bags of gold-dust plumped down one after another on to the sand.

"Why, kids, you've been doin' better even than I thought!" grinned the big man.

As he dropped to the ground, they saw that he had under his arm the two vacuum flasks which they kept for their own use. Unscrewing the drinking cup from the first of them, he sniffed at the contents and with a grimace emptied the flask on to the sand; it was Phyllis's iced lemonade. Dick's lager beer he drank with an exaggerated smacking of the lips. There was a tinkle of broken glass as he booted away the empty flask.

"With nothin' to drink and nothin' to eat, whatever will Bright Boy and Bright Girl do?" He scratched his head in simulated puzzlement. "Me, I just cain't think!" He began transferring the stolen gold to his own machine.

White and tight-lipped, Dick Sherald was watching his chance for a rush, but so far the revolver had never for a moment been out of the big man's hand. He watched him fetch over a can of petrol and empty it into the rear cockpit of the Moth.

"Just a little bonfire we're going to have," Calman explained, "to keep the kiddies amused."

"Calman, you're mad!" Dick Sherald burst out. "If we don't get back Willson will send out a search 'plane. You must be crazy!"

"Not so crazy, Bright Boy," grinned the other. "I'm giving Willson a message with your love that you've flown over to Simonstown—to choose the furniture for the happy home. Won't be my fault if you get lost. Got a match about you, Bright Boy? No? Then I must use one of my own."

He tossed a light into the saturated cockpit, and there was a sudden roar as the flames leaped high.

## RETURN TO SENDER

**P**HYLLIS, very pale, but outwardly calm, had been sitting in the meagre shade of a cactus-clump, abstractedly turning over in her hands the tin drinking cup which had rolled towards her when Calman discarded the flask. As Calman taunted Dick, a sudden thought seemed to occur to her, and she bent her head over her handbag.

Calman, revolver in hand, was waiting till the fire should complete the destruction of the Moth.

"You may find a little oil left in the sump, when the fire's out, Bright Boy. But that's the only bit of moisture you're likely to find in these parts. So when you get thirsty you can just lie down beside your girl friend and watch the vultures in the sky." He laughed brutally. "They'll be watching you, any way. This time to-morrow they'll be dropping down all around you. Coming nearer and nearer, Bright Boy!" He turned with his foot on the mounting-step of the Dragon, and waved a hand. "Keep the birds off Bright Girl as long as you can, Bright Boy! I'm leavin' her in your care, mind!" He swung into his cockpit.

"Mr. Calman, one moment!"

Phyllis darted forward as the engines of the Dragon leapt into life. Standing very close to the fuselage, she waited till he opened the cockpit window.

"Mr. Calman," she said with flashing eyes. "I just want to say that I think you are the most despicable coward I have met in my life. In spite of that I will give you one chance; get out of that 'plane and help us out of this mess—or take the consequences!"

Calman tapped his forehead

significantly and grinned.

"If you are as light-headed as that now, lady, what will you be like this time to-morrow?" Then, with a roar of engine-power he sent his machine racing over the sand, and slid smoothly into the air.

"What did you mean, Phyl?" Dick Sherald asked, but Phyllis's eyes were on the Dragon, growing smaller and smaller in the distance.

"I mean there may yet be a chance for us, Dickie," she said.

**F**OUR hours later, rescue arrived in the form of Andy Willson's Monospar, with Andy beaming in the passenger-seat.

"What have you done with him?" shouted Dick Sherald, as the engineer pushed open the door.

"'Fixer'?" Oh, 'Fixer' Calman's fixed all right," Andy chuckled. "He's in gaol by this time—and your gold's in my safe, by the way. But, tell me, whose was the bright idea to get the message through?"

"Hers!" said Dick proudly, passing his arm round Phyllis's waist. "She thought out the whole thing. She knew that your men give the once-over to every machine as soon as it lands, so she flattened out a tin cup from the flask—with the message inside—and while she was giving Calman a final talking-to she half-folded it and pinched it tight round the trailing-edge of his lower plane, so that it stuck."

"And it was the first thing I noticed when we began the overhaul," beamed Andy. "Didn't I tell you that girl was wired for brains?"

## "TWO LITTLE SOPS"

*A War-time Song of No. 54 Squadron, R.F.C.,  
sung to the tune of "Hush-a-Bye, Baby"*

HANS vos mine name, and a pilot vos I,  
Out mit Von Carl I went for a fly;  
Pilots of Kultur ve vos, dere's no doubt,  
Both of us flew in an Albatros scout.  
Ve looked for B.E.'s for to strafe mit our guns,

Ven last I saw Carl I knew he vos done,  
For right on his tail there were two little Sops I

Oh, hush-a-bye, baby, on the tree-tops!  
—From "Cinquante-Quatre."

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# RUSSIA'S ACE OF ACES

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## *The Amazing Life Story of Russia's Greatest Air Fighter*

By A. H. PRITCHARD

**T**HOUGH the public in this country know little of the work of the Imperial Russian Air Service during the Great War, our former Allies were, in fact, among the first of the great Powers to foresee the military value of aircraft and, on the outbreak of hostilities, made good use of their air arm, small and ill-equipped though it was. But gallantry is not confined to the nation with the best equipment, and many a gallant Russian fought and died in the War in the Air.

At the outset, the Russian Air Service concentrated chiefly on heavy bombers, but it was also able to muster a number of obsolete French and British scout machines. Flying these slow and ill-armed fighters, a number of Russian airmen achieved the fame of “acehood,”

but the greatest of them all, Russia's ace of aces, was Captain Alexander Kazakov, holder of every Russian decoration and member of the British Distinguished Service Order.

As was almost inevitable in a country that was later to be torn by revolution, Kazakov's record is to-day something of a mystery. Old archives credit him with seventeen victories, yet, only two years ago, the author was informed, from Soviet Russia, that his true victory score amounted to thirty-two. The official historians cannot even agree on the spelling of his name, for it appears both as Kazakov and Kazakoff. Nor are records available to give the date or place of his birth, and he first enters military history late in 1913 as a captain in the Imperial cavalry.

## AIR STORIES

### A Victim of "the Cat"

**KAZAKOV** must have entered the Air Service sometime in June, 1914, for we next hear of him in September of that year when he had obtained his pilot's certificate at the School of Military Aviation, Sebastapol, and had been posted to fly single-seaters.

Although the date of his first victory is not recorded, the combat itself is mentioned in both Russian and German records, doubtless because of its unique character. It appears that, while at the training school, Kazakov had mentioned to a fellow pupil, Captain Kravtztchik, the difficulties likely to be experienced when they attempted to attack enemy aircraft. As a result of their discussions, they evolved a weird and wonderful invention, known as a "Cat," which was nothing less than a large four-pronged anchor suspended on a long steel cable, the whole contraption being topped by a great iron ball.

One bright day early in 1915, Kazakov took-off in his Morane with the "Cat" trailing behind, and was lucky enough to meet an Albatros two-seater, whose observer let fly at him with a carbine. The Russian immediately let down his "Cat" and, more by luck than judgement, managed to hook it in the German's left wing. The weighted steel cable then lashed out in a wild sweep, wrapped itself round the already damaged wing, and tore off that very necessary member. A moment later the Albatros burst into flames and Kazakov had opened his scoring. The "Cat," however, had so strained the Morane's structure that Kazakov decided that it was too risky to use again.

On February 19th, a few days after the affair of the "Cat," another Albatros crossed the Visla River and bombed the village of Rouzoff, near where Kazakov was stationed. He immediately took-off to attack it, but as he came within range he found to his horror that he had no weapons, even his revolver having been left behind in the excitement. Nothing daunted, he ran his wheels across the German's top wing and both machines began to spin earthwards. Then the

Morane's undercarriage gave way and Kazakov was able to break free, while the Albatros went on to crash in a wood behind its own lines. Minus his landing-gear and with a smashed propeller, Kazakov's outlook was black indeed, but he managed to put the flimsy monoplane down in the centre of his own field and emerged from the splintered wreckage with nothing worse than a few bruises and a small cut in his back.

### A Present from France

**KAZAKOV** failed to score again until late in the autumn when his victim was once again an Albatros two-seater. At this time he was flying an old Farman, and his N.C.O.-observer appears to have done all the actual shooting, though, as was the Russian practice, Kazakov received the credit. At the close of 1915, he was easily the most successful Russian pilot at the Front, and early in the New Year he received a present from France in the shape of a Nieuport single-seater complete with an infantry-type Lewis gun mounted on the top wing.

Within a month he had shown his appreciation of the gift by saving the life of Lieutenant Liniac, one of the many French pilots who had been sent to the Russian Front. Liniac was on a photographic expedition over the Austrian lines when his machine was attacked by two Fokker monoplanes, his observer being instantly killed. Without any sort of weapon with which to defend himself, the Frenchman had resigned himself to his fate, when Kazakov's Nieuport appeared on the scene and sent one Fokker down in flames. The second Fokker turned to escape, but Kazakov fired the remainder of his ammunition after it and the last few rounds proved effective, for the Fokker plunged into a lake. For this feat the French rewarded him with the Croix de Guerre.

By the Spring of 1916, the Imperial Russian Air Service had obtained a large number of cast-off French Nieuports, and ten of their best scout pilots were given the most serviceable of these machines, and placed under Kazakov in

## RUSSIA'S ACE OF ACES

the *Aviatzionny Otriad Kazakova*—the Air Squadron of Kazakov. This group forestalled the idea of the Richthofen "Circus" by a year, and, like its more famous imitator, it was formed as a shock unit, to be used wherever the enemy aircraft were most active. Considering its equipment, the Kazakov Squadron was highly successful.

As was fitting, Kazakov opened the scoring on July 9th, when he shot down a two-seater after a fight that had lasted for nearly an hour. Twice when Kazakov had gained position for a perfect no-deflection shot, his gun jammed and he came in for a terrific pounding from the German's rear gun. Eventually, however, he put a burst through the Albatros' engine and the machine crashed in No Man's Land, its crew scrambling to safety a few seconds before the Russian artillery blew the wrecked machine to eternity.

On the 17th, a formation of twelve German machines bombed Dvinsk, and Kazakov was ordered to intercept them as they crossed the lines on the return journey. Owing to the presence of heavy clouds, the Russians became separated and when Kazakov sighted the enemy formation he had only one companion, Captain Nerkin. Despite the odds, the two Nieuports attacked the centre of the German flight and Kazakov soon had one Rumpler falling in flames, while the machine chosen by Nerkin attempted to escape in a steep dive; so steep, in fact, that its wings came off at five thousand feet. So swift had been this attack that the Russians were away in the safety of the clouds again before the enemy had even had time to fire in reply.

### Two Victories in a Day

THE Kazakov Squadron was very active during August, nine E.A. falling to their guns, three being credited to the leader. A Fokker was Kazakov's victim on the 13th, while the 28th saw him bag a "double." While patrolling the Kovel-Roshishtche railway he met seven hostile scouts, two of which offered fight. Within five minutes both were tumbling earthwards, one in flames, and

Kazakov was heading back for Lutsk with the rest of the E.A. vainly trying to overhaul him.

