

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

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MAY

BILL BARNE'S

Air Adventurer

10¢



MORALES OF SAMERRA

BY GEORGE L. EATON

F. TINSLEY

GO DACE AND NOW

WHO WANTS TO

*marry
a
girl?*



CERTAINLY, there is a girl you want to marry! But how are you ever going to make this dream come true on the money you're making? The wonder is not new to you, is it? Quit wondering—start acting! Thousands of men have acted by making themselves worth more money by

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Volume III
Number 4

BILL BARNES

MAY
1935

AIR ADVENTURER

Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

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Contents

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(Please print plainly)

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Dr. T. A. Ellis

create a toxic condition. I can truthfully commend the use of Cystex."

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30x4.50-21		2.40 .85	31x4	2.95	.85
28x4.75-19		2.45 .95	32x4	2.95	.85
29x4.75-20		2.50 .95	33x4	2.95	.85
29x5.00-19		2.85 1.05	34x4	3.25	.85
30x5.00-20		2.85 1.05	32x4 1/2	3.25	1.15
28x5.25-18		2.90 1.15	33x4 1/2	3.45	1.15
29x5.25-19		2.95 1.15	34x4 1/2	3.45	1.15
30x5.25-20		2.95 1.15	30x5	3.65	1.35
31x5.25-21		3.25 1.15	33x5	3.75	1.45
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29x4.50-20	2.35	0.85	30x3 1/2	2.35	0.75
30x4.50-21	2.40	0.85	31x4	2.95	0.85
29x4.75-19	2.45	0.95	32x4	2.95	0.85
29x4.75-20	2.50	0.95	33x4	2.95	0.85
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.05	34x4	3.25	0.85
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.05			
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15	HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES		
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28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15	34x5	4.25	2.00
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15	32x6	7.95	2.75
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Illustration

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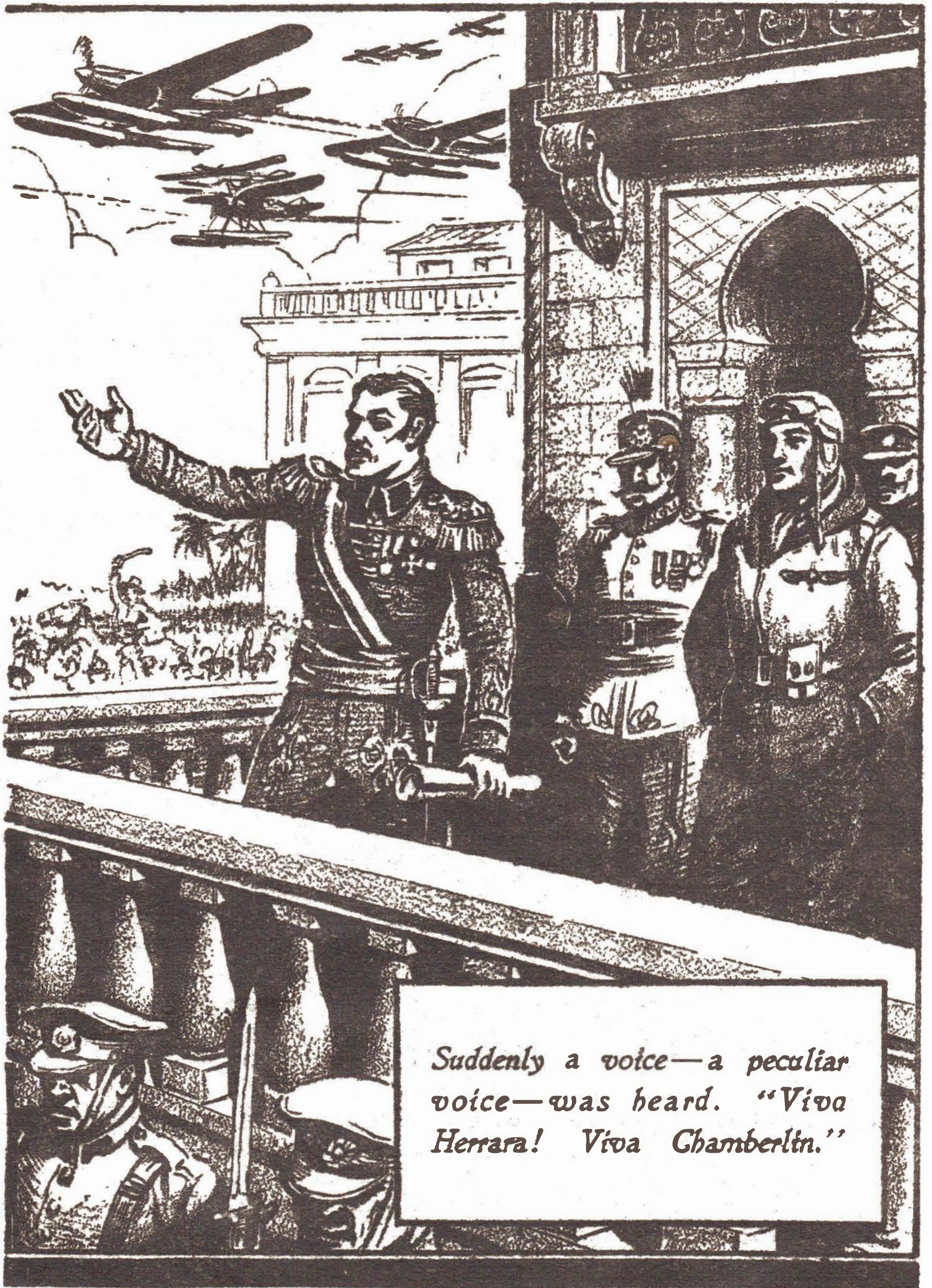
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MORALES OF SAMERRA

BY
GEORGE L. EATON





Suddenly a voice—a peculiar voice—was heard. “Viva Herrera! Viva Chamberlin.”

MURDER and violent death seemed to lurk in the shadows of every narrow street, in each of the dark, shabby houses that made up that section off the northeast corner of Central Park that is known as the Spanish quarter.

Here descendants of pure Castilian blood mingled with Negroid Portuguese, with half-caste natives of the West Indies, with men and women whose pigments ranged from jet-black through brown and yellow to the fairest-skinned Anglo-Saxon.

This was the melting pot of the West Indies. Here intrigue and treachery, loyalty and bravery rubbed elbows. Here the high and low of Central and South America met, asking only to be allowed to live according to their own code of life.

On a narrow, dark street in this section two men stood in the frowzy doorway of a brick house that was lighted by the dim glare of a fly-specked electric bulb. They were young men with flashing white teeth, well-groomed. Their brown eyes were filled with laughter and the recklessness of youth.

A peephole slid back in the massive, scarred door in answer to their knock. An eye glittered in the tiny opening for a moment. The door swung silently open and closed on them with a grim and hollow sound. A pock-marked individual led them down a gloomy corridor, opened another door and ushered them into a room rank with the smell of red wine and garlic.

From the balcony that ran around the smoke-laden room came the sudden strains of music. A voluptuous young woman advanced to the center of the cleared space in the middle of the room. She danced with a rare beauty and grace. Her high heels pounded the stone floor. The castanets in her hands kept time to the music.

Back in the dimness of the room, at a table near the dance floor, four swarthy

silent men watched her. Their faces showed neither approval or disapproval. Their features were set like the expressions one sees on the faces of stone images.

But while they watched the dancer they also watched three men who sat at a table far back in a corner of the room. The three men were talking in lowered tones, glancing about them often to be sure they were not overheard.

Miquel Morales, the youngest of the three, was a strikingly handsome man. His thick, black hair swept straight back from his olive-skinned forehead. His eyes were a deep blue and alive. His nose was straight and his mouth was broad and humorous. The hand that held his glass was long and lean and muscular. The poise of his head made you aware of his assurance, an assurance without arrogance. He had the bearing of the true Castilian who sometimes wandered into this strange section of New York.

The second man, Saul Cox, was tall, gaunt, cadaverous. His eyes were lumps of steel-blue ice. His face was an immovable mask of imperturbability. He sat quietly listening to the third man, an overly stout, gray-haired individual with a clipped, gray mustache. The kind of man you see hurrying in and out of a Wall Street office building each day of the week. Any one could have told that he, Richard Vilas, was a banker. The sort of banker who had attained his present high position via hard work in the South American oil fields.

The two young men who had just entered singled out the three men and took a table beside them. No sign of recognition passed between the two tables. The four swarthy gentlemen across the room exchanged swift glances with raised eyebrows.

After a few minutes Miquel Morales slipped a folded piece of paper into the

cuff of his trousers. He glanced surreptitiously around the room a half dozen times. Then, without seeming to move a muscle of his body he stuck his leg straight out toward the table of the two young men. One of them lifted the folded paper out of the cuff and crumpled it in the palm of his hand.

Twenty minutes later, after the two young men had finished their wine, they got up and made their way out of the dingy restaurant.

They had hardly reached the street when the lights in the place blinked once, twice. Then the room was immersed in darkness. Voices became suddenly shrill. Curses and the scraping of chairs sounded all over the room. The occupants had seen the lights go out in Yucatan Maria's before. When they had come on again they had seen that the life had gone out of a man's body.

Above the babble of Spanish and patois a scream sounded. A horrible, high-pitched scream that ended in a choked gasp and a rasping gurgle.

The tall, cadaverous man with the icy eyes swung around his table and bore young Miquel Morales to the floor. From that position, a gun in his hand belched orange flame at a barely discernible figure that groped above them. Another gun roared not ten feet away. Lead splattered against the stone floor and into the wall above their heads. A whistle shrilled; men shouted and cursed; women screamed.

When the lights came on a few moments later, the room was nearly empty of people. The few that were left were milling toward the entrance. But Richard Vilas, the overly stout man with the gray hair and gray-clipped mustache was still sitting at his table. He was sitting with his head slumped forward on his chest, his arms dangling grotesquely at his sides. A smear of crimson had spread over his shirt front.

From a spot directly over his heart the carved handle of a knife protruded.

Before Miquel Morales and the icy-eyed Saul Cox slipped quietly out a back window they made sure that he was dead.

THE TWO young men who had taken the note from the cuff of Miquel Morales' trousers went down the steps of the brick house and turned toward Fifth Avenue. They walked on the outer edge of the sidewalk and even in the street when they were passing a particularly dark spot. Their hands were in their coat pockets wrapped around the butts of loaded automatics. They did not talk until they had the security of lights and people about them. Then they spoke only a few words.

At the corner of 110th Street they turned into an all-night gas station and entered the wash room. After carefully locking the door, one of the men drew the note Morales had passed to him from an inside pocket. It was brief:

We will be ready to move within five days. All equipment has gone forward. Man with us is equipping five fully armed scouts and two bombers. Engage five more pilots. Be careful who you get. Cox and I will fly south with you. Meet us El Banco Thursday night at eleven.
M.

The teeth of one of the swarthy young men flashed in a delighted smile. "Viva Morales!" he said.

The other man whirled on him. "Shut up, you fool!" he snarled. "We'll be lucky to get out of New York alive. Luckier if we get armed planes out of the country."

They went outside, after burning the note, and hailed a cab. The cab took them to the door of a small, poorly lighted house on the lower west side of Greenwich Village. The place had formerly been a private house but now it

was cut up into small apartments. They paid the driver and started toward the door as the cab drove away and a sedan came to a stop. They paid no attention to the three men who climbed out of the sedan. That is, they paid no attention to them until the three men pushed guns into their backs as they were unlocking the front door.

Before they could even attempt to bring their own guns into action they were knocked unconscious with terrific blows from blackjacks.

The next morning a longshoreman found them lying side by side in a shed on a wharf of the North River. Their clothes were saturated with blood that had drained from long slits that gaped horribly across their throats.

II—THE WINNERS

THE AIR was causing the compass needle to jiggle in crazy fashion. The ship dropped into pocket after pocket slapping Bill Barnes against his safety strap. As his left wing dropped away he leaned the stick to the right and looked back at "Sandy" Sanders.

Sandy's expression was one of animation. He was having one swell time while Bill made certain tests with the Scarlet Stormer.

"Bill," he said, "can I take her for a while. I want to try that corkscrew turn Shorty talks about."

Bill looked at Sandy again. His expression was one that is hard to describe. It was a combination of scorn, pity and admiration. The kid, he knew, had it. He was the kind of kid who would try anything once, even if it killed him. He motioned to Sandy to come up and take the controls. Sandy moved like a youngster who had just been bitten by a wasp. He clambered out of the rear seat and up into the pilot's compartment. Bill slipped back into Sandy's seat and put on the phone helmet.

"Remember to bring her out of the dive easy and when she stalls on the spin you've got to go to work. If you crack me up I'll take you out on Brooklyn Bridge and throw you to the herring."

That was all. Sandy gulped and shoved the control column forward. The Scarlet Stormer went into a terrific power dive.

Two thousand feet down Sandy wrapped his hand around the stick and began to ease it back. He brought it back with the same grace and instinct that Paderewski might use on the piano keys. The ship came up with its nose pointed directly at the blue sky. Kicking the rudder and slamming the stick to the right got the desired effect. The ship spun around three times, much as a cork might spin in whirlpool.

Then the tail slid off toward the earth. Bill Barnes had a bad moment while he watched Sandy fight his controls. For a moment it seemed that he could never get the nose down. And the next moment he had it. The nose came down and the ship leveled off. Sandy glanced over his shoulder at Bill.

"I did it!" he said exultantly.

"You did, kid," Bill said. "But if it's just the same to you let's not do it again. There is a time and a place for everything."

"I know that, Bill," Sandy answered. "I just wanted to know how, in case I ever need it."

"You know how," Bill said grimly as he climbed back into the pilot's seat.

A small glass square in the radio panel suddenly gleamed red. Bill whirled a dial, snapped over a switch and adjusted another circular indicator.

"Calling B. B.— Calling B. B.— Calling B. B.," a voice chanted over the ear phones.

"B. B. answering," Bill said. "B. B. answering."

"Bill," the voice came back. "A man has been trying to reach you on the

telephone. There is something peculiar about it. He won't leave any message and won't talk to any one but you."

"Who is it?" Bill asked.

"He says his name is Morales, Miquel Morales——"

Bill threw the stick over and kicked the rudder.

"I'll be there in ten minutes," he said to Tony Lamport, the radio chief on Barnes Field. "Get his number and say I'll call him back."

"He won't leave a number," Tony said.

"Well, if he calls again tell him I'll be there to take the call in ten minutes," Bill instructed.

"O. K., Bill. Signing off."

"O. K.," Bill repeated.

Eight minutes later Bill Barnes brought the Scarlet Stormer down on Barnes Field with a landing that any one might envy. He fish-tailed the ship around and brought it up on the apron with a minimum of noise and flurry. He motioned to Martin, the head mechanic, to put the ship away and hurried toward his living quarters. Sandy was just behind him, coming in a close second.

Two minutes after Bill arrived in his office the phone rang. It was Miquel Morales.

"Hello, young fella," Bill said. "You may be a president on your own island but to me your name is Mike."

And then the smile vanished from Bill's face. He listened. He sympathized with "Mike" and in the end he agreed to meet him at the El Banco on 8th Street, New York City. Mike explained that it was dangerous for him to step outside the place.

Bill's usually placid countenance had become lined as he listened to Mike's brief explanation over the telephone. He thought of their days in college. Mike had been a debonair, courteous young man with nothing to worry about.

But in those days he had not been the deposed president of an island republic.

His father then had been the president of the island of Samerra. Since his father's death, Mike had been elected to fill his place. Bill had read in the papers of the insurrection that deposed Mike. But coming at a time when he was immersed in his own troubles, he gave little thought to it.

But now Mike was in trouble. And Mike was his friend. That made Mike's trouble his trouble. He turned to Sandy.

"Put on your go-to-town pants, kid," Bill said. "We're going places."

BILL picked up the telephone and got Tony Lamport on the wire.

"Tell Shorty and Red Gleason I want them to stand by," he instructed.

"They're both up in Westchester, Bill," Tony said. "Those air races." Bill's forehead furrowed as he shook his head.

"Air races?"

"Sure, they both entered with Snorters. Twenty-five hundred, first prize."

"Get 'em back here," Bill yelled. "If I'm not wrong I'll show 'em an air race."

"O. K., Bill," Tony said.

"Shorty" Hassfurther and "Red" Gleason were busily tuning up the 1200-horse power, twelve-cylinder, Diesel motors of the two Snorters when Tony Lamport made contact with them. They had removed the flexible machine guns mounted on the after deck, the Thompson machine gun, the automatic rifle, ammunition and the emergency-camping equipment usually carried in the rear compartment. They had stripped the two ships down so that they carried a minimum of weight. From the long, pointed spinner covering the propeller hub to the trail edge of the rudder, the two ships resembled two thoroughbred race horses champing at their bits as

their jockeys brought them up to the starting line.

"Right, Tony," Shorty said over the radiophone. "What's on that weak mind of yours?"

"I'm just thankful I don't have to look at that dead pan of yours when I talk to you," Tony came back.

"Smart guy," Shorty growled.

"Smart enough to keep both my feet on the ground," Tony answered. "When they bury me I'll be all in one piece and people will say, 'Doesn't he look natural?'"

"Just a kiwi," Shorty said. "Just a ground hog."

"Nuts!" Tony laughed. "Bill wants you. There is something on the fire. He wants you to report back here immediately."

"Elephant's ears!" Shorty howled. "This race starts within five minutes and I need the dough. Let me talk to Bill."

"He's busy getting ready to drive to New York."

"Well, tell him we'll be there within two hours. Ask him if that's O. K.?"

While the radiophone was silent, Shorty called Red and told him what Tony had said. They expressed themselves in a manner that is seldom heard at an old ladies' sewing circle. They waited impatiently until Tony came back on the air.

"Bill says that will be O. K.," Tony informed Shorty. "And he said to tell you that if either of you cracks up a Snorter you're both looking for jobs."

"Go button your nose," Shorty said, his blue eyes twinkling with relief. "Or I'll button it for you when I get back. Signing off, sweetheart." He flipped a dial on the radio panel and gunned his motor. Red ran back to the other Snorter and climbed into the cockpit.

Five minutes later they were turning the first pylon in the 132-mile race. Bunched in front and behind them were

the fifty-seven other planes entered in the race—fifty-seven of the fastest stock planes in the world.

The air became an inferno of noise as the twenty thousand people in the grand stand craned their necks, their faces turned skyward to follow the speeding planes.

At one side of the calcium-chlorine-covered field a radio announcer had taken his stance before a microphone. His voice boomed out above the roar of the screaming props and motors.

"Folks," the amplifiers bellowed, "I want you to take a good look at those two low-wing amphibians that are racing side by side. The two red ones. Boy! Look at 'em turn that pylon on the tip of a wing. There, I want to tell you, folks, are a couple of pilots. And when I say pilots I mean pilots.

"They are both a part of Bill Barnes' famous squadron of fighting fools. The one who is a little in the lead is Shorty Hassfurther. The other Red Gleason. You've all heard of both of them. They were about nineteen years old when they started doing combat work in Spads and Nieuports over the German lines in 1917. You know the records they both made. And they're still at it. They've flown planes in every corner of the globe since they joined Bill Barnes' world-renowned organization.

"Wow! Look at 'em go! Neck and neck they're pulling away from the rest of the field by sheer skill and daring. Some of the other planes are as fast as the Snorters they are flying, but they are getting every bit of power out of their ships as they turn the pylons and power-dive down across the field.

"Those boys can fly! This is the last leg, folks. They're giving their ships the old gun now. Did you see Shorty Hassfurther thumb his nose at Red Gleason as they took that turn? Not a bit of fear in the make-up of either of them. They wouldn't know

what you meant if you asked them if they were afraid in the air.

"There they come. Neck and neck. You couldn't find a difference of six inches between them if you measured it with a tape measure. Perhaps they are flying it that way so they can split the prize money.

"And there's the finish! And what a finish! They broke the tape together. What a pair! What a pair! You've seen something to-day, folks. With the exception of Bill Barnes you have seen two of the greatest, if not the greatest, pilots in the world.

"That's a great outfit Barnes has gathered together. And he has a great fleet of planes. You know, Barnes designed and built them himself. He's a genius, that boy. He has a half dozen of those Snorters, like Red and Shorty were flying to-day. His own ship is called the 'Scarlet Stormer' and what he didn't do with it in that round-the-world race can't be done. He started hours behind the rest of the entries and beat them all home. He has the physical strength of a Percheron and the will to go with it. He's made of iron!

"Besides Shorty and Red he had a kid pilot who can make a plane do everything but talk. And, gosh, I don't know but what young Sandy Sanders can do that.

"I wish we could have had Barnes' whole outfit up here to-day. Besides Shorty and Sandy and Red there is Beverly Bates, a brown-eyed young fellow from Boston with a Harvard accent. You might think he was a sis if you hadn't seen him fly. And there's Cy Hawkins, a leather-faced Texan, the kind of man they used to recruit for the Texas Rangers.

"Barnes has a flying field that is the envy of every port around New York and a technical staff—— But here, I'm rambling on and on like an old lady telling about her operation. I guess that Curtiss Hawk took third money if——"

III—ENEMIES

IT WAS nearly dusk when Bill steered his new streamlined roadster through the west gate of Barnes Field to Leland Lane. Sandy was laughing as they went out the gate. He was thinking about the bag of tricks he had up his sleeve. The bag of tricks he had learned only recently by mail.

He held a fifty-cent piece between his thumb and forefinger. While Bill watched, the fifty-cent piece disappeared.

"You'll be taking rabbit stew out of your hat," Bill laughed.

"I learned a new one yesterday," Sandy said. "It's an old trick of Houdini's—how to get out of a strait-jacket."

Bill chuckled again. "Where did you get the strait-jacket?" he asked.

"I bought a second-hand one," Sandy said, seriously.

"Do you mean to tell me you actually bought a strait-jacket?" Bill asked with a side glance at Sandy.

"Sure," Sandy said. "It's a new kind, too."

There wasn't anything else Bill could think of to say. If the kid had hobbies it was his own business. Anyway what was a little sleight of hand compared to some of the other hobbies the kid had tried in the past.

He steered the car across Queensboro Bridge. The lights of the bridge had just been turned on. They twinkled above and on each side of him as he guided the car expertly between rumbling trucks and fast, streamlined passenger cars. Far down the river and in the harbor of New York slow moving, massive ferryboats twinkled their lights. The skyscrapers were lighting up, their great hulks outlined against the gathering darkness like a million lightning bugs. Two or three freighters which looked as though they might have seen better times were nosing up

from the Narrows. A battleship was moving with care toward the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Bill took all those things in with one or two quick glances of the photographic eye and marveled.

It was an astounding place, New York. A place such as had never been created before. You couldn't believe it until you saw it. Bagdad on the subway, some one had called it. And here was he going to a little obscure Spanish restaurant to keep an engagement with Mike Morales. The Mike Morales who, in their college days, had been so proud of his Castilian blood, who wouldn't have hidden if the whole British fleet had been after him.

"Strange things occur in this world," he said to Sandy.

Sandy thought Bill was talking about his legerdemain because he snapped one hand under Bill's nose. Over the ends of his fingers crawled something that looked like a snake.

Bill shouted at him and ducked. "Hey!" he said, "what the dickens——"

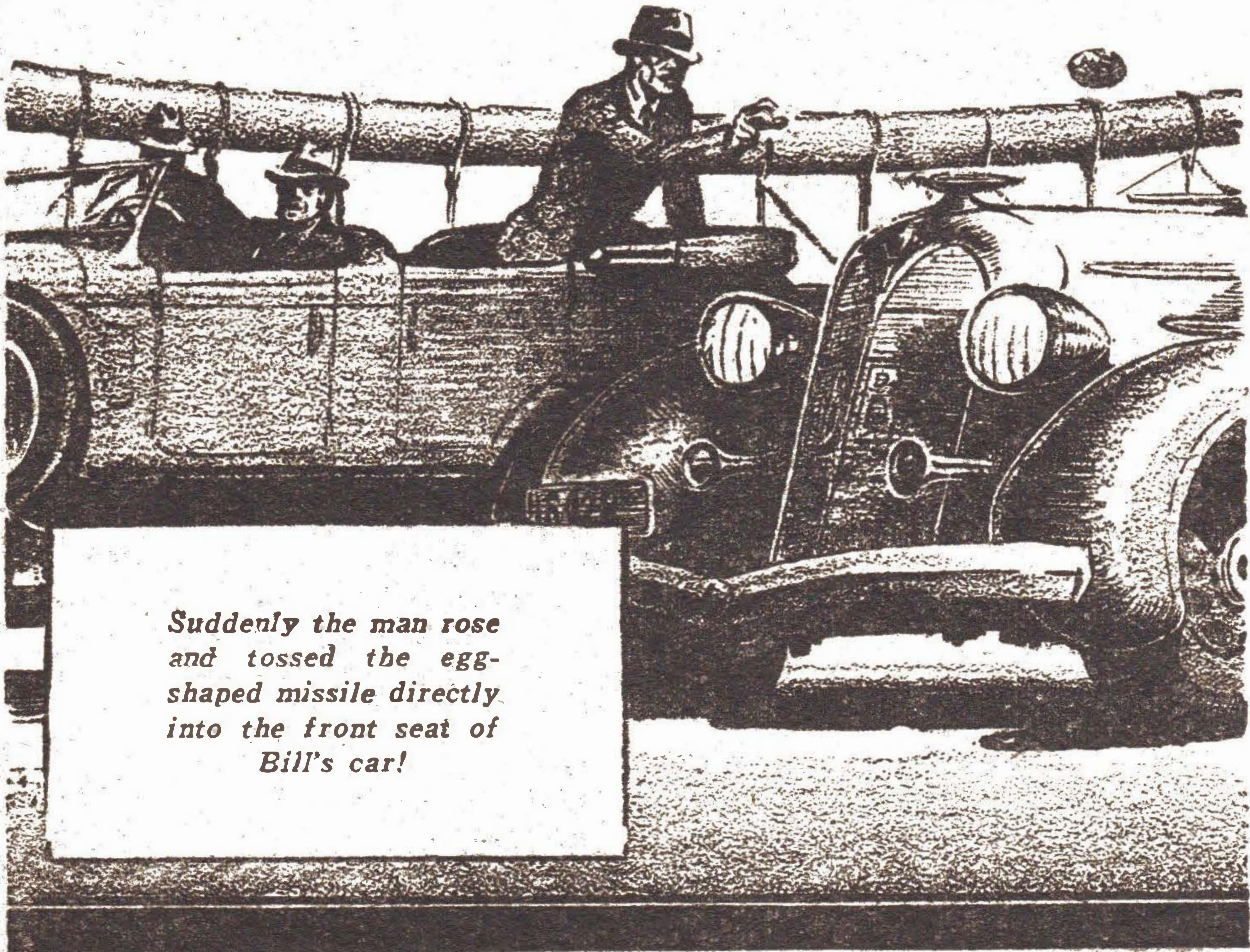
"It's rubber, Bill," Sandy said, startled by Bill's shout. "I thought you'd know that."

"All right," said Bill. "It's rubber. But call 'em when they're rubber unless you want to be driven into the East River."

After a moment Bill again spoke of the things he had been thinking about.

"What I meant, kid, is that it's strange to see Mike Morales under these circumstances. We roomed together in college. He was proud and rich and had the world at his finger tips. Today he is the deposed president of a West Indian republic, hiding in a little New York restaurant. He was a good friend to me in college. Now he needs help and it's my job to be his friend."

Sandy's smile vanished and he leaned forward with his hands on his knees.



*Suddenly the man rose
and tossed the egg-
shaped missile directly
into the front seat of
Bill's car!*

"I never knew you to let a friend down yet, Bill," he said.

"I try not to," Bill said after a moment in which various thoughts and emotions raced through his mind. "We'll put on the old smoke screen for him, eh?"

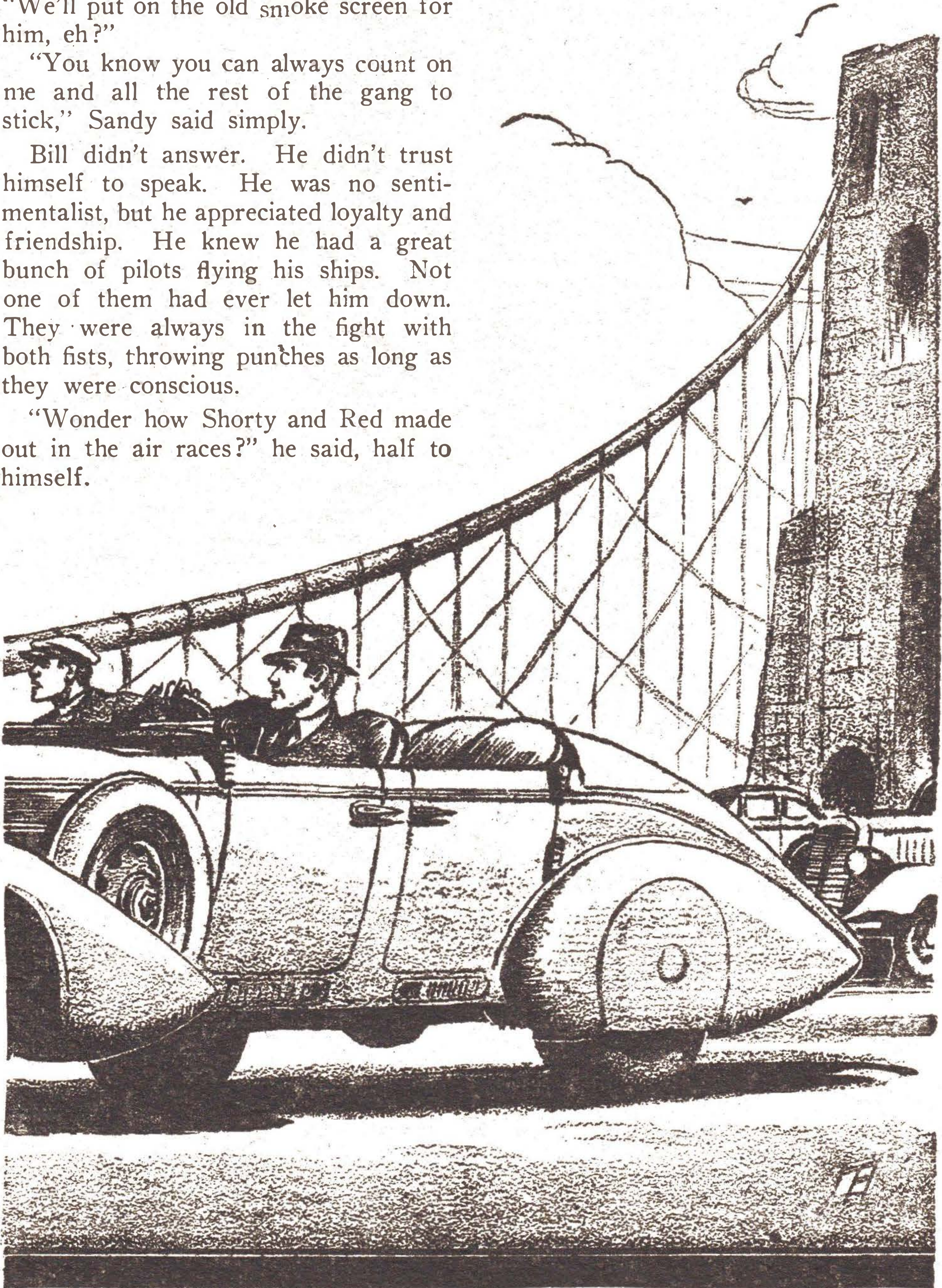
"You know you can always count on me and all the rest of the gang to stick," Sandy said simply.

Bill didn't answer. He didn't trust himself to speak. He was no sentimentalist, but he appreciated loyalty and friendship. He knew he had a great bunch of pilots flying his ships. Not one of them had ever let him down. They were always in the fight with both fists, throwing punches as long as they were conscious.

"Wonder how Shorty and Red made out in the air races?" he said, half to himself.

"Those two nitwits," Sandy growled. "Some day I——"

Bill chuckled. Those two nitwits, as Sandy called them, made Sandy's life



miserable. They were the bane of his existence with their continual ragging and jokes. Sandy smiled to himself. Wait, he thought, until I shoot that rubber snake out of my sleeve into their faces!

From Shorty and "Red" Bill's thoughts flitted back to Mike Morales as his strong, muscular hands guided the car with the touch of a born driver. He was taking it easy, keeping far over to the right side of the bridge. He was early for his appointment with Mike. He was trying to recall the things Mike had told him in college about the island of Samerra.

He remembered that Mike had told him that his family had ruled the island for two hundred years. His grandfather had been the last king. Then Mike's father had been elected president when it became a republic. And when Mike's father had died, Mike had been elected to fill the office. The revolution had forced Mike to flee for his life. Funny, Mike hadn't got in touch with him before. He must have been in the States for at least a year. Perhaps it had been too dangerous for him to let any one know where he was hiding. Perhaps—

BILL swerved his car to the right as a long, low touring car came up and held a pace beside him. Only a couple of inches separated the two cars. He turned his head and saw there were three men in the car beside him. They were dark-complexioned and wore hats pulled well down over their eyes. They were not the kind of men one would care to meet in a dark alley at night. Two were riding in front and one in back. The man in back was leaning over, busy with something in the bottom of the car as they cruised along side by side.

Sandy was looking at the occupants with that insatiable curiosity he had about everything. Bill had a sudden

premonition that the car was keeping pace with them for a reason. He watched it out of the corner of his narrowed eyes. His lips became a straight, hard line. There was something peculiar about it, something—

And then it happened.

The man in the back of the car rose to his feet. His face was contorted, his mouth drawn down at one corner, his eyes wide and frightened. In his right hand he held a small, black object a little larger than a baseball. With a flip of his hand he tossed it directly into the front seat of Bill's car. It struck Bill's knee and rolled to the floor as the other car shot on ahead, barely missing two cars that were pulling up to go by.

Bill's mind worked with that lightning speed that had saved his life a score of times. Beads of perspiration oozed from under the band of his snap-brim hat as he spoke one short sentence.

"Quick!" he barked. "Throw it over the bridge rail. *Quick!*"

A kid with slower reflexes and less coördination would have been too late. But Sandy had been trained to think and move fast. He scooped the oblong object off the floor and stood up. Icicles ran up and down Bill's spine while the kid held the thing in his hand. It seemed to take Sandy a million years to bring his arm back, his elbow stiff.

"Throw it!" Bill roared.

Sandy's arm came forward with a full swing, with the same motion a discus thrower uses. The ball of black metal sailed out of his hand, missed the cables of the bridge and dropped toward the East River.

Two seconds after it had disappeared from sight the whole earth seemed to explode. The bridge seemed to tremble like a stucco shack in a hurricane. Cars crashed into one another as men shouted and cursed. Glass jangled from the windows of closed cars. Sirens

screamed as bridge motor-cycle police came tearing through the traffic. Horns honked. The bridge became a bedlam of crazed humanity, all trying to escape, their faces white with fear.

Bill looked at Sandy. He was licking his lips, his eyes were wide, startled more than afraid.

"Suppose," Sandy stuttered, "suppose I hadn't got it away."

"Let's not suppose," Bill said grimly. The muscles in his cheeks were bulging. He was grinding his teeth with rage. As soon as Sandy let the bomb go he had tried to speed up to follow the touring car but the cars in front of him all seemed to be driven by maniacs. They were all over the road. He couldn't find an opening. He was hemmed in on every side by white-faced men and women. They were like an audience in a theater that has stampeded at the sight of smoke, all trying to reach the exit at one time.

As a motor-cycle policeman came snaking through the traffic, Bill edged over to the right again and called to him. The traffic had stopped completely now. The bridge was a madhouse of blaring horns and shouting, cursing men. The traffic officer came to a stop beside Bill, eyeing him suspiciously. Then his expression changed as he recognized him.

"What in the name of my uncle's pig was that, Mr. Barnes?" he asked.

"A bomb," Bill said. "What they used to call a 'pineapple.' Now listen, but I don't want it given to the papers. I'll answer any questions, but I don't want any publicity.

"A car with three men in it came up alongside me. They kept pace with me for a few minutes and then the man in the back seat tossed the 'pineapple' into my lap. Sandy here—Sandy Sanders—picked it up and heaved it over the rail. He just got it away in time. It might have blown us both——"

"Did you know the men?"

Bill shook his head. "Never saw them before, but I imagine I will see them again."

"Did you get the number of the car?"

Again Bill shook his head.

"I did," Sandy said calmly. He took a pencil and a piece of paper from his pocket and jotted the number down and gave it to the officer. The traffic was beginning to move slowly now.

"Can you describe the men?" the policeman asked.

"Young, wore dark clothes and hats," Bill said. "They all had swarthy complexions. That's all I can tell you."

"You'll have to come along with me, Mr. Barnes," the officer said.

"Not now," Bill said, firmly. "I have an appointment and I imagine I will be able to find out there what this was all about. I'll call headquarters a little later."

The policeman shook his head doubtfully. Bill pressed his foot down on the accelerator and threw the car into gear.

"I hadn't ought to let you go," the officer said.

"Be your age," Sandy said under his breath as they moved away in the wake of the slow-moving traffic.

THEY didn't speak until they had reached the Manhattan end of the bridge. There they were held up for a moment by the police. A half dozen police cruisers with their details and a riot squad were lined up examining each car and questioning the occupants. A sergeant waved Bill through after a smart salute. Bill didn't bother to tell the sergeant about the bomb. He knew the motor-cycle cop would report it. He wanted to get downtown and talk to Mike Morales.

They cut across town at 9th Street and parked the car on University Place. The El Banco was just around the corner. Bill locked the car as Sandy hopped out.

"Who," Sandy asked, "do you suppose they were, Bill?"

Bill shook his head. He slammed the door of the car and they moved toward 9th Street.

"Something to do with Mike Morales, I think," he said. "They looked like Spaniards or West Indians. Mike will know. They must have heard his telephone conversation with me in some way."

"Your friend Mike has nice friends," Sandy said.

"Enemies," Bill replied, shortly.

An electric sign blazing with neon lights announced that the El Banco was starring Nita Ramos in a floor show. Bill looked forward to this visit with disfavor. He didn't like these little stuffy places where people drank and smoked and ate too much. Nita Ramos, headlined in lights, was probably born in Hoboken instead of the Argentine, he reflected, as he pulled open the outer door and stepped back for Sandy to enter.

But Sandy didn't enter. As he started to go in the door, a man with a jagged scar running the length of his right cheek came hurtling out the door. He didn't try to pass Sandy. He put out his hand and shoved the heel of his palm under Sandy's chin to push him out of the way.

Caught off balance, Sandy rocked backward and skidded on his hip across the pavement. The man did not even glance at him as he turned to the right and started west on 9th Street. The whole thing had happened so quickly that the man was five feet away before Bill gathered his senses.

Then, with a bellow of rage, he took three long leaps. He grabbed the man by the back of the neck in a viselike grip and whirled him around. He took him by the lapels of his coat with his left hand as the man faced him. He could feel a gun nestling in a shoulder holster under the man's coat.

"What the deuce——" Bill raged. His words were cut short as the man swung a right fist at his face. Bill let go of the man's coat and blocked the blow with his left hand. At the same moment his own right hand came up in a vicious arc. It exploded on the man's jaw like the crack of a small-caliber pistol. He staggered backward, caught his foot and sprawled on the sidewalk.

Sandy came panting up beside Bill. His face was livid with rage.

"When he gets up, Bill," Sandy half cried, "let me hit him. He's mine. He hit me. I'll knock his teeth——" Sandy's voice broke with anger.

But when the man got up he didn't give any one a chance to hit him. Bill watched him, ready to pounce as his hand stole toward the gun in his shoulder holster. Then, as he scrambled to his feet he turned and ran. He ran as though a thousand devils were at his heels. He went around the corner of Fifth Avenue and 9th Street without a backward glance.

"Brave fella," Bill said.

"The big Spanish onion!" Sandy said wrathfully. "The big chunk of Gorgonzola!" He was trembling with rage.

"Forget it, kid," Bill grinned. "He ran because he was afraid of you."

"He'd better be," said Sandy. "If I ever see him again I'll—I'll—poking me in the face like that!"

Bill took his arm and led him toward the door of the El Banco. "I'll push his teeth so far back into his neck he can use 'em for collar buttons," Sandy finished.

IV—TREACHERY

A GIRL with a large comb in her hair and a brilliantly colored Spanish shawl about her shoulders took their hats and topcoats. They made their way by a small cubicle that housed a six-piece orchestra. The orchestra, in-

cluding the girl who played the piano, were attired in Spanish costumes. They were playing a number called "Happy Days." A half dozen couples were swinging about the dance floor going through the motions of the rumba. The place was laden with cigarette smoke.

Bill tried to penetrate the smoke and dim lighting of the room to locate Mike Morales. A waiter with sideburns half-way down his face came toward them. He bowed and indicated that they were to follow him. Sandy's eyes were wide. This was the first time he had ever been in a night club. It presented a mystery and charm he had never known existed.

"I'm looking for——" Bill began.

"Yes, sir, this way, sir," the waiter cut in. His hand brushed his lips in a manner that Bill understood to mean that no names were to be mentioned. He brought Sandy out of his reverie with a dig in the ribs and they followed the waiter. He led them the length of the dance floor and stopped before a booth for four at the far end of the room near a door through which waiters were hurrying back and forth from the kitchen.

Peering intently, Bill could see the dim outline of two men in the booth. Then a familiar voice came to his ears. It was the same musical voice he had heard each day through two of his college years. It was the voice of Miquel Morales.

"Bill!" it said. "Bill Barnes, you old son of a gun, slip in here—it isn't wise for me to stand out there."

Bill edged into the booth and grasped the hand that Miquel extended. Words were futile for those first few seconds. They grinned at one another, Morales' white teeth flashing in the dim light. Bill shook his blond head and smiled a smile that brought one corner of his mouth down lower than the other. Their eyes sparkled.

"I'm glad to see you again, Mike,"

Bill said. "Glad, too, that you're still all in one piece."

"That goes for you, too, Bill," Mike laughed. "I've heard things about you during the past few years. I tell people proudly, 'I roomed with him in college.'" Morales indicated the cadaverous, icy-eyed man across the table from him. "This is Saul Cox, Bill. Mr. Cox—Bill Barnes."

The gaunt face wrinkled into a kindly smile as Bill shook the hand of Saul Cox. "I've heard of you, of course, Barnes," he said. "But I didn't think you were such a youngster."

"And this is Sandy Sanders, one of my pilots," Bill said. "Mr. Morales and Mr. Cox, Sandy." Sandy shook hands and slipped into the seat beside Saul Cox.

"You're the kid who flies the Eaglet, eh?" Saul Cox said. Sandy nodded his head and color suffused his face.

"You're a fine bird," Bill said to Mike Morales. "I hear you've been in the States for a year and this is the first time I've heard from you."

"And what a year," Morales said. "I didn't dare come out and show myself, Bill. I've been hiding up in the Adirondack Mountains. It would have been worth your life and mine too if I had tried to get in touch with you. They've been searching for me every minute. If they had found me, I wouldn't be here now. I've been making plans and raising money. I came out of hiding only a couple of days ago."

"I believe you," Bill said dryly. "See if you can figure this one out." He told them about the bomb that had been tossed in his car on the way across Queensboro Bridge. They gazed at Sandy admiringly as Bill told how he had picked the thing up and tossed it over the rail of the bridge.

"There's a leak some place, Mike," Saul Cox said.

Mike nodded his head. "There always is," he said.

Bill went on, telling them about the man they had encountered on the way into the El Banco. Morales and Saul Cox listened intently.

"Another one of Herrera's gorillas," Cox said. "He probably came in here, saw you, Mike, and was on his way to spread the news. Otherwise," he said to Bill, "he'd have stopped to put a few bullets into you. I know that one. He's tough and he's a killer."

"What's it all about, Mike?" Bill asked, his expression one of anxious concern. He regarded Morales with steady blue eyes. They were speaking his language now. Intrigue and violence and sudden death. It was part of the code that was continually forced upon him by ruthless enemies.