His next recorded combat came on December 8th, and Russian records report it at some length. It appears that Kazakov attacked a Brandenburg two-seater over Kovel and forced it to land in a potato-field near his own aerodrome. The pilot, Lieutenant Franz Müller, had been killed in the air, and his Austrian observer, Lieutenant Hans Bergen, had landed the machine. Bergen informed his captors that he had only arrived at the Front two days previously, this being his first and last War patrol. Incidentally, Kazakov dropped the following message on the Austrian 'drome a few days later: "*Franz Müller killed. I am alive and well. Please inform my Mother and Bride. Lieutenant Bergen.*"

With the dawn of 1917 and the "sunshine revolution" there appears to have been little flying for some time, and we next hear of Kazakov on May 27th, when he and Captain Agreieff shot down an Albatros scout of a new type. A two-seater fell to him on June 8th, but exactly one week later he was put out of action by one of the new Albatros Scouts, whose pilot placed a neat burst of four bullets through Kazakov's right hand.

Although serious, this wound did not keep him out of action for long, a Brandenburg on July 21st, an Albatros on August 18th, and a Rumpler on August 30th, proving to the authorities that his air-fighting career was far from over. However, he was to score only one more victory as a pilot in the Imperial Russian Air Service—an Albatros, which went down in flames on September 10th—for revolution was rife and a general armistice between Bolshevik Russia and the Central Powers began on November 21st, 1917.

### Flying with the British

KAZAKOV was lucky enough to escape the bloodshed of the earlier revolution, and we next hear of him after the British occupation of Murmansk in 1918, when, with four other Russian War-

pilots, Captains Belousovitch, Modram, Sveschnikov, and Shebalin, he joined the Slavo-British Aviation Group. Here he put in extremely good work against the Bolos and accounted for several erstwhile German machines with his Camel. In October, 1918, when the Bolos penetrated the Allied lines, Kazakov withdrew his men and machines to the Siy Convent. The retreat took two days and nights, with the sledges often buried in heavy snow, the men half dead with cold, and the little force under constant fire from advance parties of Reds. But, so skilfully did Kazakov cover the withdrawal that he lost only two men.

Then, for three days he defended the convent and eventually beat off the attackers in time to rush out his Camels and shoot up a strong force of "Reds" which later surrendered to a battalion of "White" troops and a British light field-battery. For his skill and bravery during these five days, Kazakov was awarded the D.S.O. and promoted to the rank of Major in the British Army.

Early in January, 1919, Kazakov destroyed a "Red" seaplane near Shenskursk, but, while flying low over his victim, he was wounded in the breast by a rifle bullet and only just managed to put his Camel down in friendly territory. He was in action again by April, and his next flight was an unfortunate one, for he was flying as escort to Colonel Vandersby when his superior officer was forced to land in the enemy lines with engine trouble. Although in no way to blame, Kazakov took the loss

of his leader to heart and decided to redeem himself by attacking a "Bolo" 'drome. This he did with such success that no hostile machine was seen in the air for nearly a week.

### Voyage to Valhalla

WHEN the Allied forces evacuated Murmansk in the summer of 1919, the Powers that Were offered Kazakov a post in London, but he refused to accept it so long as his old squadron remained in being.

Two of his old comrades, Captains Modram and Belousovitch, then decided to throw in their lot with Admiral Koltchak's White Army in Siberia, and on August 1st, 1919, Kazakov took-off in his Camel from Bereznik aerodrome to accompany for a little way the ship in which his friends were travelling. At a height of three hundred feet the Camel suddenly collapsed in mid-air and Russia's "ace" of aces was plunged to instant death.

He was buried beneath the Northern Lights in the little cemetery at Bereznik, with two crossed propellers as a headstone and a simple white tablet bearing the inscription:

*"Colonel Alexander Alexandrovitch Kazakov 1-8-1919. With his comrades in Rai."*

"Rai" is the Russian equivalent to Valhalla, and surely Kazakov's daring skill and devotion to duty had earned him a high place among that gallant company of warriors.

## HERE'S THE ANSWER

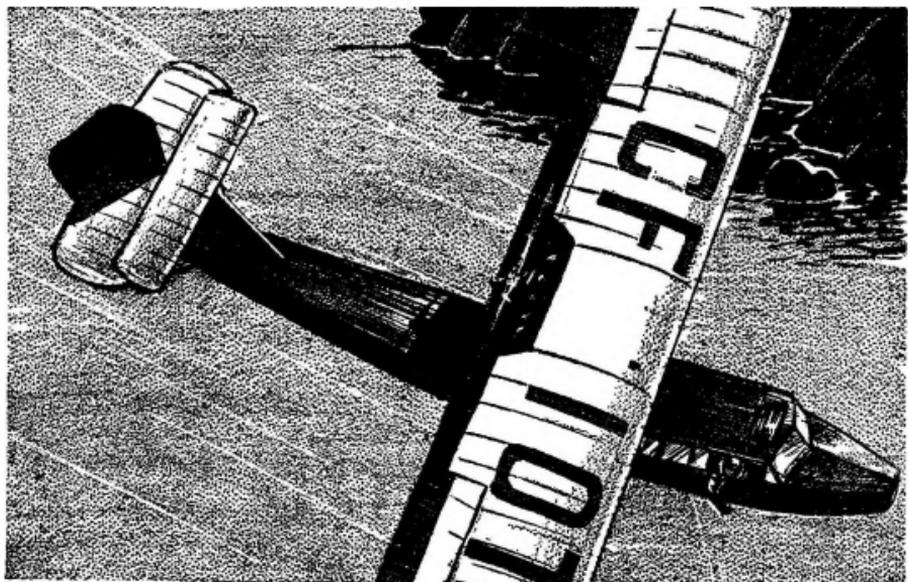
More Replies to Readers' Enquiries

**BLenheim BOMB-LOAD** (Kenneth Wallis, Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A.). The bomb-load carried by the standard Bristol Blenheim is an official secret. Some idea may, however, be gathered from the fact that the machine's useful load, including 278 gallons of petrol, 17 gallons of oil, crew, guns, equipment and bombs, is 4,400 lb.

**INELIGIBLE FOR R.A.F.** (Bengo Krook, Hörby, Sweden). Sorry, but only British-born subjects are eligible for entry into the Royal Air Force. There would be nothing to prevent your qualifying for a commercial pilot's licence in this country, however, and your hundred hours' flying experience in the Swedish Air Force would be valuable in this connection.

**DE-ICING EQUIPMENT** (L. O. Anderson, Dublin, I.F.S.). Various kinds of de-icing equipment are used in this country. Imperial Airways smear anti-freezing paste on the leading edges of the wings and other vulnerable parts. Other methods include apparatus for spraying an ethylene-glycol mixture on exposed parts, and an arrangement of three rubber tubes, covered with an "overshoe," and placed along the leading edges. An engine-driven pump causes alternate expansions and contractions in the tubes and so breaks up any ice that may have formed.

**FRANCE'S FASTEST** (G. Levick, Boscawen, Cornwall). Fastest fighter to go into large-scale production for the French Air Force is said to be the new Dewoitine D.520 single-seater monoplane, powered by a 910-h.p. Hispano-Suiza and armed with two machine-guns and a 22-millimetre cannon. Top speed is in the region of 330 miles an hour.



# THE CASE OF THE "MARY Q"

Some Queer Fish were Caught  
in the Net of the Law when an  
Aerial Fishery Patrol Challenged  
the Mysterious "Mary Q"

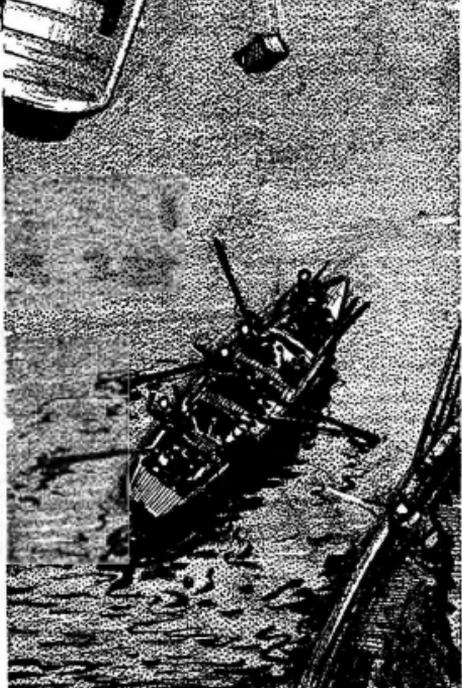
By  
MAJOR L. S. METFORD

## CHAPTER I

### The Voice of the Oracle

"PANCAKE" SMITTY was out of a job again. He leaned back in the shabby armchair, an ancient atrocity whose springs sagged almost to the thread-bare carpet every time he moved, and regarded the tips of his carefully polished brogues as they rested on the window-sill of his bed-sitting-room in a Vancouver back-street.

He wiggled one foot to see if the knot in the lace of the right shoe showed and



*Banking swiftly inwards, Pancake Smitty watched the falling case*

## AIR STORIES

sighed when he found it did, for Smitty was something of a dandy.

He grinned ruefully as he remembered the old happy days in the Air Force when he had possessed a batman all to himself ; a batman whose whole duty was to see that his raiment was spotless, his slacks creased to a knife-edge, and whom he had more than once caught in the act of removing and pressing his shoe-laces.

Good old happy days ; the days when he had earned his nickname. He grinned again as he recalled the incident, for Smitty was a cheerful soul though, at the moment, somewhat harassed by adversity.

It had happened down at St. Omer in 1917. Smitty, though barely eighteen, had been a star pilot, and he had been sent aloft to give a demonstration on a new type of single-seater fighter for the delectation of some visiting brass-hats.

He had done everything the aircraft could do in the way of aerobatics and then, coming in to make one of his spectacular dead-stick landings on the tarmac, a sudden up-draught had caught him with no way on the 'bus, and he had landed, as he put it subsequently, "ten feet up in the air."

The result was a perfect pancake, ending in two explosions as the tyres burst and a third a little later when the squadron commander had addressed him on the subject.

He still squirmed a little when he remembered the incident and "Pancake" he had been from that date forward.

It was raining outside now, and as he watched the tiny rivulets chasing each other down the dingy pane he wondered moodily what he had better do. His room rent was a fortnight overdue and the elderly widow who let lodgings to "single gentlemen" had hinted somewhat pointedly when she had brought him up his letters a little while before that "a bit of a cheque" wouldn't come amiss.

Thinking of that reminded Smitty of the post. Three or four small bills and a curious letter typed in red had been its sum total. For lack of something better to do, he leaned over and retrieved the letter from the floor where he had tossed it.

The envelope was addressed to Captain R. G. Earnsleigh-Smithers, 4086 East 109th Street, Vancouver, B.C., and inside was a curious missive headed in bold black capitals : "Psychical Research Society, Marblewell, Indiana, U.S.A."

The letter was mimeographed in red, with his name inserted at the top.

"Dear Captain," it began. He hated being called "Dear Captain." It wasn't done. He read on :

*"According to astronomical observations and astrology, the day on which you were born indicates that your actions between now and 9.35 a.m. May 11th, should prove most deciding factors in perhaps the greatest drama of your Destiny.*

*"Also look forward to 2.15 a.m. May 13th."*

He skipped a few paragraphs and then read :

*"A series of unusual and fortunate Aspects, starting at 9.40 a.m. May 9th afford perhaps the greatest opportunity you have ever had to consummate a life-long ambition of yours PROVIDED these favourable Aspects are not nullified by actions taken by yourself which would be distinctly unfavourable."*

"Bilge!" he muttered beneath his breath, "likewise poppycock. What on earth do these crazy blitherers know about the day on which I happened to be born and so forth. What else do they say?"

He skipped a bit more and then read the postscript :

*"You will receive the master manuscript by return air mail if you mail us the order blank on reverse side with a remittance of only \$5. . . ."*

"Knew there was a catch in it somewhere," Smitty grumbled as he crumpled the circular into a ball and threw it into the corner.

He rolled himself a cigarette and puffed thoughtfully.

AFTER a few minutes he rose, walked over to the writing-table and studied the calendar pinned to the wall above it.

"Dashed rummy thing," he muttered as he slumped back in his chair. "May

## THE CASE OF THE "MARY Q"

the 9th, 11th and 13th. To-day's the 10th."

His mind instantly reverted to an interview on the previous morning between himself and the Manager of Coastwise Aircraft Limited. It had occurred somewhere between nine and ten, he remembered. They had advertised for an experienced pilot, preferably Canadian, to do fishery patrol work. Mr. Abe Goldstein, the manager, had told him his references were "Okay by me but you ain't no Canuck I can tell by your accent."

Captain Earnsleigh-Smithers had admitted it readily enough, though unable to see why an Englishman couldn't be as good a pilot as a Canadian.

There had been some chat back and forth and Pancake had closed the interview somewhat abruptly by stating that he was as good a pilot as any Canadian and probably far better than any on the roll of Coastwise Aircraft Limited.

Mr. Abe Goldstein, his shiny dome pink with rage, was still spluttering in an admixture of languages in which profane Yiddish seemed to predominate, when Pancake waved his hand airily to indicate that the interview was ended so far as he was concerned and breezed gently through the doorway.

"I wonder," he now mused, half aloud, "I wonder if that could have been 'the greatest opportunity to consummate' and so forth, which they mention. I wonder, too," he added with a wry grin, "if the remarks I addressed to old Abe could be construed as 'distinctly unfavourable' to yours truly."

He puffed for a few moments, then threw the burned cigarette stub after the circular.

"I'm inclined to believe," he decided at length, "that the answer is in the affirmative."

For half an hour he sat there, turning the matter over in his mind, loath to believe there could be anything to it, but equally loath to throw away a possible chance. Then he rose to his feet.

"I hate to do it," he murmured ;

"hate it like sin, but I'm up against it and that's that."

Five minutes later he was striding westward through the rain, the collar of his raincoat turned up, and the brim of his soft felt hat turned down against its onslaught.

Some time later he was admitted to the presence of Mr. Abe Goldstein.

Pancake Smitty had essayed many difficult tasks in his life-time. Some he had achieved, others had defeated him, but not many had come under this latter heading, and it is safe to say that, in these, few would have fared any better than he.

Slight of build, but wiry and with a muscular development which not a few had discovered to their surprise and discomfort, and a lazy drawl which conveyed little of the keen mind and swift judgment behind the cool grey eyes, his tenacity of purpose and the persuasiveness of his speech when necessary were almost miraculous.

And he needed both these gifts on that wet afternoon on the Pacific Coast.

In the end he won ; somewhat to his own surprise, and very much to that of Mr. Abe Goldstein who had risen in his wrath at his entrance and threatened to have him thrown out.

A full hour later he strolled out of Mr. Goldstein's office, escorted smilingly by that gentleman himself, smoking one of Abe's own cigars and with a signed contract and a cheque for his first month's salary in advance in his pocket.

His first act was to rescue a crumpled ball of paper from the corner of his lodgings and carefully smooth away the creases.

He then attached it to the fly-blown wallpaper with a piece of stamp-paper at each corner.

"For future reference," he grinned cheerfully as he went out to supper.

## CHAPTER II

### The Case of the "Mary Q"

TWO days later, Pancake Smitty looked down from the cockpit of his Boeing 204 flying-boat at the sun

## AIR STORIES

sparkling on the gently rippling waters of the Pacific. The Pratt and Whitney "Wasp" was buzzing cheerfully above and behind him and the altimeter showed one thousand five hundred feet. Plenty of height, the Fishery Inspector had told him, and Pancake was content.

"One great advantage of a flying-boat," he had confided to the Irish G.E. in charge, "is that you can put her down anywhere you like without being everlastingly on the look-out for an emergency landing-ground."

"On a rock, for instance," Micky Finnegan had promptly agreed with an Hibernian sense of humour, "or ye kin wind her around a lighthouse if ye've the moind. Sure, Cap'n Pancake, Oi agree wid ye."

"Now listen," Abe Goldstein had recommended the morning before. "We've got a good contract to fly these Fishery Inspectors round. They're Government people and what they say goes. From the moment you take the air, you get your orders from him. You do just what he tells you—savvy?"

"Absolutely, old son," nodded Pancake, "but I'm responsible for the aircraft, of course."

"Yes, yes; sure. You're responsible for that, naturally, but you take your orders from him."

**F**OR perhaps a couple of hours they patrolled up and down the coastline, gliding gently down from time to time to get a closer view of some fishing-boat the Inspector wished to identify, then climbing aloft again into the cloud-flecked sky.

McCormick, the Inspector, was a genial, grizzled man of some fifty years, who had been in charge of a mine-sweeper in the Dover Patrol during the War and what he didn't know about boats and fishing vessels generally seemed to Smitty scarcely worth bothering about.

They sat side by side in the roomy mahogany cockpit, McCormick leaning over and shouting in the pilot's ear from time to time or merely gesturing a change of direction.

"We'll juist gang ower to yon cove

and gie it a wee bit look ower," he shouted at length, "an' then we'll awa' hame tae supper."

Smitty edged over the rudder-bar and headed the 'plane towards the spot indicated, a secluded rock-girt inlet already half submerged in the deepening shadows cast by the setting sun.

A mile away, Pancake's companion showed unwonted interest in something before him.

"Pit her doon, laddie," he shouted. "There's somethin' unco' strange doon there. Sweep her roond at about twa hunnert feet an' fly aroond a bit."

Smitty dropped the nose and a minute later was circling the cove whilst McCormick leaned over the cockpit muttering to himself.

Presently he straightened up and shouted to the pilot. Smitty closed the throttle and slithered gently to the surface of the unruffled sea.

He taxied alongside an untidy-looking sailing vessel and stopped his engine.

"Ahoj there! What ship?" hailed the Inspector as he rose to his feet and stood with one hand grasping a drift wire.

"Cancher read?" queried an unsavoury-looking seaman who was leaning negligently over the low taffrail. "It's writ big enough, ain't it?"

"Where's your Skipper?" demanded McCormick.

"What's that to do with you, stranger?" queried the other.

"Government Fishery Inspector," replied McCormick, "and I want tae see your papers."

"The heck you do. Wal, you cain't. The Old Man's gone ashore."

"When'll he be back?"

"Didn't say."

"Mate aboard?"

"Nobody aboard but me an' the cookie."

"All richt. Thraw me a rope. I'll wait."

"Wait if ye want, but I ain't throwin' ye no rope."

"Richt," replied McCormick, apparently unperturbed. "Thraw oot your anchor, Cap'n Smithers. It's only about

## THE CASE OF THE "MARY Q"

five fathoms hereabouts. T'Hades wi' his auld rope."

The little anchor went overboard with a splash and Smitty hauled in the slack and belayed it round a small cleat bolted to the nose of the cockpit.

The flying-boat swung gently round till it faced into the faint breeze which was blowing off-shore and the two settled down to wait.

The man on deck continued to lean against the rail, chewing steadily and saying no word. So quiet was it that the regular plop of his periodical offering of tobacco juice as he squirted it seaward could be heard distinctly.

**F**OR perhaps half an hour the situation remained unchanged, then a voice from the "Mary Q" hailed them.

"How long do you aim to set thar, stranger?" it enquired.

"Till one of your officers returns," stated McCormick calmly.

"Guess ye'll have a long wait then. They won't be back to-night."

The speaker made a final brown liquid offering overboard and turned away, and the two in the flying-boat heard his heavy sea-boots clumping down the companion-way.

"And what, may I ask, does this betoken?" drawled Pancake.

"I'll tell ye. It's my conseedered opeenion there's dirrty wurrk on hand. This 'Mary Q' as they ca' her, is the auld 'Minnetonka'—porrt o' registry, San Francisco. Ye can see for yersel' the paint on the letterin's wet yet. She's changed her name sae often these last twa years that there's nae keepin' tab on her," whispered Inspector McCormick.

"Ye ken we're on fishery wurrk, but juist the same we wurrk in wi' the Mounties whiles, an' I'm tellin' ye, mon, it's my opeenion we've juist happened on the verra spot whaur the 'Minnetonka,' or whatsoever they bodies choose tae ca' her, land their dope."

"Dope?" echoed Pancake in surprise. "You mean cocaine, heroin, opium— that sort of thing?"

The Scot nodded.

"There's nae sayin' hoo mony o'

they dope fiends are wurrk in along this coast. The Mounties dae what they can but whiles we happen on somethin' that's got by them. I'm thinkin' this is ane o' yon times. I ken this vessel. I ken her weel. I've seen her thrice before this an' each time she's got awa'. This time I'm thinkin' she won't slip off sae easily."

"Well," admitted Pancake. "I rather gather we're in for an all-night session. She won't go off without her skipper, and according to the Ancient Mariner with the distasteful habits, he won't be back till morning."

"That's whaur ye're wrang, laddie," chuckled McCormick softly. "Yon felly we spoke tae is her Skipper. That's auld Bandy Shoveller himsel'. I ken the cut o' his jib, the auld swab."

"Shoveller?" repeated Pancake quickly. "You don't mean that blighter who ramm'd the Coastguard cutter and got away without stopping to pick them up?"

"The same," nodded the Scot solemnly.

In the gathering dusk of the late Spring evening the two men looked at each other thoughtfully. Pancake was the first to break the silence. "What are you going to do?" he asked in a low tone.

"I don't mind tellin' ye, laddie, I'm doin' some to'able deep thinking juist noo," admitted McCormick, stroking his chin reflectively. "But I'm no sae certain hoo tae set about it."

"It occurs at times that the focusing of two great brains upon an abstruse problem is frequently more effective than one," suggested Pancake after a short silence.

"Mon," grumbled the Scot, "if ye'd stick to the English, maybe I could understan' ye better."

Pancake grinned at him in the semi-darkness.

"Righto, old scout. What's troublin' the massive old bean?"

"Listen; when we firrst glimps'd yon vessel, I could see fower or maybe five fellies aboard. When we cam' doon, this auld fox, Shoveller, must have sent

them a' below for no dinghy left her side.

"As sure as my name's Dave McCormick, the deevil's gangin' tae slip anchor and push off wi' his auxiliary engine juist as soon as it's darrk, trustin' tae dodge us i' the murrk. My idee is tae get aboard somehow while you go off in your flying-machine for the Mounties."

"The scheme is not entirely without merit," Pancake admitted after due thought, "but I can improve on it. As sure as God made little apples, they're keeping a good look-out, and as soon as you start climbing aboard you'll be seen by somebody and a reception committee will give you a good hearty welcome on the napper with a belaying-pin or a monkey-wrench or both."