"It's a long story, Bill," Mike Morales said, breaking matches and throwing them into the ash tray. "Let's have a bite to eat. Then we'll slip up to my apartment where we can talk without danger of being heard. As Saul says, there is a leak somewhere. Otherwise Herrera's men wouldn't have known I phoned you."

"We had a wealthy man lined up to finance seven fighting planes for us. He was to finance the planes and in return I was to give him certain oil concessions on Samerra when I again got control of the island. A few nights ago he was stabbed through the heart while he sat at our table in a little Spanish restaurant uptown. The same night two of my pilots were found with their throats slit from ear to ear. This is no child's play, Bill. They tried to give you a dose of the same medicine as soon as they knew I was in touch with you."

"What's it all about, Mike? What's all the shooting for? Just another tropical revolution?"

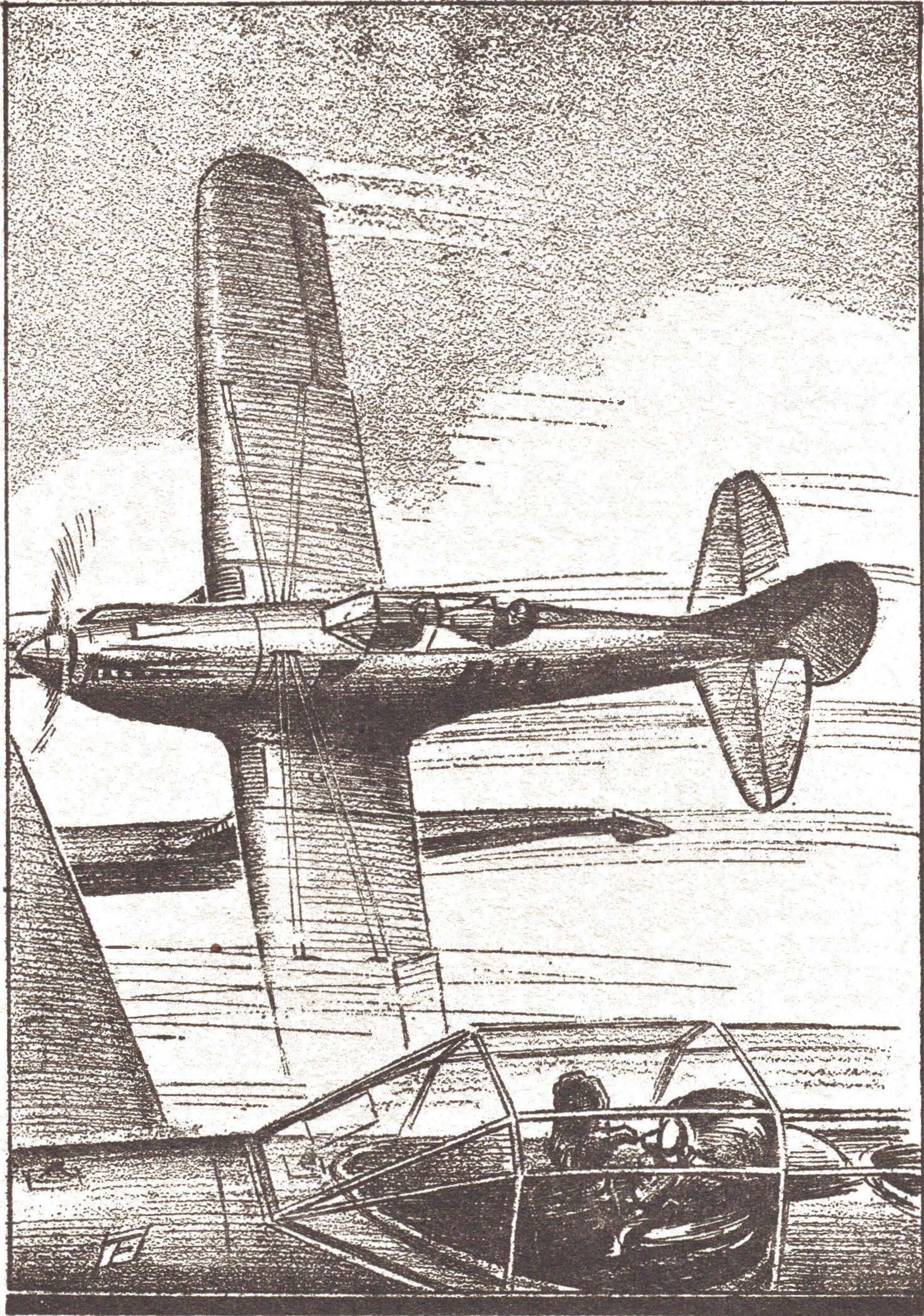
Morales shook his head. His expression was pensive, sad. "Yes and no," he answered. "I was elected to the presidency after my father died. I was

young and I trusted the men he had trusted. They sold me out to a syndicate of wealthy Englishmen who wanted the oil, mining, transportation and fruit monopolies on Samerra. I had been trying to raise the standard of living on the island and give my people something besides the crudest existence. I was so immersed in my ideals that I didn't watch the officials I appointed. The Englishmen bought the army out from under me. I had to flee for my life. They put a man named Struan Chamberlin in to pull the strings. He is now the tycoon of the island and has a bunch of marionettes under him. He manipulates the puppets to make them dance. Valtura is the president and Dimos the vice president. My people loathe them. They don't dare show themselves in public. General Herrera commands the army and is the most powerful man on the island outside of Chamberlin.

"They have made my life unbearable. I have been like a hunted animal for the past year. Their men have been searching for me constantly. They know I am trying to organize a coup to regain the presidency. Many of my countrymen were driven into exile with me. But my people are loyal to me. They refer to me as the 'liberator' and have organized themselves from the paramos to the jungle. They will fight for me if I can give them something to fight with."

Morales indicated Saul Cox with a wave of his hand. His eyes were gleaming, his face flushed as he went on. "Mr. Cox has helped me finance and organize my people. We have shipped machine guns and ammunition to the Island of Viga. The president of Viga is my friend and has given us a retreat on an uninhabited portion of his island.

"When I win back my island I will become a dictator. My people wish it. My people have ruled Samerra for two hundred years, but now the English



The two snorters rounded the pylon neck and neck, tied for honors!

have confiscated all of my land and property.

"We have guns and men waiting for us at Viga—professional fighters who have served under Mr. Cox in Central and South America. Now we need airplanes. I have been a long time in getting to it, Bill. But that is what I wished to talk to you about."

A WAITER brought them food. While he served it, Mike sat silent, crouching back in the dim shadows of the booth as though the things he had told Bill had awakened sacred memories that left him mute.

Both Bill and Sandy gazed at the lean, gaunt face of Saul Cox with new interest. Here was a soldier of fortune. The name flashed through Bill's memory. He had heard of him and his exploits. In Nicaragua, Honduras, Colombia and Guatemala. He had helped to seat and unseat a dozen rulers. It was a business with him.

"Just where is Samerra?" Sandy asked, hesitantly. Mike Morales threw back his head and laughed.

"You ought to teach your pilots geography, Bill," Mike said. "Some day they'll get to——" His voice died away. His eyes were glued on the four men who had come to a halt by the booth. Not a muscle in his face moved. Only his eyes. They narrowed down to mere slits and his chin came a little forward as his head lifted.

"It won't make any difference to you where Samerra is after to-night," a man with a short, ugly automatic in his hand said to Sandy. The other three men formed a line across the entrance to the booth. Their hands were thrust into their bulging coat pockets.

As Bill turned his head to look at them he didn't have to be told that the bulge was caused by three automatics. He could tell by the ice that surged up his spine to the base of his skull. Perspiration oozed into the palms of his

hands. He knew that he would be shot down before he could move out of the cramped booth. And he was unarmed.

The room had become quiet except for the low murmur of voices from some of the other booths. The orchestra had stopped playing. People drifted off the dance floor. Waiters hurried into the kitchen and did not come back. Only a few of the people in the restaurant knew of the drama that was taking place under their very noses. The head waiter and captain of waiters stood transfixed. Their olive complexions had become a ghastly green. They knew what was happening, but they were powerless to stop it. The orchestra had edged back against a wall of the little platform on which they played. They knew that bullets were going to fly. And they knew that bullets sometimes had curious habits.

"You wish to see me?" Morales said to the leering face that held the automatic. Bill marveled at Mike's composure, at the steady voice with which he asked the question.

"Not for long," the gunman sneered. His small eyes gleamed evilly. He spoke with a slight accent. "Keep your hands on the table!" he said to Saul Cox.

Cox regarded him with a cold stare. His steel-blue eyes did not waver from the man's face. They seemed to be boring holes through his brain.

The man with the gun spoke swiftly to the men with him. He directed them in Spanish. He told them which of the four men in the booth they were to shoot when he gave the signal. He said he would count to three. Bill and Sandy did not know what he was saying. But Mike and Saul Cox knew. They listened to their own death sentence being pronounced.

"They are going to shoot all of us," Mike Morales said to Bill.

A cold, clammy perspiration formed on Bill's body. He glanced at Sandy.

He could see the kid was scared, but he wasn't showing it. He resolved that he would take a chance when the man with the gun counted to two. He couldn't sit there and he shot like a mad dog. Perhaps he could save Sandy. It was his fault that Sandy was there. He was to blame——

"One," the gunman said as he held his gun steady on the heart of Saul Cox.

Suddenly a peculiar-sounding voice came from behind the four men lined up before the booth. It didn't sound like anything human. It was too high-pitched for a man's voice and too deep for a woman's. The four men straightened as though a red-hot poker had been pressed against their backs. Their eyes opened wide. Their faces twitched.

"Drop those guns and don't turn your heads or I'll blow your backbones through your stomachs!" the voice commanded.

There was a silence, a silence so acute that it was like something tangible, something you could hold in your hand. Bill could hear his heart beating against his ribs.

It was Saul Cox who broke that awful silence.

"Good work, José," he said in a steady voice. "Keep them covered and shoot if one of them moves." He reached over and grasped the automatic pointed toward him and pushed the blue barrel downward.

The eyes of Bill and Mike Morales were as wide as the gunmen's. There was no one standing behind the four men! The voice had come from nowhere and yet they had heard it. They looked at Saul Cox in utter bewilderment.

Then one of the gunmen started to turn his head. That was what Bill Barnes had been waiting for. He swung his body to the right. His left hand crashed into the man's stomach. The man's head came forward as he gasped horribly trying to recover his

breath. Bill's right hand cracked on the jaw of the man beside him. The man sailed across the dance floor. A shot buried itself in the bench between Bill and Mike Morales. A series of screams, each one louder than the one before came from a booth farther down the floor.

Suddenly, the lights flickered and went out. The gun in the hand of Saul Cox began to spew lead viciously. One of the gunmen sprawled on the dance floor, his legs doubled under him. His body rolled and twitched for a moment, then spread out, still. Orange flames sputtered from a gun at the other end of the room. Bullets thudded into the wooden benches of the booths. Men cursed and women screamed.

Mike Morales cut through the bedlam of noise. "Bill, Saul, Sandy," he said quickly. "Take hold of one another's arms. I'll take you out of here. Are you all right?" They answered in turn.

"Follow me. I'll lead the way," he said.

He led them across the dark room and through the swinging door into the kitchen. When they were through the kitchen door he threw the rays of a flashlight around the kitchen. He ordered the half dozen waiters and four cooks out of the room. They obeyed reluctantly.

WHEN they were gone he stepped quickly to a door in the back of the kitchen. He pulled the bolt and opened it. It led to a narrow passage in which a single dim light threw eerie shadows. When they had all passed through, he bolted the door behind him. He led the way through the passage for a matter of fifty feet. He fitted a key to the lock of an iron door that barred their passage. It opened on a flight of stairs. He locked this door behind him and led the way up the stairs. Up five flights, he opened still another door.

There was a smile on his lips as he saw Sandy and Bill look about them in amazement. They were in a sumptuously furnished apartment. The place was magnificent with its soft rugs, brilliant Spanish shawls, tapestries and gleaming silver.

"Felipe!" Morales called softly toward a closed door. He waited a moment and called again a bit louder. A puzzled expression crossed his handsome face. He took two steps and pushed open a door that led to the kitchen. They all whirled toward him as they heard him gasp. A torrent of Spanish rushed from his lips. Only Saul Cox understood him. He stepped quickly over and placed a hand on Mike's shoulder as he glanced into the kitchen.

A yellow-faced little man with straight black hair lay sprawled on the floor. His clothes were saturated with blood. One arm was curved under his head as though he were sleeping. The lower half of the window above him was shattered. The upper part had two clean bullet holes through it.

Mike dropped on the floor beside the man and grabbed his wrist, then placed a hand over his heart. He drew his hand away stained with blood. Felipe's heart was still. A sob escaped Mike's lips. He stood up and stared out the window.

Suddenly the upper part of the window crashed into a thousand pieces and the *spat, spat, spat* of bullets sounded as they buried themselves in the walls. Saul Cox whirled Mike out of range of the window. He herded them all out of the kitchen.

"He's dead, Mike," Saul Cox said. "There's nothing you can do now. They've found out you are here and have put a machine gun with a silencer on it over in that loft building. They probably thought it was you." A string of Spanish oaths leaped from Mike's

lips. His handsome face was twisted with pain.

"He was my faithful servant," Mike said to Bill. The words were a half sob. "The dirty murdering dogs. I'll make them pay for him. I'll fertilize the fields of my people with their blood."

Saul Cox had pulled back the front curtains and was gazing down on 10th Street. Something cut a clean little hole in the windowpane over his head. He let the curtain fall back into place.

"They're watching the place from all sides," he said. "They're using silencers." His cold eyes glimmered for a moment. "They'll knock us over like so many ninepins if we try to get out of here."

Bill stood pondering the situation for a moment. Then he began to pace the room with long strides. He shook his blond head. He stopped abruptly and whirled toward Mike.

"This is the top floor, isn't it?" he asked.

Mike nodded.

"How wide and long is the roof? Does it have a lot of skylights?"

Mike considered for a moment. "About a hundred feet long and fifty wide," he said. "It is entirely flat except for a few skylights along the edge of the roof."

Bill began to pace the room again. He stopped as abruptly as he had before.

"Got a couple of old sheets I can tear up?"

"Tear 'em all up if you want to," Mike said.

"Can I get up on the roof without being drilled by one of those machine guns?"

"There is a ladder up through a closet in that bedroom," Mike pointed. "The roof of this building is two stories higher than any of the surrounding buildings. That is one reason why I

took it. I don't think they can see you from the loft across from the kitchen."

"Good," Bill said. "This building faces 10th Street. - How many doors from the corner of University Place? But that doesn't make so much difference. I'll tell Shorty to fly over the Bellvue Hotel and watch for a ground strip on the top of the house due west."

They all looked puzzled. "What do you mean—ground strip?" Saul Cox asked. "How can he land on the roof?"

"I'm going to call Shorty Hassfurther, one of my pilots," Bill explained, "and tell him to bring an autogyro over here to take us back to my field. He can find us early in the morning—dawn. We will probably catch them napping at that time. Get it?"

"It's a good idea if he can make it," Cox said, nodding his approval vigorously. "We'll never get out of here any other way. We can't ask the police for protection for a great many reasons. The chief one being that Valtura, the president of Samerra has asked the State Department in Washington to extradite Mike."

"We'll have to report the death of Felipe to the police," Mike said.

"We can take care of that from my field," Bill said. "I can explain it to the police and I don't think you'll be bothered with any red tape." He crossed the room to the telephone. "I'll call Shorty now." He lifted the phone from its rack and began to dial a number. Halfway through he whirled around and slapped the instrument back on the rack.

"Say," he said, suddenly, "I wish you'd explain that hocus-pocus to me down in the El Banco." There were tiny vertical lines between his narrowed eyes. "There wasn't any one behind those four gorillas down there when that voice told them to drop their guns and not turn around." He gazed from Mike Morales to Saul Cox with puz-

zled eyes. "There wasn't any one within twenty feet of them!"

THE EXPRESSION on Saul Cox's face was one that is hard to describe. As Bill watched him his lips parted and he uttered a chuckle that came from deep down in his throat. His gaze shifted from Bill to Sandy and remained there. Bill saw that Sandy's face had suddenly become a deep red. There was a silly grin on his face. He pretended to be picking a piece of lint from his shoulder.

"Well," Bill said irritably. "What's the joke?"

"I had a lieutenant down in Honduras one time who could do it," Saul Cox said. "That is how I got wise and helped play the hand."

"Do what?" Bill roared. "I'm not talking about a poker game. I'm talking about that peculiar voice that gave us a break and kept us all from being shot while we sat there helpless."

Saul Cox pointed at Sandy. "There's your mysterious voice," he said. Sandy squirmed under Bill's astonished scrutiny.

"Listen!" Bill shouted. "What are you driving at?"

"I was almost afraid to try it," Sandy said. "I know it was a pretty lousy exhibition, but I don't have it perfected yet."

"Try what?" Bill roared. He was getting red in the face himself. His voice became high-pitched at the end of the two words.

"To throw my voice," Sandy said. "The pitch was all right, but the tone was poor." Bill stared at him with his mouth slightly open. Mike Morales was laughing.

"He was facing me on the bench and I saw his lips moving when that voice told them to drop their guns. There wasn't any one there and I remembered that lieutenant down in Hon-

duras and knew what he was doing," Saul Cox said.

"When did you learn that trick?" Bill said, glaring at Sandy.

"Oh, I've been practicing ventriloquism for about a month," Sandy said, squirming again under Bill's gaze. "I thought I'd take a chance and use it."

Bill stood with his hands on his hips shaking his blond head from side to side. Suddenly he threw back his head and laughed as Sandy had seldom seen him laugh before. He crossed the room and brought one of his great hands down on Sandy's back. Sandy staggered forward two or three steps and began to cough.

"Kid," Bill said, "sometimes I think you'll amount to something, after all."

"Not if you knock my backbone out through my chest," Sandy said, his eyes gleaming with pleasure at Bill's way of showing affection and approval.

Mike Morales put one hand on Sandy's shoulder and grasped his hand with the other one. There was both admiration and appreciation in his eyes.

"If Bill can spare you and you want to come, I can use you on Samerra when I get back there," he said.

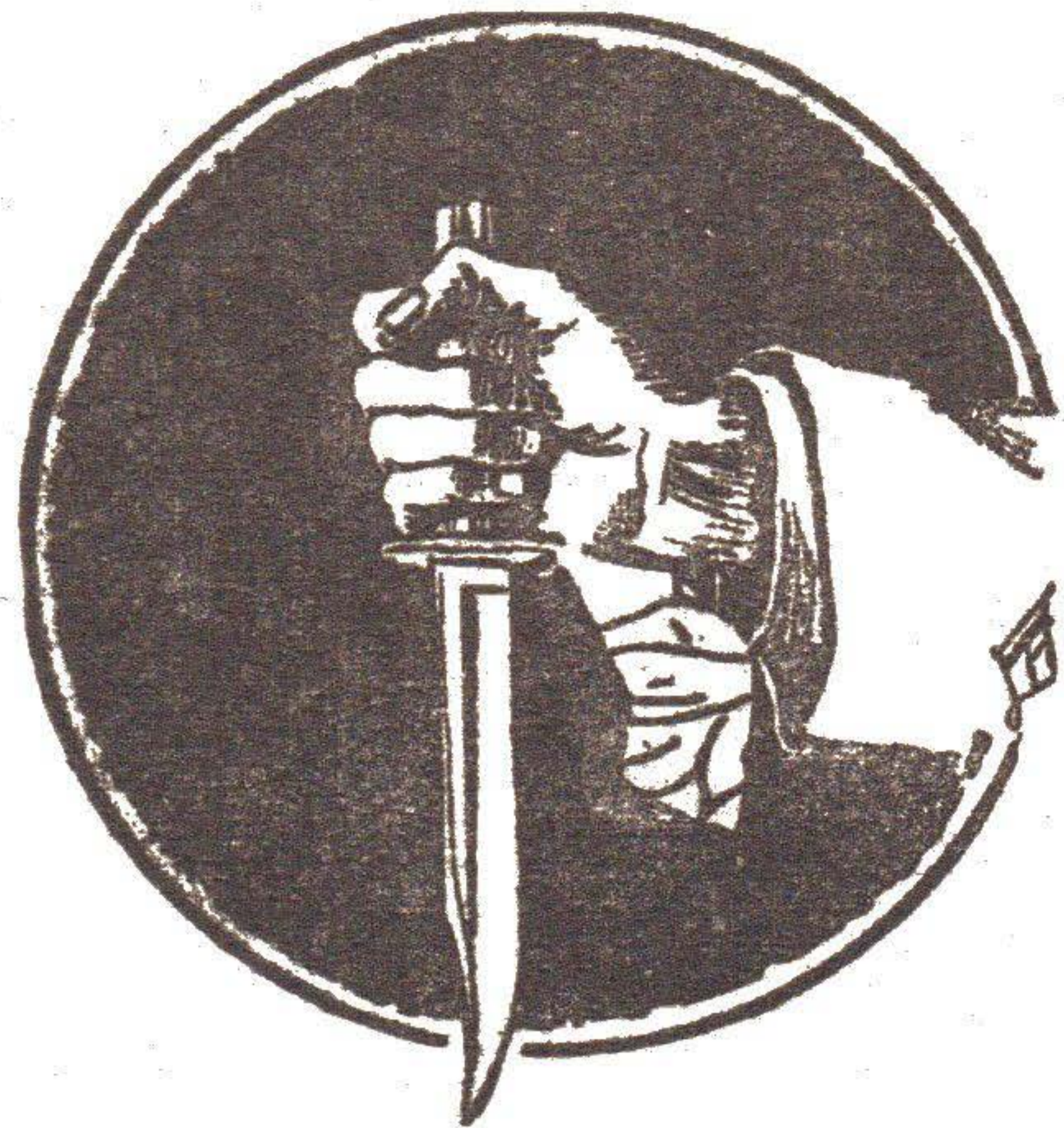
"My gosh," Sandy said, "I couldn't leave Bill."

"He couldn't get along without you, eh?" Saul Cox chuckled.

"That's the truth," Bill said, picking up the telephone again. "Now I'll get Shorty."

He dialed a number and when Tony Lamport came on the wire he asked for Shorty.

"Hello guy," he said to Shorty. . . . You won? Good work, fella. Then you and Red split the prize? . . . That's swell. Now listen. Sandy and I won't be back there to-night. And I want you to come after us at dawn. Use the autogyro and come as light as you can because you'll have to carry four of us back. But bring a subma-



chine gun with a couple of rounds of ammunition. And you'd also better have Red or Cy come along in a Snorter. Just in case.

"Now get this. I'm in an apartment on 10th Street. It is about four houses west of"—his voice dropped—"on the south side. You can locate the Bellvue Hotel at the corner of 10th. Keep on due west until you see a cross made by a white sheet on the roof of the building I'm in. Circle back and land. Have your submachine gun ready. You have plenty of room on the roof. We'll be waiting and ready when we hear your motor. . . . I know that. I'll fix it with the commissioner when I get back to the field to-morrow. Got it all straight? O. K., fella. We'll be looking for you. Good-by."

Bill glanced at the watch on his wrist when he hung up the receiver. "I'm going to get a few hours' sleep," he said, throwing himself down on a wide, deep davenport. "We'll have to be up and ready by four thirty."

"I have three bedrooms, Bill. Lots of room. I'll get you pajamas," Mike offered.

"Never mind," Bill said. "I'm too sleepy to take the time to undress. I was up most of last night working on blue prints—a new bomber I'm designing."

"Suit yourself," Mike laughed. Then he sobered. An expression of pain flashed across his dark countenance. "What are we going to do about Felipe, Bill?" he asked.

"Nothing," Bill said. "You'll just have to leave him as he is. The police won't want him moved until they've seen him and had a look around. If we call them to-night they'll hold all of us at headquarters. I'll send one of my men over to-morrow to take care of it after I've talked to the commissioner. He'll have to get my car, too. It's parked over on University Place. I'll rout you all out at four o'clock. Good night."

V—ATTACK

BILL BARNES was possessed of that peculiar faculty of being able to awaken at any hour upon which he had set his mind before going to sleep. He assumed that it was four o'clock, the hour he had set to awaken, when he opened his eyes. The room was shrouded in darkness except for a thin stream of moonlight that cut across the bottom of the window sill. There wasn't a single sound or the faintest rustle to disturb the quiet of the room. Yet something, some inherent instinct, warned him not to move, not to even raise his arm to look at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. The muscles of his body became tense and he could feel the hair rise along the base of his scalp. He knew that something foreign to the room had caused him to wake.

Suddenly, a thin stream of light struck the couch from the right and moved forward until it shone directly on the center of his body. A lean, bronze hand came between the stream of light and his vision, a hand that clasped a knife, the blade of which gleamed dully a bare two inches from his heart. Another hand darted into

his pockets so deftly that he could barely feel its touch.

Cold sweat ran into his eyes as he conquered an almost overwhelming desire to wriggle out from beneath that knife. He knew that when he struck he must strike fast and effectually. The hand that held the knife, he knew, would plunge with the speed of a rattlesnake.

Slowly, without moving the rest of his body he brought his right leg up. Like a streak of lightning his right foot lashed out and hurled the form before him across the room. With the same movement he rolled off the couch to the floor. Lying perfectly still he listened for the slightest sound. After a minute that left his nerves taut and screaming, he stretched his hand out as far as he could reach and tapped the floor. Something whistled through the air and vibrated back and forth where it had stuck into the wall above his head. Bill cursed himself mentally for not having brought a gun with him. He might have known that association with Mike would be dangerous. He glanced at his wrist watch now and saw that it was nearly four o'clock.

There was absolute silence again. He knew the man across the room was waiting for another move, probably worming his way toward him a fraction of an inch at a time. When Bill could stand it no longer he began to move forward. A button on his coat scraped the floor. He put his head down and clung closer to the rug he had reached. Another foot, two, and he edged halfway across the room. A creak sounded near where he imagined the kitchen door to be. He felt a slight breeze fan his face.

The seconds stretched into minutes, five, ten, a thousand, it seemed, as he lay there on his stomach. Then he began to move forward again. The stalked became the stalker. He moved

so slowly and so quietly that it seemed hours before he reached the other wall. No sound came from any place in the room. He began circling it inch by inch. His eyes were now accustomed to the darkness. He picked out various objects in the room. None of them faintly resembled a man. Then he slipped a hand into his pocket and drew out a box of matches. He lighted one and threw it high into the center of the room. At the same time he altered his position with a quick swing to the left. The match fell to the floor and burned itself out, throwing eerie shadows into the corners.

He lighted another match and held it high above his head. Leaping to his feet, he switched on the light before he ducked down behind the couch. Blinking in the sudden glare, he crouched there for a moment. When

his eyes became accustomed to the lights he stood up.

The room was empty.

His piercing scrutiny stopped when his eyes fell on the knife sticking in the wooden panel of the fireplace. Then he hadn't been dreaming. He raised his voice and shouted for Mike Morales and Saul Cox.

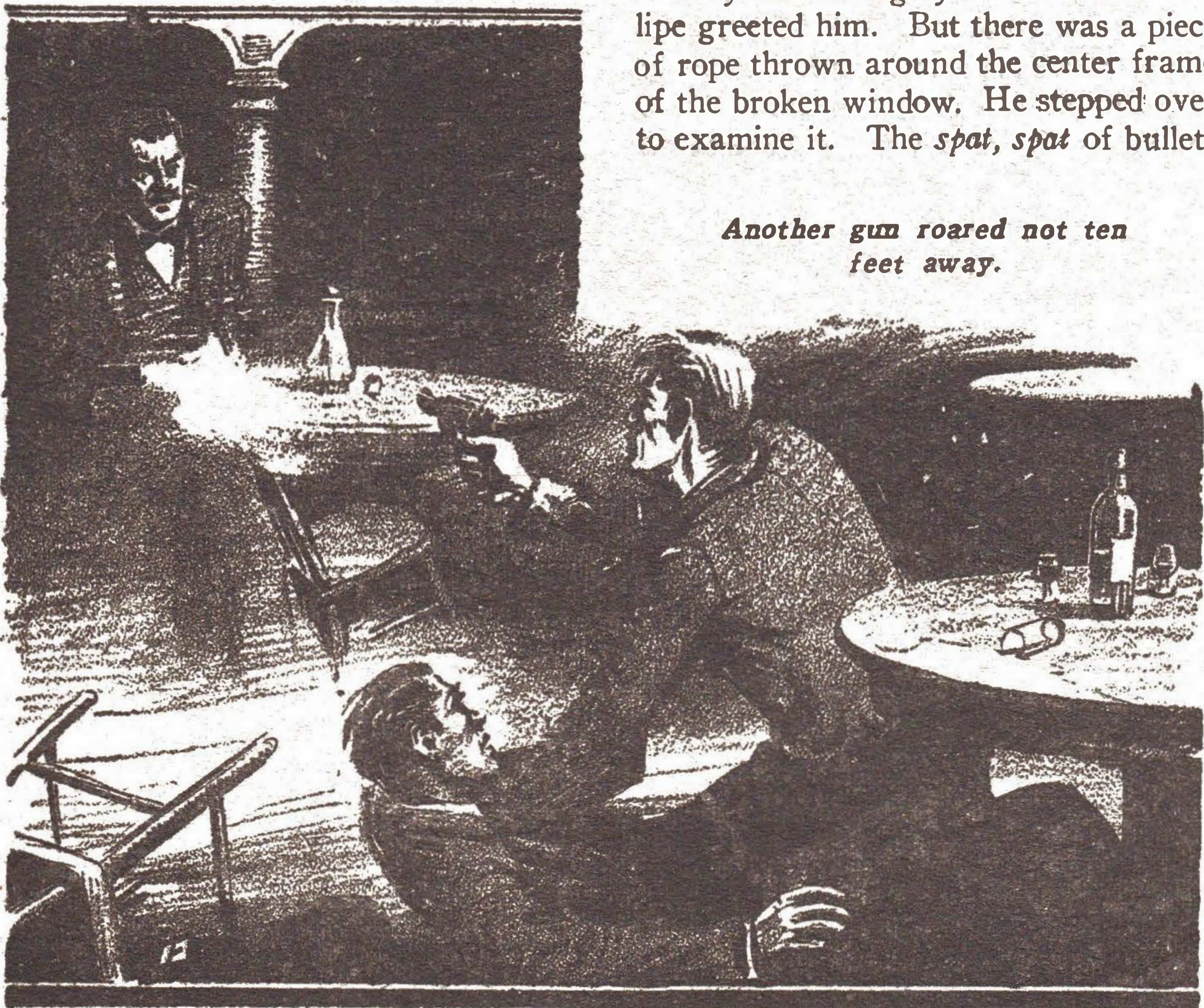
Saul Cox came out of his room, blinking his eyes, yet moving with the sleek speed and grace of a panther. He had an automatic in his hand. Bill jumped at him.

"Let me take that," he said. Saul Cox handed the gun to Bill without a word as Mike Morales and Sandy came into the room.

"Watch everything," Bill said and kicked the kitchen door open. He ran his hand along the wall and pushed a light button.

Only the staring eyes of the dead Felipe greeted him. But there was a piece of rope thrown around the center frame of the broken window. He stepped over to examine it. The *spat, spat* of bullets

Another gun roared not ten feet away.



sounded as they thudded into the wall behind him.

Saul Cox shouted, "Get out of range!" But Bill had already jumped backward, a bullet cutting through his coat as he moved. He pointed at the rope thrown over the window frame. Mike Morales was staring at it with unbelieving eyes.

"How did they get the end back after they had thrown it over there?" Sandy asked.

"With a wire hook from the loft building," Saul Cox said.

"They got it back some way," Bill said grimly. "Something in the living room woke me up. A flashlight shone on me and the man who held the flashlight also held a knife about two inches from my heart. I kicked him in the stomach and rolled off on the floor. While I was trying to locate him in the dark he slipped through the door and went down that rope—the same way he came in. He was going through my pockets."

"And you didn't have a gun?" Saul Cox asked.

"Not even a water pistol," Bill answered, shortly. "It's a good thing you're getting out of here, Mike. This place is too hot."

"It's just as well," Mike said. "I'll be able to take along a bag full of clothes, won't I? Enough to last me until we get to Viga? Most of my stuff is down there."

"Not too many," Bill cautioned. "But how are you going to get to Viga?" Morales searched Bill's face for nearly two minutes before he spoke. Saul Cox was watching Bill narrowly.

"I'm counting on you, Bill," Mike said at last. Bill stood as silently as Mike had a moment before.

"We'd better get that ground strip laid on the roof," he said. "We'll talk about the rest of it when we're back at my field. One sheet will do the trick I think."

Sandy helped Bill tear up a sheet and form a cross about twenty-four feet long by sixteen wide. They fastened it together with safety pins. Taking five heavy brass ash trays they followed Mike up an iron ladder and through a trapdoor to the roof. There they laid out the white cross, securing it to the roof with a heavy ash tray on each tip and one in the center.

THE SUN was just lighting up the sky as they went back through the trapdoor to wait for the sound of the autogyro.

"I don't think they'll be able to do any damage with that machine gun when we take off," Bill said. "I'm quite sure it's a submachine gun and they aren't accurate over thirty yards. You birds had better get into some clothes unless you want to do some flying in your underwear."

They were drinking coffee that Mike had made on an electric grill in the living room when they heard the roar of two airplane motors overhead. Bill and Sandy cocked their heads to one side and listened as the crescendo of the motors grew louder and passed overhead. Sandy looked at Bill and nodded his head.

"It's the autogyro and a Snorter," Bill said. "They're circling back. Get set. We'll stay here until we hear Shorty set her down on the roof. Give him more room."

"Is there any danger of his cracking up?" Saul Cox asked.

"Not that boy," Bill grinned. "He's a flying fool and shot full of more luck than a four-leaf clover. He'll set her down as easily as you put that coffee away. Eh, Sandy?"

"Yes," Sandy said, reluctantly, adding, "the big palooka!"

Bill laughed, but his fingers were doubled up into fists as he heard the wheels of the autogyro settle on the roof and run over it above their heads. The

smile came back to his taut face as the wheels stopped. He sprang to his feet.

"Button up your coats," he said. "We're off. Before we go, Mike, you had better take a broom and pull up that rope off the kitchen window frame. You can both come back here to get whatever you want and lock up the place securely after the police arrive."

Bill and Sandy hurried up the iron ladder to the roof. Shorty was climbing out of the cockpit of the cabin when they pushed up the trapdoor and called to him softly. He sauntered toward them with a puzzled look in his blue eyes.

"Get stuck in an all-night poker game?" he asked.

"Better than that, fella," Bill said. "We're right in the middle of revolution." He threw back his head and gazed at the plane sweeping in wide circles a thousand feet above them. "Who is in the Snorter?"

"Red," Shorty said. "What's the 'just in case' about?"

Bill went over the happenings of the day before and of that morning as fast as he could while Shorty's eyes opened wide in amazement. Bill finished as Mike and Saul Cox stuck their heads above the rim of the trapdoor and climbed on the roof. He shook their hands in turn. They gazed into his twinkling blue eyes and ran approving eyes over his stalky, barrel-chested frame.

"If you'll help me lift this chariot around I think we'll get away easier," he said. "You want to take her, Bill?"

"You stick with her," Bill said. "I'll handle the Tommie gun if we need it. Glad to hear you copped the race prize, fella."

Shorty grinned.

TWO thousand feet above the little group gathered around the autogyro, Red Gleason swept around in wide circles in his Snorter. He peered over the

side occasionally to see if the autogyro was clear. Also, he scanned the air above and below him and cast an occasional yearning glance toward that section of New York that is bounded on the north by Columbus Circle, the south by 42nd Street, the west by 8th Avenue and the east by Park Avenue. That was the section of New York he knew and loved.

While he did these things he sang to himself. He sang songs no one had ever heard before. The twelve-cylinder supercharged Diesel engine sung with him. With the bullet-proof inclosure of the front cockpit slid backward over the after cockpit, he got the full cooperation of the powerful motor. The motor was singing bass according to Red's idea. If a note sounded a little sour he blamed it on the engine or the scream of the prop.

He improvised both the words and the music as he went along. The music was a single note, a chant that did not rise or fall until the end of each verse:

"Oh, I crashed in Alabama,
I broke my nose in two.
I busted all my floating ribs—
So that's why I love you.

I knicked my knob in Borneo,
I broke my leg in Spain.
But never have I suffered,
The least degree of pain.

I lost an eye at Guadalupe,
My kidneys in Peru.
But still there's one thing that I
love—
The old red, white and blue!"

"There," he said to himself, "is a real piece of music. I'll have to remember that and sing it to Shorty."

He glanced over the side of the cockpit and saw the autogyro waddling across the roof. It looked like a huge grasshopper as it neared the edge.

"Pick it up, you clown," he shouted over the side. His own ship slid off to the right and he had to spend a busy

thirty seconds fighting the controls. When he gazed down again the autogyro was climbing. It was coming straight up as though it were fastened to a wire cable. He saw the rotor blades slow down. The propeller became an iridescent glow of whirling metal in the morning sun. He swooped down when the autogyro was at about a thousand feet. A hand waved to him from the cabin. He shot a hand over his head in salute and circled back and above the slower-moving autogyro.

He had stopped singing now. Bill had told Shorty to bring him along, "just in case." A fellow never knew what "just in case" meant when Bill Barnes gave the warning. It might mean anything. And the "anything" might happen any place between the South Sea Islands and the Arctic regions.

He scanned the sky as he followed the autogyro over the towering skyscrapers of lower Manhattan and the East River. The only things that came within his gaze were a few wispy cumulus clouds, the sun, and what he took to be a couple of army scout planes flying along peacefully at about ten thousand feet.

Just to be sure, he glanced at his instrument panel, checked his oil, gas, revs and temperature. Being sure was a hobby with Red. Being sure and improvising songs. Nobody, he told himself, ever got any place with a leaky oil line. At least, he would qualify, they never got any place they wanted to go.

The next time Red probed the sky, he saw only the sun and the wispy cumulus clouds. The two little biplanes had disappeared. He zoomed the Snorter upward and began to sing again.

Where the dickens had those two biplanes gone? It had suddenly occurred to him they couldn't vanish so quickly. The visibility was perfect. With a quick throw-back to those days when German Fokkers had come plummeting at him out of the clouds or sun he stuck

his hand up to "thumb" the sun. What he saw brought a string of invectives to his lips.

He threw the Snorter out of range of the stream of death the diving biplane was throwing at him. He didn't bother to follow its course as it went streaking under him. He gunned his motor and dove on the other biplane with orange wings and black fuselage as it pounced on the slow-moving autogyro ahead.

The autogyro went into a skidding side slip as the biplane went by it.

"Just a couple of boys who want to play rough," Red said between clenched teeth as the biplane came out of its dive and zoomed wildly. It came sweeping back in a neat Immelmann as Red pulled his throttle open and the stick back into his stomach. The orange-and-black biplane came roaring, firing long before he was within range. Red could see the fire dancing from the two machine guns mounted along the engine housing. He waited until the bullets began to beat through his port wing. Then he pulled the stick back and let the biplane race beneath him.

Red grinned as the ship went under him. At the same time, he kicked the rudder and threw the stick. The Snorter came around and Red's fingers tripped the trigger of his guns as the biplane came across his sights. His two machine guns sent a terrific burst of lead into the biplane's cockpit and engine. He saw the pilot half leap from his seat and slouch over the stick as he went by him.

Then his eyes widened as he saw black smoke curling back from the engine housing of the biplane. The smoke began to glow as flames crept along the sides of the plane.

"Never get tough with a lucky baby," Red said between his clenched teeth.

Suddenly the biplane zoomed upward and wallowed like a ship that is caught in a heavy sea. Then the nose came

down and flames licked farther and farther back along the body. The tail began to whirl and the plane turned over and over as it began its dizzy descent to earth.

At that same instant Red felt his own plane shudder like a poplar leaf in a gale. He knew that the other biplane had come up beneath him to perforate his wings and fuselage. He pulled his stick back tight against his



Bill Barnes' autogyro.

stomach and held it there. The Snorter came up and turned on its back as the second biplane dove beneath it.

As Red came out of the tight loop, he gunned his motor. He gave it all the gas it would take as he went into a terrific power dive. He saw the white face of the enemy pilot glancing back and up at him as he closed in. Then the biplane went into a side slip, executed a chandelle and raced away in the opposite direction. Before Red could safely bring his ship out of the dive the plane was a half mile away. Red shrugged his shoulders, took up a position a thousand feet above the autogyro and began to sing again:

"Oh, never get tough with baby,
Never get tough I say;
You'll live much longer if you
don't—
Perhaps till Judgment Day."

"Lousy," he said to himself. His hand was steady on the control column. His hazel eyes were tranquil and untroubled as he probed the sky.

AS THE orange-and-black biplane turned tail and raced away, Bill put the Tommie gun in a rack beside Shorty and turned a questioning gaze on Mike Morales and Saul Cox. He saw that their bronzed faces were a trifle whiter than usual. He smiled at them to assure them that everything was all right.

"Do all of your men fly like that one, Bill?" Mike asked, admiringly.

"My gosh," Sandy interrupted before Bill could speak. "He can't fly. He's shot full of horseshoes like that quince up there."

Shorty swung around in his seat and fixed him with a steady stare. It would have been effective if the twinkle hadn't been in his eyes.

"Listen, Richtofen," Shorty began scathingly. "You'd better learn to eat without a bib before you criticize your elders."

"Nuts!" said Sandy and his right hand shot out to stop just under Shorty's nose. Over the ends of his fingers crawled a dark, brown object that writhed and danced. The mouth of the thing opened and a red tongue darted forth.

"Hey!" Shorty shouted and ducked to the right. At the same time he unconsciously threw the controls. The quick movement threw the autogyro into a snap roll that in turn threw Bill, Mike and Saul Cox across the cabin.

"Come on, lay off it, kid," Bill roared as Shorty brought the ship back to an even keel. Sandy was doubled up with laughter.

"How do you like my pet, Rickenbacker?" Sandy managed to say through his laughter. He rubbed the tip of the rubber snake's nose as Shorty looked hastily over his shoulder. "'Ttle boy afraid of thnakes?" Sandy lisped.

"If you ever do that again I'll take you up over Long Island Sound and dunk you in for keeps," Shorty said.

"You'd better get——"

"Pipe down!" Bill shouted. He swung around toward Mike and Saul Cox as Sandy, grinning, dropped into the seat beside Shorty.

"Were those some of your friends from Samerra?" Bill asked.

"Undoubtedly their agents," Mike said. Saul Cox nodded confirmation.

"They must have tapped your telephone wire," Bill said. "That's the way they found out I was going to meet you last night, too."

"They've tapped everything I own," Mike said bitterly. He leaned toward Bill, his expression tense and imploring. "Bill, you've got to help me. I don't care about the power or the honor that goes with the presidency of Samerra. That means nothing to me. But I do care about my people. They are being exploited, living like dogs. The men who control the government are stripping Samerra of its wealth, taking it out of the country—robbing my people of the things that are justly theirs." His eyes were glowing with an almost fanatical light, his hands outstretched in honest supplication.

Bill knew that he was sincere. That he loved his island republic and its people, loved them enough to sacrifice his life in their behalf.

"I can't offer you much money now. But I'll guarantee all your expenses and make good any planes you might lose. Later on, when I am back at Samerra, I'll be able to reward you," Mike pleaded.

Bill put a hand on his shoulder. "It isn't that, Mike. I don't want any pay. I——"

"I will not accept your help unless you agree to some remuneration when I am able to pay it." Mike's head was up now. From his eyes shone that fierce pride that Bill knew so well. He

was Miquel Morales of Samerra, one of the Morales who traced their strain back to the true Castilians, possessed of all their pride of name and blood.

"All right, Mike," Bill said, laughing. "Let that ride. The thing is I can't get mixed up in any revolution. In the first place, I don't like war. That may sound funny coming from me. But it's the truth. I've tried to build up an organization that could right some of the evils in the world. We've built up quite a reputation for ourselves. We——"

"That is what I want to do on Samerra," Mike said. "I want to free my people from the burden they have been forced to carry, from the yoke foreigners have placed round their necks."