"I had thocht o' that," admitted McCormick, "but I can see nae ither plan."

Pancake grinned and whispered in his ear.

"Mon; ye're a fair genius," was the Scot's comment in a tone of awed admiration. "I didna' think ye had it in ye. Juist comes o' judgin' by appearances which are unco' deceevin' at times."

With which equivocal compliment Pancake was quite content.

### CHAPTER III

#### Flight of Rescue

SOME time later, when only the shadowy outline of the "Mary Q" was visible, two hard-breathing individuals silently lowered a tiny collapsible raft over the side of the flying-boat. As McCormick climbed overboard and seated himself gingerly in the middle, he confided to his companion in a breathless whisper:

"Mon, I never kenned before what an awfu' lot o' puff it takes to blow up a rubber raft. 'Tis a peety ye forgot the pump. Gang awa' noo, mon, gang awa' as soon as ye can, and guid luck tae ye. Sure ye can find the way back?"

Pancake nodded reassuringly and turned to the starting crank as McCor-

mick paddled himself silently away from the hull of the aircraft.

But after filling the cylinders, and just as he was about to switch on, Smitty hesitated. The sudden thought had come to him that if he started his engine now in that narrow inlet, the wash would almost certainly swamp the Fishery Inspector's frail raft. Therefore he unstrapped a broad-bladed paddle from the side of the cockpit and bent to the task of putting more distance between them before starting the "Wasp."

After five minutes' exertion he considered he was far enough away and shipped his paddle.

"Mon," came a hoarse whisper in tones of pained remonstrance. "Ye've clean forgot your anchor."

Smitty nearly fell overboard as he jerked himself to his feet and peered about him. Faintly visible in the darkness was a nebulous blur which he identified as McCormick in the middle of his raft, rather suggestive of a poached egg floating in space.

On the opposite side he could make out the outline of the "Mary Q." He had not progressed a yard with all his exertions and he swore under his breath at the stupidity of his mistake as he hauled the anchor in hand over hand. Then he bent to the paddle again.

Suddenly the deep bark of the exhaust of a powerful marine engine smote upon his ears, echoing and re-echoing from the mountains which girdled the tiny inlet, and he knew at once that the Skipper of the "Mary Q" was putting to sea.

He hesitated a moment, undecided what to do, whilst the tiny drops tinkled like glass as they dripped from the paddle suspended in mid-air.

It seemed impossible that McCormick could have succeeded in boarding the vessel in the short time since he had spoken to him and he cursed again at his mistake, which might well prove costly.

Should he stop and look for the Inspector or go on? Then he remembered Abe Goldstein's recommendations. Well, he had got his orders, and it was up to him to carry them out. Dropping

## THE CASE OF THE "MARY Q"

the paddle on the floor-boards he switched on and twisted the crank. The "Wasp" started at once, and as he dropped into his seat and fingered the controls, he looked about him for his bearings.

Something large and dark with a white plume frothing at her bows was boring down upon his starboard quarter and he jabbed at the throttle frantically. The engine coughed for an instant then settled down to a full-throated roar, but still the "Mary Q" tore on towards him.

He pumped the stick back and forth, trying to urge the boat onto her step, although he sensed he had not yet gained sufficient speed. But he had to do something; there was murder—stark murder in the rushing black shape—a white bow-wave curling ahead of a shapeless mass a little blacker than the surrounding darkness, overtaking him remorselessly.

The throttle was wide open against the stop now, and as the flying-boat's speed rapidly increased he breathed more freely; the "Mary Q" was dropping astern and the fate of the unfortunate Coastguard cutter would not be his. But even as Smitty reassured himself on this point, an orange flash jutted from the ship's superstructure, then another and yet another. He ducked instinctively as a whining slug struck a strut above his head and ricocheted away over the water, then grinned reflectively at memories of other days in France when similar sounds had been vastly more common events.

The flying-boat was on her step now and he jockeyed the stick to get her into the air, but the still water, with scarcely a ripple to disturb the surface, sucked at the polished mahogany hull as if loath to release it.

Then he felt the upward surge as he fought free and circled once to see if anything were visible upon the surface of the inlet.

He saw the creaming wash of the "Mary Q" as she ploughed swiftly out to sea and wondered at the speed such an ungainly-looking hull could achieve. Such a powerful engine as she must have

aboard was scarcely necessary, he considered shrewdly, in a peaceful halibut fishing-boat with no illegal affiliations. It rather looked as if McCormick had been right.

**A**UTOMATICALLY Pancake Smitty plotted the approximate course of the "Mary Q" and made a note of the time. Then he turned south down the coast and headed towards Vancouver.

He ducked his head under the cowlings, slipped on his earphones and plugged in, hesitating a moment with eyes scanning the fuel-gauges appraisingly. There was much to be done in a very short time and although there was a refuelling cache only a few miles away, he did not want to take the time to visit it. He nodded shortly as he made his decision, and a moment later he was speaking into the transmitter:

*"Roy Smithers calling CAL. . . . Smithers calling CAL. . . . Smithers calling CAL. . . . Oh, hello there! Listen, old bean, this is urgent,"*

he broke off as he heard a tinny voice answering. Then continued:

*"very urgent and for Gosh sake don't go and make a ruddy hash of it. . . ."*

For a few minutes he spoke carefully and earnestly to the operator at the other end, and when finally the voice replied with a laconic "Okay, I get you," he breathed gustily and sank back in relief.

As he sped southward, paralleling the rugged coastline whereon tiny pin-pricks of light flickered and shone at intervals as the door of a lonely cabin was flung open so that its occupant might catch a glimpse of the fleeting 'plane, he scanned the waste of waters ahead of him. Here and there he saw the riding-lights of vessels lying at anchor, but none of them winked the message he was looking for.

He glanced with increasing anxiety at his fuel-gauges. He had expected to pick up the police launch before this, and he dared not venture much further south or he would not have enough petrol for the return journey. He swore under his breath and was about to turn back and

## AIR STORIES

waste precious time refuelling at the *coche* already many miles astern, when he started suddenly and leaned forward.

Someone was working a signalling lamp from a small vessel close inshore. "CAL," he muttered, as he read the call letters in stuttering Morse—"CAL," he repeated. "H'm. Good enough, and just about in time."

He reached for his flash-lamp clipped below the instrument panel, held it over-side and replied, then, circling widely, he eased the throttle back and landed. Taxying towards the shore, he made out the lines of a speedy-looking motor-boat slipping through the water towards him, and switched off his engine.

"Nice work!" he shouted as the craft came within hailing distance. "You people certainly didn't waste much time. Splendid. How many are you? I can manage two easily."

Someone laughed. "Izzat so? Wal then I guess we can manage one even easier. Catch this, buddy, an' we'll tow you ashore."

A light rope whirled through the air and uncoiled at his feet, but Pancake Smitty, swiftly recognising the trap into which he had unwittingly fallen, threw it into the water and jumped for the starter crank.

"Naow then; naow then, buddy. None o' that!" came the curt order. "Take it easy naow. Stick 'em up an' make it snappy. The boys have got you covered."

But Pancake Smitty had no intention whatever of either taking it easy or of sticking 'em up. The cylinders were already full and the engine hot, and he reached backward to switch on the ignition. Then, as he reached again for the crank, the Boeing lurched suddenly sideways. Off-balance, he grabbed at a bracing wire to steady himself, recovered, and as he snatched at the crank once more he found himself caught round the waist and flung overboard.

**P**ANCAKE SMITTY came up, spluttering and choking, shook the streaming hair from his eyes and took a swift glance around.

But he had taken the precaution of coming up for air in a very different place to where he had taken his involuntary ducking.

A powerful swimmer, he had kept his sense of direction even as he struck the water, and was now taking in the proceedings from the stern on the opposite side to the boat's crew and completely hidden from their sight by the flying-boat's hull.

Slowly and gently treading water, he raised a dripping arm and got a little support from the bottom of the rudder, then rested easily and listened.

"Went in jest thar, Bill," announced a voice, and Pancake saw the light of a flash-lamp illumine a small oval patch of water.

"Sure; saw him go," corroborated another. "He oughter be up again by now. Yuh didn't knife him, Steve—huh?"

"Naw. Didn' hafta. Jest gave him a heave an' he plopped right inter the drink. He sure oughter be up again by now though. Shine that there glim over thisyr way a bit, Boss."

Pancake saw the light waver to and fro as the crew searched the still waters for him. He shivered, for the water was very cold, and wondered what would come next. He knew by the movements of the sheltering hull there was someone still in the cockpit, doubtless the man, Steve, who had been his attacker.

"Pull around t'other side, Bill," ordered the voice of the man who had been addressed as the Boss. "Maybe the guy's playing possum t'other side."

Pancake heard a couple of paddles slipped into the water, and as the launch was slowly urged round the nose of the aircraft he gently removed himself to the far side, hoping they would not investigate too far astern. Fortunately for him a new idea occurred to the Boss at this moment, for he called to the man in the bows.

"Haul that line in and heave it to Steve as we go past. Make fast to some dam' thing or other aboard and we'll tow the kite back with us as soon as we've had another look for the guy."

## THE CASE OF THE "MARY Q"

Again the flashlight beam flickered over the water from bow to stern and away out to sea, but nothing showed up on the black and oily surface.

"Awright," decided the Boss, "the feller's gone and corpsed himself. Musta' bumped his nut against something as he went overboard. Doesn't cut any ice anyway; jest means they're shy one more blasted snooper, I guess. C'm on; let's beat it ashore. Police launch's liable to come along 'most any time now. Sure was a lucky break we got, intercepting this guy's message. Shoveller'll be tickled pink all over when we tell him. Get her going, Bill."

A few moments later the engine of the launch rumbled into life and Pancake found he was hard put to it to keep his grip on the slippery doped surface of the rudder, even with the launch pulling at quarter speed. Peering ahead, he made out the sandy shoreline some distance away and thought he could just manage to hold on until they reached it.

For a little while he succeeded, and though his arms were tired and his fingers stiff with the cold, he held on with dogged tenacity. Suddenly the rumble of the engine rose to a higher pitch and as the aircraft surged forward under the increased propeller thrust, he felt the rudder pulled from his grasp.

Treading water, he looked about him, and caught sight of a searchlight beam scudding over the surface of the water paralleling the shore. He swore to himself, opened his mouth to shout, and swallowed sea-water instead.

"The police-boat," he coughed. "So that was the reason for the sudden burst of speed. Not," he thought, "that it will be of much help to yours truly. Dam' nuisance," his thoughts ran on as he struggled slowly and yet more slowly in the wake of the fast-disappearing flying-boat and its captors. "I'd like to have had a chance to burn that—oh, dam'—that Psychi—psychic—Research—oh, hell!"

Captain Earnsleigh-Smithers, swallowing another mouthful of very salt water, threw up his arms and went under. Once—twice—three times his head broke

the surface, and he gulped in gasping mouthfuls of air. Then he stayed under for a very long time.

### CHAPTER IV

#### McCormick Takes a Hand

LATER that night the "Mary Q" churned into the rock-girt inlet with the sandy beach towards which the Boss, a few hours earlier, had towed Pancake Smitty's flying-boat. She dropped anchor and a dinghy was promptly lowered. Into this five men scrambled and rowed ashore.

At the water's edge they were met by the Boss—who, after recounting the evening's success in tones of high satisfaction, led the way to the flying-boat, now anchored in the lee of a mighty rock surmounted by a lone fir tree, where no glimmer of the new-risen moon could shine upon her satiny yellow dope.

"Man!" exploded Bandy Shoveller, smiting his companion mightily between the shoulders. "Man! I couldn't have done it better myself! It's been a great night one way and another. Of course I didn't dare land the stuff; not with that dam' flying-machine around, so I've brought it back till to-morrow, but there's one thing I don't savvy. You say the pilot feller got himself drowned, but what about McCormick? What have you done with him? I've an old score to settle with that old devil."

"McCormick?" The Boss scratched his head in perplexity. "You mean the Fishery Inspector? Never seed him. Where does he come in?"

"You meanter say," Shoveller exclaimed, regarding his subordinate with surprise and some suspicion. "You meanter say he wasn't in the flying-machine with the other guy?"

The Boss shook his head decisively.

"Nup. The flying feller was all alone."

"Wal, that beats creation," puzzled Shoveller, spitting accurately upon the centre of a very dead and brittle starfish. "Where in Hades can the swab be, then?"

The Boss shrugged his broad, sweater-covered shoulders.

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"You kin search me, Bandy," he remarked. "I haven't seen hide nor hair of Mac, though I'm not saying I wouldn't like to," he added vindictively. "C'm on up to the camp," he suggested, "and you kin ask the boys while we have a tot or two."

As the steps of the pair, followed at a little distance by three of the others, crunched up the beach a curious thing happened. From behind a gnarled and stunted fir tree, growing from the midst of a pile of tumbled rocks not far from the water's edge, arose a pale form which glimmered eerily in the moonlight. Taking advantage of the cover offered by every rock or storm-tossed drift log, it worked its way to where the fifth man was seated on the edge of the beached dinghy, keeping a careful watch seaward. Slowly, with infinite caution, the naked figure drew closer, its bare feet making no sound on the fine sand.

Not ten feet from the motionless figure of the watcher, it sank behind the roots of a tree torn from their hold in the earth by some fierce winter storm. Silently it crouched, with muscles tensed for a final spring.

The seaman ducked his head momentarily as he cupped a match in his hands to light his pipe. At that instant the figure darted forward and wound his arms around the smoker's neck. Taken completely by surprise, since he had expected no attack from shoreward, the captive struggled desperately, but as the pressure on his throat tightened, his struggles gradually ceased until he fell forward limply on the sandy beach.

For a few moments Pancake Smitty, breathing gustily from his exertions, stood looking down upon his victim, then, dropping beside the unconscious man, he quickly stripped him. Dressing himself in the borrowed clothing, he gagged him with a handkerchief, bound him securely with part of the dinghy's painter and dragged him into the darkness of the fallen tree.

Then, running along the beach, eyes scanning the shadows for any sign of the other smugglers, he gained the motor-launch. Climbing aboard, he unclipped

the distributor cover, tore the ignition wires from the plugs and thrust them into his pocket. His next act was to cut the anchor cable of the flying-boat and give it a shove so that the gentle off-shore breeze began to bear it almost imperceptibly seaward. Then he raced back to the dinghy. Pushing off, he rowed out to the "Mary Q," climbed aboard, secured the dinghy's painter and began a cautious but systematic examination of the vessel.

He was sweating now, and for the first time he knew real fear.

"If McCormick isn't here," he muttered beneath his breath, "God knows where he is. Can't give him a hail in case there's some of the crew still aboard. Poor beggar; wish I'd never suggested the raft. Damned crazy idea anyway, but," he added as he crept quietly down into the evil-smelling 'tween decks, "not as crazy as his own benighted stunt."

He knew by the smell of hot oil that he was in the engine room, and lit a match.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed involuntarily as he caught a shadowy glimpse of the huge auxiliary engine. "Gosh! No wonder she's fast! Fishing-boat—my eye! More like a ruddy destroyer."

He heard a slight sound behind him, turned—but not quickly enough. As the match flickered out he saw a menacing shadow loom from the darkness, and threw up a sheltering arm above his head.

As he dropped into unconsciousness beneath the impact of a smashing blow behind the ear, he heard a voice booming as from a vast distance:

"There's ane o' yon blasted swabs onyway! Now whaur's that Bandy Shoveller—the auld devil?"

**P**ANCAKE SMITTY came back to consciousness and a splitting headache to find McCormick rubbing his temples with brandy and muttering viciously to himself.

"Losh, laddie," he exclaimed in tones of mingled relief and self-reproach, "I didna' mean tae dae it. I didna' ken it

## THE CASE OF THE "MARY Q"

was yersel'. But hoo the divil could I ken it was yersel' aboard an dressed like ane o' auld Bandy's men an' a'? Air ye better the noo?" he asked anxiously as Pancake struggled to sit up.

"A shade better," answered the victim, trying unsuccessfully to grin. "But you're a hard hitter, Mac. What did you use on me—an anchor?"

"Noo—noo, mon," replied the Scot seriously. "Naething o' the sorr't. Juist ma ain fistie—that's a'."

"Well, if it's all the same to you, old thing," Pancake suggested, rubbing his ear gingerly, "would you mind—just as a personal favour—would you mind using an anchor next time. Oh, my head! Give me a drink, will you, then we'll push off."

By the light of the smoky lantern McCormick had lit, the two sat facing each other across the grimy cabin table. Between gulps of raw brandy, with McCormick marching step by step with his companion, Pancake told his end of the story, and himself heard how McCormick had succeeded in swarming aboard the "Mary Q" and concealing himself, after slashing the raft with his clasp knife.

"But," Pancake concluded, when he had made an end of the telling, "it was a dashed near thing. I had gone down for, I supposed, the last time, and, you know, it's a dashed funny thing, I didn't seem to mind much—I was so 'all in' I suppose—when my feet touched bottom. I crawled along a little way—somehow—then managed to stand up—I'll never know how I did it, but the bottom seemed to shelve a bit, and my head came out into the air. I've told you the rest and now I suggest we remove ourselves from these singularly foul quarters before we're thrown out. They may have another boat ashore. Come on."

But McCormick shook his head.

"Not yet, laddie. I'll bide here a wee bit langer. I havena' foond the dope yet. I've lookit a'most everywhere but not quite. I'll bide a wee bit langer an' then I'll come wi' ye."

"But Heavens alive, man," Pancake protested. "I've set the 'bus adrift.

Lord knows where she's got to by this time—thanks to your well-meant efforts at murder—but if we find her, all we've got to do is chase off after the police-launch, bring 'em back here and let the Mounties clean up the mess."

"I ken that—I ken that weel," admitted McCormick obstinately, "but I'm findin' yon dope—if it's here."

"Gosh, but you're a pig-headed blighter," Pancake grinned. "Well, I suppose I'm still under your orders—at least according to Abe—so I'll go on deck and see if I can spot the 'bus anywhere. If I can, I'll row after her, taxi back, and take you off. If not—well, we'll just have to start up the engine of the 'Mary Q' and go off in her. But I'd hate to lose the 'bus.'"

**B**UT Pancake Smitty's luck held good, for on arriving on deck he saw the trim outlines of the flying-boat not a quarter of a mile away, lying motionless upon the silvery water.

He called down the companion-way, slipped into the dinghy and rowed off. Reaching the flying-boat he climbed aboard, made the dinghy fast alongside and bent to the starter crank. The engine fired almost at once and he taxied towards the "Mary Q." Keeping his engine running, he gave a hail and as soon as McCormick's head appeared above the taffrail he unfastened the dinghy and gave it a lusty push towards the vessel's side, where McCormick secured it with a boat-hook. Then he lowered three cases into the boat and paddled alongside. When they were safely stowed away, he grinned up at Pancake.

"I'll awa' back noo, laddie," he shouted above the sound of the clicking valve gear and the swish of the idling prop. "I havena' foond yon dope yet. Ye can tak' me off when ye bring the Mounties back."

"Then what the Hades have you got there?" roared Pancake in stupefied amazement as the Scot backed water.

"Yon's whusky," he shouted back, paddling with an oar at the stern. "Too

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guid for the likes o' Bandy Shoveller."

And no further argument which Pancake could bring forward served to shake the stubborn Scot's determination, so that in the end he reluctantly left him. As he opened the throttle wide and surged forward for a difficult take-off in a flat calm, a dozen men raced down the beach behind him. But Smitty saw neither them nor the tiny fountains of water their bullets flicked up around him; he was far too busily engaged in urging the reluctant flying-boat onto her step in that glassy sea.

**S**AFELY in the air at last, Smitty faced the difficult task of finding one small craft amongst the hundreds of tiny inlets and scattered islets which dotted the rugged coastline. Two facts alone aided him. Although he realised his wireless message had been intercepted by the smugglers, it was obvious it had also been received at the aerodrome, relayed, and immediate action taken. He knew, therefore, the destination of the police launch. So far he was favoured.

The other matter was that the moon, being now high in the sky, enabled him to see almost as well as by day, so that if the launch were anywhere within range of his vision, he would be almost certain to spot it.

Pancake Smitty flew as close as he dared to the rocky, tree-girt shoreline, keeping a watchful eye open for the white craft for which he was searching.

In the end it was the occupants of the police-launch who saw him first, and the first intimation he had of their whereabouts was when a blinding searchlight dazzled his eyes.

Promptly he throttled down, made a wide circuit, landed close beside the launch and switched off.

The police-launch throbbed gently alongside and a Mountie in the bows hailed him.

"Something's gone wrong with the works," he grumbled. "Either your information was all wrong or they've given us the slip. Where've you been

all this time, anyway? Thought you'd be travelling south."

Pancake Smitty grinned widely.

"If you fellows had used your rotten searchlight intelligently," he remarked, "you'd have seen me in tow of one of Bandy Shoveller's comic boats, but you kept it straight ahead and missed us."

"Where was that?" demanded Sergeant Thornlow truculently. "We don't want any funny remarks from you flying blokes. Rotten searchlight, be damned! We picked you up with it just now, didn't we?"

"Oh rather; nearly blinded me in fact," agreed Pancake agreeably. "But next time you might remember not to shine it full in a pilot's face. However, that's enough back-chat for the moment. McCormick's on board the 'Mary Q' conducting a treasure hunt of his own. You know the little bay about thirty miles south of here where there's a big bare rock with a fir tree on top . . .?"

"Sasquatch Rock? Sure—we know it," answered the Mountie briefly.

"Well, that's where they're hiding out. How long will it take you to get there?"

"'Bout an hour and a half. I'll come along with you and the others can follow."

"All right, Mountie. Come aboard and don't forget to salute the quarter-deck or I'll clap you in irons for contempt of court, or what have you."

"Funny guy, huh?" grinned Sergeant Thornlow as he clambered into the roomy cockpit. "All right. Switch off. Throttle open. Suck in," he remarked in one breath.

Pancake Smitty glanced over his shoulder as he bent to the starter.

"Why the recitation?" he demanded, pulling the engine over compression. "Seem to have heard it before somewhere."