"But I can't afford to get mixed up in a revolution," Bill said. "My own government would crack down on me. I would lose everything I have spent years in building up."

"If——"

Bill held up his hand. "Wait a minute, Mike," he said. "I'm going in with you. But when we get down to this other island we've got to find some other way of giving Samerra back to Samerrans than fighting for it. We'll figure a way out. We'll hobble that British syndicate and put you back where you want to be. Eh, Cox?"

Saul Cox thrust out his hand to Bill. Mike Morales' eyes were shining and were, perhaps, a little wet.

"We will, Bill," Cox said.

And Bill, gazing at the gaunt, lean face and the ice-cold eyes of the man, was glad that he was going to work on Struan Chamberlin, the present tycoon of Samerra, instead of on him.

VI—NARROW ESCAPE

SHORTY set the autogyro down on Barnes Field in a manner that was suggestive of a duck going home for its evening meal. Red Gleason flattened

out the Snorter at a thousand feet. Without bothering to circle the field he brought it up on the apron at a terrific speed.

"That," he said to the grease monkey who came out to trundle the ship into its hangar, "is that."

"And some day," Bill said over his shoulder, "you'll go straight on through the hangar."

"No such luck for us," said Sandy.

"Why *Mister Sanders!*" Red said in mock protest, his red hair shooting in all directions as he whipped off his helmet. "How could you be so unkind and unfeeling?"

"Stop your clowning," Bill bellowed, glaring at Sandy. "Red, this is Mike Morales and Saul Cox. You and Shorty show them around the field for a few minutes while I run over to my bungalow and get the police commissioner on the wire. Come on over and bring their bags when you're through." He raced across the apron and disappeared behind the Administration Building, his parachute pack still on his back.

Mike Morales and Saul Cox gazed at the rectangular field with respect. Shorty pointed out the various buildings to them.

"All of the seven runways converge right there by the traffic tower—or dispatch tower—we call it," he pointed out. "They are all lighted with border lights at night. The long building ahead is the Administration Building. The small one at the right houses a fire engine, an ambulance, a crash truck and a miniature hospital. The one to the left of the center is a complete airplane factory for repairs and where Bill designs and builds his new planes. The one to the right of the fire house there is where Bill keeps his Scarlet Stormer and Sandy his Eaglet. All the rest are hangars for the Snorters and transports. That is, the ones that face on the apron here."

"What are the towers along the fence for?" Saul Cox asked.

"Guards," Red answered. "All the wire fence is electrified. The guards are supplied with motor cycles to get around the concrete paths fast. And, of course, all the towers are armed with machine guns and gas guns."

Mike Morales whistled. "He certainly has a corking place here. And well armed."

"It has to be," Shorty said meaningly. "We've been gassed, bombed, machine-gunned——" He broke off shrugging his shoulders.

"Let's wander over to the living quarters," Red suggested. "Bill ought to be through with the commissioner by now."

But he wasn't through. He wasn't through for an hour after they arrived. When he came out of his office his face was streaming with perspiration. He pushed his blond shock of hair back from his forehead and whistled. He looked at Morales with a curious expression.

"You're certainly hot," he said to Mike. "I had to get the commissioner, the mayor and finally the governor of the State. And even now I don't know whether it is going to hold. We'll have to get out of here and get out fast while they quiet the whole thing down. I'll leave one of my best men, Scotty MacCloskey, my chief engineer to handle things. There's a devil's cauldron brewing in New York over all those killings. The papers are howling but they haven't got to the truth yet."

"Do you want me for anything right now, Bill?" Sandy broke in.

"I do," Bill said grimly. "I want you to tell Martin to have the Stormer and a Snorter out on the apron. Keep them warm and ready to take the air. Tell him to check 'em before he takes 'em out. Equipped for anything. Tell him to check the transport and

three more Snorters and have 'em ready to take off for—well, never mind where. All the fuel they'll carry and fully armed. The bombs set on the transport.

"Then tell Tony Lamport to phone the guards and instruct them to keep their eyes open extra wide. No one allowed inside the gates without a check on it from me. Have him phone the observer in the dispatch tower to keep his eyes in the air and report anything flying extra low until dusk and the electric eye takes over the job. Got it?"

"I got it, Bill," Sandy said eagerly. He hesitated a moment. "The Eaglet goes in the transport, doesn't she?" His eyes were just a trifle fearful.

"She goes," Bill said. "Now scram!" He swung a foot at Sandy's retreating figure as the kid darted away.

"I want to talk to you and Mr. Cox," Bill said to Mike grimly, leading the way into his comfortable living room. He closed the door, pointed to chairs and offered them cigars. They both lighted cigarettes. Bill sat down on the edge of a table, swung his powerful legs and looked thoughtfully out the window. Suddenly his head came up and his eyes narrowed.

"What the—what are you getting me into, Mike?" he asked. "Come clean! All kinds of pressure has been organized to get you. I couldn't seem to get much information. No one that I talked to knows why the State Department in Washington is interested in the murder of a few men from obscure West Indian Islands. Fortunately for me, there were plenty of witnesses to the attack those two orange-and-black biplanes made on Red Gleason. Such things as that have happened to me any number of times before. That's out. But why is Washington interested in the murder of your servant, the two men found on the water front, the man who had

dinner with you the other night and a half dozen more? What's behind it?"

MORALES ran a lean hand over his tired eyes as though to shut out the vision of the men Bill had mentioned. Saul Cox's eyes were boring into Bill's with calm inscrutability.

"The set-up is as I told you, Bill," Mike said. "I know they are trying to get me. But Washington isn't interested except to aid the powerful money interests that have stolen my island, robbed me by buying my army out from under me. They think I'm through. But they know that while I'm alive I'm dangerous. Herrera, Valtura and a few figureheads are supposed to be in command of the government now. The government is unofficial but strong. Chamberlin and the men behind him are the government.

"There are traitors in my organization now. There are always traitors and double-crossers in every conspiracy. But people and the men working for me on Samerra and the other islands are loyal. I have no army except the army of Samerra. They will be loyal to me if I can make one coup. I have some strong American money behind me. They want to see me take the island back. They know the vast unexploited resources of the island." A sardonic smile flitted on Morales' lips. "They are not helping me for nothing, Bill!"

"In other words, Mike," Bill said, "you believe that if you can swoop in at the right moment and strike a paralyzing blow you can drive out Chamberlin and give the island and its wealth back to your people? Do you think you're justified in taking it that way—by force? Isn't there any court, any tribunal that can help you win it back?"

Morales got to his feet and paced nervously across the room. "Court? Tribunal? Bah! I must take it the way I lost it. I am contributing money

to churches, to the poor natives, to a hundred organizations now. The money of the Americans that are backing me. At least I know the Americans will not rob my people as the others have done. There is only one law in the little republics of the tropics, Bill. Force!

"If you knew how my people were suffering, how they are being tortured, killed, robbed, starved!" Tragedy was in Mike's eyes now, and Bill was moved. He paced back and forth across the room a half dozen times. Suddenly he whirled and pointed a finger at Morales. His eyes were blazing.

"I believe in you, Mike," he said. "I believe in your sincerity." One large fist banged into the other. "I'll take my men down there to help you, if they want to go. I can't order them to go. I'll have to talk with them. But I don't promise I'm going to do any fighting. Not one of my men has ever made an attack without a reason. We believe in a strong defensive. But I'll help you get back your island. There are other ways than killing people to do it."

The two old friends shook hands to seal the pact. Then Saul Cox came forward and wrung Bill's hand.

"It ought to be apparent from what you've already seen that you'll have to do some fighting," he said, a quiet smile twisting his lips. "I've been in every country down there and I've had to fight in every one. We're pretty well organized now. After we reach Viga I will take my lieutenants to Samerra. They will be ready to take command of the army under my direction. The army hates Herrera. I've done these little things before."

"How about their air force?" Bill asked. "Have they any?"

"Eight fast scouts and four bombers," Morales said.

"Any place I can conceal my planes at Viga?"

"We'll be up at the north end of the island in the harbor until we are ready to strike," Mike said. "If there is any way to camouflage them from overhead it might help."

"I'll do that. Any place we can land for fuel between Miami and Samerra?"

"We must be careful when we get down in the islands," Mike said.

"San Juan, Puerto Rico will do the trick," Bill said. "We'll be out of here and in Miami some time in the morning—perhaps to-night. I'll go over and get the ball really rolling. You'd both better stay under cover."

"Our stuff in New York?" Mike asked. Bill laughed.

"Forget it," he said. "I can get phone calls through for you without any danger. But be careful what you say if you have to make any arrangements." His face was burning. His whole body was quivering with excitement now. Mike's story began to dovetail in his mind. Mike was fighting a fight he believed in. The same way he, Bill, had had to fight a score of times. He could see justification for the whole thing. It wasn't just another banana war as it had looked at first.

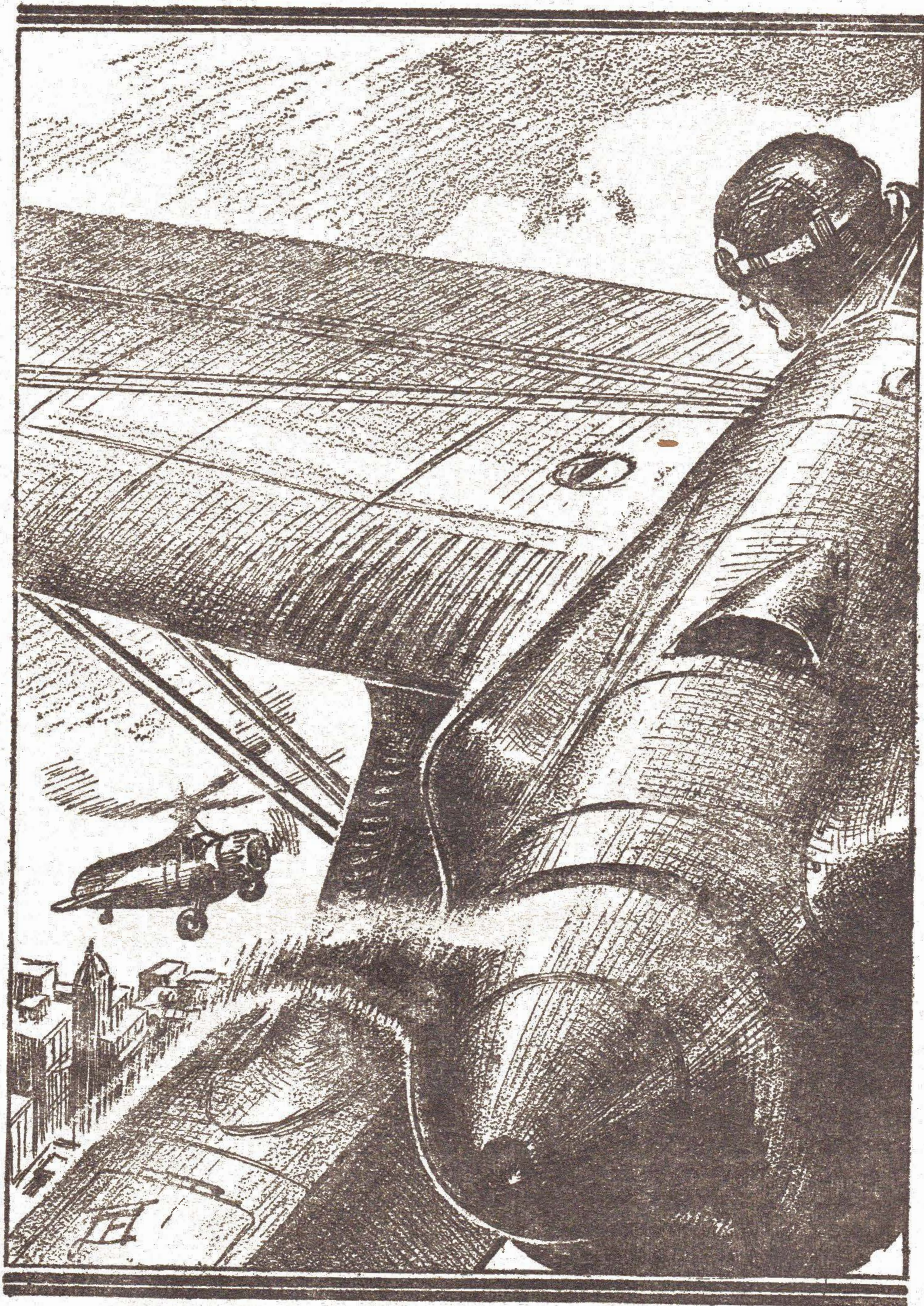
He grabbed at the telephone and asked the operator for old "Scotty" MacCloskey. A heavy bur came over the wire in a moment.

"Scotty? Will you check over the stratosphere equipment on the four Snorters, the Scarlet Stormer and the carrier-transport? Martin is working on the ones I am going to use now.

"And when you're through with that will you go up to the meteorology department and ask Crabbin about the best camouflage to use on the top of all of them if they are to be moored close to shore down in the West Indies. When you find out have all six of them decorated."

"How soon are you going to use them, Bill?" Scotty asked.

"Just as soon to-day as they're



*When he gazed down again
the autogyro was climbing.*

ready," Bill snapped. "The sooner the better. I want to see you in a half an hour. I'll come over. Good-by."

His bronzed face was set and hard as he slapped the receiver on the hook. He had cast the die in his customary manner and now that he was in the thing he would give it everything he had. He moved across the room with long decisive strides. Saul Cox, watching him, knew they had an ally worth having.

"I'll be back after a bit," he said as he opened the outer door and lunged through it to nearly knock Sandy off his feet.

"Come on, kid," he said, grabbing Sandy by the neck. "I may need you."

HE FORCED Sandy to run to keep up with him as he started with long strides down the narrow concrete path from his bungalow toward the transverse road in front of the Administration Building.

"Everything moving along all right?" he asked Sandy.

"Fine, Bill," Sandy said. "One thing I was wondering about, though. We'll want amphibian gear on the transport, won't we?"

"Sure," Bill said. "Remind me to tell Martin. I——" He broke off and whirled to gaze into the east as the approaching roar of a low-flying plane came to his ears. He put up a hand to shield his gaze from the sun. His eyes were narrowed to mere slits and his body was taut. He did not get the low-flying plane under focus until it came roaring over the field at the east end of the transverse road.

A curse ripped from between his clenched teeth as he recognized it to be a sister ship to the orange-and-black one Red had shot down. He held his breath as it went over the Administration Building at a terrific speed.

If it carried bombs it could blow his three hangars to bits. But it didn't

have bombs. Or if it did, it didn't use them. Instead, it drove at a steep glide straight toward the guard's booth that stood at the entrance to the field from Leland Lane.

The guard at the door of the booth clutched his stomach with a shriek of pain as the *tat-tat-tat* of a machine gun joined the roar of the diving motor. Blood ran from his mouth as he curled up on the floor of the booth.

Bill Barnes' right fist rose in the air to follow the steep fast climb of the orange-and-black biplane as it raced away to the west. Both horror and fury gripped him as he started to race across the concrete toward the hangar of the Scarlet Stormer. The battle was on. A ruthless battle where a man's life was worth no more than a raindrop in a cloud-burst!

Suddenly he checked himself. A medium-weight blue truck had swung into the Leland Lane gateway on two wheels. A half dozen mechanics who had raced out of their dormitory toward the guard's booth leaped frantically out of its plunging path. It careened straight down the transverse road, cut to the right between the Administration Building and repair hangar and came to a stop a few feet in front of the traffic control tower. Bill and Sandy were racing side by side as it came to halt and a man leaped from the driver's seat leaving the engine running.

Putting more drive into his powerful legs, Bill raced away from Sandy and caught the man as he started to the left across the apron. As Bill whipped him about in his viselike grip the man swung at his face with both of his fists. Bill rocked his head back on his neck with a vicious left hook that traveled a bare eight inches.

The man began to scream and kick like a thing gone mad. His face was deadly white, his eyes and mouth wide with fright. He tried to speak, but

he could only make unintelligible noises as he pointed toward the truck. Bill glanced at it and saw a wisp of smoke curling out the back. It came to him with a sickening flash that the truck was loaded with explosives. The machine-gunning of the guard at the gate and the arrival of the truck had been timed to coincide!

Bill threw the man a dozen feet away from him with a roar and started toward the truck. Perhaps he could reach it and get it away from the center of his buildings before it blew them a thousand feet into the air.

But Sandy had anticipated him. He had seen the man's face contorted with fright as he pointed at the truck. And he had seen that dim wisp of smoke. His mind, trained to coordinate with his eye, had ordered his muscles into action. In a half dozen long strides he was on the running board of the truck and had thrown himself into the driver's seat.

He had not stopped to reckon the danger to himself. He had thought only of the lives and the buildings and planes and machinery that would be wiped out when the thing exploded.

With that thought in mind he slammed off the brakes, threw the gears in mesh and clamped down on the accelerator. He went around the traffic control office the way a racing driver takes a banked turn. His tanned face was white as he whirled the wheel to the right and stuck the nose of the truck straight down the center concrete runway toward the far end of the field.

Bill Barnes stood with his blond head thrown back, the muscles of his face working in agony as he watched Sandy speed the careening car across the intersection where three of the main runways crossed, to whirl the wheel to the left and down a runway away from the corner of the field where explosives were stored.

"Why doesn't the half-wit jump and

run?" he groaned. He expected to see the death truck explode at any second. His breath came in agonized gasps as he watched the kid racing to a certain death.

"Let it go, you fool!" he roared and he began to run down the field toward it without knowing his legs were in motion.

As Sandy came to the edge of the last concrete runway he braked the car down and cut the wheel to the right again. As the wheels struck the macadam, heading toward the machine-gun targets, he jumped, rolling over and over a dozen times before he could get to his feet. Without a backward glance he started a race with death. A race he knew he would remember as long as he lived. His legs pumped up and down with all the strength of his lithe, wiry frame. His heart and lungs seemed ready to burst. It did not seem he could bring his heavily weighted feet off the ground. He dimly saw figures running toward him through the perspiration that streamed down his face. His lips were drawn back over his teeth in agony as the whole world seemed to explode behind him.

He pitched forward on his face!

BLUE FLAMES crept along the electrified fence of Barnes Field as tons of earth and concrete were hurled high into the air. The men running across the field toward Sandy were thrown headlong, stunned. Others standing on the apron sat down abruptly, their eyes wide with surprise. The glass rattled out of every window within a half-mile radius. Stones beat a tattoo on the roofs of the hangars and Administration Building.

Bill Barnes rose from his knees as stones thumped to the ground around him. He raced the remaining hundred yards toward Sandy with his breath coming in short torturous gasps.

"If that kid is badly hurt," he kept

saying to himself, "I'll blow their dirty island out of the Caribbean Sea. The murdering——"

He rolled Sandy over on his back and loosened his belt and collar before he put his ear above his heart. He exhaled a long breath as he heard the strength of its action. The kid was just stunned. If he had been fifty yards back he would probably now be buried in the bottom of that great yawning crater. He gulped as he realized what Sandy had done, what courage he had shown.

Guts! That was the word. Sheer guts! And a mind that told him how to use them at topmost speed. He knew that if Sandy hadn't driven the truck away it would have killed at least a hundred people to say nothing of wiping out every building on Barnes Field.

Dr. Humphrey leaped off the front seat of the field ambulance as it came to a stop beside them. The driver slid a litter out of the back while the doctor bent over Sandy. He looked up and smiled at Bill after a moment.

"Just stunned," he said. "We'll rush him over and get him in bed. That was a courageous thing to do, Bill. The kid has more of the stuff it takes than most of us."

"Than all of us," Bill said, huskily.

They lifted Sandy into the ambulance and the doctor climbed in beside him. Bill climbed on the front seat with the driver. He was cold, shaking. Sandy's freckled nose and mop of carrot hair bobbed before his eyes. He would never forget this thing the kid had done.

Sandy's eyes were open and he was grinning in a sickly fashion when they carried him over to the hospital. Bill went in for a moment. He shook Sandy's hand and tried to look hard-boiled. It was a pretty hard thing for him to do at the moment. "That was the bravest thing I ever saw a man do, kid," he said. Sandy looked at him in surprise. The intensity of Bill's tone

startled him. Then he grinned and brushed his left hand before his face as though he were brushing away a fly. He was at a loss for words. He had never seen Bill so moved.

"You saved all our lives," Bill went on.

"She certainly did go *boom!*" Sandy said. Bill grinned and became himself again.

"Shake your useless carcass out of here as soon as the doc will let you," he said. "We've got places to go."

VII—OFF TO SAMERRA

THE EMPLOYEES of Barnes Field were still milling around when he went out on the apron. A number of them were down at the south end of the field gazing at the great yawning hole the truck's cargo had torn in the ground. He could see that the southeast corner of the fence had been torn away. He hoped the guard in the tower had escaped. The other guard, he knew, was dead.

All his fliers—Mike Morales, Saul Cox and Scotty MacCloskey—were gathered in a huddle behind the Administration Building. Bill shouted at Scotty MacCloskey.

"Scotty! Get a flock of men out there to clean off that center runway. And have Martin run another Snorter out on the apron."

"Did they get the guy who was driving that truck?" Bill asked Shorty as he came running toward him.

"Did they get him, you ask?" Shorty said. His lips barely opened to enunciate the words. "They got him. You ought to see him!"

"Where is he?"

"What's left of him is in the brig. But, Bill, things are popping. There are a million cops and detectives nosing around. If you're thinking of taking on this job with Morales you'd better

forget it. We'll never be able to get away from here for a month. I——"

"Forget it?" Bill interrupted. "Where's Red?" Shorty pointed.

"I want you two birds to stay here on the apron," Bill said grimly. "Stick right alongside your Snorters. If you hear a plane drumming overhead get in the air and get there fast. I don't think they would be insane enough to come back again, but you never can tell. They might come back with some bombs to finish the job. They're after Morales and they want to cripple us. Stand ——" He broke off and cocked his head on one side like a terrier who hears the distant footsteps of his master. His voice rose to a bellow as he started to run. "Red!" he roared. Shorty followed him. The three met and Bill whipped out orders.

"That's the same ship coming back!" he said. "It's a Type-3 Hawk and she's high. Ride it down. The three of us can force him. Don't hit him. I want the pilot." They raced for their planes.

The crowd of mechanics swarming on the apron had seen many a ship take the air from Barnes Field and from other fields. But they had never seen three ships take the air the way those three did. They literally blasted the planes into the air with determination, after incredibly short runs down the rock-strewn runway. How they ever avoided a shoe blow-out will forever be a mystery.

The twin Diesel motors of the Stormer roared with the rising crescendo of a bloodhound on the trail as Bill brought the wing flaps down and took it into the air. Climbing with short fast spirals he was at twenty thousand feet in four minutes. Adjusting the flap crank and propeller-pitch controls he added another five thousand and leveled off. The two Snorters were still ten thousand feet below him as he sighted a speck that was the plane he had heard.

His eyes were grim spots of fire as he scanned the instrument panel before him. He whirled a dial on the radio panel and said, "Shorty! Red! Stay under him. He's coming back in the sun. I'm going to dive. Keep driving him down, but don't hit him. I want him alive."

His eyes were slitted and gleaming as he shoved the control column forward and blasted his ship into a power dive. His speed was terrific and mounting higher. He saw the white, upturned face of the enemy pilot as he tripped the trigger of his two machine guns. White death streamers cut a path above the head of the biplane. It, in turn, went into a dive to escape that torrent of lead.

As Bill leveled off and whipped back in a chandelle he saw that Shorty and Red had closed in on the biplane and had him neatly trapped between their fire. The pilot tried desperately to outmaneuver the two Snorters. He was losing altitude and he was becoming desperate. Shorty darted across his gun sights to lure him lower. As he dove on Shorty, Red whipped around and forced him to dive again. From Red's thin, grim lip was coming a song without music:

"Mary had an airplane,
And how she used to fly,
But everywhere she took it,
Red was in her eye."

"You murdering lizard," he raged as he came up and over in a tight loop, "I'd like to get in your eye."

Bill was back in the fight again. The waters of Long Island Sound gleamed blue and green in the sunlight a thousand feet below them. Bill was holding a position directly above the biplane. Red and Shorty were riding it on either side. They had flamed back and forth across the sky with the enemy pilot trying desperately to use his guns effectively. The man could fly. There was no doubt of that. His desperation had

added to his skill. But he was like a fly caught in the web of three spiders.

BILL fired a round directly over the man's head. His face turned upward. It was drawn and white. He bent over his stick and suddenly swooped downward toward the wide beach. The two Snorters hit the beach at nearly the precise moment his wheels touched it.

Dropping back, Bill fishtailed in behind him. As the biplane pilot climbed over the side of his ship and started to run, Bill whipped an automatic from a side pocket. The man collapsed on the beach with his second shot. He struggled to his feet, but one of his legs buckled under him. He was holding a shattered kneecap when the three came up to him. A string of invectives rushed from between his lips.

"You can't make me talk, see!" he snarled. None of the three spoke for a moment. Their narrowed eyes were deadly and menacing as they bored into him. Fear crept in to join the pain in his eyes.

"Don't worry, you'll talk," Bill said quietly. "Get a first-aid kit, Shorty. We'll fix up his leg. Then we'll tie him up and stick him in the back of the Stormer."

As the three ships climbed into the air again and turned their noses toward Barnes Field, a red light gleamed on the radio panel of the Stormer. Bill flipped a switch and listened.

"Calling B. B. Calling B. B."

"O. K., Tony," Bill said.

"Did you get him?" Tony asked.

"He's riding home with me," Bill said grimly.

"The police are raising merry what'll you have," Tony said. "They think there is something funny about the three of you shoving off."

"Tell 'em to keep their shirts on," Bill said, irritated. "Tell 'em I've got something for them. Or no, don't tell

'em anything. I'll tell 'em. We'll be there in a few minutes."

The police commissioner, a couple of deputies and a half dozen lesser officials were waiting on the apron as the three ships rolled in and applied their brakes.

"What's all this, Barnes?" the commissioner asked, his close-cropped gray mustache bobbing up and down, his gray eyes hard. Bill gazed at him for a moment silently. His bronzed face was harder than the commissioner's eyes and there were lines along his cheeks that gave him a haggard, gaunt appearance.

"You know as much as I do," Bill said. "It's all part of the thing we talked about yesterday. I have a prisoner for you. He's the man who was piloting the biplane that flew over our guard tower and murdered one of my men. You can have him and the man who was driving the truck that tried to destroy us. But I want to be left alone. I have a job to do and I've got to do it. I want to take my men and my ships off within a few hours. When I do that you'll have no more of the trouble that you've had in the last few days. Is that a bargain?"

The commissioner chewed on his lip for a minute, hesitating. At last he bobbed his head up and down in unison with his mustache.

"All right, Bill. I'll probably lose my job. But go ahead. When you come back you'll give me the right story?"

"I'll tell you anything you want to know," Bill said. He pointed to the figure slumped down in the tiny rear compartment of the Stormer. "There's the man who did the machine-gunning. He says he won't talk."

"Oh, he won't, won't he?" a burly, red-faced inspector growled. "Maybe he got that idea from reading fairy stories."

BILL BARNES sat down in the chair behind his desk as his men filed into the room and threw themselves into comfortable positions in big leather chairs. His blond hair was tousled his face was a little white and drawn underneath its bronze. He grinned as Sandy brought up the procession, still shaky from his experience.

"Old Houdini," Shorty gibed at Sandy. "The man with a thousand lives."

"Skunks' ears to you," Sandy said, his grin belying his words. Bill got to his feet and as his eyes swept the group of men before him he felt a swell of pride.

"Here's the layout," Bill said. He told them about Mike Morales and the friendship that had always existed between them. He told them Mike's situation at the present time. He told them why the field had been nearly destroyed. Then he told them that he had agreed to go in and help Morales.

"But, I made an exception," Bill said. "I told him I wouldn't order any of you to go because—well, because—it's sort of a personal thing between Mike and myself. If it was any one else, I wouldn't take on the job. The thing is—do you birds want to go?"

With one exception they voiced their accord. The exception was "Cy" Hawkins. He was busily turning over the pages of a book he had picked up and had not answered.

"How about you, Cy?" Bill asked him.

"Eh?" said Cy, looking up guiltily.

"I asked you whether you wanted to take a chance on your life in this thing?"

"Sure. *Sure,*" Cy said. His gaze wandered back to the book. "What thing?" he finished absent-mindedly. They all laughed at the dreamy slow-speaking Texan who never seemed to move fast and yet usually got places before any one else.

"All right," Bill said. "It may be

a tough job. Maybe some one's number will be up. You never can tell. We'll get out of here as soon as Martin and Scotty have the ships in shape. Scotty, I'll depend on you to get the field back in shape and handle the police. There is going to be a little trouble there.

"Red, Cy, and Henderson will fly Snorters. Shorty takes the Stormer, and Sandy and I will lug along the transport fully manned. I don't know how long we'll be gone, but take along some personal gear. I guess that's all, guys. Be seeing you on the apron."

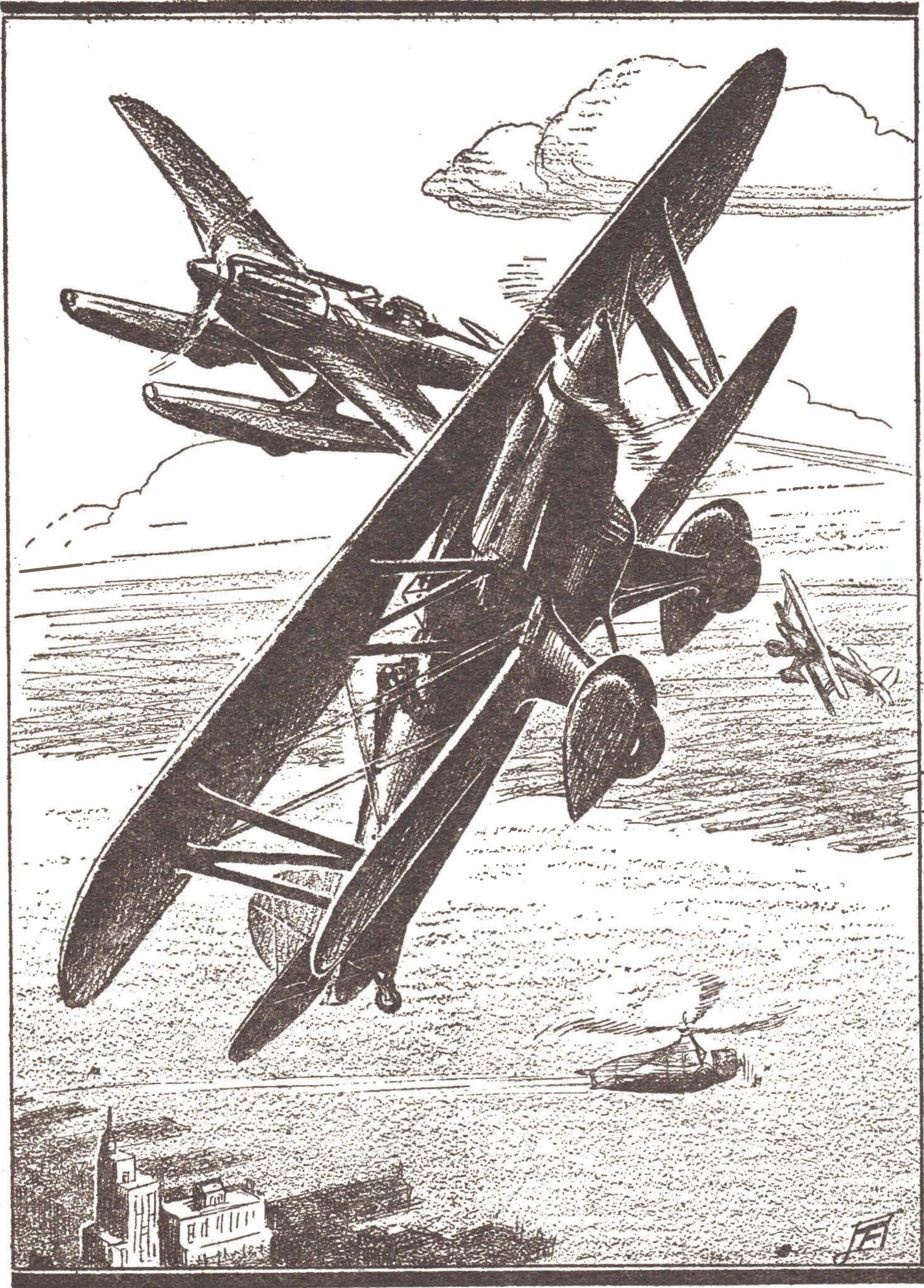
After they had gone, Bill picked up the telephone and got Martin on the wire.

"How soon can you have those ships out on the line?" he asked. "An hour? O. K., Martin." Bill slapped the receiver on its hook with a decisive bang. He had a million things to do in that hour: Talk over the rebuilding of the south end of the field with Scotty; tell Scotty how to handle the police; check the ships they were going to fly and the equipment and have another talk with Mike and Saul Cox.

But he was happy. The thought of the action to come lifted him up by the boot straps. To Bill Barnes action was one of the things really worth living for.

IT WAS ten minutes to two that afternoon when Bill stood on the apron giving last-minute instructions to Scotty MacCloskey. The props of the four Snorters, the Scarlet Stormer and the transport were ticking over slowly. The goggled, white-helmeted heads of Bill's men jutted above the rim of the scarlet amphibians. They were waiting impatiently for Bill's signal to the dispatch tower to take off.

"You're in full charge, Scotty," Bill finished. "I'll keep in touch with you by radiophone when the weather is decent. By cable when it isn't." He



Suddenly the biplane zoomed upward and walloped like a ship that is caught in a heavy sea.

gazed down the field at the huge yawning crater and mangled fence, then swept the windowless buildings along the apron with his eyes.

The muscles in his cheeks bulged and his fists clenched as he thought how close to death they had been. He had more reasons than merely wanting to help Mike Morales now. They, that unofficial crew of murderers behind the presidency of Samerra, had no thought as to the damage they did him while they tried to murder Morales.

Well, he'd give them something to think about. He wouldn't wait for them to come to him again. He'd go to them. He shook Scotty MacCloskey's extended hand. His arm came up above his head. The dispatch tower acknowledged. The motor of the first Snorter in line blasted. A signal flashed. The Snorter rolled forward as the brakes were released. Red Gleason grinned as he gunned his motor. From his lips came a popular song: "Rolling Down to Rio"——

His hand came up as he threw open the throttle. The Snorter headed swiftly down the field and left the surface with a smoothness and grace that was typical of the hand of Red Gleason. He spiraled swiftly upward, then began swinging in wide circles while the next and the next and the next Snorter took the air to join him.

Shorty flipped a hand in the air as the twenty-four hundred horse-power engines of the sleek Scarlet Stormer thundered. The flaps came down and the wheels of the long, streamlined pontoons left the concrete. The amphibian gear rose smoothly to cuddle itself in its bed beneath the long fuselage. The Scarlet Stormer joined the circling Snorters overhead as Bill climbed into the starboard pilot's seat of the "B-T-3," the Eaglet carrying transport.

Bill slipped his flying boots into the rudder stirrups and fed juice to the twin supercharged engines. He cocked his

head to one side for an instant and listened to their steady monotonous roaring. A helmet of white leather with ear phones attached fitted snugly over his blond head.

Directly behind him, in the commander's seat, sat old Saul Cox. He was watching Bill's every movement with keen interest. In the port pilot's seat Sandy was chewing lustily on a thick, ham and cheese sandwich. Bill gazed at him with unconcealed annoyance.

"If you ever get to heaven you'll enter the gates with a sandwich in your hand," he said.

"Gee, Bill," Sandy said. "I didn't have a chance to get any lunch. I had to pack my stuff and get all my paraphernalia ready."

"Your what?" Bill snapped.

"My strait-jacket and——"

Bill swung around in his seat and glared. "Listen, you half-wit!" he roared. "Where do you think you're going? This isn't going to be a picnic. You'll be lucky if you don't get your head shot off."

"Heck, Bill," Sandy protested. "We may be gone a long time. Just because a fellow is going to get his head shot off isn't any reason he can't have a little fun beforehand, is it?"

Bill didn't answer because he didn't have an answer. He shook his head in disgust and plugged in the interplane phone connection. Saul Cox was grinning broadly, a gesture not a little alien to his nature.

In a tiny cockpit, the farthest point forward in the huge transport, sat a grim-faced man of about twenty-eight. Between his feet was a rectangular window through which he could gaze down on the bomb sights. Before him was a machine gun mounted so that seat, gun and dome above his head swung simultaneously at a turn of a wheel. The dome was made of a light steel framework into which were cemented sheets of amber-tinted transparent material to

kill the glare of the sun. Looking back over either shoulder he could see the twin Diesel motors. Directly behind him was a small compartment illuminated by two portholes. In the ceiling of the compartment was the radio installation; in the floor, on either side, were metal trapdoors covering the landing lights. On each side were racks for bombs.

As the man connected his ear phones, Bill spoke to him from the pilot's compartment above. "Everything all right, Harwood?" he asked.

"O. K., sir," Harwood answered.

Bill repeated his question to Miles, the mechanic in charge of the lowering and raising of the Eaglet and the retractable machine-gun turret in the center section of the fuselage. And again to Charlie, the cook, who manipulated both the galley stove and the machine gun in the cockpit in the tail. The machine-gun cockpits in each of the wings abaft the engines were empty. But Saul Cox, who smilingly told Bill that he could operate a machine gun, had volunteered to man one of them in case of need. Bill intended using Mike Morales in the other after Harwood had given him a couple of lessons.

Bill's lips were a thin, grim line across his face and the knuckles of his hands were white on the control wheel as he threw the brakes on the carrier-transport. The big transport rolled down the concrete with ponderous grace, quickly gathering momentum. As Bill eased the stick back he turned to smile at Mike Morales.

"Well, Mike," he said. "Here's where we win back your marbles!" But the tense, set expression on his face belied the lightness of his words as he took the huge ship into the air in a long, low climb. Circling to gain altitude, he brought the transport to a position a little below the Scarlet Stormer and the four Snorters.

The six ships fell into formation

with the precision of an army squadron. Red Gleason dropped down to take a position slightly to starboard of the transport. Cy Hawkins took a position on the port side. Above and slightly behind "Bev" Bates and Henderson fell in the parade. And far above in the lead, Shorty Hassfurther streaked along in the sleek bullet that was the Scarlet Stormer.

A flat, billowing mass of clouds stretched below the trim little squadron as it swung to the south. Here and there a great white peak jutted upward like the spire of some mighty cathedral. Above the September sky was a great vault of clear blue. Only the steady roar of their motors broke the tranquility and abysmal quiet.

The motors roared and the voice of Red Gleason sang tenor to the bass of his motor:

"Oh, you can pack up your back
With a Foreign Legion sack,
Or you can don the navy blue.
On the land or on the seas,
You can get what you please—
If there's half a man in you.
But when you've made every grade
In old Bill Barnes' parade,
Every goof in the woof
Knows you're there.
For you must come strong,
Or you don't last long
In old Bill Barnes' parade!"

"Come home to honey!" Red shouted to himself. "There's my masterpiece. I'll wow the girls in Samerra with that one. I'll have to remember that."

But he knew he wouldn't. He could never remember any of the songs he improvised when he got on the ground and there was no motor roaring out the bass.

VIII—DOG FIGHT

THE GIANT, low-wing carrier was boring through the air at a steady two hundred miles an hour, the cruising speed Bill had told Shorty to hold. The September sun shimmered and glistened

on the metallic wings and through the iridescent arcs of the whirling propellers. Bill lifted his eyes to scan the air ahead and then swept the gleaming instrument board.

What, he asked himself, was ahead? Had he been unwise to listen to Mike Morales' pleas for help? There were two long water jumps before them. And after that he would be exposing his men to death and treachery and intrigue. Was it worth the risk? For a moment he pretended to himself that he didn't know the answer. But deep down in his heart he did know the answer. He knew that friendship and loyalty, and keeping faith, all intangible things, were worth while. If they weren't worth while then nothing was. Look what Sandy had risked for him that day. There was a warm glow in his heart as he thought about it. Yes, he decided, it was worth the risk. His thoughts were interrupted by the soft voice of Mike Morales speaking from his seat behind Sandy.

"Will I bother you if I talk to you now, Bill?" Mike asked.

"Not a bit," Bill said. "Take her, kid," he said to Sandy as he threw him the control wheel. He turned around in his seat and faced Mike.

"Just some things I didn't have a chance to tell you before we left," Mike said. Bill nodded. Saul Cox leaned forward in his chair, his eyes on Bill's face.

"I was in touch with our backers in New York. They still have confidence in us. They found out in some way that you were going to join us and were very pleased. All of our ammunition and machine guns have arrived at Viga safely and are being smuggled to Samerra from there.

"Our ally in the Herrera cabinet, Vivarrio, the minister of the interior, reported that everything is going well. He believes that a red uprising has been set for October 2nd and has been en-

couraging it secretly as it will help mask our actions. The commanders of the several companies of infantry and cavalry in the army are aware that Saul will arrive soon and will take command of the army when we are ready to strike. They all hate Herrera and his cruelty. My loyal friends have spread the word among the natives that I will return soon. They are praying for it and will all be behind me. I do not see how we can fail if we are careful."

Bill gazed out the port window of the compartment for a full minute before he spoke.

"What would happen," he asked slowly, "if this Englishman Chamberlin and President Herrera should just disappear some day?"

Mike's forehead furrowed. He gazed at Bill with puzzled eyes.

"I mean," Bill said, "suppose some night they went to bed and the next day no one could find them."

Mike smiled. "If I were there when that happened," he said, "there would be no cause for bloodshed. I would take over the presidency or become dictator. I would appoint Saul commander in chief of the army. My people would follow me. We are a highly emotional people. That is why revolutions are so frequent. The people will follow the leader of a new regime hoping against hope that their conditions will be bettered. In the past they have been sadly disappointed.

"But Herrera and Chamberlin are well guarded. They employ professional fighters to protect them. They will not disappear. They will have to be removed."

"I just wondered," Bill said.

"Vivarrio also sent word that the commander of the small air fleet is anxious for you to come to Samerra," Mike went on.

"Anxious for me to come?" Bill said. "Where do I fit into his picture?"

"He is an American," Mike ex-

plained. "He has boasted what he will do if you attempt to aid me."

"What's his name?" Bill asked brusquely.

"Fells," Mike said. "Colonel Barney Fells."

The big transport gave a sudden lurch as Sandy half whirled in his seat, an ejaculation springing from his lips. Bill gazed at Mike with unconcealed astonishment.

"You're sure?" he asked. "Barney Fells is supposed to be dead."

"He is very much alive," Mike said. "And usually very much drunk. Do you know him?"

"I know him," Bill said grimly. His hands knotted into fists. His eyes narrowed as he gazed out the window again. He was remembering how Barney Fells had worked for him one time when he was first starting his organization. He had had to take any one at hand at the moment to help with a gold-mining job in the West. Barney Fells had double-crossed him and had destroyed the four planes Bill had managed to build. He had sold out to the enemy leaving Bill without a ship and heavily in debt.

"Yes," Bill repeated, "I know him! And he is commanding the Samerra air force?" Mike nodded.

"I'm more than glad I came, Mike," Bill said. "Fells wiped me out financially and almost physically one time. I'm not vindictive, but if Samerra has to have an air force to oppose me I'm glad it's Barney Fells. I feel easier about the whole thing now."

"Chamberlin hired him," Mike said.

"If that is the kind of man Chamberlin hires I can understand better the way you feel about him."

Suddenly Sandy leaned forward and flipped a dial on the radio panel as a light gleamed red.

"Yeah, just a minute, you walrus," he said over the radiophone. "Shorty wants to talk to you, Bill."

"How high above you are they?" Bill asked after listening for a moment.

"Keep an eye on 'em. But leave 'em alone unless they bother you. Everything going all right? . . . Good. You're setting a nice even pace, fella. Let me know if they get nosey."

"Shorty reports two biplanes flying about five thousand feet above and behind us. He put a glass on them but the distance was too great to learn anything." He flipped a switch and made two adjustments on the radio.

"Calling all planes," he said. "Calling all planes."