"Yeah? So've I," answered the Mountie. "Did eighteen months overseas observing in the R.F.C. Ready for contact?"

"Contact," nodded Pancake, cheerfully.

## THE CASE OF THE "MARY Q"

### CHAPTER V

#### The Mounties Take a Hand

"OMIGOSH!" shouted Sergeant Thornlow after some twenty minutes of fast flying. "What in Hades is going on down there?"

Pancake Smitty leaned over the cockpit rim and followed the direction of the Mountie's outstretched arm. Five hundred feet below them and a mile or so ahead, he saw the unmistakable flash of rifle fire in Sasquatch Bay. It seemed to be coming from a small boat lying close in to the "Mary Q." Also, he saw an occasional flash from the deck of the vessel herself.

"They've got hold of a boat," he shouted, "and Mac's holding 'em off. Looks as though we're just in time for a really first-rate scrap. What are you going to do, Mountie?" he enquired with professional interest.

"Put her down and taxi alongside," the other answered briskly. "I'll handle 'em."

"Think you can?" Pancake was distinctly dubious. "They're a hot lot."

"Hot lot be darned. Put her down." Pancake shrugged slightly and closed the throttle. The Boeing touched lightly and taxied towards the two vessels.

"Keep your engine ticking over," advised Sergeant Thornlow, as they came within hailing distance. He stood up, his scarlet tunic plainly visible, and drew his revolver from its holster. The firing from the small boat ceased momentarily.

"Stick 'em up, boys," he ordered sternly. "You're under arrest for suspicion of trafficking in contraband goods."

"Arrest be damned," stormed Bandy Shoveller, standing straddle-legged in the stern sheets. "Push off, Mountie, before you get drilled," and he raised his rifle threateningly.

"That's not going to get you anywhere, Shoveller," said Thornlow evenly. "Put down that rifle."

There was a sharp crack. The dope smuggler had fired from the hip and at that short range he could not miss. Sergeant Thornlow's revolver dropped

to the bottom of the cockpit as he clapped his left hand to his shoulder. He staggered slightly and would have fallen if Pancake had not caught him.

With one hand he dragged him to the seat beside him as he jerked the throttle open with the other. The Boeing sped down the bay with bullets flailing about it. Sergeant Thornlow shouted orders, but Pancake, seeing red, took no notice. He was taking no further orders from anyone this trip. He had taken orders enough and they had led him into this mess. From now on he was going to run this show in his own way. He jockeyed the flying-boat into the air, banked over and came streaking back.

"Ever flown a 'bus?" he shouted.

The Mountie glanced up at him with pain-drawn face and shook his head with a thin smile.

"Well, this is where you get your first lesson. Grab hold."

Thornlow gripped the stick whilst Pancake shouted instructions.

"Hold her steady; that's all you've got to do. I'll see to the rest."

WITH his feet on the rudder pedals Pancake steered the aircraft until it was aimed straight towards the boat whose occupants were still firing up at them. Then, releasing the controls with a final word of caution, he rose to his feet and heaved one of McCormick's precious cases to the edge of the cockpit. Then, balancing it with one hand, he dropped back into his seat and resumed the controls.

"One, two, three," he counted aloud, and gave the case a gentle shove.

Banking swiftly inwards, he watched its descent. Describing a gentle curve it fell with ever increasing velocity and crashed fair amidships as the smugglers vainly struggled to get way on their boat.

That the case, weighing something in the neighbourhood of fifty pounds, went straight through the bottom of the boat, did not surprise Pancake in the least. The acceleration of velocity calculated at thirty-two feet per second squared, swiftly mounted, he knew, to a really astonishing total. But he felt a

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shade of regret for the unfortunate individual who had temporarily interrupted its passage as he bent to his oar.

**L**ANDING once more, Smitty taxied towards the swimmers struggling in the water and switched off. Picking up the Mountie's revolver, he menaced a man who tried to clutch at the side of the cockpit.

"Back to the 'Mary Q,'" he ordered sternly, and, as the man gripped the side, he hit him over the knuckles so that he dropped back, whining for mercy. "Back! Darn you! Get aboard and surrender!"

One at a time, dripping like drowned rats, they climbed aboard under cover of McCormick's revolver; all but one, whose battered body was recovered, hauled up the side and covered with a blanket. It was the man named Steve, upon whom the case had fallen with full force.

"Did you find the dope, Mac?" asked Pancake as he bound up Sergeant Thornlow's upper arm.

McCormick, his back towards them as he kept careful watch upon the prisoners, grunted.

"I havena'," he said briefly. "They bodies interrupted me sairly." And he relapsed into silence, nor would he say any more on the subject.

Some time afterwards, when the police-launch churned alongside with reinforcements, Pancake Smitty and McCormick took-off in the Boeing on their return trip.

"Why," Smitty enquired as they settled back comfortably, "were you so frightfully keen to discover the alleged dope, Mac?"

"Mon," replied the other dourly, "there's an unco' guid rewarrrd for ut," and said no more until some time later, when, with fuel tanks completely drained, Pancake was forced down on the water. Then he turned to his companion with a question.

"Hae ye a screwdriver or something o' the like aboard? A wee drappie wad dae us baith nae harrm in this emairgency."

Pancake fished in a locker and produced a cold chisel and a hammer.

**S**OME two hours later the "Mary Q" hove in sight and took them in tow. They berthed as the stars were paling before the first grey tints of dawn.

"Did ye find ony dope, Sairgeant Thornlow?" queried McCormick with a queer glint in his shrewd grey eyes.

"We have not," replied the Mountie sourly as he nursed his bandaged arm. "But we shall."

"I hae me doots," responded McCormick with a broad grin. "Yon whusky cases were filled wi' little tin packages o' opium an' Smitty an' me are pittin' in for the rewarrrd."

Somewhat later in the day, a smartly dressed customer entered a picture shop in Granville Street, Vancouver. From his breast pocket he produced a type-written sheet—much creased. Little strips of stamp paper adhered to its four corners.

"I want you," he announced to the assistant who came forward, "to iron this important document out very carefully and then enclose it within a chaste frame of your fairest gold. Treat it with deep respect, my friend, for it portendeth much of value."

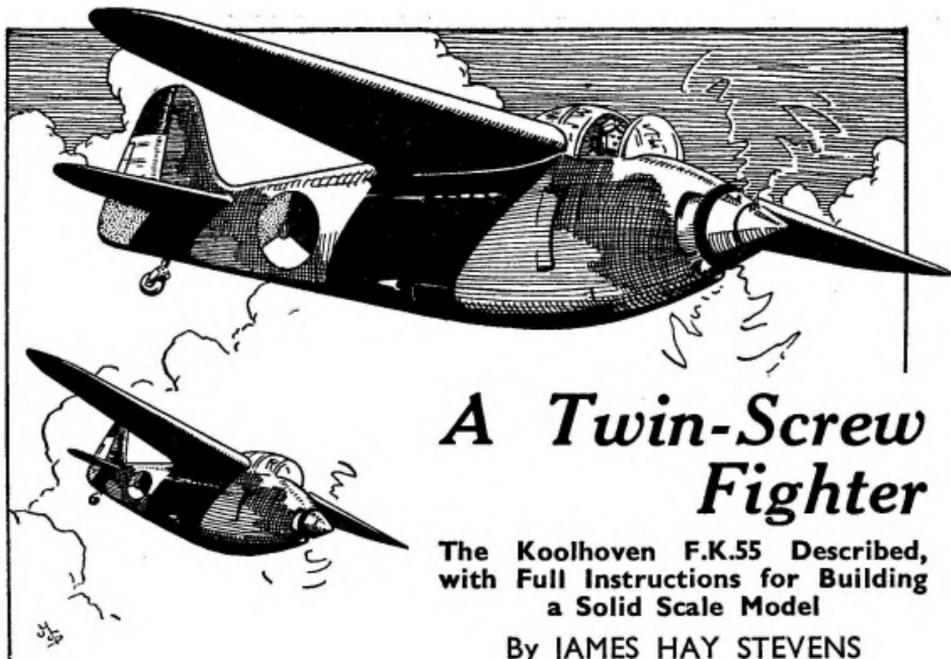
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## A Twin-Screw Fighter

The Koolhoven F.K.55 Described, with Full Instructions for Building a Solid Scale Model

By JAMES HAY STEVENS

**T**HIS unusual-looking twin-airscrew single-seater fighter, the Koolhoven F.K.55, was first shown to the public in the form of a "mock-up" at the 1936 Paris Aero Show, where its unconventional arrangement and high estimated performance aroused a great deal of interest.

But although the F.K.55, with its engine beneath the main plane and its oppositely-revolving airscrews, looks, at first sight, an extraordinarily original aeroplane, both these ideas have, in fact, been successfully tried in the past. The Koolhoven fighter, however, represents the first attempt to combine both ideas in one machine.

To say which was the first aeroplane to use either of these features would be dangerous, as some distant experiment of the past might be overlooked. It is possible, though, to recall the Macchi-Castoldi 72bis of 1932 (the present holder of the World's Absolute Speed Record of 440.67 m.p.h.) which has two Fiat engines in tandem driving oppositely-revolving airscrews. The object of this arrangement is to overcome the effects of airscrew torque, that is, the tendency

for the machine itself to rotate in the opposite direction to the airscrew. The problem of this reaction is becoming more and more acute with the high engine powers in use to-day and is receiving attention in several countries.

The Westland Aircraft Works also built an experimental fighting biplane several years ago in which the engine was mounted between the wings and the airscrew was driven by a shaft running between the pilot's legs. The object of this arrangement is to give the pilot an almost uninterrupted forward view and to improve the machine's manoeuvrability by having the heavy engine mounted at the centre of gravity. In the past, such experiments have usually failed because of the weight and unreliability of the shafting, the difficulty of keeping the engine cool, and its inaccessibility for ordinary routine maintenance.

### Speed and Manoeuvrability

**I**N the F.K.55, however, the designer has sought to produce a small, manoeuvrable, controllable machine without in any way sacrificing performance. With the greatest weight at its centre of

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gravity and with engine torque overcome, it is possible to make the machine small, and thereby further increase its manoeuvrability. The cantilever wing is built of wood with a plywood skin. The front part of the fuselage, as far aft as the trailing-edge of the main plane, is built of welded steel tubes. The rear part of the fuselage is a plywood monocoque. The tail unit is also built of wood and is integral with the rear part of the fuselage.

At the present time the F.K.55 is being flown with a temporary fixed undercarriage, though a retractable type is soon to be fitted. The armament consists of one shell-gun firing through the airscrew shaft and four machine-guns mounted in the wings.

The engine is a French Lorraine Sterna liquid-cooled 1,000 h.p. unit, fitted with a special extension shaft and gear-box to drive the two oppositely-revolving airscrews. The radiators are mounted in ducts on each side of the nose of the fuselage, the air entering through slots just behind the spinner and being expelled through slits in the sides of the fuselage.