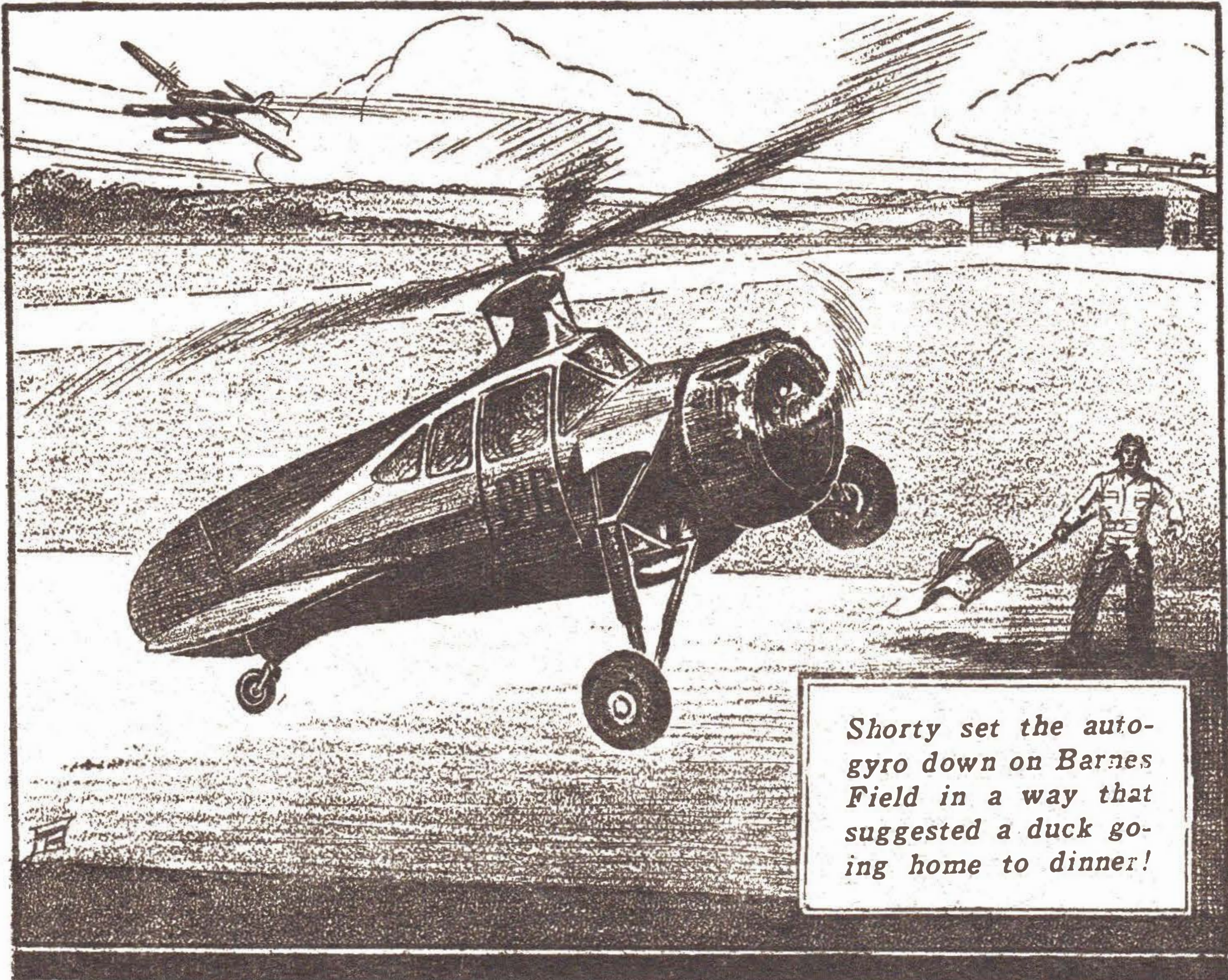
He waited for each pilot to check back before he spoke again. Then he told them to keep their eyes open for the two biplanes Shorty had sighted. "Leave them alone unless they bother you. Signing off," he finished.

THE CLOUDS that had obscured the earth from view when they started had disappeared. Ten thousand feet below, the State of Delaware spread out like a gigantic relief map under the speeding formation.

Bill took the control wheel from Sandy as they left Delaware behind, skirted the eastern shore of Maryland and fled over the choppy waves of the Chesapeake Bay into Virginia. At four o'clock they had left Virginia far behind and were roaring over North Carolina. Bill checked his position carefully and reported it to the five other planes.

He smiled grimly to himself as he lolled back in his seat. The air was peaceful and undisturbed. The steady drone of the two supercharged Diesels were like a lullaby. Saul Cox and Mike Morale had ceased to gaze out the windows. Their heads were nodding, and they were half asleep. Sandy was asleep. There wasn't any halfway about it. He was snoring.

Bill could see Red Gleason's Snorter off to starboard holding a steady pace



Shorty set the autogyro down on Barnes Field in a way that suggested a duck going home to dinner!

beside him. He wondered if Red was singing. Cy Hawkins, off on the left, was probably half asleep also. He usually was until some one started something.

The smile left Bill's lips as he thought about the death truck that had been driven on his field that morning. He was lucky, darned lucky, the thing hadn't exploded where the man left it. It would cost him plenty for repairs, but it wasn't as bad as it might have been. He shuddered to think of what might have happened. But what was the use in that, he asked himself. There was no use worrying about the things that had happened. The important thing was to be ready when something else happened. Which was just what he wasn't doing now. The worst things happened just when you thought you were sitting pretty.

He woke Sandy and threw the con-

trols to him. Getting to his feet he went down the several steps into the center section of the fuselage where the Eaglet, Sandy's little fighter, nestled with folded wings. He wandered back through the tail and into the galley where he had a few words with Charlie the cook and fixed himself a glass of ice water.

From there he made his way forward and had a little chat with Harwood in the gunner's cockpit stuck in the nose. He inspected the egg-shaped projectiles that were bombs, and then went back to the pilot's cabin.

He was surprised to find that they had already passed over Jacksonville and were well down the coast toward that fantastic wonderland of blue sky and water and sand and bizarre effects that is Miami.

From now on, he told himself, anything might happen. Something would

him that the first hop would be the last uneventful one.

He sat down in the starboard pilot's seat again and motioned for Sandy to give him back the controls. He switched on the radio.

"Calling all planes," he said. "Calling all planes."

After they had all checked in he spoke:

"Shorty," he said. "Make a landing in the lagoon between the city and the beach. Then Red. Then Cy. Bev next and Henderson last. I'll bring the carrier in behind you."

The sun, a flaming ball of fire, was sinking behind the skyscrapers of the city as Shorty's pontoons left a gurgling wake along the surface of the lagoon. Twenty minutes later the six ships were riding their sea anchors in the same formation they had flown, the huge transport surrounded by the five fighters. They had made the flight from Barnes Field to Miami in a little more than six hours.

Bill made contact over the radio with the little fleet as soon as they were all shipshape.

"Bev," he said, "you and Cy stay aboard your planes and keep your eyes open. Red and Henderson will relieve you at two o'clock. Harwood, Miles and Charlie will remain aboard the carrier. Tony arranged by telephone about refueling. Keep an eye on them when the launch comes alongside. A smaller launch will be out to take the rest of us ashore. Get some sleep if you can, all of you. We're shoving off at daybreak. The men aboard the carrier will stand watches and keep a searchlight playing on all the planes all night. Don't be afraid to shoot if you think any one is trying to do any damage."

The sun had plunged down behind the skyscrapers of Miami when a small motor launch came alongside to pick them up. The sky showed an indigo blue through wisps of white clouds as

the night settled down. Off to the west, as the sun marched beyond the horizon, the sky became a dazzling mixture of pink and salmon and gold. The lights in the city twinkled behind the palms and bamboo lining the drive along Biscayne Bay, and on the causeway that connected the city of Miami and Miami Beach. Two pusher blimps soared over the bay with their cargo of sight-seeing passengers.

Before Bill left the carrier he talked to Tony Lamport at Barnes Field. Tony had nothing of any importance to report.

THE SUN was just surging out of the sea to the east when the six planes, one after another, taxied into the wind, took off, and fell into formation.

Bill twirled the dials on the radio panel as soon as they were at ten thousand feet and leveled off on their true course.

"Stick close together," he instructed sharply. "This is the hurricane season and when they come they come fast. Barometer O. K. this morning. Check your position with me every twenty minutes, Shorty. All planes check in every half hour.

"And as for you," he said to Sandy when he had signed off the radio, "you keep your eyes peeled. Things are going too smooth. Considering the things that happened in New York, I don't like it."

Sandy tried to hide a yawn with little success. His eyes were still red-rimmed and sleepy. His humor was in keeping with the hour he had been rooted out of bed. He looked disgusted and he showed it.

"Nothing's going to happen on this trip," he said bitterly. "It's going to be just like a ride on a merry-go-round."

"Oh, it is, is it?" Bill roared at him. "Well, snap out of it and come to life."

He connected the interplane phone and talked to Mike Morales and Saul

Cox. They were each riding in one of the gunner's cockpits in the wings abaft the engine, in case of trouble.

"How does she ride out there, fella?" Bill asked Mike.

"Like a perambulator," Mike laughed.

Bill disconnected as the light gleamed red on the radio panel. It was Shorty. As Bill listened to his short staccato sentences, a tiny trickle of ice water seemed to travel up his spine.

"Formation of eight planes," Shorty said, briefly. "Flying at about fifteen thousand, keeping a parallel course. They look like army planes but they're amphibians. Biplanes. And they're fast. Hard to get a line on them. They're in the sun."

"Calling all planes! Calling all planes!" Bill chanted into the radio-
phone a moment later. "On your toes with your eyes open," he said after each plane had checked back. "Shorty reports formation of eight planes at fifteen thousand to the east. Shorty, drop back. The rest of you close in around me. I'll hold the carrier steady on her course if they attack——"

Sandy's voice cut in as he pulled binoculars from his eyes and leaped across the cabin. "They're diving, Bill!" he screamed.

"Come back fast, Shorty!" Bill roared. He switched off the radio and connected the interplane phone again. The muscles in his bronzed cheeks bulged as he talked through clenched teeth to the gunners of the carrier.

"Battle stations!" he barked. "We're being attacked!"

"Here, kid," Bill barked at Sandy. "Take the controls! I'll handle the radio. Hold her straight on her course and hold her steady. Give her all she's got!" He grabbed the binoculars from Sandy's hand and leaped to the window.

Harwood in the forward gunner's cockpit scanned the air above him as old Charlie leaped to his station in the tail cockpit. Miles was lowering him-

self below the fuselage in the cylindrical turret, his machine gun ready for action. Mike Morales and Saul Cox were holding their hands against the sun as the eight khaki-colored biplanes came diving out of the sun. Old Saul was as calm and collected as he would have been sitting on a park bench as he nursed his trigger. His eyes held an anticipatory glint.

The four Snorters closed in to cut the formation of the eight planes in half as they dove on the carrier with their guns streaming tracers and lead. Bullets thudded through her wings and her tail surfaces as they dove by. Old Charlie and Miles in the turret beneath the bottom of the fuselage poured lead into them as they came by. Harwood tore the belly out of one of them as it went overhead. As the seven planes pulled around, the eighth one—the one Harwood had riddled—kept on toward the waters of Biscayne Bay ten thousand feet below. It began to turn over and over out of control. The body of the pilot was hung half in and half out over the cowling.

AS the seven planes swung back to the attack a scarlet comet came diving out of the south. Shorty Hassfurth's hand was wrapped around the control column of that comet with the grip of a python around its prey. His blue eyes were gleaming with that recklessness that always rode with him when he rode close to death. He tore the carefully aligned formation apart like chaff in a gale. They dived and zoomed and rolled to get out of the path of mad fury that swerved neither to right nor left, its guns belching death.

As three of the khaki planes whirled to pounce on him he flipped over like a hawk and shot across their rear. His fingers clamped down on his triggers as he caught one of them under his hair sights. The burst of fire lasted a mere second and a half but his aim was

deadly. The pilot toppled over the control stick and the plane went into a dizzy spin as it fell.

"Dive on 'em, Snorters!" Bill roared into the radiophone as the six remaining biplanes jockeyed back into formation.

The Snorters did not have to be invited. They were already diving and in their lead was Red Gleason riding his ship with that same reckless daring characteristic of Shorty. He followed a khaki ship as it pulled steeply up into the sky, went over in a half loop, rolled right side up and came tearing back at him with guns bellowing. Bullets ripped across the Snorter's right wing, chopping through the metal skin.

"Oh, sweet little boy, come play
In my garden——"

Red sang as he pushed the stick forward and went into a dive. He felt his machine shudder and tremble as the bullets from the khaki plane drilled through his tail assembly.

The next second he jerked the stick back into his stomach to zoom vertically in the sky and over on his back. Neutralizing the controls, he opened the throttle and was on the biplane's tail. Hanging head downward, he lined up the ship in his hair sights and tripped his guns. Fire and smoke belched from the biplane's engine housing as Red went by it. He threw the stick to the left, rolled right side up and came around in a swirling vertical bank. He held his fire as the khaki biplane became a whirling ball of red smoke.

Three thousand feet above Red the five remaining biplanes were fighting for their lives in a mad whirlpool of spitting, snarling death. They were no longer aligned in formation. Each time they had tried to maneuver into position a scarlet ship gone berserk ripped their alignment apart. The nine ships were careening across the heavens in a flam-

ing battle that had become a dog fight, slashing and ripping, darting in and out looking for that opening that would mean death.

Far up ahead, the carrier-transport kept steadily on its course. In the pilot house Bill Barnes, his eyes glued to his binoculars, alternately cursed and prayed. His eyes glittered with pride as he saw his men outfighting, outsmarting, outmaneuvering the biplane pilots.

He saw Cy Hawkins flash over in a dazzling inverted loop to come up under the tail of a khaki biplane. The biplane staggered like a thing mortally wounded. It came up on its nose and then fell away into a vertical dive. Cy followed it, his guns pouring lead and tracers into it as it dove. Suddenly, both wings folded back against the fuselage and it went into a dizzy whirl as it plunged toward the Atlantic.

As though the falling of that fourth enemy plane had been a prearranged signal, the other four dove to follow it. The four Snorters and Shorty were after them, their guns sending burst after burst into the retreating ships.

Bill reached the radiophone in one leap and roared into the microphone:

"Calling all planes! Calling all planes!" he barked. "Let 'em go! Come back and take your positions. That was neat fighting, all of you. Any one hurt or any controls shot away?"

"I got a bullet through the fleshy part of my left hand," Cy Hawkins said. "I'm putting some whoosis on it. Doesn't bother me."

"Are you all right to go on? We'll make San Juan in five hours."

"Sure," Cy drawled.

"I'm changing the course a little to skirt Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, in case something develops after that fight," Bill said. "Same speed, Shorty."

Bill switched off the radio and connected the interplane phone.

"Every one all right?" he asked. They all answered in the affirmative.

"What," Bill asked, "do you think of my fighters, Saul?"

"I don't want any part of them," Saul Cox said. "They're a tough bunch of babies. What do you feed Hassfurther—dynamite?"

"Cream puffs!" Sandy broke in. "Cream puffs and on Sundays lady fingers."

IX—A GREAT LOSS

FOR THE next two hours Bill busied himself with checking his position and keeping in constant communication with his fleet.

The visibility had been perfect when he had taken the giant transport off the blue waters of Biscayne Bay at sun-up. A tail wind had helped them to make up the time they had lost during the dog fight with the eight khaki biplanes. Mike Morales had been certain that the eight planes had been hired by Herrera to prevent Bill's squadron from reaching Samerra. That, Bill agreed, was the only explanation.

As a wrench and a twist suddenly dropped the big transport three hundred feet, little furrows of anxiety formed between Bill's eyes.

"The weather's going to get soupy," he said. "I'll see what Tony has to offer." Five minutes later he had made contact with Tony Lamport on Barnes Field. The radio was scratchy. He could barely get Tony's indistinct and blurred words. Static screeched in his ears.

"The barometer is falling," Tony told him. "Storm warnings are being broadcast from South America to the Virginia Capes. If you can find a safe place to put up you'd better do it. I've been trying to contact you for an hour—since I got the first warning."

Bill flipped the radio switch and made contact with his five ships. Clouds had

suddenly appeared from nowhere. Fog began to lick at the coated windows as great drops of rain spattered against them. Another air pocket slapped the huge ship down seven hundred feet. Bill worked quietly to regain balance, his eyes anxiously scanning the instrument board. He stuck the nose up again to regain his lost altitude.

After the five ships had checked in he gave them instructions.

"Drop back and down, Shorty," he instructed. "The rest of you get closer to me." He gave them their bearings and his own compass reading. "Check in every five minutes. Shorty first, then Red, Cy, Bev and Henderson." The drone of the two supercharged Diesels filtered through the soundproof construction of the pilot house. As the velocity of the wind increased, their roar rose and fell with the force of it. Bill peered through the fog that licked at the windowpanes toward the gunner's cockpits in the wings. He switched on the interplane phone.

"How is it riding out there now?" he asked Mike and Saul Cox.

"Bumpy," Mike said. "How much longer to San Juan?"

"I don't know," Bill said. "We're battling a strong head wind. Ought to make it in three hours if it doesn't increase. I had hoped to skirt along the edge of Cuba and Haiti, but it won't do us any good now. No visibility."

Great angry banks of clouds were sailing by them. Rain beat against the windshield and hatch like the constant *pat-pat-pat* of machine guns. The wind seemed to increase in fury, lashing at them in sudden bursts, bobbing the ship about like a cork on an angry sea. Rain seeped down through the hatch and began to trickle across the deck. He threw a switch on the radio and tried to contact the other planes. A roar, like that of an angry lion, nearly deafened him.

He was flying blind now and with

that inborn perception and instinct that was second nature to him.

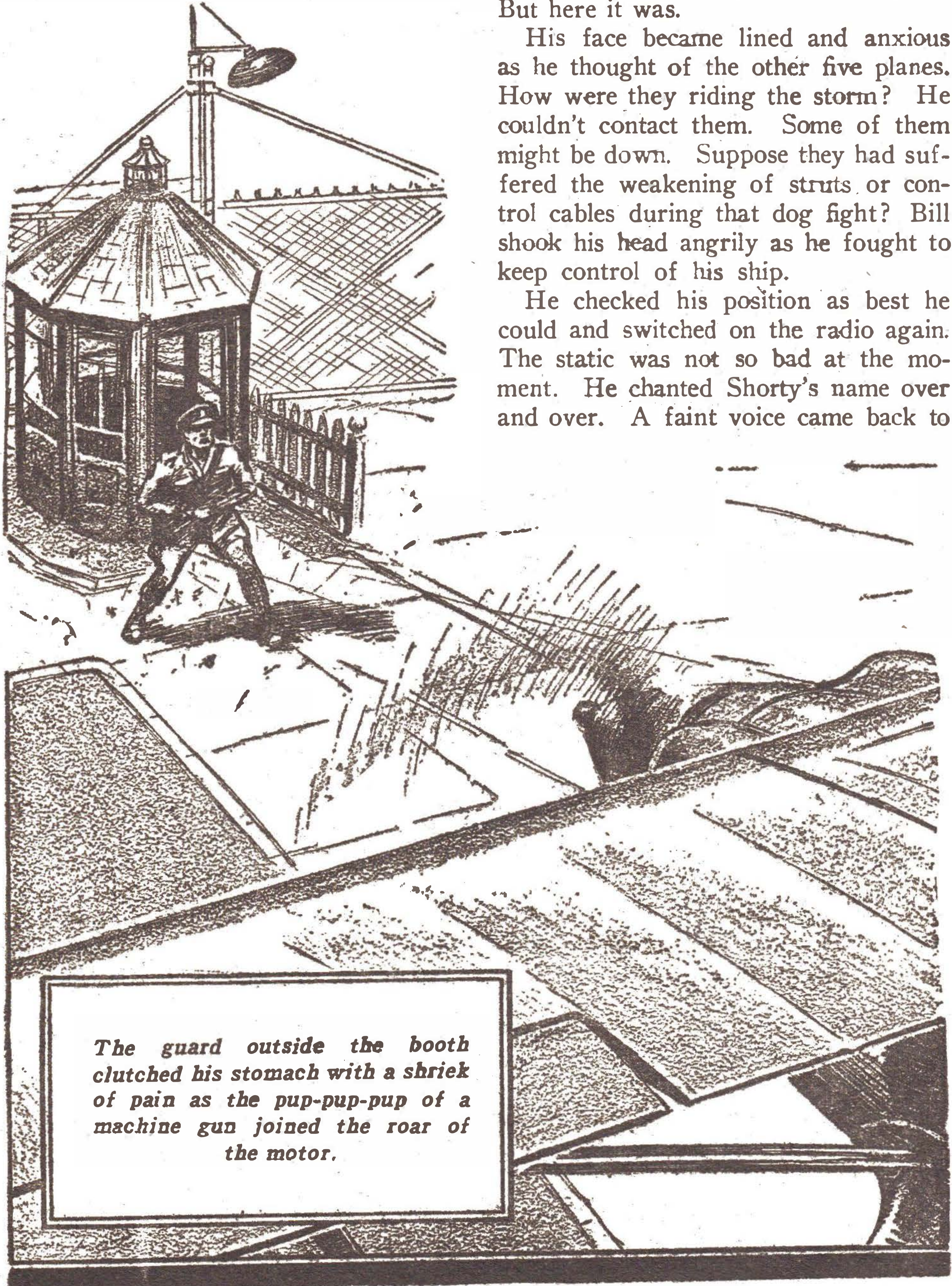
"Do you think it's going to blow up?" Sandy shouted in his ear.

Hail began to beat on the window-panes. He gazed at it in astonishment.

Such a thing was not supposed to occur in the subtropics. Hail this far south was unheard of. Bill laughed as the ship did a crazy dive and came up with a bang that shook it from stem to stern. Maybe it wasn't supposed to happen. But here it was.

His face became lined and anxious as he thought of the other five planes. How were they riding the storm? He couldn't contact them. Some of them might be down. Suppose they had suffered the weakening of struts or control cables during that dog fight? Bill shook his head angrily as he fought to keep control of his ship.

He checked his position as best he could and switched on the radio again. The static was not so bad at the moment. He chanted Shorty's name over and over. A faint voice came back to



The guard outside the booth clutched his stomach with a shriek of pain as the pup-pup-pup of a machine gun joined the roar of the motor.

him. Then faded out. He flipped the switch with a curse.

Sandy went shooting across the compartment to bring up against a bulkhead with a bang as he tried to speak to Bill. Charlie, riding the storm in the galley, reported that he was sick.

"What do you want me to do about it?" Bill growled.

"Let's go home and come some other day," Charlie groaned, his voice heavy with misery.

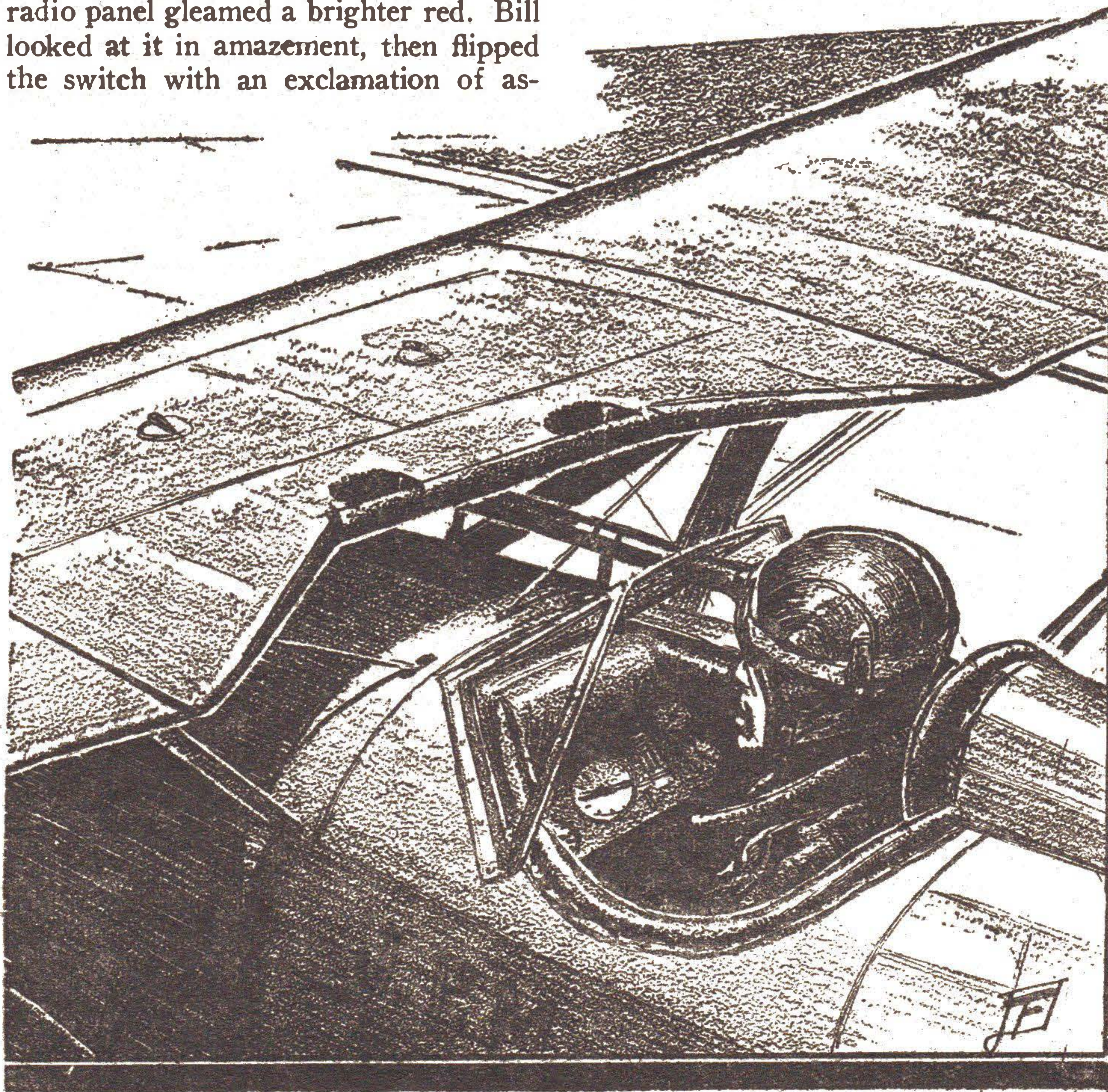
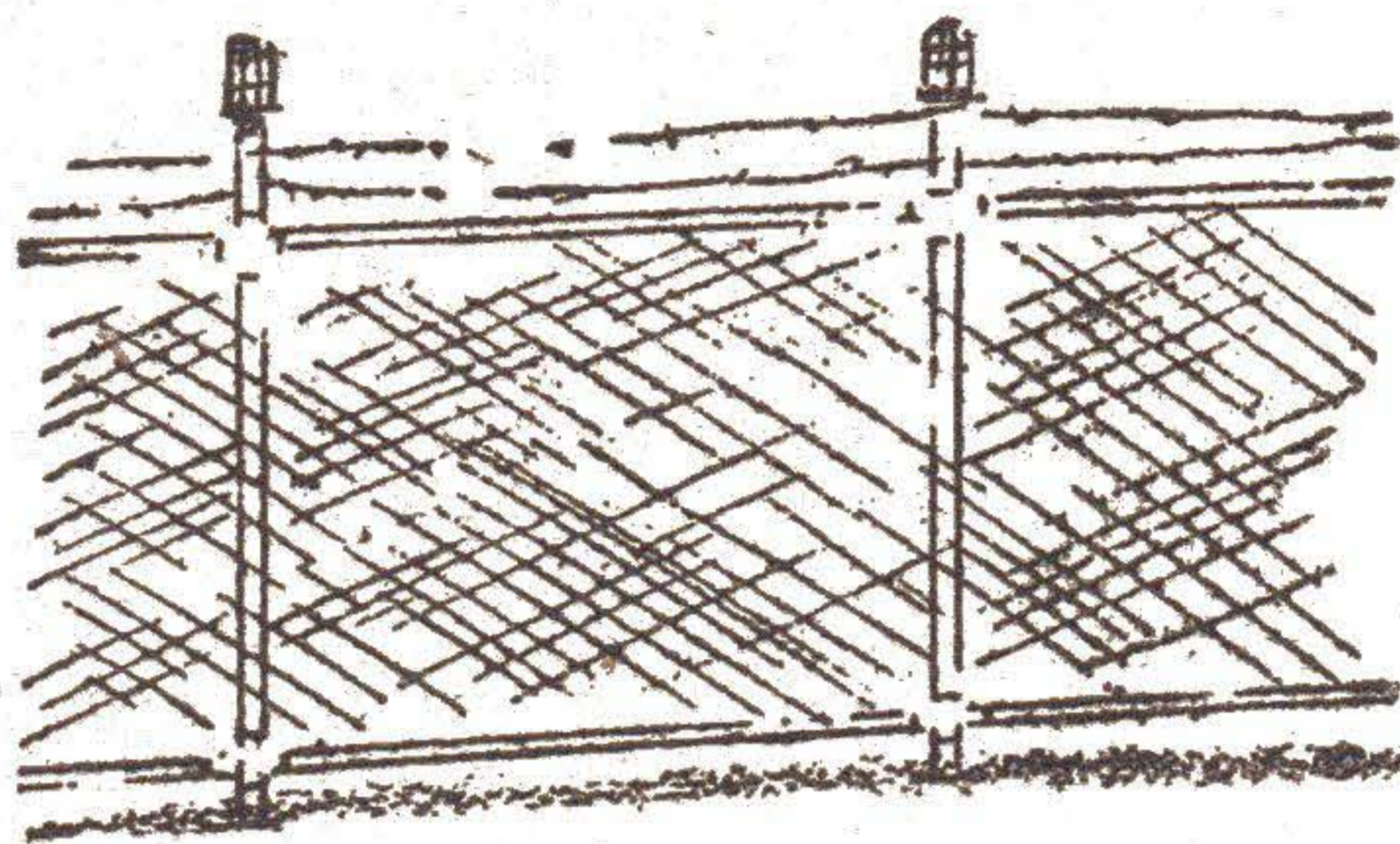
"How're you taking it up there, Harwood?" Bill asked the gunner in the forward cockpit.

"She'll do," Harwood said. "But I've been places I liked better, sir."

Suddenly the little red glass on the radio panel gleamed a brighter red. Bill looked at it in amazement, then flipped the switch with an exclamation of as-

tonishment. Some one was getting through to him.

A FAINT, far-away voice came to his ears. Perspiration stood out in great beads on his forehead as he strained to catch the muffled words that were being sent to him. His hands



gripped the control wheel so hard that his knuckles were white. He tuned the delicate instrument carefully. He recognized Beverly Bates' voice. It sounded ten thousand miles away. It was repeating Bill's plane call over and over.

"Bill answering, Bev!" he shouted. The voice stopped for a moment and Bill leaned closer. The roar of the wind was terrific, beating out every other sound.

"I'm out of control, Bill!" Bev's voice said. "Rudder. Must have been hit by bullets. Can't fight it any longer. Going down. Good luck." The voice died away as the radio screamed with high, sharp notes. Bill tried to tune it in again. He called Bev's name over and over. Sandy was sitting beside him, his face tense, horror-stricken.

Bill's head came down on his chest for a moment as he turned off the radio. Then it came up. There was a wild, mad light in his eyes. He loosened his hold on the control wheel for a moment and drove his right fist into the palm of his left hand. It smacked as it might have smacked on the jaw of an opponent. He cursed Chamberlin and Herrera of Samerra. It was another murder on their heads.

He knew there was nothing he could do about it. Trying to find Bev in this storm would be like trying to find the proverbial needle in the haystack. And if he did find him he couldn't do anything about it. Landing on the waters below would be like trying to float a toy boat in a whirlpool.

Bev's cultured voice with its Harvard accent sounded in his ears. He could see Bev's brown eyes quietly smiling at some crack from Shorty or Sandy. He could see him taking his Snorter into the air to whip it around the heavens like some flaming meteor. There was not a vestige of fear in his make-up. His voice had sounded strong, fearless over the radio. He had

said good-by as though he were about to take a train for his native Boston.

And now he was down there fighting for his life. He would fight. Bill knew that. He wouldn't throw up his hands and quit. But a fight wouldn't do him any good when he struck the storm-lashed waters below him.

The great rollers of that sea would wash over him, beating him down until they closed over his head.

He connected the interplane phone and talked to Mike Morales.

"Bev Bates is down in the storm," he told him. There was a silence for a moment.

"I'm sorry, Bill," Mike said. And there was real sorrow in his voice. Bill broke the connection without another word. What good did it do to be sorry? For a moment he blamed Mike, his dinky little island, his revolution. Then he shook himself out of it. If any one was to blame it was his own fault. He had taken on the job. Bev had followed him, not Mike.

"Maybe he had a chance to launch his boat," Sandy said. Bill gave him a withering glance. Then he realized that Sandy knew as well as he did that a rubber boat couldn't survive this storm for sixty seconds.

FAR OUT in front and high above the transport, Shorty jerked the stick of the Scarlet Stormer back into his stomach to bring it out of a dive. It was being buffeted about like a leaf in a gale. His body ached from being thrown against the cowling. His stomach pained from being bumped against his safety strap. His heart was pounding from exertion and his whole body was bathed in perspiration.

"This is no place for Mrs. Hassfurth's boy," he was saying to himself between the times he shook his fist at the weather. He not only shook his fist at it. He cajoled it, he pleaded with it, he cursed at it.

He nursed the ship back into level flight only to have it picked up and slammed down another four hundred feet. He checked his bearings as best he could, always keeping one eye on his turn-and-bank indicator and his inclinometer.

The rain beat against the hatch overhead and played a tattoo on his windshield. It roared and raged at him without a let-up. The Scarlet Stormer was creaking and groaning like a ship in a heavy sea. He wondered how long it would hang together, how long any ship could weather a storm such as this one.

"Anyway," he told himself when it seemed that the combined fury of the elements had been unleashed upon him, "it can't get any worse. And when things can't get worse they usually get better."

But Shorty had never tried to ride out a West Indian hurricane before. Fifteen thousand feet down the ship would not have lived for fifteen minutes. That he was riding the top of the storm was the only thing that saved the Stormer from being taken apart like so much matchwood.

About on an even keel with Shorty, and also riding the top of the storm were Red Gleason, Cy and Henderson. They were riding it with a stoicism peculiar to each one of them. To Henderson, the square-faced, level-headed ex-engineer the storm was a storm. It was something you had to fight and you had to lick it or it licked you. He didn't stop to wonder whether he was going to win. He just stuck to his controls and fought the weather. That was his job. That was what he was there for.

To Cy it was even more of an everyday affair. He would probably have been half asleep if water hadn't been cascading down his neck.

Every few minutes he would shift his position irritably and try to close the hatch over his head a little tighter. The

harder it rained the higher he went until he had twenty-two thousand feet between himself and the sea.

At eighteen thousand feet Red Gleason was fighting with a laughing tenacity that was characteristic of him. He laughed at the weather and he thumbed his nose at it. When that didn't do any good he sang to it. He sang with that peculiar tenor, knowing full well that he couldn't carry a tune. The motor sang bass and the screaming wind that beat against his prop, he told himself, was carrying the baritone. He sang his own improvised songs because he couldn't carry the tune of any others. Nor could he remember the words.

As the rain beat against the windshield and the wind threatened to tear the wings from his Snorter he went into a serenade:

"Percival Green was an air-o-plane fiend,
All he knew in the world was air.
In a Hispano Suiza he was a geeza,
In a howling gale he was a bear.

You can go and tell his mother,
He's about to take another
Air-o-plane glide.

"Not so hot," he said to himself. "But how can you expect a guy to compose good music in a storm like this. I wonder how the rest of these monkeys are holding up. And I wonder where I am!"

He studied his compass and checked his course against it. Then he shrugged his shoulders. He didn't know where he was and he didn't, at the moment, much give a darn. His whole body ached. His head was ringing from the beating he had been taking. He marveled that the terrific gale hadn't torn his ship apart.

"You're a stout fella and you've got to get me out of this," he said with a grin, patting the instrument board. He threw on his radio. A roar like the bellow of a mad bull greeted him.

BILL BARNES' back and arms ached as he hung grimly to the control wheel of the heavy transport. It was like driving a truck where you had to put all the strength of your shoulders and arms into the work. His eyes were worried and red-rimmed. He wondered if any of the other ships had weathered the nightmare of the past three hours. It didn't seem possible that the frail little amphibians could live through it.

Suddenly he noticed that the wind was abating. Fog and rain no longer licked and beat at the windowpanes. His air indicator showed that he had picked up forty miles an hour. It had happened so suddenly it was hard to believe.

He spoke over the interplane phone to see if all of the crew were all right. He noticed that Sandy was heavy-eyed and pale through his tanned skin. He knew how the kid felt. Weary, weary to a point of exhaustion. As though he had been beaten for hours.

"I didn't want to tell you before," Mike Morales said when Bill spoke to him. "I didn't want to worry you needlessly if you didn't know it. But you've flown through the first half of a hurricane. The only thing that kept us from being taken apart was your altitude. We were riding on the top of it. You'll have to give your ship everything she has to make San Juan before it breaks again."

"Again?" Bill roared.

"Again," Mike repeated. "This is the lull that always comes in the middle. We're in the center of the hurricane now. After it swings its tail around to the west it will hit us again. If it weren't for your motors you would realize what is happening. If your motors were dead you would learn what silence is. The silence in the middle of a hurricane is ear-splitting. How have the other planes fared?"

"I don't know," Bill said dully. "I know one of them—Bev Bates—is down. I'm going to check the rest now if I can get them."

"There is a big hydroplane hangar at San Juan," Mike said. "It used to be a sugar warehouse and was built two or three hundred years ago to withstand hurricanes. I think you can get all your planes in it if we can get down before the storm breaks again. But don't try to land if it has broken. None of your ships would survive a minute near ground. You might better stay in the air and try to ride it out."

"We're almost out of fuel," Bill said. "We'll have to make it. I'm going to try to contact the other planes now."

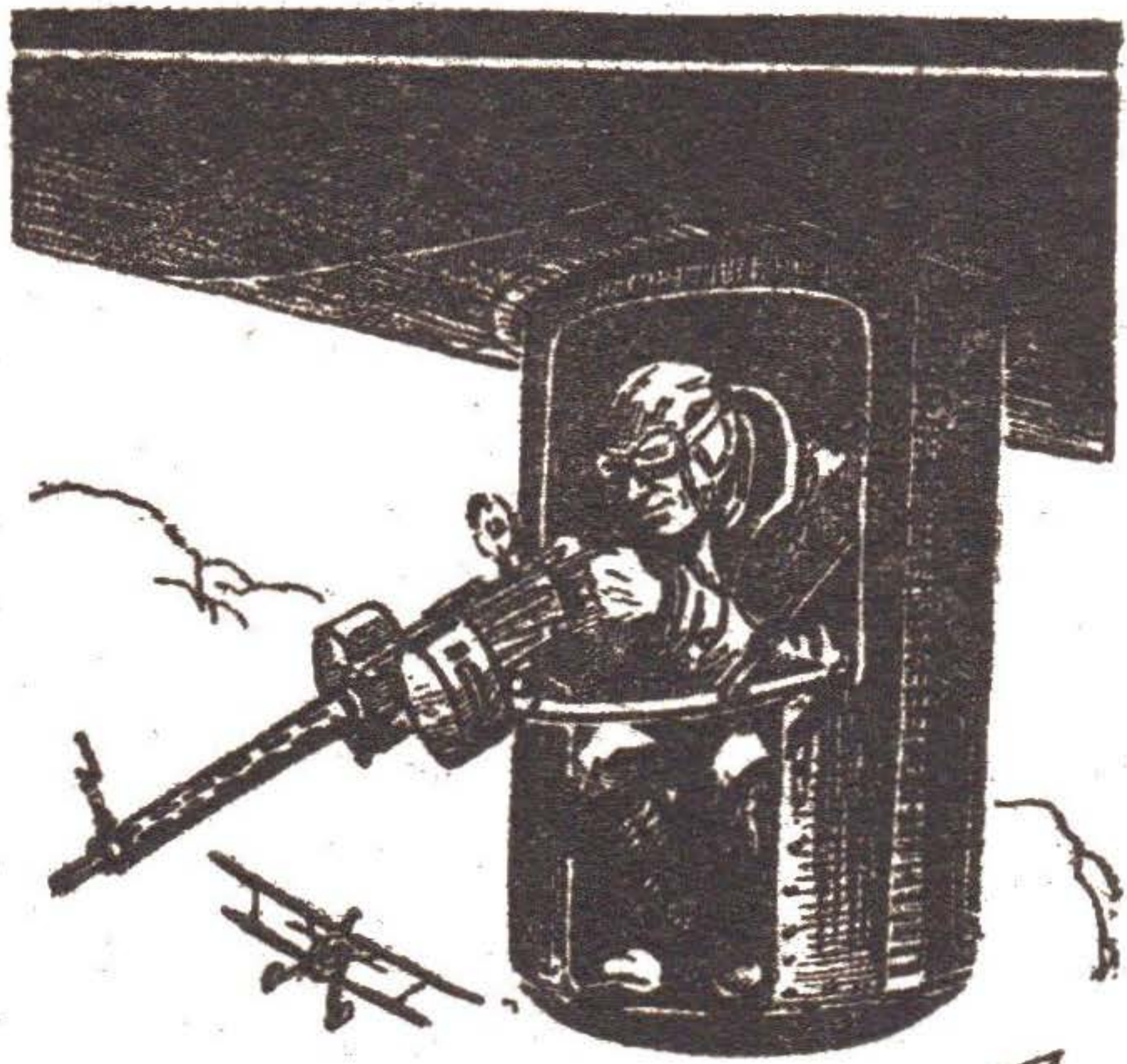
Bill held his breath as he made adjustments on the radio. When he threw the switch, no static blared in his ears. Just a faint crackle that sounded as though it might come from a storm far away.

"Shorty!" he bellowed. "Red, Cy, Henderson!"

The four of them gave him the all-clear signal. His breath hissed between his lips as he exhaled. His eyes swept from his map and chart to the instrument board as he asked them for their positions. He checked them against his own and ordered them all to come to his position. Ten minutes later they were all back in the original formation.

"Shorty," Bill instructed. "Break away and get to San Juan as fast as the Stormer will take you there. Land in the harbor and locate the old sugar warehouse that has been converted into a hangar. Make 'em make room for us. Mike says this storm is going to break again soon. We'll push on as fast as we can and try to get down before it breaks. As soon as you get there contact me on the radio."

"I forgot to tell you," he finished, "Bev went down with his ship in the storm." There was a silence from the



Retractable gun turret on transport.

four men who got the message. Perhaps they did not trust themselves to speak.

"I'm signing off now," Bill finished gruffly. "Give your Snorters all they've got. I'll stick with you."

"Isn't there anything we can do about Bev?" Sandy asked in a moment.

"Nothing, kid," Bill said.

"Gee, he was a swell guy," Sandy said.

Bill didn't answer him. He bent forward over the instrument panel. His eyes were a little blurred as he studied the dials and indicators.

The roaring, steady drone of the two powerful Diesels came more plainly through the soundproofed cabin now. Bill's eyes, his whole body, ached. He tried to lean back and relax, but he could not get the thought of Bev Bates out of his mind. His face was haggard and lined and gaunt. Its usual bronze had turned to pasty white.

The minute seemed to drag into hours as the four ships raced through the muggy unnatural calm that had settled about them. Bill had the throttle of the transport open wide and he found that it could hold its own with the Snorters. It was the first time he had ever called on a full performance from

the two motors. They were fanning their way through the air with the speed of a pursuit plane.

Every few minutes he took the positions of the Snorters. The fuel supply of all of them was dwindling. He began to count the minutes. The hands on the clock seemed to be chained in one place.

"You'll have to hurry," Mike Morales told him over the telephone. "There won't be any warning this time. I mean, it won't come up gradually. It will pop out of the west like a fifteen-inch shell."

"I'm giving her all she's got, Mike," Bill answered, wearily.

Five minutes later Bill spoke sharply to the pilots of the three Snorters.

"Nose 'em down now," he said. "I'll lead the way. We'll have to circle over the harbor to get our bearings. You go in first, Red. Then Cy and then Henderson. Take it easy. Shorty just told me he had made a landing. There is room for us in the hangar. It's on the far side of the harbor. You'll have to land and taxi into it carefully. The harbor is littered with wrecks. You'll be able to spot Shorty. He'll be on a sea wall on the side of the harbor that leads up to the town. Let's go!"

The four ships poked their noses down out of the soupy atmosphere and circled above the harbor. It was almost impossible to see the water. The buildings of San Juan were mere blurs in the warm, moist fog that hung over them.

After he had ascertained the direction of the almost imperceptible breeze that fanned the harbor, Red took his Snorter down in a steep landing. Two thin lines like the wake of torpedoes followed his pontoons toward the huge stone building at the far side of the harbor. Cy and Henderson followed him down with Bill bringing up the rear.

THEY HAD no sooner slid the huge, iron-bound doors across the front of the stone building than the last trace of daylight seemed to be extinguished as though the world had been shut in a dark room. There were no stars, only blackness and the hissing roar of the wind as it came out of the west. It was as though a giant ferris wheel, a ferris wheel a thousand miles in diameter had suddenly been set into motion with a million pieces of scrap iron tied to it, clanging against one another. The heavy stone structure vibrated as the gods threw cannon balls on the corrugated iron roof. Bamboos behind the stone building bent and rattled like dead men's bones shaking castanets.

The magnificent avenues of royal palms along the water front were picked up like toothpicks and flung hundreds of feet away. Through the increasing roar of the wind the rain beat a steady tattoo on the roof. Above it all rose the shrill clatter of the millions of seeds in the dry pods of "shaggy-shaggy" trees.

Sandy, listening to the horrible din of the storm, could not believe his ears. Shingles, fences, thatched roofs, and treetops beat on the roof of the building like the bombardment of heavy artillery. The terrified howlings and bellowings of animals joined the shrieking and grinding of trees and the pounding of the breakers on the reefs in the harbor.

As Sandy turned around to survey the big stone building he saw row after row of rolling eyes and hanging tongues in the far corners of the building. He pointed the strange sight out to Bill. Mike Morales laughed.

"They're native blacks," Mike explained. "Came here for shelter. Not one of them will have a home when this is over."

Water was beating against the huge sliding doors of the hangar. The planes of Bill's fleet were bobbing up and

down in spite of their being lashed together. He watched them anxiously, rushing here and there to direct Harwood and Miles and old Charlie in keeping the planes from being ground to bits. Each time a wave slapped against the sliding doors and bent them inward he held his breath.

The din was terrific now, maddening. Shorty stood with his hands clapped over his ears while Red Gleason tried to add to the noise by singing. He could not hear his own voice. Cy Hawkins was huddled up trying to keep warm. He was wet to the skin. He told them he had seen a hurricane before. "It came in off the gulf," he said, "and hit east Texas. Only one chicken and one mule left in town when it was over. Dead horses, dead pigs, dead cows, dead people, dead everything!" He shuddered.

The hurricane windows of the old stone building had been closed and their bars dropped to hold them in place, but it seemed that a hundred malignant fingers were tugging at them trying to rip out staples and hooks. The hangar crew kept thumping them back into place knowing that, if one went and the wind burst in, the roof would go sailing off the place.

The manager of the airport came up to Bill and shook his hand. His hair was matted over his face, his shirt ripped to ribbons. His back was stained with blood from a gash in his shoulder.

"You're the first man who ever brought a fleet of ships, to say nothing of one ship, through a West Indian hurricane," he said.

"I was lucky," Bill said. "I got a storm warning in Miami, but you know how storm warnings are. Sometimes they jell and most times they don't. I thought I could get through before it broke."

"Did you lose any ships?"

"One," Bill said.

"What about the pilot?"

Bill shrugged his shoulders and turned his face away. The manager understood. He didn't ask any more questions.

Five hours later, when the hurricane had revolved its lf away into the east carrying its artillery on the caissons of the wind, Bill and his men fell asleep. Some of them sank where they stood, others managed to climb into the cockpits of their ships. The manager and crew of the hangar fell exhausted on the hard concrete.

When Bill had made sure that all of his men were bedded down in one place or another he climbed into the pilot's compartment of the transport.

He sank into the commander's seat with his mind and body bruised and aching. He fell asleep with a vision of Bev Bates' eyes pleading for aid as the waters of the storm-lashed Atlantic rolled over him.

X—VIGA

WHEN BILL awoke he could hear the *lap, lap* of water against the pontoons of the transport and could feel the gentle sway as it bobbed back and forth. From the far corners of the hangar came the continual prayers and groans of the blacks who were still huddled there. The hangar was as black as a dungeon. He switched on the cabin light and looked at his wrist watch. It was six o'clock in the morning.

Sandy was sprawled out over the port pilot's seat. His head was thrown back in a posture of utter exhaustion. His hair was matted on his face and head. Bill tried to peer into the blackness of the hangar. Not a person was stirring. Only the eerie chanting of the half-mad blacks came to his ears.

As he started down the steps to the lower deck, Sandy opened his eyes. For a moment he stared at the dim bulb above his head with eyes that were wide. Slowly, his gaze circled the room

to rest on Bill. He shook his head from side to side.

"I'm glad you were standing there," he said with a shudder. "I was having a nightmare." He stretched out his legs cautiously and groaned. "I ache," he added.

"Want to take a look outside?" Bill asked him. He nodded.

They made their way over and around the forms of men who had dropped in their tracks the night before to a little door at the back of the hangar. They threw the bar and stepped out into the muggy daylight.

The tragedy that greeted their gaze brought a gasp of horror to their lips. It was a sight such as they never seen before. A sight that would have caused any man to gasp with horror.

Where there were trees still standing, they were headless. Long, gray, twisted trunks that had been proud royal palms stuck their warped shafts into the sky. Stone walls were down and from some of them protruded the feet of men. Everything except the stone hurricane houses were down. Snakes and lizards ran along the dead roots of the trees. and crabs scuttled along unmolested through the débris.

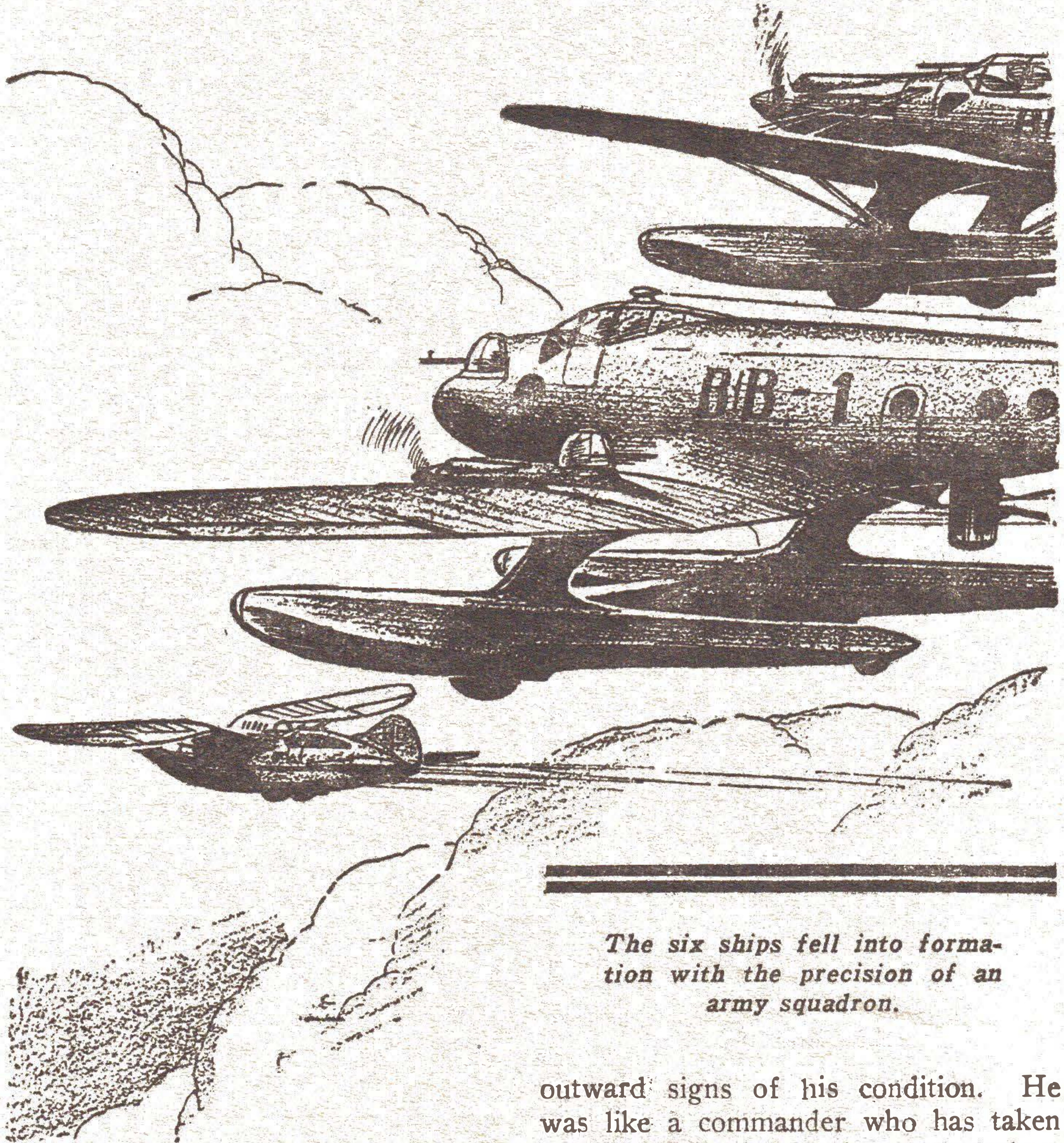
The streets and gardens were full of rubbish and the shore of the harbor was strewn with the wreckage of ships. Hundreds of pounds of fish were beginning to decay where they had been thrown up on the banks. There was a horrible stillness about the place. A few ragged blacks with rolling, fear-crazed eyes poked among the débris of crumpled walls and thatched-roofed ruins.

The stench of decomposing flesh mingled with the odor of rum and filth. Here could be seen a woman's hat, there a man's shoe. Personal things that had been picked up by the gale and carried hundreds of yards or miles.

"Ugh!" Sandy grunted. "I've never seen anything like it."

"There isn't anything like it, kid," Bill said. "Fighting enemy planes in the air is child's play compared to fighting the weather. Let's go back and

just coming to life when they got back. It was then that the true greatness of Bill Barnes made itself manifest. He was as tired and exhausted as any of his men. His mind was a whirlpool of mental chaos. But he threw off the



The six ships fell into formation with the precision of an army squadron.

stir up our crowd and get out of here. The place will be a mad house in a few more hours."

Gulping, they turned away from that street of death and destruction.

Bill's men and the hangar crew were

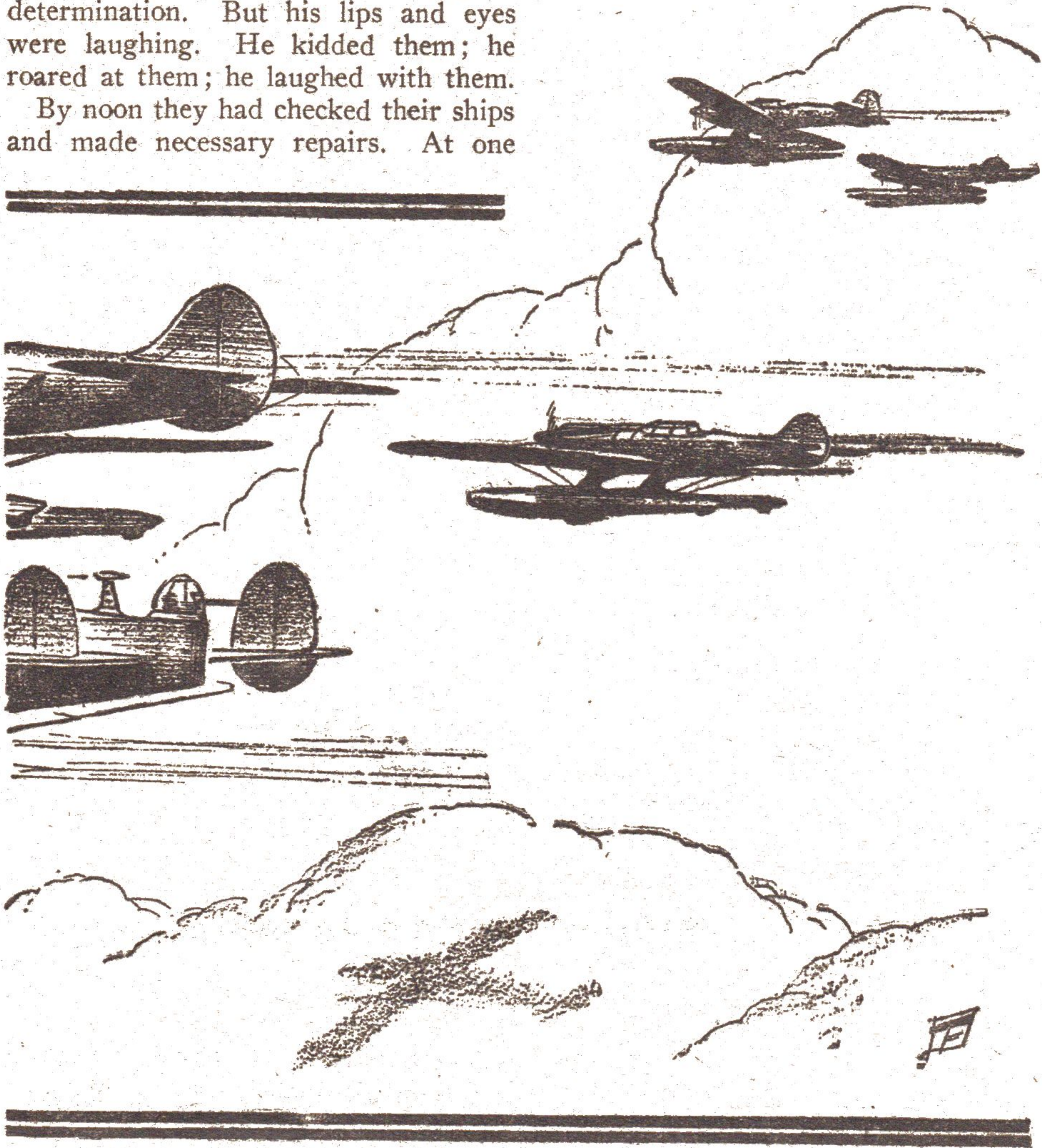
outward signs of his condition. He was like a commander who has taken his weary troops halfway through a battle and looking at them realized that he must take them the rest of the way with the sheer force of his own will.

He rooted out Charlie and half dragged him to the galley of the transport to prepare food. He went among

BB-4

his men with his jaws clenched in grim determination. But his lips and eyes were laughing. He kidded them; he roared at them; he laughed with them.

By noon they had checked their ships and made necessary repairs. At one



o'clock they had been refueled and were riding their sea anchors calmly in the harbor. Old Saul Cox shook his head in open admiration.

"You missed your calling, son," he said to Bill. "You ought to be leading an army."

"I'm leading the equivalent," Bill said quietly. He turned to Mike. "Any messages here for you?" Mike shook his head.

"The wireless has been down since yesterday morning and there has been

too much static to get anything by radio. There should be a message here from Vivarrio, but there isn't. We'll hear from him when we get to Viga. How long do you think the last hop will take you?"

"Two hours," Bill said, adding, "unless we run into another hurricane."

AT one thirty Bill at last got through to Tony Lamport on the radiophone. The connection was indistinct and blurred because of the static. When

he could finally understand Tony, Tony could hardly speak because of anxiety and nervous excitement.

"I've been trying to get you all night and all day," he said to Bill. "I heard from Bev, Bill!" Tony's voice was shrill. "Do you get what I say?" A band of steel locked itself around Bill's heart for a moment. He couldn't speak. His hands clenched and his face burned. He forced himself to speak calmly.

"I get you, Tony," he said, at last. "What about Bev?"

"He got down safe, Bill! He was bruised and battered, but nothing serious. He got his ship down and had to lie on his stomach with his face to the ground for four hours because of the hurricane. He's all right. The message came from the station at Guantanamo. That's all I know so far."

"That's enough!" Bill said.

"Are the rest of you all right?" Tony asked.

"We made it," Bill said. "Just. I'll contact you again in a couple of hours, Tony. When we reach Viga. Stand by."

Bill flipped the switch and sank back in his chair. It was like seeing an old friend climb out of his coffin. It was incredible. No, it wasn't. Bev was the kind of bird who wouldn't stop fighting as long as he had any breath left in his body. They were all like that. Every mother's son of them. They'd take a sock on the nose and go back for more. That's what made them what they were.

The news made him feel like one of those bodies crushed beneath a stone wall or house along the harbor. Only the wall had been lifted from him and he was still alive. He knew the news would put the rest of his crowd back on their feet. He climbed out on a wing of the transport and had it relayed from plane to plane.

He could tell by the way they all took their ships into the air a few min-

utes later what effect the news had had on them. The sky over San Juan harbor became an aerial circus for fifteen minutes as the three Snorters and the Scarlet Stormer were whipped through every evolution known to airmen. Inverted outside loops were followed by wing-overs and barrel rolls until Bill himself became dizzy.

"Snap out of it, you guys!" he roared at them. "Fall into formation. We still have a job to do."

As the five planes took their positions Sandy dropped into the port pilot's seat and took the controls from Bill. He looked at Bill with questioning eyes. Bill laughed.

"All right, kid," he said. "I know what's on your mind. You can break out the Eaglet before we land at Viga. We'll probably be needing it." Sandy's face lighted up like the face of a child who has just been given a lollipop.

"Hotcha!" he said. The lines of weariness seemed to disappear from his face. "I hope you haven't shot down all those rebels."

Bill's eyes were laughing. The news about Bev had served him as a physical massage to knead the ache out of his own muscles. The world looked brighter. The expedition didn't seem so disastrous, so futile, now.

Ten thousand feet below the droning transport a thousand islands broke the surface of the Caribbean Sea. Some of them were barren, rocky, uninhabited. Others were a mass of green and blue that became wooded hills, narrow valleys and misty mountain tops that reached into the clouds. A planter's house gleamed white in a valley; a pebbly beach stretched between high bluffs with a grove of palms half hiding a village of rude huts along its border.

Mike Morales' eyes gleamed in his flushed face as he gazed down on the string of islands he knew so well. He had been a man without a country and

now he was returning home. Bill, looking at him, was glad that he had undertaken the expedition.

"Do you think we're apt to run into any trouble to-day?" Bill asked Mike.

"I don't think so," Mike answered. "Of course, they may send out scouts to watch for us knowing we are coming. I——"

"I think so!" Sandy's shrill voice cut in as he pointed toward the dim speck that was the Scarlet Stormer far ahead. A biplane was diving on it from above, its twin machine guns spewing out lines of fire.

SHORTY was half asleep when he realized that screaming lead was tearing through the leading edge of one of his wings. He had been sitting back in his seat, relaxed. He had been going over the battle with the weather of the day before and thinking about Bev Bates when bullets cut through his wing and a tan biplane went by him in a mad, reckless assault.

He skidded his ship to the side, swung it violently around, and threw open the throttle. The biplane had zoomed upward when it came out of its dive and was now far above him. Shorty's hand tightened on the control column and eased it back. The two fast machines came roaring toward one another. Shorty tripped his two .50-caliber guns and sent a blast of lead tearing through the cabin of the onrushing biplane.

It yawed wildly out of range, dived and came streaking back to the fight. The two planes raced and tumbled across the sky, each man looking for an opening. The air was filled with the roar of their motors and flaming lead.

For a fleeting second Shorty got the biplane's fuselage across his sights. His fingers came down on his triggers. A line formed along the fuselage as his bullets whipped into it. Then the bi-

plane whirled around in a fast Immelmann and dove. Shorty pushed his stick forward and headed straight for the blue-green waters of the Caribbean until his air-speed indicator galloped past four hundred miles an hour. He eased the stick back while the motor screamed a protest. The nose pointed for the sky and came over. The Stormer was on its back. The biplane was just ahead of it. Before it could slip out of the way, Shorty poured lead and tracers into its belly.

The nose of the biplane came up and it rolled into a side slip. It yawed wildly again and went into a spin. Shorty dove over it and could see the pilot bent double over the stick. He followed it down as it plunged toward the sea. Perspiration ran down his face as he realized the fight was over. He cursed himself for not keeping his eyes open. The man had almost got him with that first burst of fire. Another three feet——

Red and Cy Hawkins came diving down to flip a hand above their heads in salute. Red held his forefinger up so that Shorty could see it.

"I hope they've got more stuff on the ball than that first one," Shorty said, contemptuously. "Banana cowboys!" he added.

He climbed back to his position above and in front of the transport. He settled back in his seat. The hot tropical sun was beating down on him. He loosened the collar of his white overall and ran a finger around the neck.

"It's going to be darned uncomfortable down here," he said and half closed his eyes after scanning his instrument board.

"ALL RIGHT, kid," Bill said to Sandy as he took the controls of the transport from him. "Go down and wrap the Eaglet around you."

Sandy didn't have to be urged. He was out of his seat and down the steps

to the main section of the fuselage where the Eaglet was stored in two jumps. He clambered into the cockpit and strapped himself in as Miles got ready to work the mechanism that lowered the little fighter.

When he flipped up his hand, two sections on the floor of the fuselage slid back to make a gaping hole. A long, latticelike crane lowered the small, single-seated biplane smoothly and quickly down through the aperture.

The tiny plane hung suspended, gently swaying back and forth from the force of the transport's engines. The wings suddenly snapped out and locked as Sandy manipulated a crank. The prop turned over as he worked his starter. The engine caught and the propeller became a silver disk. At another signal from Sandy the Eaglet was released to dive toward the Caribbean in a long, fast glide.

As it came out of the glide, Sandy brought the stick back and brought it over in a tight, flashing loop. It rolled dizzily from side to side and executed a split S and a chandelle. He then came up in the first half of a normal loop and from an inverted position at the top half rolled the ship level in the maneuver that is known as an Immelmann turn.

Bill's bronzed face shone with pride as he watched Sandy execute his repertoire of acrobatics. He flew the Eaglet as though it was a part of him. Bill could not disassociate one from the other when they were in flight.

Old Saul Cox was watching Sandy with eyes that were wide. He turned to Bill.

"What else do you have up your sleeve, son?" he asked. "Next you'll have a kindergarten student out there doing outside loops."

Bill grinned and threw the switch on the radiophone.

"Snap out of it, kid," he bellowed at Sandy. "Keep your eyes open for

Viga. We'll be sighting it any time now. Get up there alongside, Shorty."

Five minutes later Shorty announced that he believed Viga was dead ahead. Bill handed the glasses to Mike who nodded his head.

"Get down out of this, all of you," Bill shouted into the radiophone. "Level off at a thousand feet. We don't want to be seen any more than necessary."

"The natives will know," Mike said. "If one of them sees us it will travel across the island like wildfire. The north end of the island is practically uninhabited. That is where we must land. There is a landlocked harbor and an abandoned lime estate there."

"Are these natives the same as the ones on Samerra?" Bill asked, curiously. Mike's lip curled. His eyes were indignant.

"Not a resemblance," he said. "The natives on Viga are mostly blacks with a few Carib Indians on a reservation. There are twenty thousand blacks and only a handful of whites. Not more than two hundred whites counting men, women and children. Most of the whites have a touch of the tar brush. The in-betweens, what you call 'high yellows' rule the island. The president is a high yellow or half-breed. But decent enough."

"Does he ever have any trouble with the blacks?" Saul Cox asked.

"Plenty," Mike said. "The blacks always hate the half-breeds. They will work harder and have more respect for a white than for a half-breed. The half-breed tries to patronize the black and the black resents it in one of his own blood. He respects the white man because he has been trained to respect him."

The high mornes of Viga towered black and menacing against the sky. Their tips were swathed in snowy clouds that looked like great balls of cotton. Stretching north and south were a long

line of hills, an isolated peak jutting up at intervals. The summits were blue and black in the distance. Within the line of hills were deep, dark valleys and gorges. The hills were covered with a luxuriant vegetation of green of every hue. The purple of mango and cacao, the golden green of cane and lime mingled with orange and citron. Palms crowned the ridges of the hills and cultivated ground gleamed golden brown on their slopes.

Down from the wall of mountains great waterfalls dropped to the sea, mere silver threads in the distance. Far up at the summit of one of the mornes vapor and steam could be seen rising from the boiling lake that was the mouth of an inactive volcano.

Giant *gommiers* and *bois diable* towered up through the jungle interlaced with lianas and jungle parasites and here and there a flame tree with its broad umbrella-shaped top, a mass of flaming crimson.

"The vegetation is like my own Samerra," Mike Morales said reverently. "But Samerra is flatter and not so many mornes and so much jungle."

"Where do we sit down?" Bill asked him.

Mike pointed toward a cliff some hundreds of feet high that faced the Caribbean.

"We circle to the right when you are nearly parallel with those cliffs," he said. "There you will see the landlocked harbor." Bill flipped the switch on the radiophone for what he hoped would be the last time on this trip.

"I'm going in first," he told his pilots. "Follow me down in the order we've been using." He laughed over the phone. "This, me hearties, is Viga!"

He swung the giant transport around in a sweeping turn and brought it down in a long, low glide. Saul Cox and Mike Morales could scarcely feel the slight jar as he sat it down on the water.

XI—REVOLUTION

LOW-HANGING, fleecy clouds clung to the tops of the mornes that surrounded the little harbor on every side. Jasmine, frangipanni and acacia sweetened the hot, humid air as two natives rowed Bill and his men from their planes to the dock. Behind the square, squat stone house on the shore, a cascade sixty feet in height dropped from a deep cut in solid rock to a broad basin below.

A troop of chattering monkeys, disturbed by the roar of the motors raced through bush and tree away from the banana swamp where they had been feeding. Brilliantly colored humming birds darted in and out of the jungle. Large, lizardlike iguanas peered at the crowded boat from the palm-bordered beach.

Little John, parrot fish, fish of every hue, swam lazily through the crystal-clear water, their colors standing out against the blue, clay bottom.

Bill Barnes shook his head in wonder as he gazed at the towering mornes, the blues of the sky and water, and the colorful fern trees, palms and flame trees.

There were a half dozen white men standing on the dock awaiting their arrival. Behind the whites were four natives of varying colors of brown and black. Two of them were women dressed in long, high-waisted dresses, red bandannas bound around their heads. The third was a boy and the fourth a light-skinned Indian with high cheek bones and almond eyes. As the boat neared the dock he began to pound on a drum hollowed from a log and covered with skin. While he hammered he chanted:

"Neech-i-goo, bah-li, boo ni,
Leh-bi chi, wei-i-ga-mak, ah-wah-si."

"Right down your alley," Sandy said to Red Gleason. "Why don't you sing

tenor?" Adding, "He looks like you when he dances, Shorty."

A smile spread over Mike Morales' flushed countenance.

"Native servants," he explained. "The one with the drum is a Carib. They sulk if they can't come out and greet the guests." He was peering intently at the half dozen men in whites on the dock. His right hand came down on the seat beside him.

"There's Vivarrio, my minister of the interior, and Talley, the president of Viga," he said excitedly. "Things must be breaking or they wouldn't be here."

A half hour later the little band of conspirators were sitting on the broad front veranda of the stone house. All of them, except Bill and his pilots, had their hands wound around glasses containing swizzles or planter's punch.

Saul Cox's first lieutenant, a red-headed man of about forty, with hard, blue eyes and a scar that ran from temple to chin, was explaining to Mike what he had done on his numerous trips to Samerra.

"Your army is all lined up," he finished. "Every sergeant in every company is ready to go over to you when you make your bid."

"October 2nd is the day," Vivarrio offered. "A red uprising is set for that day. Herrera knows it and is getting ready to resist with the army. If you step in and take command of the army and make a few concessions to the reds they will join you. I think you will go back into office without bloodshed if things go right."

"And if they don't?" Bill asked.

"A great many of our people will die," Vivarrio said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Chamberlin and Herrera will die first. The people will take care of them. They will be torn to pieces because they are so thoroughly hated."

"No," Mike said emphatically. "They must not die. Chamberlin is an Englishman. There is British money behind

him. I don't want any trouble with England. I only want to take my country out of their hands. We will give them safe passage from Samerra."

"Suppose they prefer to fight?" Vivarrio asked.

"A few hours tied in a Mimosa bush will change their ideas," one of Saul Cox's paid fighters grunted.

"Mimosa bush?" Sandy asked.

"They got long thorns filled with ants." The man grinned. "When you tie an one in 'em they scratch themselves and the ants come out and lick the wounds."

Sandy gulped and looked at the man with eyes that were as large and round as saucers. Something turned over in Bill's stomach as he listened to the man's words and realized the horror and cruelty of such torture.

Talley, the president of Viga broke the momentary silence.

"Chamberlin and Herrera know that you are going to land here," he said to Mike. "They have a man living at the Hotel Campeche. I am sure he is their agent. He is stirring up trouble among the natives here. They were restless before he came because of new taxes. With his encouragement they are becoming dangerous. I am afraid of a revolt if you stay here, Morales. They have already assaulted a couple of whites and are threatening to burn Government House."

"It is only a short time until October 2nd," Saul Cox said.

"A short time, yes," Talley said nervously. "But it may be too long. Herrera will probably send some of his planes over here to locate your planes. They can't fail to see them anchored down in the cove. They may bomb them."

"Only once," Shorty said. "It makes us mad when people try to drop bombs on us."

"Awful mad," Red Gleason grinned.

"You understand my position?" Tal-

ley said to Mike. His light-brown face was a pasty-white and his hand trembled as he lifted his glass to his lips.

"I understand, Talley," Mike said. "We'll be out of here as fast as we can. But we'll have to stay and make good or it won't be only while we're here that your island will be in danger. Herrera and Chamberlin will bomb you out of the Caribbean if they keep control of Samerra."

"I know. I know," Talley said, shrugging helplessly. "But I may need your help before October 2nd. If this man, Zapaca, who is staying at the Campeche stirs up the natives too much I may have an uprising on my hands."

"We'll be sticking around just in case," Sandy said, eagerly. Shorty looked at him and laughed.

"You'll get one of those machetes wound around your neck," he said.

The sun was fast becoming a ball of fire over the western rim of the mornes and a light rain was falling when Talley and Vivarrio climbed into their motor launch and started back toward Batcab, the capital and only town of Viga.

"We'll get word to you by messenger if we need you," Talley told Mike Morales before they left.

WHEN the brown-skinned Carib awakened them the next morning they found that it was still raining, and the clearing behind the house was swathed in fog and clouds that prevented them from seeing to the first rim of jungle. But while they were eating a breakfast of fish, plantain and weak tea, the sun broke through on the green slopes of the mornes and patches of blue appeared in the sky.

"This is a beautiful place when the weather is nice," Bill said. "When do you get your rainy season?"

"From December to April," Mike said. "It rains most of the time." He followed Bill out on the porch a moment later.

"Would you mind taking one of your men with you and delivering a message to Vivarrio?" he asked Bill. "I don't dare trust a messenger. I want to find out if it will be all right to start landing Saul's men on Samerra, and where to land them."

"I'll take Sandy with me," Bill said.

"You had better wait until dusk," Mike said. "I would go only if it would never do for me to be seen on Viga."

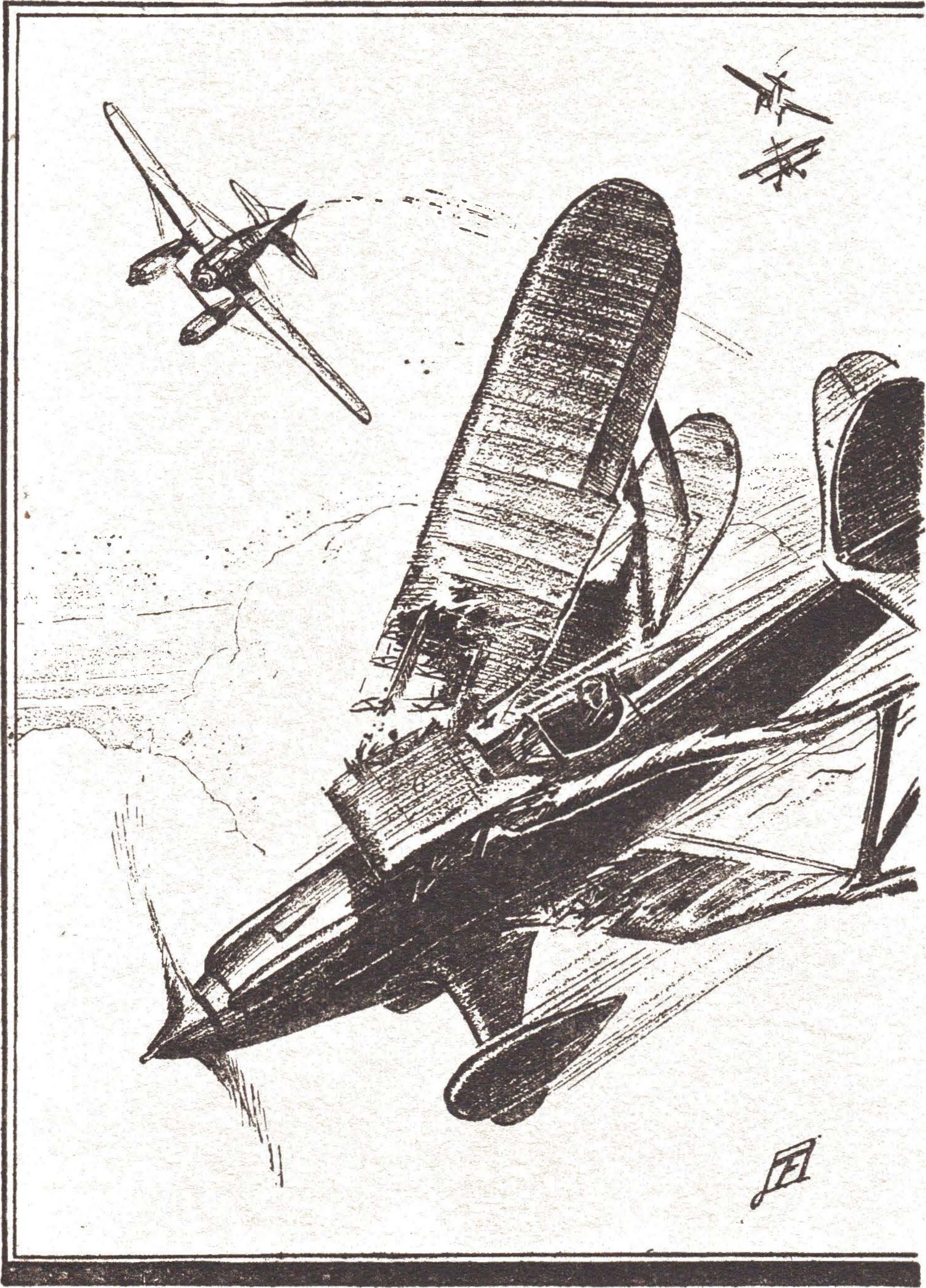
Bill kept Shorty and Red Gleason and Cy Hawkins on alternate watches throughout the day. They probed the sky with powerful glasses every few minutes for any sign of a plane from Samerra. Henderson, Bill, Sandy and the two gunner-machinists from the transport checked the motors of the Snorters and the Scarlet Stormer and made small repairs.

At five o'clock Bill and Sandy headed the motor launch out through the cove and toward Batcab. Mike drew a map of the town and gave them minute instructions about getting around it and how to find Government House and Vivarrio.

"Stay away from the Hotel Campeche," he said. "That is where this man Zapaca makes his headquarters according to Talley. Be sure to take automatics with you."

They ran their launch up on the beach at the lower end of the town as Mike had told them and took a hard, shell road into Batcab. When they were nearly there they heard the harsh cries of a band of natives coming down a trail. The voices became a bedlam of high-pitched screams and bestial baying as they came closer.

Moving quickly, they slipped behind a screen of plantain leaves. As the jabbering, frenzied blacks came into their range of vision they saw they were all reeling from the effects of palm wine and rum. In the lead was a giant black, naked to the waist, his body gleaming with the brilliant stain of herbs.





Suddenly both wings folded back against the fuselage and it went into a dizzy whirl in its plunge to the Atlantic.

In his left hand he carried a rifle. From his right dangled a keen-edged machete. Less colorfully decorated, a mob of fifty blacks followed him, all armed with machetes, a few with rifles and old muskets. Their eyes were rolling as hideous shrieks came from their lips.

The sun was just slipping into the sea when Bill and Sandy edged up over the last steep foothill and gazed down on the town below. At almost the same instant smoke and fire began to pour from the government buildings that lined the water front.

The staccato rattle of rifle fire came to their ears, and the wild howling of a thousand voices suddenly gone mad. As the firing increased in volume and was reinforced by the *tat-tat-tat* of a machine gun, conflagrations sprang up in a half dozen places. Almost below them the barracks of the native police burst into flame, lighting up the Government House grounds as though a huge searchlight had been thrown on them.

Suddenly, over the top of the stone wall that surrounded the grounds, a thousand black forms poured like a river of ink. Waving machetes, screaming, leaping in the air as they advanced, they had progressed halfway to the house when a machine gun sprayed them with leaden death. For an instant they halted, wavered, then pushed on. Another burst that mowed down the second rank brought them to a dazed halt. As suddenly as they had attacked, they broke and went streaming back over the wall, beating and tearing at one another to escape the deadly fire from the house.

Far out along the shore another fire flared into the heavens. They were both a little sick at the thought of the butchery that was going on.

"Looks as though this Zapaca had succeeded in starting things," Bill said. "We'll have to get down there and help. Probably most of the whites who could

get there are at Government House. They are probably safe, unless they run out of ammunition. We'll slip into the place from the back."

"I wish I had the Eaglet," Sandy said.

"That would give our whole show away," Bill said. "You ready?"

"I'm set," Sandy said, pushing his blond hair out of his eyes.

ROLLING, slipping, they began a perilous descent down the slope of the hill. At the bottom they slipped into the shadows of a row of giant crotons that lined an alleyway, advancing cautiously in the general direction of Government House. Rounding a corner they came upon a band of a dozen blacks who were creeping toward the rear wall of the government grounds. They carried huge pitch torches in their hands prepared to throw them over the wall.

At a signal from Bill, he and Sandy fired a half dozen shots over the heads of the blacks. Taken by surprise, the natives screamed in terror and went racing away.

Running along the wall, Bill and Sandy stopped before a huge gate whose hinges formed a foothold. Scrambling upward they stood in bold relief at the top and then dropped to the other side. Lying flat on their stomachs to escape being riddled by lookouts from the house, they waited. After a few minutes they got to their feet and made a dash for the protection of the postern gate.

Crouched inside they saw that the walls at the back of the house were fully thirty feet high and practically impossible to scale. They decided that the defenders were so few they had left it unguarded, while the attack was concentrated on the front.

They beat the butts of their automatics on the heavy hurricane door and were rewarded by the sound of a bullet ripping through it from the inside.

Bill roared at the door: "Tell Mr.

Talley it's Bill Barnes!" he shouted. They heard the heavy bar slip out of the brackets and then the door swung slowly inward while a torch played on their faces.

Stepping in quickly, they saw a man in the uniform of the constabulary standing on the landing with a smoking gun in his hand.

"I'm sorry, sir," the native said. His voice was unsteady. His eyes rolled.

Talley gazed at them in amazement a moment later and then wrung their hands.

"I tried to get the north end of the island on the telephone but all the wires have been cut," he said. "And they have put the wireless out of commission. Most of the constabulary have gone over to the natives. The majority of the white people on the island are here. If we can hold out until morning or until your planes come to our aid we can weather it. Your men will probably come for you if you don't get back there to-night?"

"Probably," Bill said. "Give us a couple of rifles."

A few minutes later they were pouring lead into a howling mass of blacks as they made another attempt to close in on the house. A bare dozen got within ten yards of the porch where they were mowed down by the withering fire. A larger band succeeded in coming farther to throw flaming torches on the roof. The ground about the house became strewn with black bodies, some of them screaming and writhing in agony, others sprawled grotesquely where they had fallen.

As the room became filled with the pungent fumes of burned powder, the defenders stripped to the waist and went down on their knees on the floor between attacks, gasping for breath.

"If they land any of those torches on the roof we're going to cook, young fella," Bill gasped, wiping sweat from his eyes with the back of a grimy hand.

"I'm almost cooked now," Sandy answered. His face was streaked with powder, his eyes shining with the excitement of the battle.

"I thought you said nothing would happen on this trip," Bill reminded him while he pumped lead out the window.

"Gosh, Bill," Sandy gasped, "I take it back! I wish that scum Shorty was here. He'd have a swell time."

Suddenly, the grounds directly in front of the house were illuminated by a blaze from above. The roar of the prancing, dancing blacks became high-pitched and terrible to hear.

Rushing into the hallway Bill collided with Talley as he came puffing up the steps, his face white, his lips set. In his hands he carried two chemical extinguishers. Bill took one of them and followed him up a steep flight of steps that led to a trap that opened on the roof. As he pushed the trap up, a gust of flame darted over the edge and licked at his face. Falling backward Talley landed on Bill's shoulder. They both crashed to the floor below.

When Talley tried to rise he fell back, his face twisted with pain.

"It's my ankle," he groaned.

GRASPING an extinguisher in one hand Bill took the steps two at a time and literally dived onto the roof with the flames licking all about him. Exposed to the fire of rifles from the ground he calmly broke the plunger on the extinguisher and turned it on the licking flames. As the fire began to sputter and die the howls from the natives became shrieks of rage and the firing more desperate.

With bullets singing beneath his arms and through his clothing Bill moved leisurely, disdainfully, back into the opening and brought out the second extinguisher. As his head and shoulders came into view, a bullet drove him back against the trapdoor as it cut through the fleshy part of his shoulder.

Pandemonium broke loose as the blacks saw him stagger backward. There was a grim smile on his lips as he broke the second plunger. Another bullet tore a heel off his boot and nearly threw him over the edge of the roof. When he had emptied the extinguisher he broke a branch from a tree and finished putting out the fire.

After he had closed the trapdoor behind him he found that Talley had been carried to the first floor with a fractured ankle. After a doctor had dressed the flesh wound in his shoulder Bill went back to his station beside Sandy.

Vivarrio, the minister of the interior of Samerra, joined Bill and Sandy as a terrific crash sounded outside the house. The gate had been forced with a battering ram. Before a machine gun could be swung into action a stream of black bodies had swarmed around the base of the house, out of range.

"Zapaca is the man who started this carnage," Vivarrio said to Bill. "He stirred up the natives and fed them rum. They have gone mad." Bill regarded Vivarrio thoughtfully for a moment. There was something about the man's sleek face and shifty eyes he didn't like.

"Could Zapaca stop it?" Bill asked.

Vivarrio shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he said in his broken English.

"Listen, kid," Bill said when Vivarrio had gone. "I have an idea. It may be goofy but it might work. I think it's worth a try. All these natives are superstitious. They believe in ghosts and worship their *Obeah* men. If we could get this bird, Zapaca, he might—come on down while I talk to Talley."

Talley listened in wide-eyed amazement while Bill told him his plan. Then he shook his head.

"You wouldn't live two minutes outside Government House," he said.

"It doesn't look as though I'll live very long inside it," Bill said.

"There's an underground passage that

leads under the house and comes out below the old fort," Talley said. "But you'll never make it."

"You'll be surprised," Sandy remarked.

Both Bill and Sandy took off their flying boots and blackened their legs, faces and hands after ripping their breeches to tatters. Each stuck an automatic in his pocket, then Bill asked Talley to show them the entrance to the underground passageway. Inside, the air was damp and foul. At the far end they could hear the roar of the sea as it broke on the boulders that lined the shore beneath the fort. Guided only by the flickering light from a ginger-jug flambeau they waded through the winding tunnel for three hundred yards before they came to the outer iron door.