The performance and weight figures issued by the Koolhoven Company are as follows :

Weight empty . . . . .	3,540 lb.
Weight loaded . . . . .	5,050 lb.
Maximum speed (11,800 ft.) . . . . .	348 m.p.h.
Cruising speed (11,800 ft.) . . . . .	301 m.p.h.
Landing speed . . . . .	65 m.p.h.
Service ceiling . . . . .	33,200 ft.
Range in still air . . . . .	750 miles

## HOW TO BUILD THE SCALE MODEL

### Details of Materials, Tools and Constructional Methods

ON the opposite page there are reproduced to the  $\frac{1}{16}$ nd scale of this series three-view general arrangement drawings of the Koolhoven F.K.55. Should a model to another scale be desired, fresh drawings can easily be made with the help of the scale-rule included in the drawings.

#### Materials and Tools

THE principal materials necessary for this model are :

Fuselage . . . . .	Block of whitewood, $4\frac{1}{2} \times 1 \times \frac{1}{8}$ in.
Main plane . . . . .	Fretwood (birch or satin walnut), $5\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{4}$ in.
Tail-unit . . . . .	$3 \times 3 \times \frac{1}{8}$ in. in one piece fibre.
Undercarriage, exhaust pipes, etc. . . . .	12 in. of 20 swg brass wire.
Cockpit cover . . . . .	$3 \times 3$ in. of heavy Cellophane or thin celluloid.

The most useful tools are the following :  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. chisel ; small plane ; penknife ; oilstone ; fretsaw ; small half-round file ;  $\frac{1}{16}$  in. bradawl ; archimedean drill ; small long-nosed pliers ; tube of cellulose glue and a penny ruler measuring in  $\frac{1}{10}$ ,  $\frac{1}{8}$  and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch. This list is rather fuller than is absolutely essential for a model of this nature, but it is appended as a guide for the tyro modeller's general requirements.

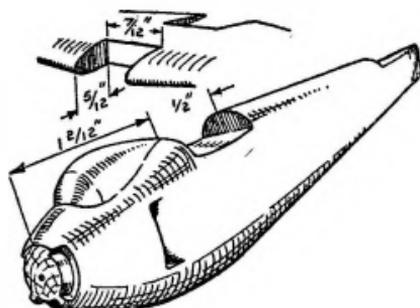


Fig. 1.—The fully-shaped fuselage block prior to cutting off the cabin-top

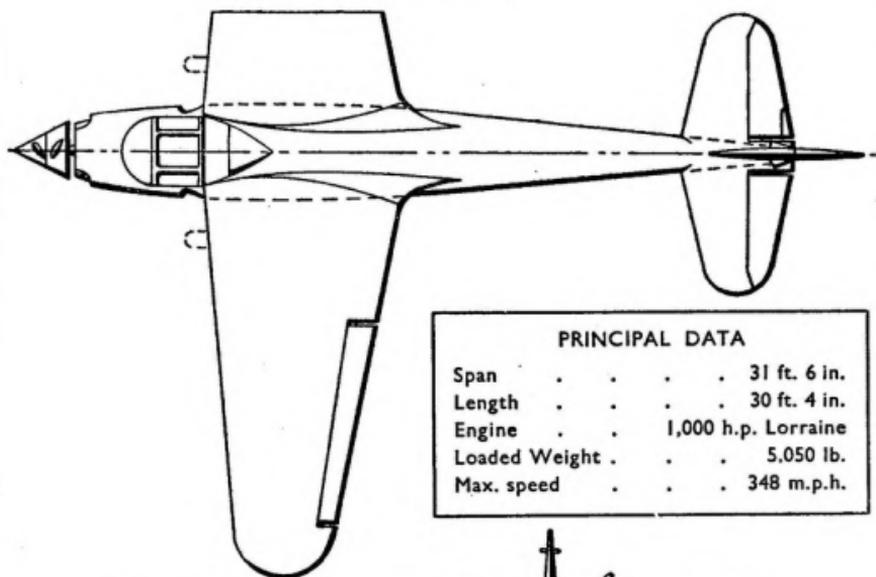
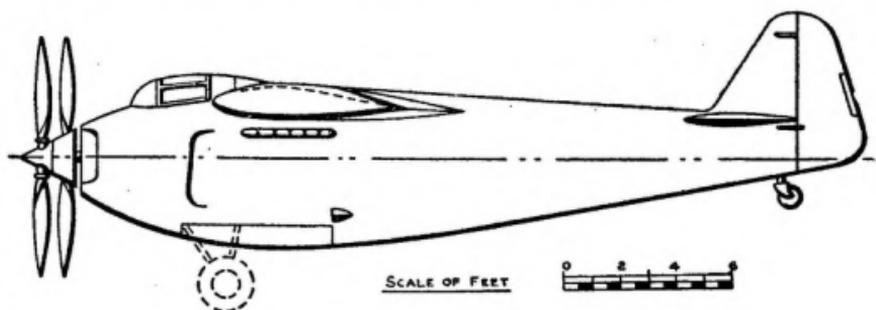
#### Method of Construction

FIRST trace the side-elevation of the fuselage from the General Arrangement Drawing, lay the tracing on the fuselage block, pin-prick the main features and, after removing the tracing, line in the outline with a pencil. Cut away the surplus wood with a saw and chisel. Draw centre-lines along the top and bottom surfaces of the block and, on the top surface only, draw the plan of the fuselage. Again remove the waste wood.

When making the fuselage, the cut-out (shown in Fig. 1) for the main plane must be allowed for before shaping is started.

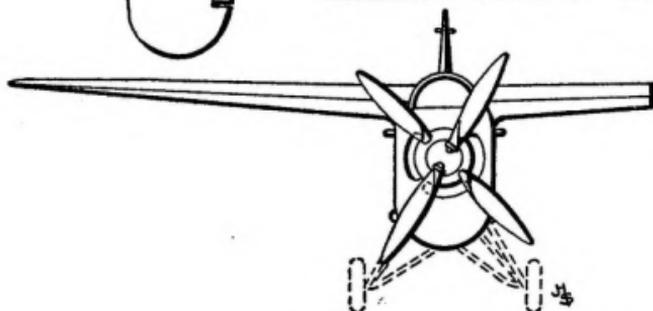
## A TWIN-SCREW FIGHTER

### THE KOOLHOVEN F.K.55 TWIN-AIRSCREW FIGHTER



#### PRINCIPAL DATA

Span	. . . . .	31 ft. 6 in.
Length	. . . . .	30 ft. 4 in.
Engine	. . . . .	1,000 h.p. Lorraine
Loaded Weight	. . . . .	5,050 lb.
Max. speed	. . . . .	348 m.p.h.



A General Arrangement Drawing of the Koolhoven F.K.55 Fighter, drawn to a 1/72nd scale. If a larger-sized model is required, scaling-up may easily be effected with the aid of the scale-rule shown above

## AIR STORIES

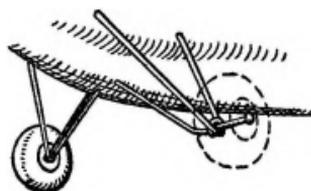


Fig. 2.—  
Fixed under-  
carriage  
made from  
brass wire  
with pins for  
axles

The top and bottom of the fuselage are rounded to a semi-circular section, the sides being practically flat. The slots for the inlet and exit of the radiator cooling air are made at this stage, and are also shown in Fig. 1. Note that in this illustration the cockpit cover is solid.

At this point the piece of heavy Cellophane mentioned in the list of materials is placed in a bowl of hot water and, when it has become limp and plastic, it is formed over the wooden shape on the fuselage. Handle the material gently and, if necessary, re-heat it to get as good a fit as possible—there is no reason why even a new modeller should not turn out a good cover first shot. One point is very important: all celluloid materials are inflammable to the point of being explosive, and many of the new celluloid substitutes are also fairly inflammable, so that on no account should the cockpit material be heated over a flame. Having made the cockpit cover, cut off the former and hollow the cockpit opening.

Now draw the plan of the main plane and cut it out with a fretsaw. Taper the bottom surface from root to tips and then camber both bottom and top with the small plane. Mark the outline of the ailerons with a bradawl and ruler, used as if one were ruling a pencil line. Finish the wooden parts, fuselage and main plane with fine sandpaper to the smoothest surface obtainable.

Next, trace the outlines of the two tail-unit sections (the fin and rudder and the tail-plane and elevator are each combined to make single parts) and pin-prick them on to the sheet of fibre. After cutting out with a fretsaw, these surfaces are cambered with a file and glasspaper, while the outlines of the controls are scored with ruler and bradawl.

Unfortunately, no details have been released as to the form of the retractable undercarriage beyond the position of the extended wheels and the outline of the undercarriage doors. The landing gear shown dotted in the drawings and in perspective in Fig. 2 is the temporary fixed one. This is made from wire "vees" with long pins for the half-axes as drawn in the sketch. The tail-wheel may be made from a suitably sized china bead carried on a wire fork.

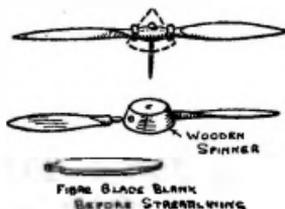
### Method of Assembly

THE main plane is first securely glued into the cut-out in the top of the fuselage. The wing roots are faired into the fuselage with plastic wood, the largest fairing being that on the rear part of the top surface. The two parts of the tail-unit are glued in place and also faired with plastic wood.

The cockpit cover is fitted together with the tail-wheel, undercarriage and airscrew. The two former have already been described. It is worth mentioning, however, that it is quite a good idea to buy cast wheels from a model shop, as the problem of making fat low-pressure air wheels without a lathe is an awkward one. Replica metal airscrews may also be bought and fitted with plastic wood spinners, or, alternatively, the spinners may be made from wood and fitted with blades made from waste pieces of fibre. Both methods are shown in Fig. 3.

Fig. 3.—(top)  
Cast model air-  
screw with plas-  
tic wood spin-  
ner

(Below) Wood  
spinner with  
fibre blades



### Painting and Colour Scheme

ALTHOUGH the Koolhoven F.K.55 has been shown with the Dutch Army Air Service markings, it has not yet been officially adopted.\* Dutch machines are

\* An order has since been placed by the French Air Service so that French fighter markings may be used, if preferred.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

## A TWIN-SCREW FIGHTER

camouflaged with uneven patches of colour in a generally diagonal direction. The colours are olive green, apple green and light khaki. The undersurfaces are khaki. The national markings are a circle with a yellow centre, red, blue and white segments carried on the wings and sides of the fuselage. The rudder has red, white and blue markings. In the heading sketch the red and the blue are indicated by solid black and a dot stipple respectively.

The best paints for models are 2d. or 3d. pots of oil enamels; the colours for this machine being red, white, blue and yellow. The brushes necessary are a No. 5 sable and a small liner's brush—the latter is a long-haired, flat-tipped

brush useful for painting lettering and insignia.

The following rough guide to colour mixing may be helpful. Dark green: blue and a little yellow; light green: yellow with a little blue; light khaki: yellow and white with a little blue and red.

Keep the model free from greasy finger marks, cleaning, if necessary, with methylated spirits or petrol after assembly. Put on two or three coats of colour very thinly, the first along the grain of the wood, the second across it and the last (if needed) along it. Make sure that each coat is quite hard before applying another.

### FOR ADVANCED MODELLERS

## THE ARMSTRONG-WHITWORTH F.K.8

A British War-time Bomber of Dutch Design

AS the initials preceding its number indicate, this aeroplane was also a design of Frederick Koolhoven. Mr. Koolhoven was in England during the War (while his compatriot, Anthony Fokker, was in Germany) designing aeroplanes for several British firms.

The F.K.8 was a 1915-16 general reconnaissance and bombing two-seater. It was originally fitted with a 120 h.p. Beardmore water-cooled engine. In a later form it had a 160 h.p. Beardmore engine. Refinements not incorporated on the early type shown in the drawings, were neat radiators on the sides of the fuselage, a long exhaust pipe and a neat "vee"-type undercarriage. The fuselage of both types was arranged for the stowage of a fixed Vickers gun, observer's Lewis gun, camera and wireless.

The earlier version has been chosen as the subject for this article because it was the more widely used, but the following figures refer to the higher-



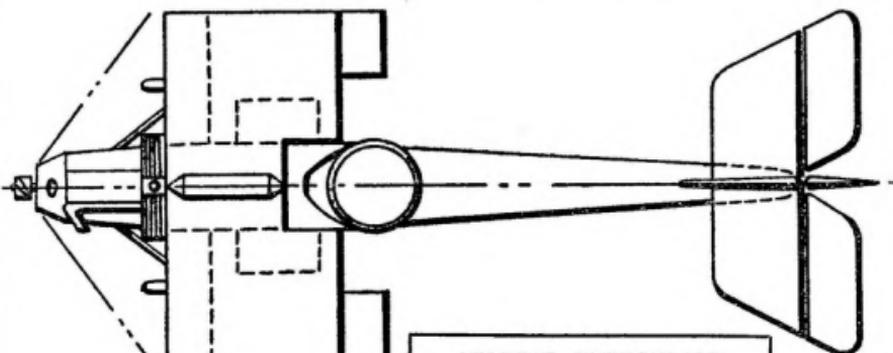
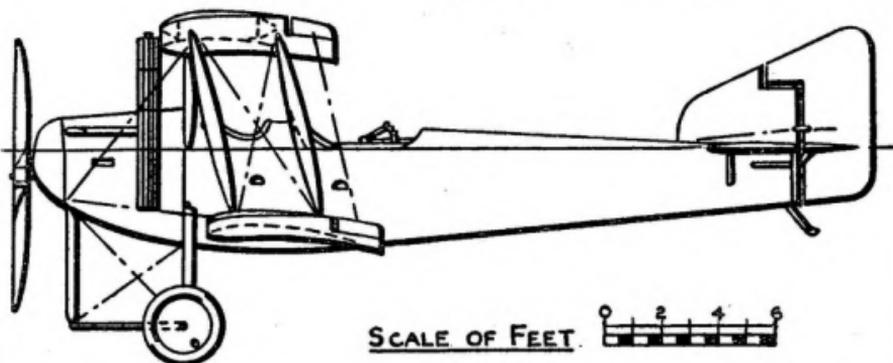
powered type. The data were contained in an official War Office report, except for the two speeds marked by an asterisk, which were quoted by the constructors.

Weight empty	1,916 lb.
Weight loaded	2,811 lb.
*Speed at 1,000 ft.	104 m.p.h.
Speed at 6,500 ft.	95 m.p.h.
Speed at 10,000 ft.	88 m.p.h.
*Landing speed	45 m.p.h.
Climb to 6,500 ft.	15.4 min.
Climb to 10,000 ft.	27.8 min.
Service ceiling	13,000 ft.
Duration	3 hours

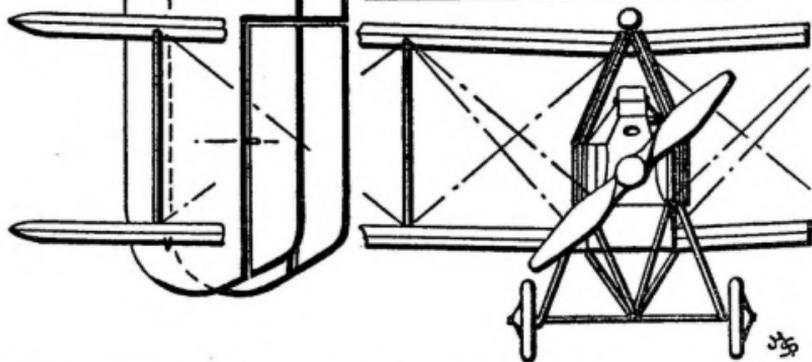
The machine was painted dark green with cream undersurfaces, and the engine cowling was usually grey. The undercarriage struts were green or grey, the interplane ones the yellow colour of varnished spruce. The radiator was black. R.F.C. cockades were carried on wings and fuselage and the rudder bore red, white and blue stripes. In addition to the machine number painted on the fin, there was usually a white squadron identification letter on the fuselage.

(NEXT MONTH: *The Sopwith Dolphin Single-Seater Scout and The North American Harvard R.A.F. Trainer.*)

# THE ARMSTRONG-WHITWORTH F.K.8. BOMBER



LEADING PARTICULARS	
Span . . . . .	43 ft. 4 in.
Length . . . . .	31 ft. 6 in.
Engine . . . . .	160 h.p. Beardmore
Speed (max.) . . . . .	104 m.p.h.



*These Drawings contain all essential data for building a 1/72nd scale model of the Armstrong-Whitworth F.K.8*

# CONTACT



Editorial Offices : Tower House, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2

**W**HY are no R.A.F. machines fitted with shell-firing *moteur-canon*s, when this type of gun is being increasingly adopted by foreign air forces? This is the burden of a question which a number of readers have recently asked us and to which, since we are not the Royal Air Force, it is impossible for us to give any authoritative answer.

As the subject seems to be one of general interest, however, we can at least briefly point out the contentions of the two opposing schools of thought, those who favour the use of a battery of machine-guns and those who prefer the *moteur-canon*, and leave our readers to form their own opinions on the subject.

## Value of Machine-Guns

ADVOCATES of the battery of machine-guns, such as is installed in our Hurricane and Spitfire fighters, contend that fighting speeds are now so high that a pilot, however skilful, will have his opponent within range and sight for little more than a second or two at a time. In that fraction of time, they say, the greater the fire-power he can bring to bear, the greater will be his chance of hitting some vital part of his target. A modern machine-gun can fire at a rate approaching 1,500 rounds a minute, so that in that single vital second while the machines are within range of one another a battery of, say, eight machine-guns, can pour out a hail of close on 200 bullets, at least

some of which, claim the advocates of this form of armament, will find a billet, if not a "bull's-eye," in the target.

## The Claims of the *Moteur-Canon*

THE *moteur-canon* supporters, on the other hand, retaliate by pointing out that the effective range of a machine-gun is not much more than 200 yards, whereas that of a heavier-calibre shell-firing gun is considerably greater. They admit that the *canon's* rate of fire is slower than that of a machine-gun, but claim that this disadvantage is outweighed by the *canon's* heavier shells, one of which could do far more damage to an aeroplane than a hundred machine-gun bullets.

And if you still show signs of scepticism, the *moteur-canon* enthusiast will ask you to consider the case of two opposing fighters of approximately equal speed, one armed with several machine-guns and the other with a *canon*. The *canon*-equipped machine, he will argue, can open the attack at much longer range and might well destroy his opponent without ever coming within the 200 yards' range of his enemy's machine-guns. To which supporters of the machine-gun battery will reply that a target moving at some 400 miles an hour takes quite a lot of hitting—even by a *moteur-canon*.

There, in brief, are some of the arguments on both sides of the question.

## AIR STORIES

Which side is right, if either, must remain a matter of opinion, until the next war, at all events. All that can be certain, meanwhile, is that the R.A.F. experts concerned know as much about *moteur-canon* capabilities as anyone abroad and that if they consider them necessary they will adopt, or may already have adopted them—even though they continue to mount a battery of machine-guns as well.

### Captain Ball's Last Flight

"REVELATIONS" of the mystery surrounding the death, in action, of Captain Albert Ball, V.C., have become so numerous and contradictory in recent years that the following letter from Major Gerald C. Maxwell, M.C., D.F.C., A.F.C., is specially welcome as an authoritative rebuttal of at least one of these alleged solutions. Major Maxwell writes:—

"I was interested in Carl von Schönbeck's statement about Captain Ball's death, as published in your March issue. He says that his patrol, led by Richthofen's brother, Lothar, took-off one morning and that in the course of this patrol Ball was shot down by Lothar. This is obviously incorrect, because the patrol of three flights of 56 Squadron led by Captain Ball took-off at about 6 p.m. and returned about 7.45 p.m., and it was from this patrol that Ball failed to return.

"I was in Ball's flight at the time."

Which seems effectively to dispose of that particular story!

### More Fact in Fiction?

FRIENDLY criticism comes this month from Mr. R. Trebell of Brockley, London, who, as a reader of AIR STORIES since the first number, is rightly concerned with keeping us up to scratch.

"I am another of the Camp," he writes, "who consider the ratio of War-Modern stories well balanced, but I would like to point out that the War stories should be kept in the period to which they belong. Often the twist, the climax, or remarks of the characters have shown things that had no place in the War. Happenings not belonging to that age are brought into the story with only a thin veneer of disguise, the aircraft are handled like Gladiators or Furies with no regard to their weakness as compared with modern aircraft.

"How often has the Camel overhauled the Fokker D.7, outclimbed it, R.E.8's put up unheard-of speeds, B.E.2c's climbed like rockets and so on? So often the whole story depends on these things for its success, yet surely we know better? The limits of the Wartime aircraft were numberless, their defects legion, so why spoil good stories by making them all do impossible things?"

"Perhaps you imagine I am too much of a realist and will not allow the writers any licence at all. Not so, but I often wonder why the R.F.C. and R.A.F. did not wipe the sky with the German Air Force. Certainly, writers make their aircraft good enough.

"For all this, I still devour AIR STORIES with the greatest pleasure when it arrives each month."

We were not conscious of having committed the crimes alleged, but if Mr. Trebell will give us instances of some of our more glaring exaggerations of performance, we'll certainly look into the matter. After all, the R.A.F. *did* eventually wipe the sky with the German Air Force, and we've never yet published a War-flying story which wasn't written by an author who actually served as a pilot on active service during the Great War. But a B.E.2c that "climbed like a rocket"—no, that would be beyond the wildest dreams of even our most imaginative author!

### A Slimming Suggestion

A SOUTH African reader, Mr. W. J. Abery of Durban, Natal, pays us the doubtful compliment of suggesting that, while our heart is good, our appearance could do with some improvement!

"If you've no objection," he writes, "I should like to suggest one small improvement to an otherwise excellent magazine—couldn't it be printed on paper worthy of the quality of the stories?—something thinner and smoother, so that it would be more compact and easier to bind.

"And couldn't you persuade someone to write a story about the South African Air Force? I am sure there is lots of scope in this subject for someone with a flair for modern air force stories.

"Meanwhile, '*alles von dibete*'—and may your undercarriage never fail to unfold!"

To print a magazine the size of AIR STORIES on smooth paper would greatly increase production costs and would consequently involve an increase in selling price—which would not be popular. So, as we can't afford to be pretty, we'll continue to be plain but good.

As for a story with a South African Air Force setting, we've been looking for years for someone with the necessary experience to write one. We haven't succeeded in finding him yet, but we are constantly being offered stories from all parts of the world—and there's always another post to-morrow!

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