With their bare hands and the aid of the iron bar they tore at the earth that had settled about the door. Finally they managed to get a leverage inside the crack and put their combined weight into moving it back and forth a fraction of an inch at a time. As the accumulated dirt of years began falling away, the old timbers above them sagged dangerously.

Peering outside, Bill saw leaping, shrieking figures along the quay where the customhouse and post office had stood.

"Stick inside and don't show yourself until you see me coming back," he said to Sandy. He slipped out into the shadows and faded from view.

XII—GOVERNMENT HOUSE

A FEW minutes later Bill became one of the howling devils who careened along the water front. After he was safely through the mob around the burning customhouse he turned up a narrow alley and crept along within the shadows of a high stone wall. The few blacks who passed him thought he was drunk or wounded. One giant black swung a club that just missed his head and

knocked him sprawling. He feigned unconsciousness.

He staggered through group after group of blacks. The stench of their black sweating bodies was terrific. Behind the Hotel Campeche he stepped back a few feet and ran toward the high wall. Catching the top he pulled himself up and over to drop silently down on the other side.

Stealing across the courtyard, he had approached within two yards of the back entrance when a black form stepped from the shadows into the light. Bill caught the man on the side of the head with the flat of his gun. The black slumped forward without a sound. He shoved him back into the shadows.

Moving noiselessly he traversed the ten feet to a back stairway and sped up it. At the top he saw native runners and messengers passing back and forth along the corridor. Within a room with an open door, through which they all poured, he knew he would find Zapaca.

When the hallway was empty he slipped inside and moved quickly down the corridor. Two blacks dressed in the uniform of the constabulary hurried past him.

A swarthy-faced man with long, black hair was pouring brandy from a bottle into a glass as Bill peered into the room. A giant guard stood just inside the door. He slid to the floor as Bill tapped him on the head with the butt of his automatic. The hand of the man with the bottle flashed to a gun on the desk before him. The gun flew out of his hand as Bill's automatic spoke once. It clattered to the floor. Bill hit him on the chin with a right hook that traveled a bare twelve inches. He sprawled on his desk, unconscious.

Bill whirled as a footstep sounded behind him. A machete grazed his head. The black who had thrown it made a horrible strangling noise in his throat and fell across the guard with a bullet through his neck.

Bill locked the door, upturned Zapaca's desk and shoved it against the door. There was no one in the courtyard below. Bill slid Zapaca's body out the window and lowered him by the wrists until he hung a bare two feet above the ground. He released his hold as impatient knocks sounded on the door. He dropped out the window beside Zapaca and hoisted him across his shoulders like a bag of flour.

Circling north he stole down an alley toward the water front. Accosted by a guard he mumbled unintelligibly and pretended to stagger beneath his burden. As the guard turned away he clipped him on the head. Near the mouth of the little river that tumbled down out of the hills he found their motor launch on the beach. He dumped Zapaca in the bottom and shoved the boat into the water. Paddling straight away from shore he was soon out of the vision of the mob on the water front.

He paddled along parallel to the shore until he was opposite the old fort. Then he swung in toward the shore as Zapaca stirred and tried to sit up.

"I'll knock your head off if you make any noise," Bill assured his glowering, cursing captive. Prodding the stupefied Zapaca with his automatic, he got him to his feet. With his gun in his back Bill shoved him toward the dark blotch on the side of the hill where he knew Sandy was waiting.

As they neared the entrance, the sound of voices came from the top of the hill. Looking up Bill saw half a dozen blacks led by two men in the uniform of the constabulary. Prodding and pushing Zapaca, Bill forced him through the passageway.

"Just in time," he said to Sandy. "Now listen, kid. Wait a few minutes until those blacks have gone. Then I want you to slip down to the boat and get back to the transport-carrier as quickly as you can. Get Shorty and Cy and Red and bring the transport back.

Don't drop any bombs onto the natives unless you have to. Let a couple go up on the hill. I think that'll scare 'em to death. I'll hold them off with this bird until you get back. It shouldn't take you more than an hour. Can you handle the boat all right?"

"Anything from free balloons to submarines," Sandy said with a grin.

"Good luck and hurry," Bill said. He opened the iron door. Sandy stuck his head out, then streaked down over the hill toward the motor launch. A few minutes later Bill heard the engine pop. He shoved the fear-stricken Zapaca down the passageway and into the cellar of Government House.

Talley and the rest of the men defending Government House gaped as he prodded Zapaca into the room.

"Maybe it won't work," Bill said, "but it's worth trying. I'm going to make a *jumbie* cross out of two rifles and shove Zapaca up on the roof to talk to the blacks. He started this thing. Perhaps he can stop it."

Shoving the man before him, Bill took him to the top floor where he tied two rifles together in the form of a cross. While he did it he suggested to Talley that he have one of his men take a machine gun through the postern gate and mount it ready for action on the stone wall above the street.

"If this little trick doesn't work," he explained, "we'll have 'em between a cross fire when they attack again."

Placing the cross of rifles in one of Zapaca's hands and a huge flambeau in the other he pushed him up the stairs and shoved back the trap. As he stuck his head out a half dozen bullets whistled by his ears and he tried to duck back to safety.

Suddenly the firing ceased as the shrieking mob below recognized their terror-stricken leader. Following Bill's orders and with Talley making sure that his words were correctly translated into patois, Zapaca threatened his followers

with all the evil curses in the *Obeah* man's litany if they did not give up their weapons.

The mob of blacks dissected itself into jabbering hesitant groups. Then, as suddenly as the attack had stopped it was whipped into action by one of Zapaca's lieutenants. While he screamed at his leader he emptied his automatic.

As Bill ducked back through the trapdoor, the form of Zapaca toppled after him to settle in a grotesque, sprawled heap, a tiny stream of red bubbling from his lips.

A battering ram came crashing into the front door as Bill grabbed a machine gun and clamped his finger down on the trigger. The bullets crashed through the door and the porch became strewn with screaming bodies, a barricade before the second rank of attackers.

The sweating, cursing, exhausted little band of defenders in Government House poured round after round of bullets into the advancing blacks. It was only when Talley announced that they were nearly out of ammunition that they almost gave up hope. They quietly made sure that each woman had a fully loaded automatic before they went back to the job of selling their lives dearly.

Something that Bill didn't quite understand welled inside him as he gazed at the brave little band of dirty, bloody defenders.

Had Sandy cracked up on the rocks with the launch? Was he going to be too late? A groan escaped his lips as he listened for the rhythmic roar of the two Diesels. His fists were clenched and his face strained.

Then a shout that caused the rest of them to gaze at him in wonder, as he heard a terrific detonation and felt the very house under him tremble.

"It's Sandy with the bomber!" he shouted at Talley as the first explosion was followed by another.

The bloodthirsty shrieks of the blacks became frightened howls of super-

stitious fear as the giant transport flew low over the mob, two of its machine guns belching death.

In fifteen minutes the town was empty of live natives. They were streaming into the mornes away from that soaring thing that dealt death from the sky.

MEN dropped in their tracks exhausted, as the bestial cries of the blacks receded into the foothills. Their wives came creeping out of the dining room where they had been huddled throughout the siege to dress their wounds and cleanse the grime and dirt from their faces.

Bill took advantage of those few minutes to hold a hurried conversation with Talley.

"Tell them I am passing through the islands on a tour of inspection, research, government, anything," Bill said. "Evade the real reason. Sandy will taxi in and pick me up off the quay when he is sure the town is clear of blacks."

"There is nothing I can say that will convey how deeply I am indebted to you," Talley began. Some of the color had come back into his face now. His hands were no longer trembling. "I can't tell you——"

"Don't try," Bill said with a grin. "I'm going to slip out now to avoid a lot of questions."

"Tell Morales I'll be out there tomorrow," Talley said.

Bill slipped out the front door, through the broken gates and trotted across the deserted parade ground of the old fort as he heard Sandy bring the transport down. The engine blasted again as it slid across the water toward the jetty.

A few minutes later he sank into the commander's seat in the pilot house. Shorty was in the starboard pilot's seat at the controls. He inclined his head toward Sandy and winked one eye at Bill.

"Young Lochinvar out of the West, here, thinks he saved the white race from extinction," Shorty said. "If he had a horse he would probably change his name to Paul Revere." Sandy's face turned a deep-red as he struggled for words. He finally managed to speak:

"I got a jackass in the seat beside me," he said. "Maybe that would do."

"Why didn't you try some of your tricks on 'em?" Shorty grinned. "A little ventriloquism would have brought down the house."

Bill laughed. Then his face became serious. He realized he was tired. "They almost brought down the house," he said. "We were nearly out of ammunition when you fellows arrived. Things would have been tough in another five minutes. The plan was to destroy our planes and wipe us out when they finished in the town."

"It was a good thing we went into town," Sandy said.

"Yeah," Shorty agreed with mock seriousness. "It's too bad you weren't around to help Napoleon when he got in that jam. Everything would be different now."

"Tell us how you won the World War," Sandy jeered.

"I told you once I didn't win it," Shorty said. "They just had me hanging around in case a fella made a mistake."

"Aw, nuts!" Sandy growled.

"Shut up, both of you," Bill shouted. "You make more noise than all those blacks. And say less."

BETWEEN SIPS from a tall, cool glass of lime and lemonade, Bill told Mike and Saul Cox and his men about the uprising and his part in it. Mike Morales shook his head as he listened. His usual expression of geniality was gone. His face was hard and set, his lips a thin straight line.

"There's no doubt Zapaca was Herrera's agent," he said. "And we

got more bad news to-night, Bill. We had word that two of Saul's men were picked up and imprisoned on Samerra. Also, some of our machine guns were found and confiscated. They tortured Saul's men to make them talk.

"It looks like wholesale bloodshed now. Some one on Samerra, some one we have trusted, has been betraying us. We've got to find out who that some one is. Without the element of surprise we haven't a chance of a bloodless victory. We'll have to fight."

Mike's face was sad and twisted with anguish as the bright moonlight fell on it. An iguana scampered across a rafter and peered down at them from its perch over their heads. No one spoke as the far-off beating of drums mingled with the rattling bamboos and sighing *chataigniers* along the water front. Mike rose from his chair.

"It means bloodshed, Bill. If the army stays with Herrera, I will have to arm the peons. They are untrained and unwarlike. A great many of them will be killed and wounded. But it is worthwhile to sacrifice a few to save the rest. Do you get the idea, Bill?" He held out his hands in mute supplication.

Bill Barnes nodded his head. He got the idea. He knew what Mike was trying to say. But he wouldn't be stampeded into something he didn't believe in. He rose and put a hand on Mike's shoulder.

"Let's sleep on it," he said. "I might have an idea."

"It'll probably give you headache," Sandy, the irrepressible, remarked.

"And I'll give you an ache some place else," Bill roared as he swung a boot at Sandy.

XIII—BARNEY FELLS

WHEN Bill was awakened the next morning he thought he was back among those blood-crazed blacks of the night before. He swung his feet to the floor

and became tangled in the canopy of mosquito netting that hung over his bed. When he had extricated himself he rushed for the door after grabbing at the automatic under his pillow.

High-pitched, blood-curdling screams were coming from the rear of the stone house. They were broken by a voice that chanted in patois, a voice that was fear-crazed, pleading.

He rushed down the hallway as Mike Morales, Shorty, Saul Cox and Red Gleason came dashing out of their rooms, their hands wrapped around the butts of automatics. He stopped on the threshold of the kitchen with the others crowded around him. Their mouths fell open as they gazed at the scene before them.

"Jolly John," the copper-skinned Carib who had greeted them with a beating drum on their arrival, was standing in a corner. From his lips were coming screams that would have frozen the blood of a man of iron. His eyes were half glazed, his face contorted.

In the center of the room stood Sandy gazing at Jolly John with startled, perplexed eyes. In his hand he held the brown rubber snake with which he had startled Bill and Shorty. He was pressing the snake in such a way that its tongue darted in and out of its mouth in the general direction of the terrified Carib.

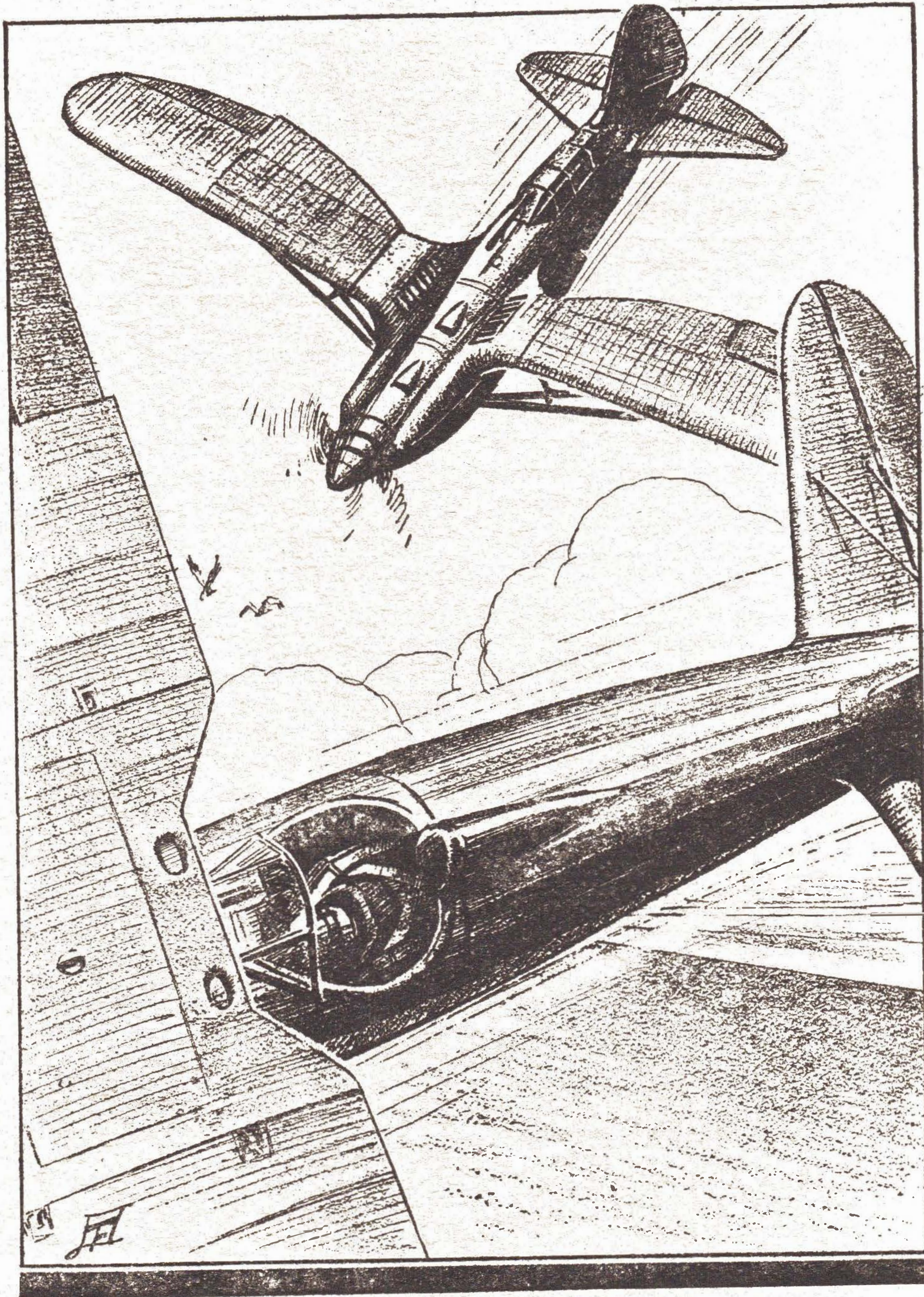
When Jolly John saw that help had arrived he sank down in the corner and covered his face with his hands. His voice continued to chant in a high-pitched treble.

"Get out of here with that thing!" Bill shouted at Sandy.

Mike Morales, laughing, went over to Sandy. "He thinks it's real," Mike explained.

"I told him it wasn't," Sandy said. "I told him about fifty times. My gosh, how he can holler!"

"He thinks—all the natives think—a snake is a *jumbie*—a ghost—something



Shorty drove across above it. He could see the pilot bent double over the stick.

that will haunt them and follow them at night," Mike said. "You'd better take it outside until we get him quieted down."

Sandy went out the side door with one last backward glance at the sobbing Carib. It was all Shorty's fault, he figured. It was Shorty who suggested that he try some of his tricks on the natives. He pondered on the question of getting even with Shorty. He wandered across the clearing and down to the beach. He sat down in the shade of a palm tree. He'd teach that guy Shorty a lesson this time. He'd teach him not to make a lot of sappy remarks that—

Sandy jumped to his feet and ran a few feet down the beach. He cocked his head on one side to listen. Then he put his hand up to thumb the sun.

The next instant he was running toward the porch. And he was making almost as much noise with his shouts as Jolly John had made a while before.

"Bill! Bill! Shorty! Red! Cy!" he shouted as his boots pounded up the steps and over the porch. "A formation of ships is coming in from the southeast!"

Bill Barnes and his men came popping out of their rooms half dressed.

"How many?" Bill snapped. His eyes were gleaming.

"Couldn't tell," Sandy answered, breathlessly. "The wind carried their motors to me. I could make out a couple of specks in the sun."

"Never mind your clothes!" Bill roared. He started down the hallway toward the porch. Mike Morales was racing across the clearing toward the motor launch alongside the dock. Saul Cox brought up the rear with Shorty, Cy and Charlie.

The motor of the launch turned over as they scrambled in it. A black boy poled it away from the dock as Mike threw the engine into reverse. He brought it around and opened the throttle. It sped across the waters of

the cove like a thing possessed. Bill was standing up in the back of the launch with a strong glass turned on the specks speeding toward them from the south.

"Six pursuit ships," Bill said his eyes glued to the glass. "Same type as the ships that attacked us over Biscayne Bay. 'Tear-drop' biplanes with plenty of speed. Single-seaters. And one bomber. They will try to destroy our ships before we can get 'em off the water." His words were coming in short, staccato bursts like machine-gun fire.

"Shorty, Red and Cy take the Snorters. Henderson, Harwood and Miles ride with them to handle the swivel guns. I'll take the Stormer. Sandy, the Eaglet. I'll lead with Shorty and Red on each side of me. Sandy and Cy back and inside. We won't be able to get much altitude before they dive. When they zoom after their dive, you cut back and go after the bomber, Sandy. Don't dive on him. Come in level from behind. Shorty, you and Red and Cy stick to me. When we get them on the level hold them there. I'll take the leader—that'll be Barney Fells. Got it?"

"Got it!" they said, almost in unison.

"Can't you use me, Bill?" Saul Cox asked, his blue eyes squinting into the sun.

"You get in the transport with Charlie," Bill said. "One of them may dive and try to set the fuel tanks afire if the bomber misses it. Keep 'em high enough to spoil their fire."

The launch swirled around beside the Scarlet Stormer. Bill dove for a wing and pulled himself up as the boat skidded away toward the first Snorter.

The two metal propellers of the Stormer whirled into glistening arcs. The supercharged Diesels bellowed as he advanced the throttle. His glance divided between the oncoming patrol of planes and his tachometer. As the tem-

perature rose the engines of the Snorters and the Eaglet thundered into action.

He taxied the Stormer around into the wind and pushed the throttle open another notch. The engines became a steady, deep-throated roar. The powerful amphibian responded to his slightest touch as he brought it head on into the wind. As the air-speed indicator read a hundred miles an hour he eased the stick back. The pontoons came off the smooth waters of the cove with the grace of a rising mallard and the speed of a bullet.

Bill glanced back over his shoulder and saw Sandy take the Eaglet off the water like a streak of lightning. He was flying the little Eaglet as he always flew it, as though he were a part of it. He saw that the Snorters were not yet off the water. Shorty was taxiing into the wind. The other two were still warming their motors. The muscles in his cheeks bulged and the knuckles of his hand showed white as he gripped the stick. If they didn't get off the water within a few seconds——

THE STORM broke from four sides as the leader of the patrol above him led three of his men downward in a power dive. They converged on Bill from every side with their guns streaming lead and tracers.

He knew that he could not escape the fire of all those guns as the tan biplanes hurtled toward him. But he knew they could not judge or estimate the terrific speed of which the Stormer was capable. He pulled back on the stick as he opened the throttle wide. The powerful engines bellowed as his ship roared vertically into the sky. He could feel and hear the *spat, spat* of bullets as they tore through the Stormer.

One of the biplanes must come across his sights, he told himself. His fingers touched the metal firing trips of his two .50-caliber guns. A tan shape tore over him. His fingers fastened down in a

short burst of fire. His guns stuttered two streams of death into the diving biplane. He saw the ship slide off and stagger upward in a drunken zoom. The next instant its nose came down. Smoke and fire poured out of the engine housing. As the flames crept back along the sides of the fuselage the ship began a dizzy descent to earth.

As Bill leveled the Stormer off he saw the Eaglet roll dizzily away from the fire of another tan biplane. As it came out in a short dive it had changed its direction about 180 degrees. Bill saw the nose of the little ship come up as Sandy took it skyward in fast, tight spirals.

He glanced down and saw that the three Snorters were trying desperately to keep out of range of the three tan biplanes. They were using every trick known to them to escape the deadly fire. Perspiration bathed Bill's body. He had taken his own ship out of danger but the three Snorters were in tough spots.

As the three biplanes came out of their dives and zoomed for another attack Bill banked around and pushed his stick forward. He aimed his ship dead at the first of the biplanes. His eyes were glittering, his whole body hot, steaming. The enemy biplane began firing before he was within range. Bill could see the lines of his smoking tracers racing toward him. His speed was terrific. Too fast. He dove by the biplane and circled the Snorters as they climbed toward him.

The five tan biplanes were circling in a V formation above them as Shorty, Red and Cy took positions around Bill that formed a diamond. He probed the sky to find Sandy. A terrific detonation drew his eyes toward the shore. Dirt, trees, sand and stones were flying out of the great mushroom of dust that had risen along the water's edge. He could see the bomber holding a steady course a thousand feet above the house. Saw it come about and turn back. Then the Eaglet spun up on one wing out of no-

where. He saw white lines of tracers tearing out of the Eaglet's guns toward the giant bomber as Sandy leveled off.

The three Snorters and the Stormer met that V formation as it dove. The air churned with smoking lead as they raced up to meet them. Bullets slapped through wings, drilled through tail surfaces and pontoons. Shorty's fingers clamped down on his gun trips as a diving madman came at him head-on. His two guns vomited forth a torrent of lead. The smoking lead tore through the body of the biplane's pilot. He rose up in the fuselage and flopped over the side as the ship careened upward out of control.

It was four to four now, with Sandy harrying the huge bomber like a terrier at the heels of a mastiff. The four biplanes went past and continued their dive as the radio signal on Bill's instrument board gleamed. He threw the switch. It was Cy Hawkins. Bill could barely hear the words that came over the phone.

"I got one through the leg, Bill," Cy said. "If you can make out without me I'm going down."

"Get down, fast!" Bill barked. "Is it bad?"

"It was worse once," Cy drawled. "Be seeing you. It was your friend Fells who got me. The one with the flag on his fuselage."

Bill's blood pulsed hot through his body. He looked over and down to spot Barney Fells' plane. The thought of Cy with a shattered leg filled him with rage. He shook his fist over the side.

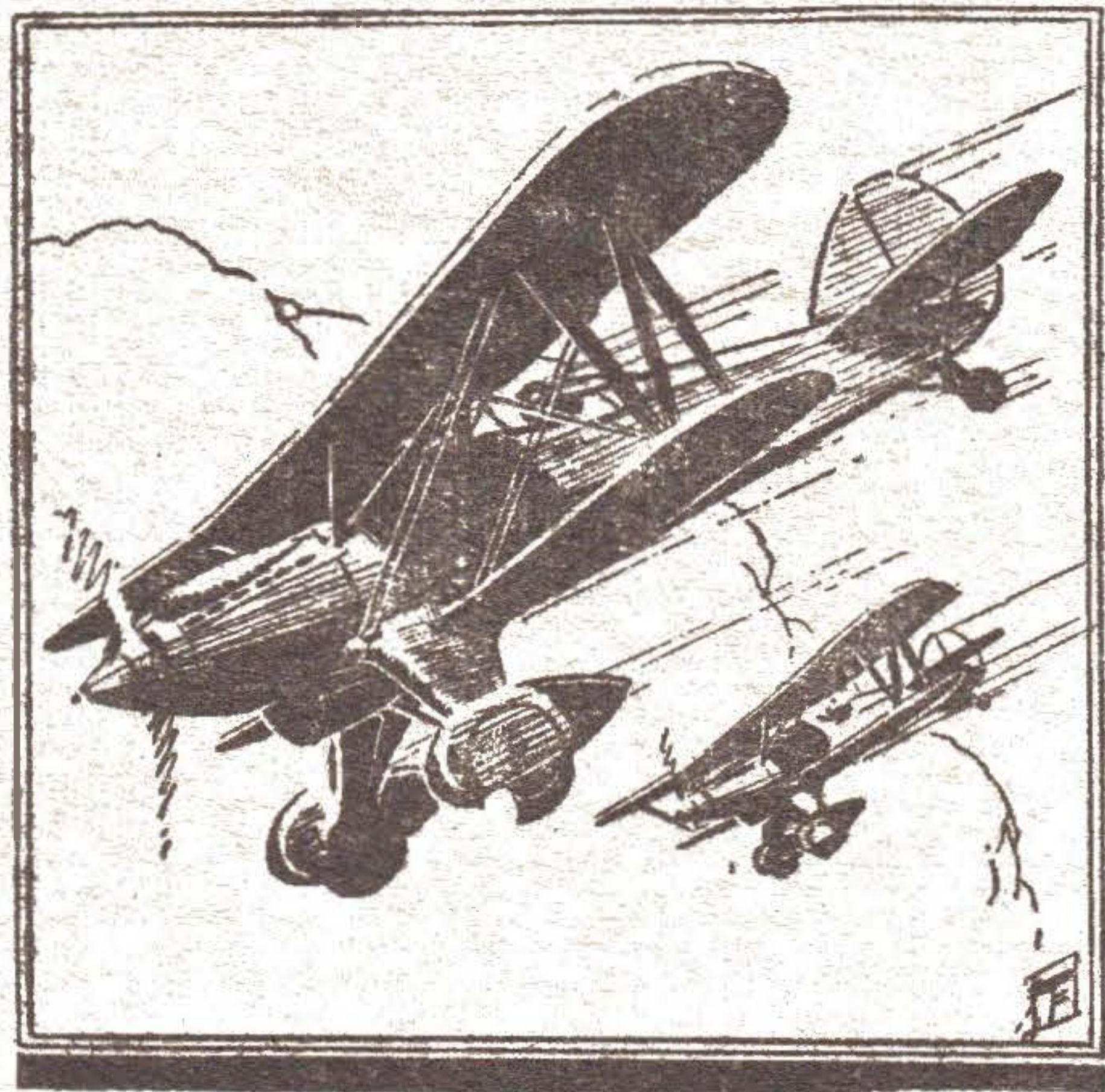
Then the enemy planes came hurtling up again. The eight ships leveled off like eight Negroes in a free-for-all. The air was choked with slashing, ripping fury and streaming death. Bill and his men took their planes through the air in wild, acrobatic maneuvers, their fingers constantly playing on their gun trips.

Bill saw Red Gleason flash beneath

him. He was sitting forward in his seat pouring round after round into a wobbling tan biplane. At the same time his mouth was opening and closing and Bill knew that he was singing.

He felt the Stormer being riddled from wing tip to wing tip as he threw it dizzily through the heavens. A torrent of lead raked his tail as he flung his ship into a wild stall turn. A ship whirled across his hair sights. It was a ship with a flag painted on the side of the fuselage. He knew it was the ship of Barney Fells, the leader of the enemy patrol. His fingers came down on his trips. His guns chattered madly in two wild bursts before the tan biplane fell away. His hand curled around the control stick like a vise as he flung his ship up and scanned the air for Barney Fells.

FAR BELOW him and to the east he saw the giant tan bomber circling above his own transport. He saw Sandy darting in and out in mad rolls and turns, his guns streaming tracers and lead. He saw the fire from the gunner's cockpit in the tail of the transport and another stream of tracers from one of the cockpits abaft the engines. He saw the bomber waver as Sandy dove on it from above, raking it with a deadly fire. It nosed down toward the surface



Enemy Biplane.

of the cove as Barney Fells' biplane came diving in at him again.

Bill's head was whirling in dizzy circles. The seconds became minutes, the minutes hours. The speed of the fight had been terrific. It couldn't go on much longer. He decided to stick to Barney Fells, to shoot him down or force him down. He whipped his ship over in a tight loop and fastened himself on the tail of Fells' ship as Fells dove under him. His fingers jammed down on his gun trips. They were weary and tired from clamping them down on the triggers.

He watched the white streamers pump out of his guns and into Fells' biplane. The plane rolled over and staggered. Flames licked from the engine housing as it went into a spinning dive.

Bill, watching it, saw a figure stand up in the cockpit. The next instant it dove over the side, turning slowly over and over as it fell. Down a thousand feet a white ball of fluff opened into the wind. Bill nosed his ship down and circled the dangling, swinging form of his enemy.

Far below him he could see that Sandy was boarding the huge bomber. Old Charlie and Saul Cox had their guns trained on it. A tan biplane was fluttering to earth beyond the beach. The jungle swallowed it up as it crashed through the thick foliage. Red Gleason circled above it for a moment. Then he headed his Snorter back over the cove. The two surviving biplanes had given up hope. They were streaking away to the southeast from whence they had come.

Bill Barnes set the Scarlet Stormer down on the surface of the cove as Barney Fells slipped out of his parachute harness and dropped into the water. He could see the expression of hate and rage on Fells' face as he taxied close to him.

"Grab a pontoon and climb on," Bill formed with his lips, pointing. Barney Fells' face twisted into a snarl. Bill stuck an automatic over the side of the cockpit and pulled the trigger. A bullet whipped up the water three feet from Fells' ear. Bill grinned at him as he began to curse.

He took hold of the pontoon and clambered aboard it. Bill motioned for him to hang on as he taxied toward the shore. He shouted at Sandy aboard the bomber as he taxied by. Sandy turned a face that was glowing like a baby's.

"Is she damaged much?" Bill asked.

"One engine," Sandy shouted back. "Pilot's dead and one of the gunners wounded. Other two are all right. I'm O. K., too."

"Bring her up near the shore," Bill instructed.

Shorty and Red fishtailed their Snorters down on the water and flipped a hand over their heads. Their faces were still flushed, their eyes still glittering with the light of battle.

"Who's your passenger?" Shorty howled. "Find him up in the air?"

Barney Fells glared and spat in the water. Bill laughed. He was human enough to be enjoying Fells' discomfiture. He could remember only too well how Fells had sold him out. How he had cost him a small fortune when he could least afford to lose it. And he knew that Fells would have been only too glad to have killed him in the air.

XIV—OBEAH MAN

AFTER BILL had made sure that Cy Hawkins was resting comfortably and had had the flesh wound in his own shoulder dressed by the doctor Talley had brought down from Batcab for that purpose, he announced grimly that he was going out to the little stone build-

ing behind the house to have a talk with Barney Fells.

"See if you can't sweat some information out of him, Bill," Mike Morales said. "We've got to find out who is relaying all of our plans to Chamberlin and Herrera. They know what we are going to do before we do it."

"I'll sweat it out of Fells," Saul Cox said, the lids of his steel-blue eyes narrowed.

Mike shook his head. "Not that way, Saul. I know you'd get results, but I don't want any one tortured. Sticking burning matches under men's finger nails doesn't sit right on my stomach."

"Maybe I could scare it out of him," Sandy said. "If he's like old Jolly John he'd tell me anything if I snapped my snake in his face."

"Just tell him what a flier you are and he'll be scared to death," Shorty said, laughing.

Bill regarded Sandy with a far-away look in his eyes for a moment. A little smile curved the corners of his mouth. He turned, suddenly, to Talley.

"Has Vivarrío gone back to Samerra?" he asked.

Talley nodded his head. "This morning on the mail boat," he said.

Bill made his way back to the little white stone building that had been used in years gone by as a hurricane refuge for the blacks of the plantation. There were no windows in it. Only narrow slits high up in the walls. It was a perfect jail, and not one to give a prisoner the idea that he was being pampered. Two enormous blacks stood, one on each side of the door. They swung heavy, razor-edged machetes back and forth as Bill approached.

Bill unlocked the door and entered. He was wearing a heavy automatic in a holster on his hip. He closed the door and stood with his back to it until his eyes had become accustomed to the

semidarkness. Barney Fells was sitting on a built-in bunk in a corner. His hands were secured with handcuffs. His expression was one of snarling defiance as Bill's eyes drilled into him in the dim light.

"You're in a pretty tough spot, Barney," Bill said.

"Not as tough as the spot you'll be in before you get away from here," Fells sneered.

"You're the one who is on the spot now, though, Barney," Bill answered. "Some of Morales' men want to work on you. They know their business, too. They know how to make even rats talk."

"It's easy enough to call a man names if his hands are tied," Fells sneered.

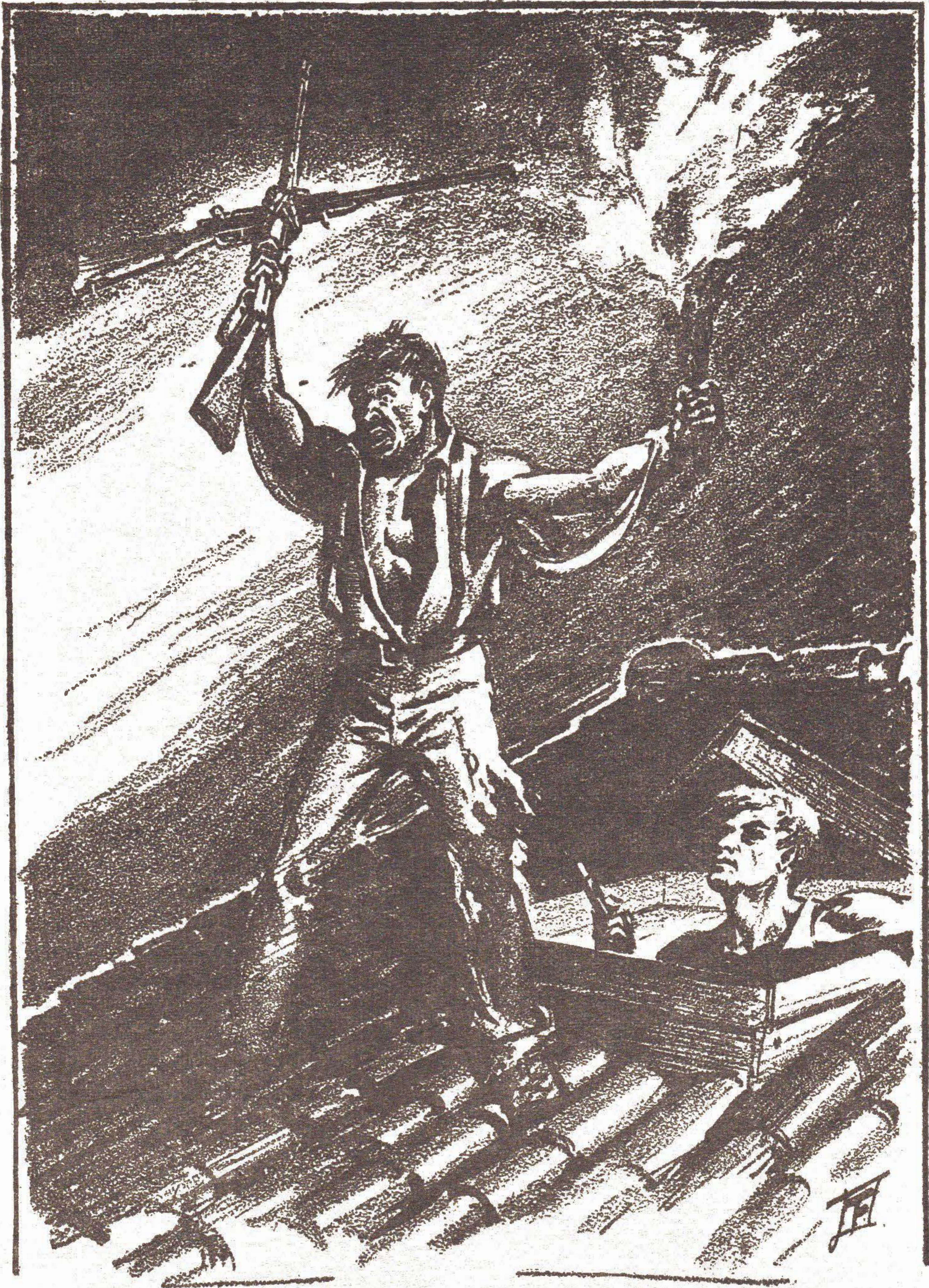
"You didn't seem to be able to do much out there in the air with your hands untied," Bill suggested mildly. Fells cursed until he had to stop to regain his breath.

"Very pretty, Barney," Bill said. "You've been developing your vocabulary. The first thing you know you'll be able to read and write. But that has nothing to do with this case." Bill stopped and regarded Fells speculatively for a moment. "I can get you out of this jam, Barney," he went on. "I can get you out of it and get you a safe passage on a boat back to the States." Barney Fells' eyes became crafty. He didn't answer. He waited for Bill to go on.

"You can get out of here and get away safely by just doing something that is right down your alley. It ought to be easy for you."

"All right, smart boy. What is it?" Barney snarled.

"By selling out your boss," Bill said. "By doing the thing you do best—the old double cross." Again Fells remained silent. But his eyes glittered like the eyes of a cornered snake.



Zapaca threatened his followers with all the evil curses of the Obeah Man's Litany.

"All we want from you is a little information," Bill said. "We want to know who is double-crossing Morales. Some one who is supposed to be friendly to him and who knows all his plans is passing them on to your boss, Chamberlin, as fast as he learns them. We want to know who it is. When we're sure you're not lying you go free to get another job and double-cross some one else." Again that silence from Fells.

"Well?"

"And if I don't tell you?" Fells sneered.

"You'll probably rot here," Bill answered.

Fells leaped to his feet and pushed his face close to Bill's. He raised his manacled hands above his head for a moment and then dropped them before him. His eyes shone with a wild, mad light. He mouthed words that were unintelligible. Bill pushed him backward with one hand and put his other one on the latch of the door.

"All right, Barney. Think it over," he said. He closed and locked the door behind him. He walked slowly back to the others on the front veranda. His face was a thundercloud. They looked up expectantly.

"I don't think he'll talk unless we make him," he said. "I went about it in the wrong way. I couldn't help it. I couldn't help thinking about the way he double-crossed me and I rubbed it in."

Suddenly he turned and looked at Sandy with that same far-away expression he had had in his eyes before. Sandy squirmed and his face became flushed under Bill's scrutiny. Bill smiled thinly.

"Could I talk to you a moment, Talley?" he asked after a few minutes. Talley nodded and they walked down the beach and conversed in the shade of a clump of bamboos.

AN HOUR later Talley and old Jolly John, the Carib, and Bill started off on a trek that led straight up through the jungle of the morne towering behind the stone house. They came back late in the afternoon and told Mike and Saul Cox what they had done and where they had been.

"It's a dangerous business," Saul Cox said. "But it may do the trick."

At six o'clock that night, the sun, a flaming ball of fire, went hurtling into the sea. The tropical night settled down almost immediately. Something of a wind had sprung up to bring snapping white caps racing in to break with an angry boom over the outer reefs of the cove. The creaking and rattling of bamboos and the whining *gommiers* and *chataigniers* in the jungle sounded like the rattling of dead men's bones. As the wind rose, the lashing of the trees became a constant moan, rising and falling weirdly with the force of the wind.

Suddenly, another sound, indistinct but far different from the other sounds of the jungle night, came rolling through the humid night air.

A solitary flambeau burned in the center of the little stone building where Barney Fells was confined. The wind drove the flame this way and that throwing eerie shadows about the room, making grotesque shapes of the restless man who paced the floor.

As the new sound came to his ears his eyes flew wide. His gaze darted into the shadows of the room. The hair along the base of his scalp began to creep.

A light drizzle had begun to fall when Bill, Mike, Talley, Saul Cox and Sandy went to the hurricane building and unlocked the door. They each carried a flashlight or storm lantern in one hand and each of them had an automatic strapped around his waist. They motioned to Barney Fells, pushing him out of the building without a word.

Talley led the way up over a trail that plunged almost immediately into the jungle. Bats, mosquitoes and giant moths flew about their heads attracted by the light of the lanterns. Barney Fells cursed constantly until the sharp upward swing of the trail began to take his breath, until he could breathe only with short gasping breaths.

As they wound their way upward, that strange indistinct sound that had come to their ears became constant, rising and falling on the wind.

They plodded steadily upward, finally cutting off the trail and onto a narrow, treacherous path. Only the sighing of the trees, the *scuff, scuff, scuff* of their feet, and the far-away beating of tom-toms came to their ears. The jungle was like a huge tomb, humid, silent, terrible.

The horrible, eerie shriek of a parrot came reverberating through the jungle, then another and another. Their squawking was like the wail of a score of banshees. Sandy's blood ran cold in his veins and a tiny trickle of ice water ran down his spine. Bill, glancing back, saw that Barney Fells' face was white and pasty.

Suddenly the tom-toms became more distinct. A great arched blotch of light appeared around a turn ahead of them. Puffs of a warm sulphurous gas struck them in the face like the breathing of some huge monster. The stench of human bodies was heavy in the air as they came to a halt at the edge of a huge cavern and Talley made signs to a ghastly figure that crouched over a red fire in the center.

The figure was naked except for a crown of feathers and the insignia of the *Obeah* man that hung about his neck—cat's ears, wisps of human hair, fish-bones, and alligator teeth. His face was daubed with a white clay, leaving black rings about the eyes and mouth. His ribs protruded and his bones were

picked out with smears of white, giving him the appearance of a skeleton. He looked up.

As he turned from the fire he cast some kind of a powder on it that turned it a livid green. At the same moment, a dozen black figures danced toward the group at the entrance. At a sign from Talley they lifted Barney Fells off his feet. He was pulled into a writhing, shrieking, howling mass of blacks that came from the shadows.

PANDEMONIUM! The tom-toms swelled and were joined by the groan of conch shells and the hollow rattle of pigs' bladders filled with pebbles.

The witch doctor threw more powder on the flames and they turned a gruesome blue. Then he went round and round the fire, snuffing, baying, shrieking, writhing like a dog gone mad.

The blacks raced about him uttering bestial cries, their eyeballs rolling drunkenly, sweat pouring from them, toppling forward on their faces half insensible, only to rise and stagger on.

Suddenly the tempo of the tom-toms changed. The dancers continued to writhe, chanting now, as they formed a weaving circle about Barney Fells, their sweating bodies gleaming where the flare of the gum torches touched swelling muscles and rounded flesh.

It was then that Barney Fells saw that something was roasting on the fire. The *Obeah* man poured a liquid on it that sent up a cloud of nauseous smoke. His mouth opened and closed; his eyes protruded as he saw that the thing looked like a huge monkey curled up on the spit.

The tom-toms boomed deafeningly, the blacks howled insanely as they forced Barney Fells closer and closer to the fire. His face was like a death mask beneath the sweat that poured down it. His knees began to sag as he had spasms of nausea. He screamed

horribly and tried to claw his way through the circle of rum-maddened blacks.

He had seen that the thing he thought was a monkey had no tail. His voice rose, high-pitched and terrible, as he was buried beneath an avalanche of hot, stinking bodies, his face trampled into the hard clay of the cave.

It was then that Saul Cox and Bill, at a sign from the chanting, howling *Obeah* man, sent a half dozen shots winging into the inner blackness of the cavern. The roar of their guns blended with the screams of the half-mad blacks and the beat of the tom-toms. It beat back into their ears as it reëchoed through the cave.

At the same moment Bill touched a match to the two fuses he had placed at the mouth of the cavern. Two lights flashed simultaneously, lighting up the jungle, sending a thousand bats winging the deep recesses of the cave.

The *Obeah* man's voice rose to a piercing scream as he beat at the shining black bodies that were smothering Barney Fells. They broke away and rolled about on the ground.

With their guns ready, Bill and Saul pulled and hauled the slobbering Fells to his feet while Sandy shot a machete out of the hands of a crazed black. For a moment they all stood with their backs to the entrance of the cavern. The blacks eyed them with rolling eyes. The *Obeah* man danced before them, cutting the blacks off from the entrance. They whirled around and dragged Barney Fells to safety down the trail.

At the first small clearing, with the steady rhythmic beating of the tom-toms still ringing behind them, they stopped. Rain beat down on Barney Fells' upturned face as he threw back his head and drank deeply from the flask of brandy Mike handed to him.

Gone was the sullen defiance that had

marked him earlier in the day. His face was white and drawn, his eyes bloodshot and terror-stricken. His attempt to talk was like the babbling of a baby or a lunatic.

"That," said Saul Cox, "will just give you an idea. We didn't let them really go to work on you. If you don't talk now you're going back and we'll leave you there. Do you talk or do you stay here?"

Fells buried his face in his hands as though to shut out the vision of the things he had seen. When he lifted his head his eyes stared horribly into the light of one of the lanterns.

"I'll talk," he said. He whimpered the words and gulped.

"Who is double-crossing us?" Mike asked, his square jaw thrust forward. The words that came from Fells' lips were just a whisper, hardly loud enough to be heard above the sighing of the jungle.

"Vivarrio!" Barney Fells said. His head rolled drunkenly on his shoulders and he slipped to the damp, matted floor of the jungle.

XV—NEW PLANS

IN THE center of the savanna in Jacmel, the capital of Samerra, stands a white marble statue of Miquel Morales, I, the last king of Samerra. Surrounded by magnificent royal palms he gazed down on the mobs of natives milling about the savanna with an expression of regret, on that first day of October.

Directly behind the statue, running to the south, was a dirty, down-at-the-heel, cobblestoned street. The houses that bordered it lacked the gay red roofs and slatted green jealousies of their neighbors to the north. The hotels and cafés strongly resembled the waterfront hang-outs of any shipping port in the world. The people about the tables were fairly representative of what the

tropics can produce in the way of human scum. Disheveled, unkempt, bleary of eye and shaky of hand, they lived for the rotgut rum they poured down their throats. They made up as evil a collection of scoundrels and riff-raff as one might encounter in years of travel.

At a table in one of those cafés on that sweltering day in October sat two men. Before them were two tall glasses containing an *apéritif*, weak in alcoholic content, for those two needed clear heads for the work before them.

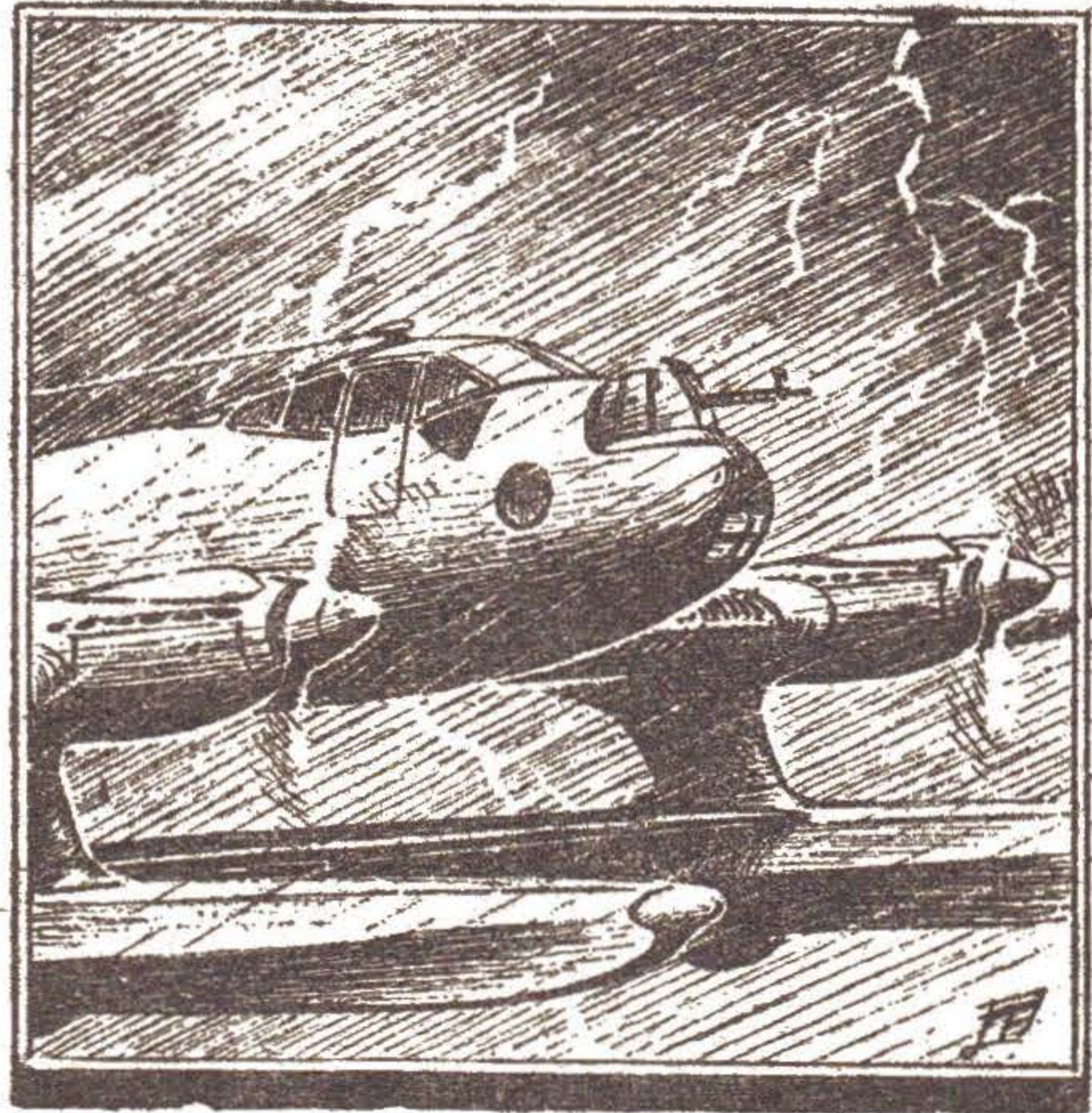
One of them was Carlos Vivarrío, the minister of the interior of Samerra. His broad, flat nose and slightly kinky hair gave every indication that he had what the tropics term "a touch of the tarbrush." He was dressed with scrupulous care even to his hands which were small and nervous and overmanicured. His every movement was furtive, cautious, suave. He was a typical politician. The kind who deals in intrigue and treachery. While he talked, his lips spread over yellowish teeth in a nervous smile. His eyes were constantly darting about the room as he spoke in a low voice.

His companion was a tall, well-built man with reddish-blond hair. He had an aura of evil about him—an intangible but very real atmosphere of evil. His eyes were eyes that any one might well remember. They weren't gray and they weren't green, but a curious combination of the two that made them seem almost transparent. They were as devoid of expression as a bar of steel. Looking into them you would be sure that they never changed expression, that they would remain the same whether he was kissing a baby or slitting a man's throat.

"How do I know," he said to Vivarrío, "that you won't double-cross me the same way you've double-crossed Morales?"

Vivarrío flushed. His beady eyes gleamed.

"Your reputation is not so good, Chamberlin," Vivarrío said with a sneer. "For instance—why is it you never visit England? You speak of the days when you were an officer in the Gordon Highlanders. Why did you



Transport flying blind through hurricane.

leave such an honorable life for—for what you are doing?"

Struan Chamberlin's expression did not change. His face remained the same. An inscrutable mask. He gazed at Vivarrío as though he was pondering his words. Finally he spoke, slowly, thoughtfully.

"All right, Vivarrío. We won't speak of one another's past. Suspicion will not help us. We must trust one another." Vivarrío nodded. Chamberlin lowered his voice after glancing about him.

"Herrera will have the army mobilized around the presidential palace tomorrow morning at sunup when the reds are expected to attack. But they aren't reds. You know that, Vivarrío. They are natives who have been aroused by Morales' men. When Valtura appears on the balcony to speak to them, three

rifles will speak before he has a chance to open his mouth. The president will be dead. And you will become the president. There will be no election. I will see to that. You will just assume office. In the confusion attached to the death of the man they blame and hate for their troubles, the peons will forget to attack. They will greet you as their savior. They think you're friendly to Morales. Then we will put two companies of infantry aboard the gunboat and make Viga by dusk. We'll have Talley and Morales and this American Barnes bottled up there. We'll hold a summary court-martial and shoot all three of them the next morning.

"Viga will be rich picking. We will declare a protectorate over it and of course you will be the ruler there, also. Things will settle down again the way they were a few months ago after all of the men who have been loyal to Morales mysteriously disappear."

Chamberlin smiled and took a sip of his drink.

"They'll settle down until three more rifles crack," Vivarrio said. "Then I'll be dead and you'll appoint another president."

An amused chuckle came from Chamberlin's throat.

"You're always looking at the gloomy side of things, Vivarrio," he said as he got to his feet.

AFTER Bill Barnes, Saul Cox and Mike Morales had locked Barney Fells in the little stone building, again they joined the rest of their band of conspirators on the veranda. Mike Morales was morose and dejected. The news that Vivarrio was a traitor to his cause was almost more than he could believe. If he couldn't trust his own countrymen—

"I often wondered," Saul Cox said after they told the rest of the incredulous group where they had been and

of Fells' confession, "what he did with all the money you sent him. I knew that it took a lot of money to grease the skids in a revolution, but his demands were endless."

"I never suspected him," Mike said. "He was one of my father's best friends. I don't know where to turn any more. Yet some of my friends must still be loyal. Fells said that rioting on Samerra was increasing. That means that some of my men are at work. They are rioting in the daytime as well as at night. That means they are not afraid. Shopkeepers are leaving their iron shutters up night and day and people are stocking their houses with provisions. Everything is ready. Yet, I can't count on the army. If they remain loyal to Herrera and Valtura they will slaughter my people by the thousands. They are armed with light artillery and poison gas and machine guns and grenades. The traitors are turning the peons' unrest and dissatisfaction to their own ends. Troops of my own cavalry are dashing about the island quelling riots, killing their brothers. I think—I think that I shall give up my attempt to regain the island. I am doing more harm than good."

Morales fell silent and his head came down so that his chin was resting against his chest. He was a picture of absolute dejection. The beautiful picture he had painted for himself had faded. The bubble had burst. He was beaten and willing to acknowledge the fact.

Saul Cox walked across the porch and put a hand on his shoulder. "A man should never stop trying until he's dead," he said.

Bill Barnes got up and walked down the steps to the clearing that sloped down to the beach. He wet his finger and stuck it above his head. There was scarcely any breeze. Land crabs scuttled along the beach, their claws scrap-

ing. The small cannons that peeked their noses over the parapets of the ancient fort on the hillside showed black against the jungle. The full tropical moon had turned the night into day. Bill walked down to the water's edge and gazed out at the Scarlet Stormer. He stood there for a matter of ten minutes. Then his right fist came down into his left palm. He went striding back to the porch, his jaw outthrust, his expression one of grim determination.

"Saul is right," Bill said, his voice rising with confidence. "A man should never stop trying until he is dead. You birds are all sticking along, aren't you?"

Their reply came instantly. They were sticking. Bill laughed. He turned to Mike.

"Have you ever plopped a 'chute, Mike?" he asked. Mike looked mystified.

"I mean," Bill said. "Have you ever gone over the edge of a plane and come down in a parachute?"

"No? Well, this is just the night for learning," Bill went on. "No breeze, plenty of light. C'mon! We'll go up to two thousand and I'll teach you the trick. Shorty, you come along and pick him up in the launch. He can't miss the cove."

There was a period of stunned silence on the porch. Then Saul Cox began to protest, shaking his head vigorously.

"Suppose it doesn't open?" he said. "If Mike is killed or even injured all our efforts will have been wasted."

"The same thing would apply if he stopped a bullet standing against a stone wall," Bill said, harshly. "C'mon, Mike!" Mike got to his feet and followed Bill.

"Do you have an idea, Bill?" he asked.

"I have an idea," Bill said, calmly. "C'mon, Shorty."

The three men went down to the dock and stepped into the launch. The motor turned over a few minutes later. The boat headed for the Scarlet Stormer. Bill was talking to Mike on the way out with Shorty at the wheel.

Bill took the Scarlet Stormer off the water in a long, even climb. When he was out beyond the opening of the little cove he began to climb in fast, tight spirals. At two thousand feet he leveled off and took the Stormer around in wide, smooth circles while he talked to Mike over the phone.

"Just keep your head and be sure to count as I told you before you pull your ring. Ride it easy and unbuckle your harness just before you strike the water. Be careful not to get tangled in your parachute. Just dive over the edge of the cockpit. I'll get the tail out of the way. Are you ready? Take it easy, now."

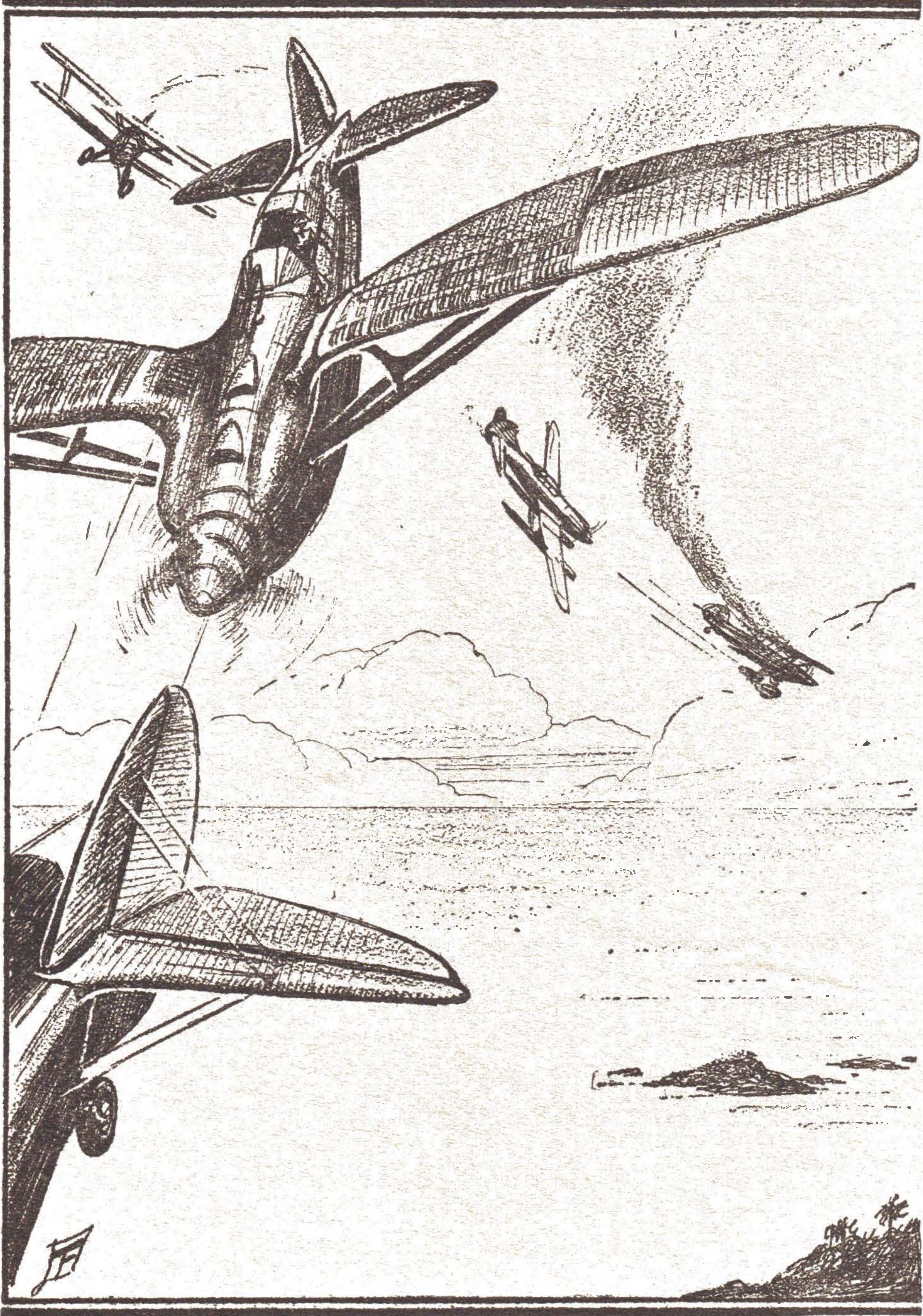
"All set, Bill," Mike said. His voice was soft and steady. He pushed back the sliding cockpit inclosure above his head and disconnected his ear phones. He didn't look over the side. He stood up and glued his eyes on the back of Bill's neck. Bill was to nod his head as a signal. When his head bobbed forward, Mike closed his eyes for a brief instant. Then he stepped up on the seat and dove headlong over the side. As the ship bounced, Bill whipped the tail out of the way and stuck it up on the right wing.

MIKE, clad in a suit of Bill's white overalls, turned lazily over and over. As the white speck grew smaller and smaller against the black water, Bill's hands clenched and unclenched. Perspiration began to run down his face. Suppose Mike was one of those people who "blacked out"—went unconscious—at a time like this. Why didn't the big so-and-so pull the string? Perhaps, he thought. Mike had jumped be-

fore and had been kidding him. He might be pulling a delayed opening on him to scare him. All right; if he was, he had done it. The fun was over.

Why—Bill was half sobbing—didn't he pull the string?

As the Stormer nearly went into a stall, a white ball of fluff opened up be-



hind the white figure far below and the figure began to swing gently back and forth as the parachute opened. He dove the Stormer and hit the water as Shorty was helping Mike over the side of the launch. They picked him up a minute later. He looked at Mike suspiciously.

"Are you sure you never plopped a 'chute before?" he asked.

Mike shook his head.

"Well, pull your ring sooner the next time you do it," Bill said. "I nearly swallowed my tongue."

When they climbed up on the jetty, Saul Cox and the rest of the guests in the stone house were waiting for them.

"What," asked Saul Cox, "is the idea?"

Bill ignored the question. He turned to Mike.

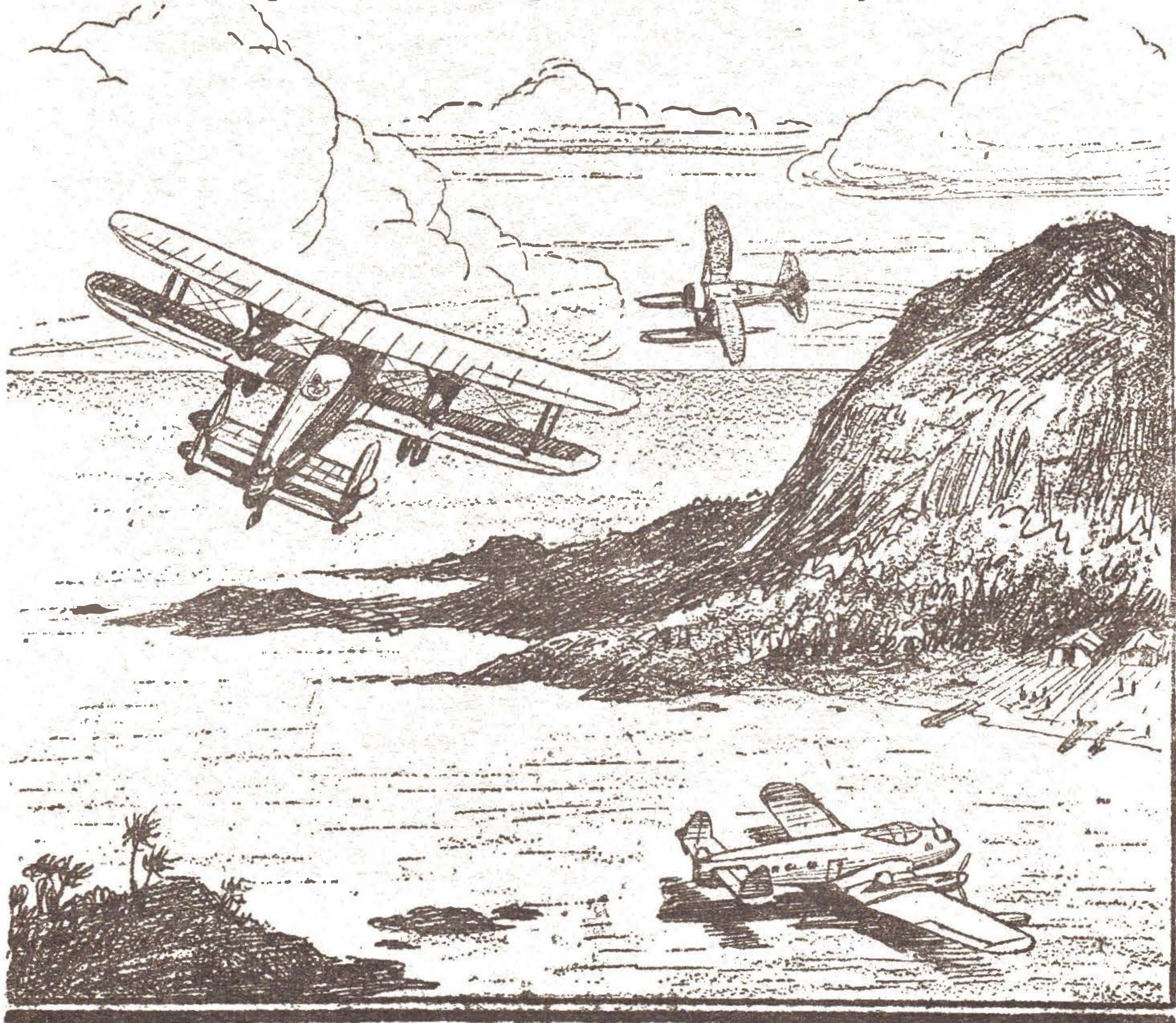
"Can you get word to Vivarrio that we have abandoned the idea of attacking on October 2nd?" he asked. Mike nodded, his eyes puzzled.

"Do that," Bill instructed. "Tell him we've given up hope and are leaving for New York within a few days. As soon as we've made repairs and tuned up our planes. Tell him everything has gone wrong and you haven't any more money and have to go back to the States to raise it."

"Then you think we ought to quit, too?" Saul Cox asked.

"Quit, nothing!" Bill said. "We leave for Samerra late to-morrow afternoon. I've got to think things out a

Far below him and to the east he saw the giant bomber racing toward his own transport.



little clearer. I mean get them clearer in my own mind before I tell you our plans. But we're going to Samerra! I'm going to bed now." He turned on his heel and went striding across the clearing toward the house.

A voice that might have been either a bad tenor or a worse baritone cut through the night air behind him. It was Red Gleason's voice. And it had a laugh in it. He sang to the tune of "Tipperary." Or thought he did:

"It's a long way to old Samerry,
It's a long way to go,
It's a long way to old Samerry,
Where the pickaninnies grow.

"It's a long way to old Samerry,
Farewell Tally-ho,
It's a long, long way to old Samerry,
But that's where we go!"

"You ought to get a job in a chorus," Sandy said, scathingly.

"Say!" Red answered, "I used to sing tenor before the crowned heads of Europe."

"It's a wonder some one didn't crown you with boiling water," Sandy said.

"It wouldn't hurt me." Red laughed. "I'm so tough I bathe in boiling oil."

"You're telling me!" said Sandy, holding his nose between his thumb and forefinger.

XVI—VIVA MORALES!

THE WIND was light; flying fish darted in all directions as Bill Barnes' little armada of planes thundered into the bay of the little town of Tabasco on the western shore of Samerra. High cliffs frowned down on the ships, cliffs from which silver streams rushed to the sea. A shower suddenly pattered over the planes and the sea, ending as suddenly as it had commenced. A rainbow spanned the bay and dissolved in the ruins of what had once been Tabasco.

Behind the town towered the smoldering Morrotombo, the volcano that

had erupted in the early morning, wiping out every living soul in the town with one terrific burst of fire and molten death. Down the sides of the mile-high mountain through ravines and black gorges ran innumerable rivers. Grass, palms, fern trees grew out of the windows and up through the decayed floors of what had once been houses and cathedrals and stores. Iguanas and snakes, agouti and land crabs scurried for cover as the sun slid down below the rim of the sea to clothe the white-turreted clouds with color.

The giant transport-carrier with Bill Barnes at the wheel roared down to tie up beside the stone jetty. Mike Morales, Saul Cox and his four lieutenants stepped out on the jetty as Harwood, Miles and old Charlie made the big ship fast. The three Snorters with Red, Cy Hawkins and Henderson at the control columns came dancing over the calm waters with the grace of a ballet. Shorty, in the Scarlet Stormer, and Sandy, in the Eaglet, dove from a height of eight thousand feet. They leveled out of their power dives as their altimeters read a thousand feet. They hit the water side by side and disappeared behind a wall of spray and mist.

When they were all on the jetty, Bill led the way toward shore. His lean face was strained and anxious yet there was a twinkle in his eyes as he stopped them at the end of the jetty.

"I'll tell you what it's all about now," he said, his eyes belying the seriousness of his expression. The thought flashed through his mind that these were men. They had followed him without a question when they didn't know where they were going.

"Mike," he said, "you're staying here on the transport to-night with Shorty, Red, Cy and Henderson. Shorty has his instructions. So have you. They'll tell the rest of you what to do.

"Saul, I'll tell you and your men

what to do on the way into Jacmel. Sandy is coming with us, also. I'm expecting every man to do his job. The whole thing depends on our working together, in having everything coördinate. The element of surprise will do the trick or——" He hesitated for a moment. "If things don't jell, none of us will be around to tell about it tomorrow night. They won't give us any quarter." He shook hands with Mike Morales. "Remember, don't wait all morning to pull your ring. We don't want to have to sweep you up!"

Bill, Sandy, Saul Cox and his four men hurried toward the ruins of Tabasco. The dirty, ragged white clothes they had worn flapped around their herb-stained bodies. Their wide-brimmed straw hats were pulled down low on their foreheads. No one could have distinguished them from the peons of Samerra as they trudged along the dusty road.

"We can probably pick up a ride into Jacmel after a mile or two," Saul Cox said.

"Sandy and I had better leave you before that," Bill said. "We'll slip into the town and get a room at the Hotel Paz. If you want us we'll be there some time during the night. But be careful.

"I want you to do the same thing you've been trying to do," Bill went on to Saul Cox. Cox looked at him questioningly.

"I mean get your men in command of the four companies of infantry——"

"But they've put new men in command of them since Vivarrio told them our plans," Saul Cox protested. "Herrera yanked the commanders out and probably shot them—the ones that were friendly to us."

"Get your men in," Bill insisted. "If you can't do it any other way put the present commanders of the companies out of the way and dress your men in their uniforms. It will be dark when

they go out to protect the presidential palace to-morrow morning. Let your men pretend they have been put in command. You've handled things like this before. You ought to know how to handle this.

"Another thing. I want you to be in the presidential palace and near that balcony Mike talks about—the one where the president makes a speech at sunup on October 2nd—Emancipation Day. Be there at sunup when your men march their companies there to guard it and be ready to take command of the army."

Saul Cox looked at Bill out of the corners of his hard, old eyes. "You're taking a lot for granted, aren't you Bill?" he asked.

"I've got to," Bill said. "If Sandy and I can pull off our job to-night I think we'll win."

"If not——" Saul Cox drew his finger across his throat.

BILL and Sandy entered the lobby of the shabby Hotel Paz on the south side of the savanna of Jacmel at a little after ten o'clock. They had ridden the last five miles seated in the bottom of a high two-wheeled cart. They were both tense and strained as they went through a room filled with drunken peons and Indians, dock workers and seamen. They knew it was not likely they would be recognized, but the work they had before them was dangerous.

They stopped at the cashier's wicket and asked for a room. The woman at the desk regarded them suspiciously until Bill produced a roll of Samerran money that Mike had given him. They went to their room and locked the door behind them. Bill turned out the light and opened the shutters. A milling mob of rioters made the street and the savanna hideous with their noise. Not a light showed in any of the shops or houses that lined the street. Most of them had their iron shutters securely fastened in place.

In the distance the *tat-tat-tat* of a machine gun barked. A troop of mounted soldiers came pounding down the cobblestoned street. The people on the street faded out of sight at their approach until it was deserted. A rifle and a pistol barked simultaneously on the corner. A ragged peon plunged into the gutter, his arms and legs thrashing the air. He rolled over and lay still. The rioters in the savanna broke before the charge of the mounted troops. Rifles and revolvers cracked. A dozen forms lay still in the savanna. A dozen more tried to crawl away on their hands and knees. The place was deserted except for the soldiers in their scarlet uniforms. Two riderless horses bent their heads to graze on the long grass.

Bill and Sandy sat beside the open window watching the clashes between the marching natives and the mounted troops. A half dozen dead men were sprawled in the street. They might have been taken for drunken sleepers if it had not been for the pools of blood that spread out beneath them.

When only a few scattered shots came to their ears and the street was empty of people Bill looked at his watch. It was nearly twelve o'clock.

"They're nice people," Sandy said. He was pale and his stomach seemed to be creeping up into his mouth. He looked away from the nauseating scene below him toward the lighted cathedral on the side of a mountain behind the town. A steady procession of lighted flares marched up the hill toward it. Bill followed his gaze.

"Peons going to give thanks for their freedom," he said.

"What freedom?" Sandy wanted to know.

"Better check your gun and ammunition," Bill said. "We'll have to be moving. The lobby ought to be empty

by now. We'll have to break into a garage and steal a car to bring 'em back in."

But they didn't have to break into a garage to steal a car. The lobby was deserted except for the driver of a small car that stood in front, his drunken fare and a boy on night duty.

Bill stepped into the driver's seat of the car and released the break as Sandy joined him. The motor was still running. They heard the shrill cries and imprecations of the owner of the car behind them as they went around a corner on two wheels.

"Do you know how to get where we're going?" Sandy asked.

"Yes," Bill said. "Mike gave me directions. Keep your gun in your hand. Shoot if you have to. Get 'em in the legs. Don't shoot to kill unless you have to." His voice was as hard as marble, as true as the ring of steel.

"Do you have any special plans, Bill?" Sandy asked in a strained voice.

Bill laughed a short, dry laugh. "I'm just going to follow Frank Buck's policy," he said.

Sandy gazed at him with questioning eyes, waiting for him to explain.

"Bring 'em back alive!" Bill finished, grimly.

THE STREETS were deserted and silent now except for the distant clatter of horses' hoofs on cobblestones. The shutters of all the houses were closed. Not a light showed. It was a place of mystery and intrigue and violent death.

They circled around through the houses of the poorer section of the town until they were behind the presidential palace on the north side of the savanna. Bill coasted the car into a driveway after he had killed the engine. They stepped softly out of the car and stood in the dark shadows of a tree for a full ten minutes. Not a sound came to their ears. The night was as still as death.

"The house will be guarded inside," Bill whispered to Sandy. "Keep your gun ready but don't shoot unless you have to. Too much noise." He motioned to Sandy to follow him as he darted across a lawn, leaped high into the air and caught the edge of the high stone wall that surrounded a square, white, stone house. He threw one leg up.

"Look out for the glass," he whispered to Sandy. "The top is studded with broken glass."

They worked themselves to the top and dropped to the ground on the other side. Not a light showed in the large stone mansion. Bill grabbed Sandy and drew him into the shadows of a bush as the soft patter of feet came to his ears.

A soldier in a scarlet uniform rounded a corner of the house. He carried a rifle with a bayonet on his shoulder and about his waist was strapped an automatic. He looked neither to the right nor left.

Bill waited until the man had passed. Then he started after him with the speed of an end going down a football field under a punt. He hit the man from behind and carried him five feet through the air. They landed with a shattering impact and a crunching sound that made Sandy wince.

The soldier did not move as Bill got to his feet. He pulled two short lengths of wire from his pocket and bound the man's hands and feet while Sandy wedged a pad of cloth into his mouth and fastened it with adhesive tape. Bill stuck the man's automatic in a hip pocket and threw his rifle into a clump of bushes.

"So far so good," he whispered.

They stole to the back of the house, keeping in the shadows when possible. Bill tapped on a rear door that was flush with the flagging. He thought that there would be another guard in the

kitchen to relieve the one he had just bound.

A bolt slid back on the inside of the door. A thin shaft of light showed and Bill hit the door with all the force of his hundred and ninety pounds, his powerful legs driving. There was a crash inside and a stream of invectives in patois that was suddenly cut off as Bill grasped the dazed soldier who had opened the door. His right fist traveled twelve inches with the speed of light. There was a crack like the sound of a small-caliber rifle being discharged. The man slumped in Bill's arms. They bound and gagged this man as they had the first one.

Bill and Sandy were both smiling now. They were smiling and there was a mad glitter in their eyes as they surveyed their work.

"Now comes the tough part, kid," Bill whispered. "We've got to find him and then we've got to get him out of here and into the car. His professional killers probably sleep outside his door. Take it easy. We may have to shoot our way out of here. But we can't fail."

Sandy nodded his head, opened his shirt front and pointed to an intricate roll of silk cords that were bound around his body.

"I brought these along in case we need them," he said.

"What——"

"Strait-jackets," Sandy said. "Two of 'em. Remember I told you I bought one. Well, I bought another one before we left up North." Bill stopped to stare at him. He knew it was no place to waste time but he couldn't help it. He glared at Sandy in the dim light, but inwardly he was laughing.

"Did you bring your snake?" he asked, sarcastically.

"Yes," Sandy said, breathlessly. "Do you think I'll need it?"

Bill chuckled as he motioned to Sandy

to follow him. They went up three steps and crossed the kitchen without a sound. They went through a pantry and into a dining room with a high ceiling and paneled walls. Bill threw a flashlight across the room for a few seconds to locate the objects in the room and the doorway. As they stepped out into a wide hallway the dim murmur of voices came to their ears. Bill stopped and listened intently. He saw a thin sliver of light under a door ahead of them. He glided toward it like a shadow and bent to peer through the keyhole.

Suddenly he drew in his breath with a soft hiss. He put a hand like a vise on Sandy's arm.

"They're both here!" he said. Sandy's heart was pounding. He hoped they couldn't hear it inside the room. "I'm going to open the door. Be ready to shoot!" Sandy pushed the safety catch off his gun and crouched as Bill opened the door.

"Don't move!" Bill said softly as Sandy followed him through the doorway and closed the door quietly behind him.

THE TALL, well-built man with reddish-brown hair and transparent eyes who sat at the flat-topped mahogany desk checked the movement of his hand as Bill's automatic bore straight at his heart. His usually expressionless eyes opened wide as he breathed one word.

"Barnes," he said. He could not believe his eyes.

"Barnes," Bill repeated after him. "This is not exactly a pleasure Mr. Chamberlin. But it is a pleasure to find Señor Herrera here. It saves us a great deal of trouble."

The heavy, beady-eyed man beside Chamberlin eyed Bill with gleaming eyes. Eyes that were a little afraid. Suddenly Bill's voice rose sharply. "Get your foot off that button!" he said to Chamberlin. He spoke out of the side of his mouth to Sandy.

"He just pressed a buzzer under his desk with his foot. Stand against the wall by the door and if any one comes through cover 'em—or kill 'em if you have to!" He moved over so that he would be behind the door when it opened, never taking his eyes from the still forms of Chamberlin and Herrera.

But the door didn't open. Instead, a curtain that Bill thought covered a window, swayed gently and two hard-faced men stepped from behind it. There was a grim ruthlessness about them that any gangster might have envied. Each held a blue-black automatic in front of him. One of them said, "Reach sweetheart!"

Bill did not whirl as a gun pressed against his spine. He lifted his hands slowly above his head. Cold perspiration cascaded down his face. He cursed himself silently for being caught so easily. He gazed out of the corner of his eyes at Sandy. The kid's face was white.

This could end in only one way. They'd be stuck up against a stone wall. Perhaps they'd be tortured first. It meant the death of Mike and Saul and probably all of his own pilots. He began to slip his left foot back to give him leverage when he whirled and struck. He might just as well be shot now.

Chamberlin was on his feet. His gray-green eyes were expressionless but the smile of a born sadist was on his lips.

"Take their guns," he said.

The pressure on Bill's back disappeared as the gunman stepped around in front of him. Bill got ready to strike.

The other man stepped toward Sandy, his lips curled in a brutal leer. Sandy lowered his hands as though to give the man his gun. Suddenly, the man jumped backward with a howl of fright as a lithe, brown snake leaped out of Sandy's hand directly at the man's face. As his gun came down Sandy shot him through the shoulder and the gun clattered to the floor.

At the same instant, as the man covering Bill glanced for a fraction of a second toward his howling confederate, Bill brought his gun down on the man's head. He dropped like a clubbed ox. The gun in Chamberlin's hand clattered to the floor as Bill shot him through the arm. Herrera had not moved. He sat as though he had no strength. His swarthy complexion had turned to a pasty green.

Bill bound and gagged the two gunmen while Sandy covered the sobbing, cursing Chamberlin with his gun.

"Ain't you the smart fella?" Sandy taunted him.

"Forget that, kid!" Bill whipped out. "Tie their hands behind their backs. We've got to get out of here." He slapped adhesive tape over the unconscious gunman's mouth and stood up. He motioned to Chamberlin and Herrera.

"Step on it!" he said. "You're going for a trip."

"'N hurry up," Sandy said, "or it may be a one-way trip."

"Wait a minute, Sandy," Bill put in. "We'd better gag them first."

Ten minutes later Bill was driving the little car out of Jacmel. Sandy was sitting in the front seat beside him covering the two men in back with a gun. Shrines and native huts dotted the road they sped along but there was no sign of life anywhere.

TEN MILES out from Jacmel, Bill guided the car to the left on a narrow road that cut through a field of sugar cane. A mile in he came to the planter's house. He pulled up before it and got out to knock on the front door. After a few minutes' delay a man stuck his head out the door.

Bill talked to him quietly for a few minutes. His eyes were wide and frightened as they traveled from Bill's

face to the two mute forms in the back of the car. Then he agreed to Bill's request.

Bill ordered Chamberlin and Herrera out of the car. The muscles of Chamberlin's face twitched as he was forced to obey. His eyes were twin points of murderous venom.

In a small, stone building, not unlike the one where Barney Fells was still confined, Sandy slipped the two prisoners into his strait-jackets. The gags were taken out of their mouths. As Sandy and Bill started to leave Chamberlin spoke: "You'd better kill me," he said. "If I ever get free you'll die the worst death a man ever died."

Sandy laughed. "When I get time," he said, "I'll teach you how to get out of one of those things!"

"Come on, kid!" Bill roared. He started on a run for the car, shouting his thanks to Mike Morales' loyal supporter as he ran. They jumped into the car and Bill took it down the narrow road just as the first streaks of light heralded the coming dawn. They had accomplished a lot that night.

Bill bent over the wheel and drove the little car the way he piloted the Scarlet Stormer. His foot went all the way down on the pedal as he swung into the main road. He shook his head as Sandy began to chatter in his ear. He had to get to Jacmel before the sun stuck its tip above the horizon. He had planned the show and he had to be there to direct it.

The little car responded gallantly as he nursed it over the hard road.

Peons and priests, blacks and whites, Indians and soldiers were on the road now, all headed for Jacmel. The blare of a military band came to their ears as they reached the town and headed for the savanna. Companies of infantry were marching toward the presidential palace. Bill saw that the officer in command of one of them was a lieu-

tenant of Saul Cox. He smiled grimly to himself.

A sea of faces were turned toward the sky in the savanna as four airplanes roared out of nowhere and skimmed over the housetops. Bill and Sandy both smiled as they saw Shorty whip the Scarlet Stormer through the heavens followed by the three Snorters.

Angry mutterings and shrill cries greeted the four companies of infantry, gay in their scarlet uniforms, that surrounded the presidential palace. The crowd pressed in closer. A group of students began to sing. They were dispersed by a handful of jabbering, gesticulating policemen.

Bill stopped the car two blocks from the savanna. He pushed his way through the milling mob of people toward the palace, Sandy at his heels.

They were halted at the entrance by the crossed bayonets of soldiers. Desperately, he tried to get the eye of the man commanding them. The officer turned, recognized Bill in spite of his tattered clothes and stained face. He barked out an order. The rifles barring his path dropped. The soldiers gazed after them in wonder as Bill and Sandy raced up the steps. They had little time to spare.

Officers of the army and members of the cabinet of Samerra were milling about inside. Bill saw Saul Cox in the background. The question on all lips had to do with Herrera and Chamberlin. Where were they? Had they lost their courage because of the rumors of the uprising and the return of Morales?

The questions went unanswered. As the sun was about to push its head above the horizon, Valtura, the president, asked Vivarrio to speak to the people, to quiet them until Herrera arrived to take command. Vivarrio stepped out on the balcony. The four planes roared three thousand feet above his head.

As he put out his hand to quiet the

people the crack of three rifles electrified the crowd. Vivarrio's hand came down to his throat. He gazed at the blood on his hand with an expression of stupefaction. His legs collapsed under him and he sprawled on the marble floor.

As the voice of the crowd rose from dull mutterings to a roar, one of the planes overhead dove a thousand feet and leveled off.

A lone figure stood silhouetted against the sky for a moment. Then it dove off into space. The assassination of Vivarrio was forgotten as they saw that figure turn lazily over and over in the air. Their faces were white and strained. Not a whisper came from the now silent mob.

Bill Barnes rushed across the foyer to the side of Saul Cox. He grasped him by the arm and talked in his ear.

"This is the time for you to take over," he said. "Go out on the balcony and order one company of the infantry to surround Mike when he lands and bring him here." Saul Cox nodded. His gaunt, lined face lost all sign of uncertainty. He marched out on the balcony. His voice bellowed an order. One of his own men took it up. A company of infantry started at double time toward the south side of the savanna. A band struck up the national air of Samerra. A hundred voices, then a thousand took up the air. They sang with that mad abandon of the Latin.

Then their voices rose in a mad shriek as they rushed toward the spot where the figure at the bottom of the parachute dangled. They had recognized the man they loved. Their messiah had come back to them. The stunned peons believed that he had come back from the sky.

"*Viva Morales! Viva Morales! Viva Morales!*" came from thousands of throats.

The company of infantry surrounded

Mike as he landed on his feet and deflated his parachute. He stepped out of the harness and lifted his uniform hat to the half-mad crowd. He was dressed in a gold-embroidered scarlet uniform and black boots. His white teeth flashed a smile. His eyes glittered. He was a romantic, mysterious figure of a man.

TEN MINUTES later he walked out on the balcony of the presidential palace. Three bands were playing the national air now. The crowd had become hysterical. They shouted his name over and over. Bill Barnes was on his right and Saul Cox on his left. Next to Bill stood Sandy.

As the crowd obeyed his gesture for silence a peculiar high-pitched voice sounded behind the four figures standing at the rail of the balcony. It was a

voice such as none of them had ever heard before.

"*Viva Chamberlin!*" it said. "*Viva Herrera!*"

A gun flashed out of Saul Cox's shoulder holster as he whirled.

The doors were closed behind them and there was no one there. Three of the four faces gaped for a moment. Then Sandy began to laugh.

They all whirled on him at one time. His face was crimson but he couldn't help laughing.

"I had to see if I could still throw my voice," he said.

"I'll throw you off this balcony if you don't pipe down!" Bill growled.

"I'll make you the court jester," Mike Morales said, laughing.

He turned back to the silent crowd below him and started to speak.

Even at this moment, strange events were transpiring back in the North. A mysterious message came to Barnes' Field.

Don't miss

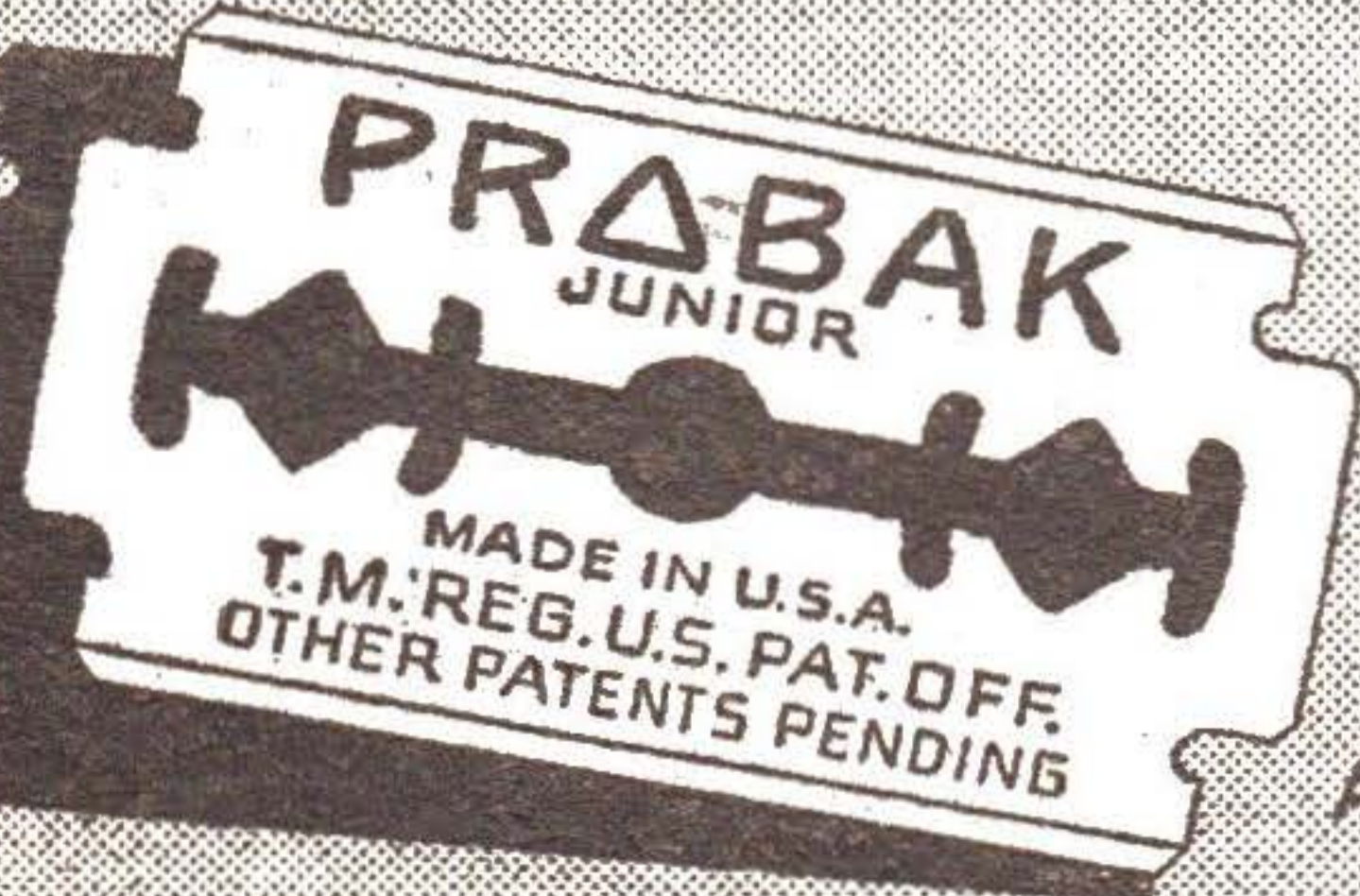
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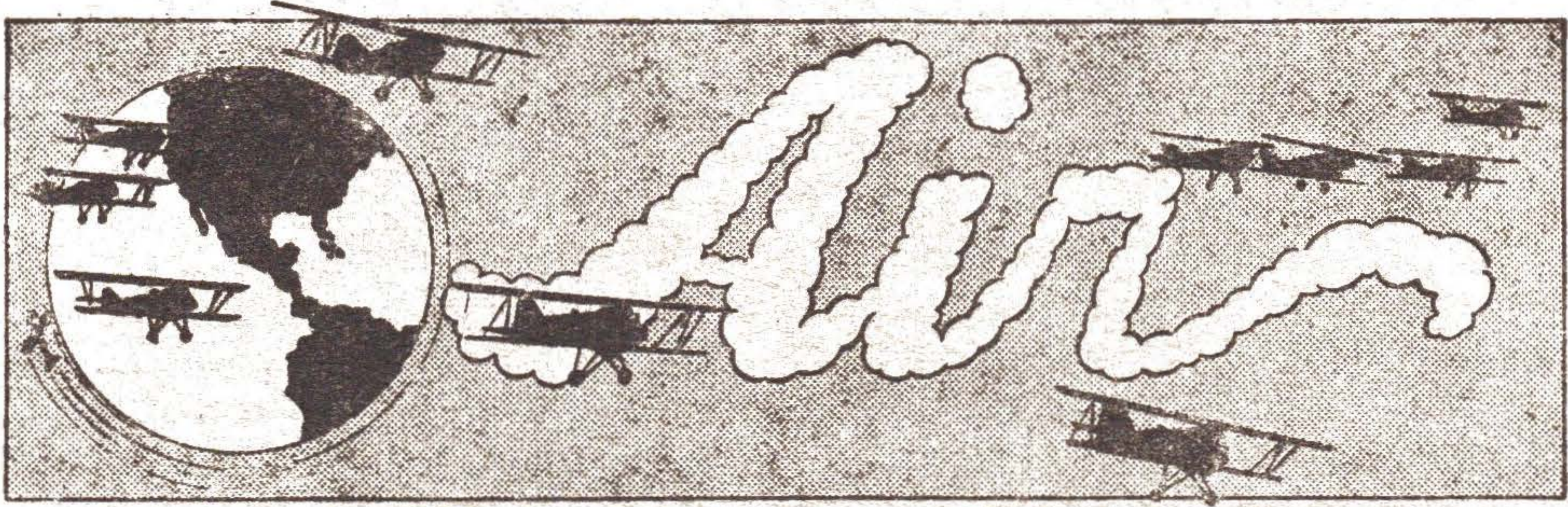
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An Organization for the

WE'VE GOT some great news coming! Don't be too impatient for it. Read the sketch of Clyde Pangborn's life carefully. He's our new Wing Commander. And what a flier!

It was quite a job, convincing him that he had time for his new duties, but once we had told him about our thousands of members, of our new Creed, and of our work on the manual, he felt different.

"Why, Carlson," he said, "I've got to find the time—or make it. Sure I'll be your first Wing Commander, and I'll do more. I'll run a question-and-answer page for you. Any of the Air Adventurers with puzzling questions on their minds can write to me and I'll answer them. After all, I can use my flying experience to help my fellow members, if I'm to be one of them."

And I said, "Commander Pangborn, you speak like an Air Adventurer."

It was all I could say. I was thinking how proud we would all be to have him one of us. So I wrote a sketch of his life, of the records he holds. Read it.

You can hold your heads up even higher now and say, "Yes, Clyde Pangborn and I are Air Adventurers."

There is other news coming, too! Don't miss a single issue of Bill Barnes, or you'll miss some of the news.

SPRING is in the air again! All winter model builders have been working in their shops building newer and better ships and now is the time to try them out.

A few years ago this season the sky was full of kites. Now it's full of model airplanes!

One of the models won't take off; a second will go into a tail spin; another will nose over in landing. Some of the builders will give up in disgust. But not an Air Adventurer! No sir! He is disappointed, naturally, that his ship won't fly, but he doesn't give up.

Our creed has taught us that we mustn't give up at the first sign of failure. The true Air Adventurer will go over his damaged plane and find out what caused the crack-up. He will rebuild it and correct the faults. He may have to do this several times but he will get that ship into the air! And when it does fly—well, there is no thrill that will ever equal it.

Many of the best airplane designers in this country to-day started out by building models! They created new ideas. To-day, when they invent a new type of ship, they make a model and give it a thorough test. Then they build the real ship.

Model building is a real education. It's a great sport and a valuable one.

The air services have realized the im-



Advancement of American Aviation

portance of being able to fly and navigate entirely by instruments. They are concentrating on blind flying, and it is going to mean a great deal to us in the future. Man cannot control fogs and clouds but he can conquer them.

You will want to join our club. It is very easy but don't let its simplicity make you think that it is just one of those hit-or-miss organizations. We are a permanent group, exerting our influence for the betterment of aviation. Since our first issue, membership applications have literally been pouring into headquarters. Each month the number of new members has been increasing until now we have thousands of members, representing every State in the Union, Province of Canada, and even foreign countries.

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If you can honestly sign that statement, you should be a member of our great organization and we want you to be one. Mail the filled-in coupon to: The Flight Commander, Air Adventurers, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Together with this application send ten cents to cover the cost of handling and mailing your wings and life-membership certificate.

Albert J. Carlsson

FLIGHT COMMANDER.

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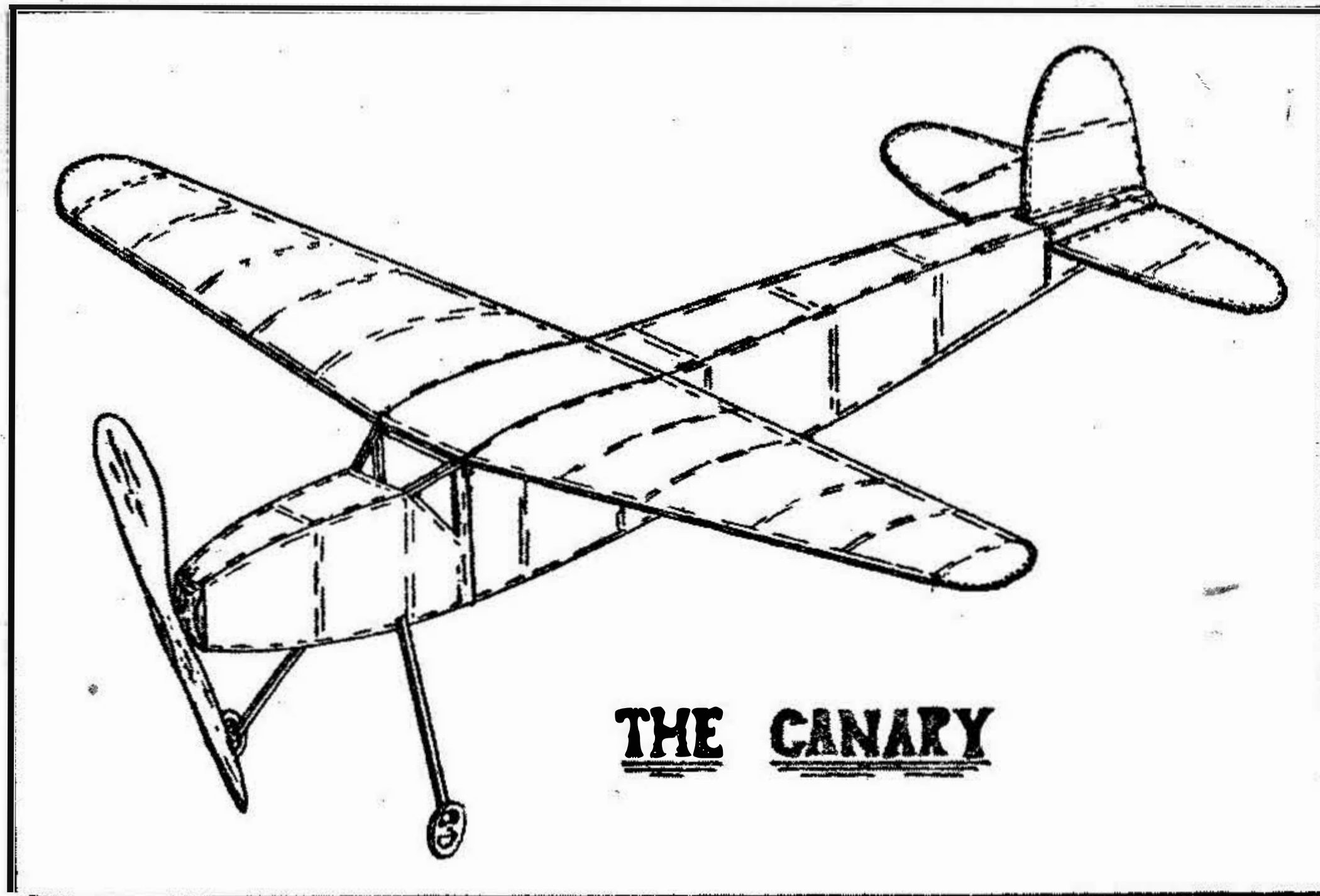
I am interested in aviation and its future developments. To the best of my ability I pledge myself to support the principles and ideals of AIR ADVENTURERS and will do all in my power to further the advance of aviation.

Please enroll me as a member of AIR ADVENTURERS and send me my certificate and badge. I enclose ten cents to cover postage.

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

Check here if interested in model building.



"Let's Build the Canary"

This month's model is a flier worthy of careful effort. Build it now!

by GORDON S. LIGHT

LET'S HAVE a taste of indoor flying this month, and build and fly the "Canary," a light-weight fuselage model—yet so substantial that you can fly it outdoors when the wind has died down. So don't feel too badly about it if you do not have access to a gymnasium or auditorium in which to fly the Canary.

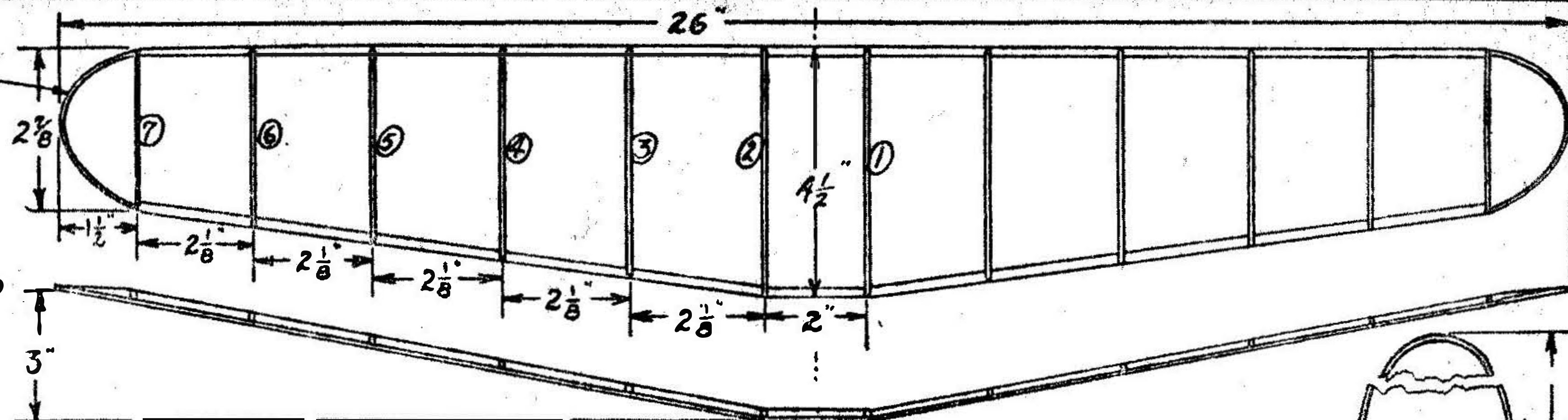
Indoor modelers are famous for their "fiendish" methods of reducing the weight of their models. They have developed microfilm, many times lighter than the finest tissue, which is used on the wings and tail. They study their models with the thoroughness of a bank clerk examining a suspicious-looking ten-dollar bill. Any trifling rough spot that might add needless weight or offer air resistance is carefully sanded away. The propeller is paper-thin. The number of strands of rubber motor has been cut down to two strands of $3/32$ " flat rubber.

All these reductions in weight have resulted in light-weight models, undreamed of several years ago. A championship indoor fuselage model weighs about $17/100$ of an ounce or about as much as a five-cent piece. The Canary will be heavier than this, however, since it is intended to give you just a taste of indoor building and flying.

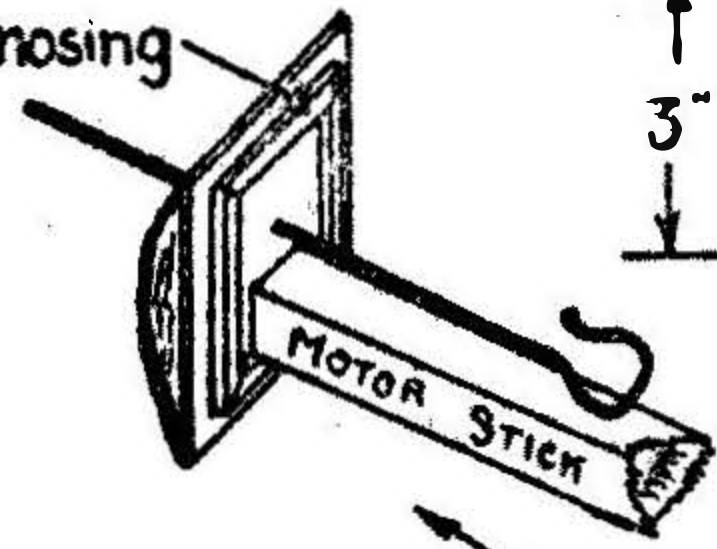
The indoor records recognized by the National Aeronautic Association are 22 minutes and 59.4 seconds for stick models and 13 minutes and 24 seconds for the fuselage models, but it's safe to say you'll never approach that record until you've built and flown many indoor ships. Carl Goldberg and Emmanuel Enderlein, the holders of these records, first traveled the stony path of broken wing spars, split propellers, and torn microfilm. Their models are practically perfect. But don't let these obstacles discourage you, as you'll be able to build

1

Balsa

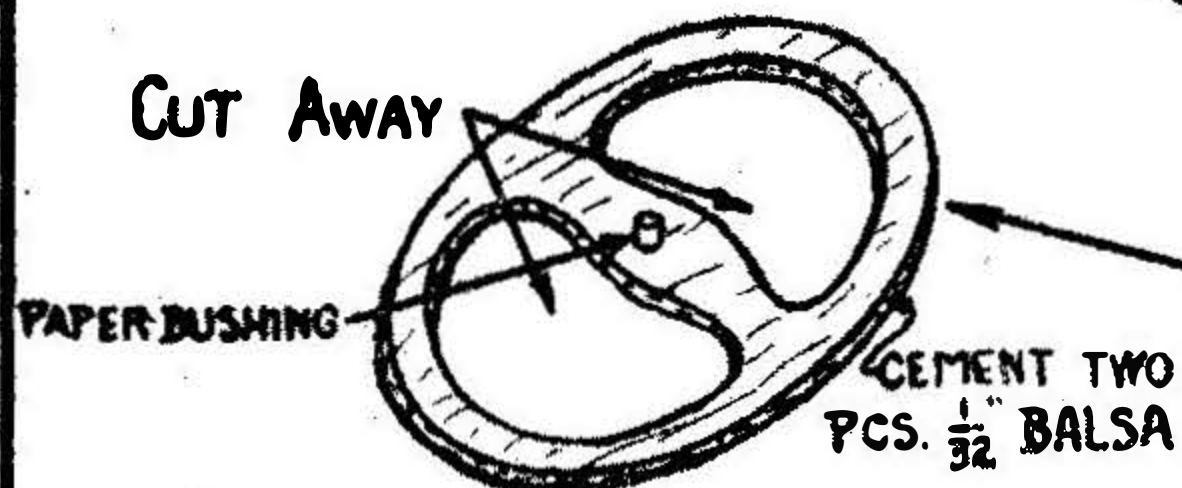


Inside outline of balsa fits into nosing

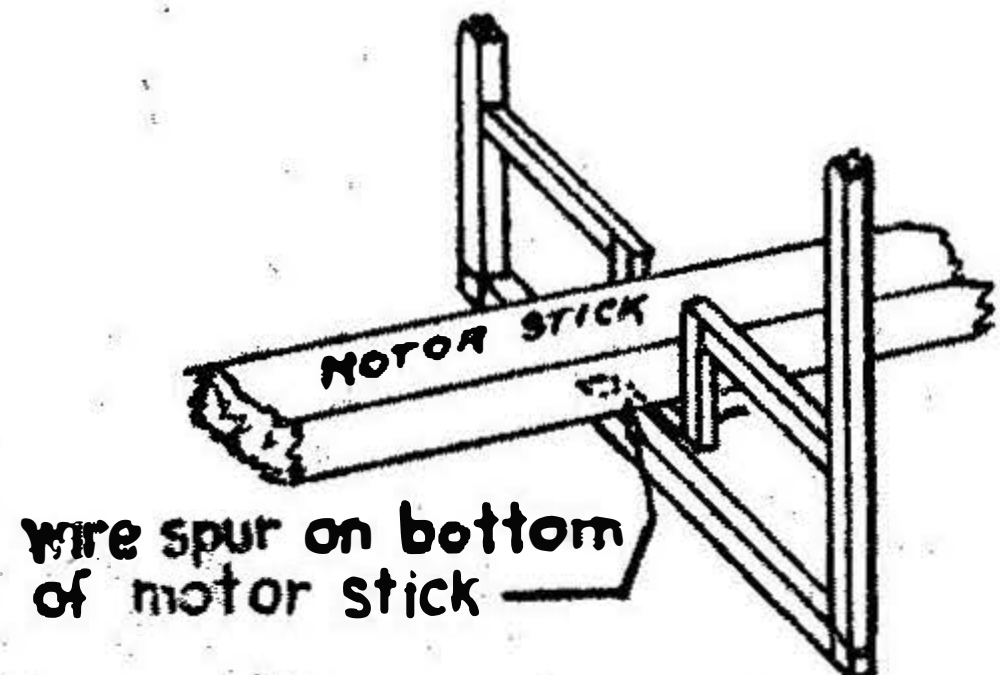


FRONT OF MOTOR STICK

CUT AWAY

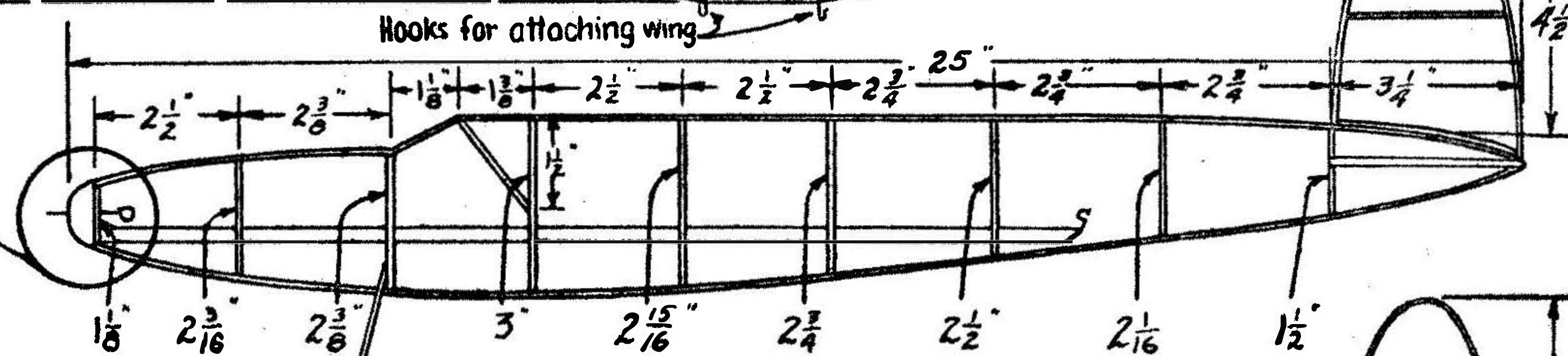


1 1/2" WHEELS CUT FROM 1/16"

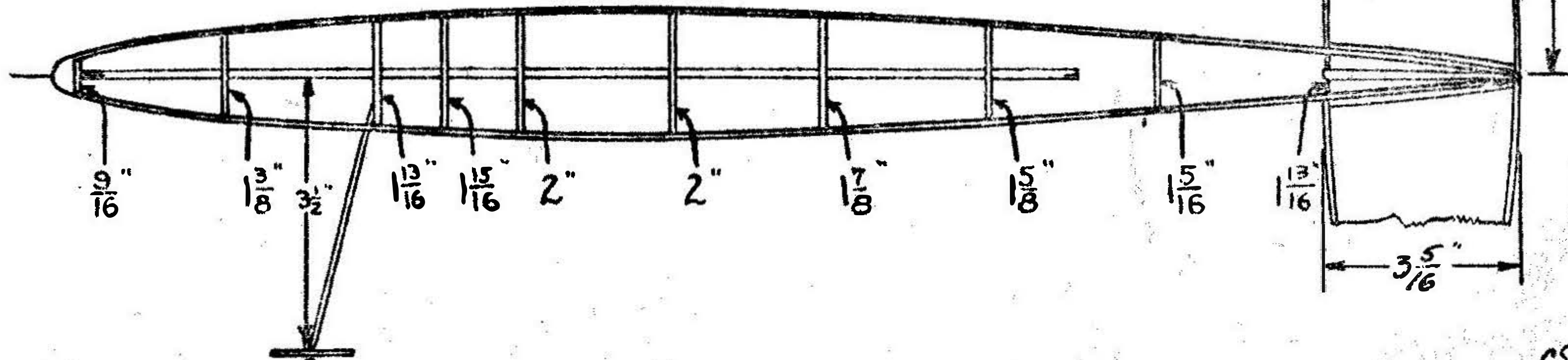


REAR MOTOR STICK SUPPORT

Hooks for attaching wing



BALSA 1/16" x 1/8" x 6 1/2"



CSL

the Canary and keep it in the air several minutes without much trouble.

CONSTRUCTION.

THE construction of indoor ships is not a great deal different from that of other models. Smaller sizes of wood are used and the propeller must be carved paper-thin. But on the other hand, the wing and tail are covered on only one side, so there is just about as much work as in building any other model.

MATERIALS.

- 4 wing spars $1/16 \times 1/8 \times 12$ ".
- 6 fuselage longerons $1/16 \times 1/16 \times 24$ ".
- 1 motor stick $1/8 \times 1/4 \times 18$ ".
- 4 p s. $1/32 \times 1/16 \times 15$ " for elevator, rudder, etc.
- 1 pc. $1/32 \times 1 1/2 \times 6 1/2$ " for wheels.
- 2 pcs. balsa $1/16 \times 1/8 \times 8$ " for landing-gear struts.
- 1 propeller block $3/4 \times 1 1/2 \times 12$ ".
- 3 pcs. $1/32 \times 3/32 \times 12$ " for wing and elevator ribs.
- 1 ft. of #11 piano wire.
- 1 sheet of superfine tissue.
- Small bottles of banana oil and cement.
- 5 feet of $1/8$ " brown rubber.

FUSELAGE.

FROM drawing #1 you can get all necessary dimensions for making a full-sized drawing of the fuselage. Make both halves at the same time—one on top of the other. The longerons are $1/16$ " sq. balsa. Moisten them to bend into shape. Drawing #1 will also supply you with the dimensions necessary for joining the two halves.

MOTOR STICK.

THE MOTOR stick is $1/8 \times 1/4 \times 18$ ". The stick is tapered toward the ends as shown in drawing #3. The stick is held in place in the rear of the fuselage by a support built up of $1/16$ " sq. balsa

(see drawing #1). A rectangular nosing is cut from $3/16$ " flat balsa and cemented to the front of the stick. Cement strips of balsa on the back of the nosing so that when the stick is inserted, these strips of wood will fit inside the model and hold the stick in place. A small wire spur shown full-size in drawing #2 is cemented to the bottom of the stick so it fits under the balsa support in the rear of the fuselage. A rear hook, bent from #11 piano wire is cemented to the rear of the stick. A copper washer cemented to the nosing $1/4$ " above the top of the motor stick serves as a bearing for the propeller.

LANDING GEAR.

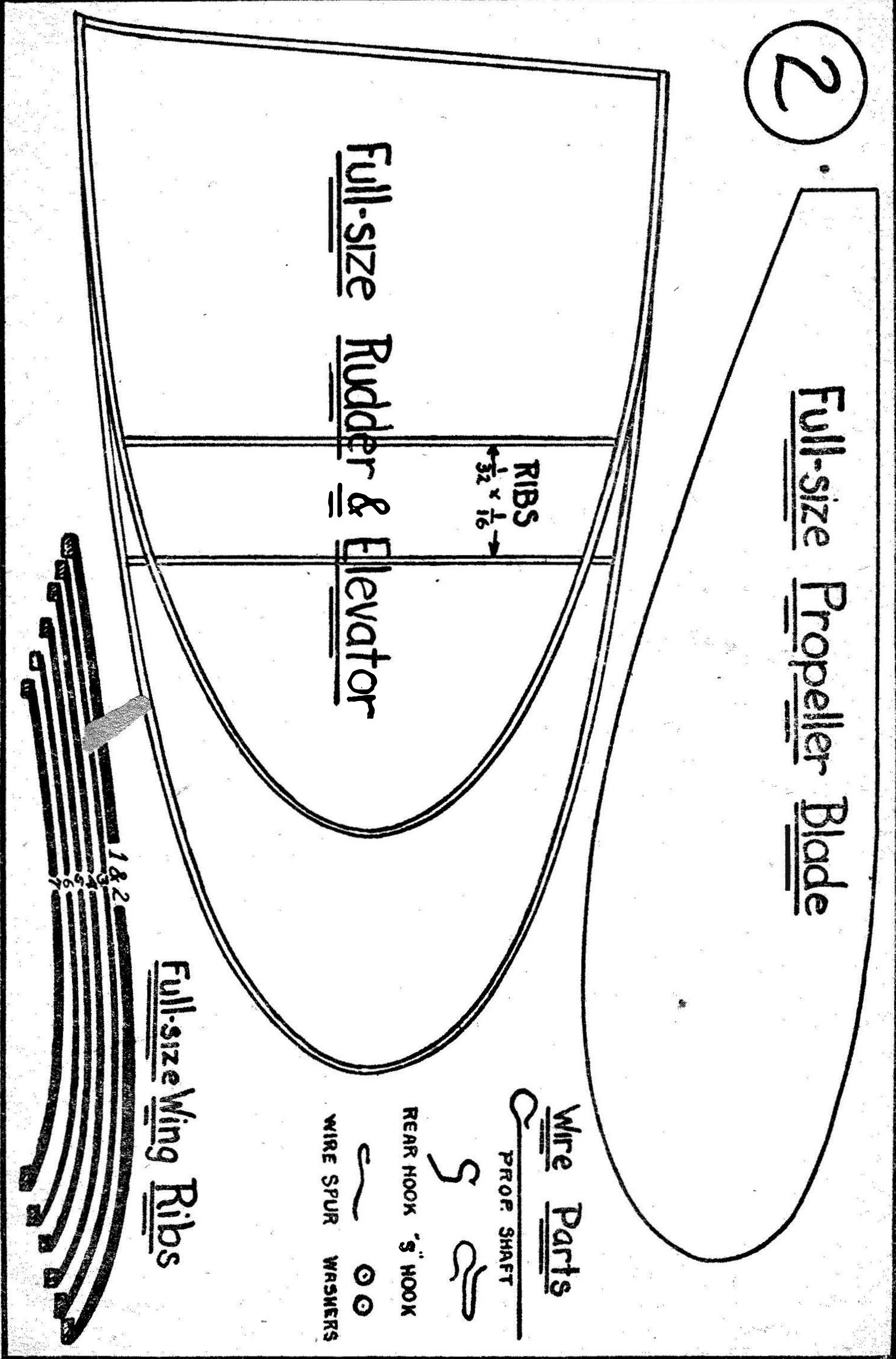
CEMENT two pieces $1/32 \times 1 1/2 \times 1 1/2$ " balsa together so the grains of the pieces run in opposite directions, that is, cross-grained. Mark off the wheels— $1 1/2$ " diameter—with a compass and cut them out with a razor blade. Cut lightening holes in the wheels as shown in drawing #1. Make paper bushings by rolling a small strip of paper into a little tube. Insert these bushings through the center of the wheel. The landing-gear struts are balsa, $1/16 \times 1/8 \times 6 1/2$ ", sanded to an oval shape and cemented to the fuselage. Small pieces of wire are cemented to the ends of the struts and the wheels are slipped on and held in place by a drop of cement on the end of the axle.

WING CONSTRUCTION.

THE WING is made in two halves and then joined by a center section. The full-size ribs are given in drawing #2. Bend them from $1/32 \times 3/32$ " balsa. Moisten the wood with saliva and press against a hot light bulb to obtain the correct curvature. The wing tips are bent from $1/32 \times 1/16$ " balsa by wrapping the moistened wood around a cardboard pattern the exact shape of the wing tip. Cover the two halves of the

2

Full-size Propeller Blade



Full-size Rudder & Elevator

RIBS
 $\frac{1}{32} \times \frac{1}{16}$

Wire Parts

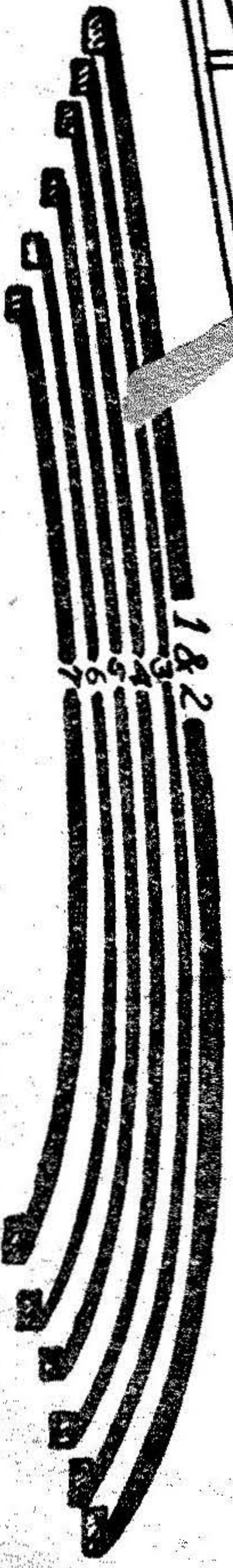
PROP SHAFT

REAR HOOK

WIRE SPUR

WASHERS

Full-size Wing Ribs



wing before joining. The center section should be the width of the top of the body. Raise the tips of each wing 3 inches. Small wire hooks used to mount the wing on the body are cemented to the four corners of the center section.

ELEVATOR AND RUDDER.

THE OUTLINE of the rudder and elevator is balsa $1/32 \times 1/16$ ". Cut full-size cardboard patterns to the shapes in drawing #2 and bend the moistened wood around these patterns. Make the elevator in two pieces and reënforce the center of each piece with a balsa rib. Cover the elevator and rudder and cement them to the fuselage in line with the rubber motor.

COVERING.

USE superfine tissue. All wrinkles must be removed as the paper is not doped or sprayed with water. Iron the tissue with a hot iron and apply it to the wing while hot. Having the paper warm when you put it on will prevent warping the wing out of shape when you get your model in hot air. Single-surfaced wings are easily twisted out of shape because there is no bottom layer of paper to counteract the twist of the top layer.

PROPELLER.

THE SIZE of the propeller block is $3/4 \times 1 1/2 \times 12$ ". Use straight-grained light-weight balsa. The block is laid off as shown in drawing #3. The big problem is to get your propeller very thin without splitting it, so cut carefully! A good indoor propeller is about $3/32$ " thick at the hub and tapers to tissue-paper thinness at the tips. Don't try to make an indoor propeller extremely light until you've had some practice. By holding the propeller up to the light, you can locate the thick portions. Use sandpaper and plenty of "elbow grease" to thin out the blades.

FLYING.

THE WING is attached to the fuselage with thin loops of rubber that pass underneath the fuselage and fit on the wire hooks at the center section of the wing. The number of strands of rubber motor that you'll need depends on the weight of your finished model. A good estimate would be three strands of $1/8$ " rubber. Use *brown* rubber. Many model shops handle it. Brown rubber is slightly heavier than black rubber and will give your model more power. Lubricate the motor with prepared rubber lubricant or glycerin.

Adjust the model to fly in left circles. Warp up the leading edge of the right wing—looking from the front. Give the rudder a little left turn. Remove the motor stick when winding and stretch the rubber several times its normal length.

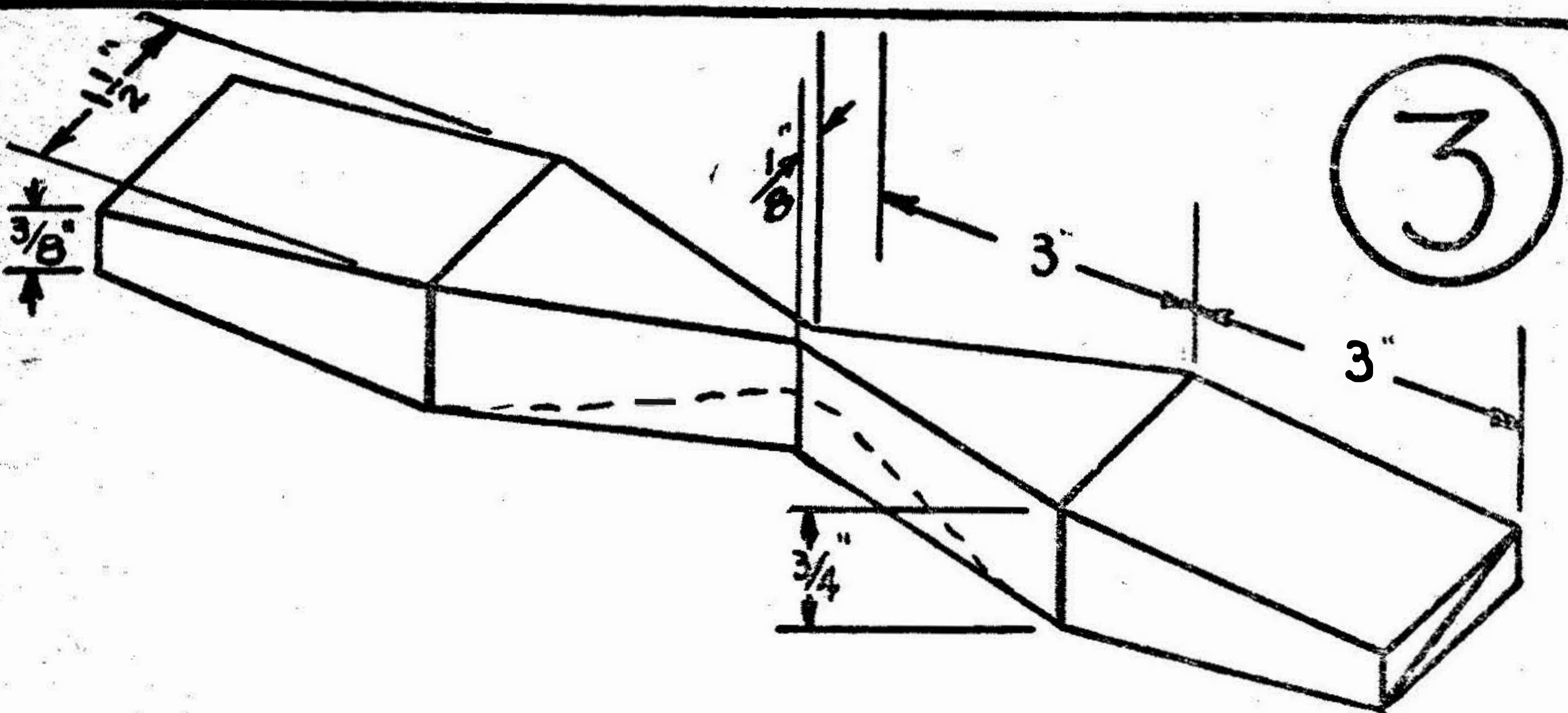
To perform as a champion, this model should weigh about .15 to .20 ounces. But unless you're an experienced indoor builder, the weight of the Canary will be .4 ounces or more. The probable weight of the various parts are:

motor stick, prop, rubber	
(3 strands).....	.22 ounces
wing075
fuselage, tail, landing gear	.120

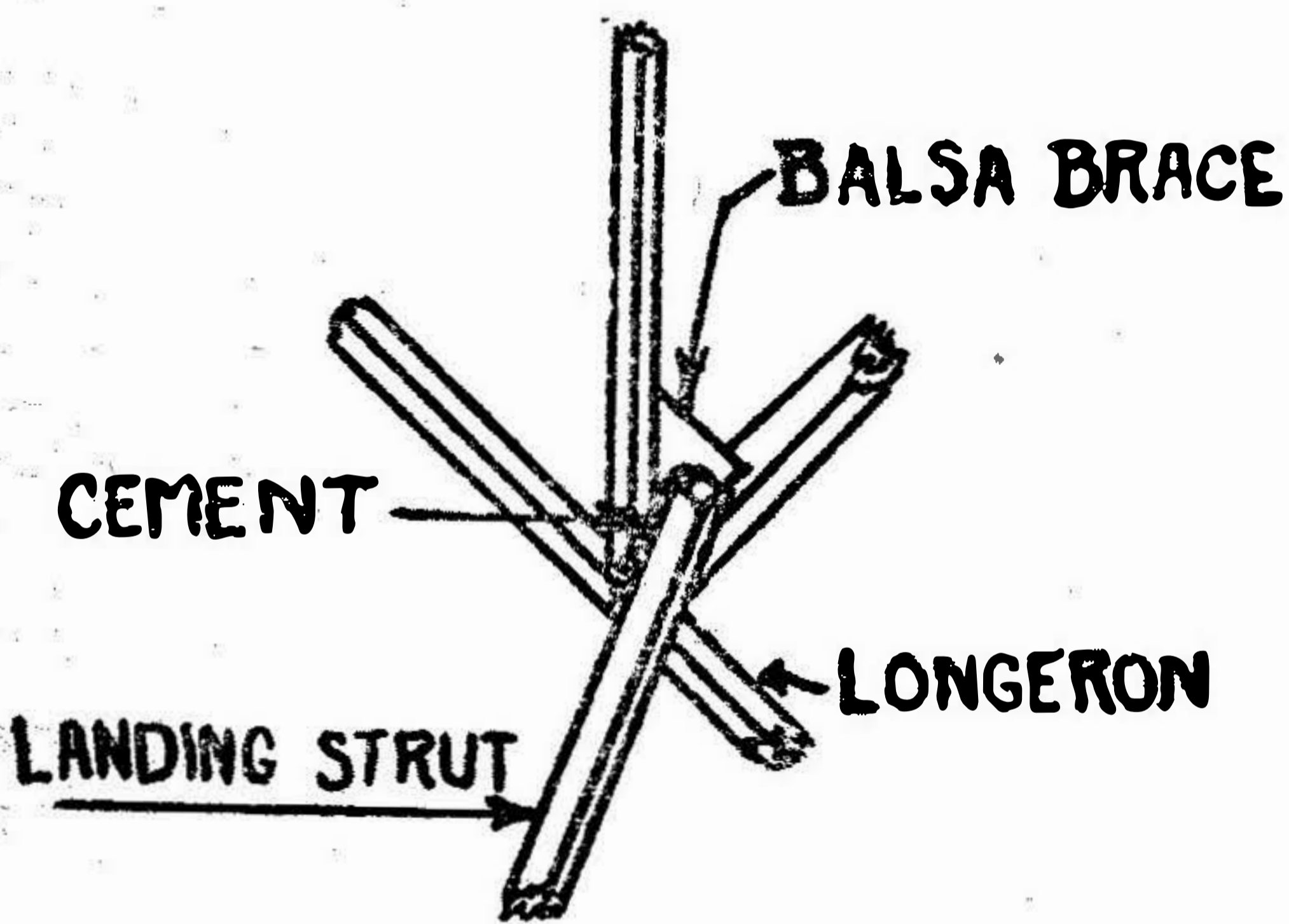
total.....415 ounces

A model weighing this amount will be able to stand plenty of rough treatment and can be flown outdoors when the air is calm. The weight of the model can be substantially reduced by using microfilm instead of tissue covering.

SPRING FEVER—we all get it. Nothing better than a model airplane to work off an attack of it. There's a model waiting for you next month that's a sure cure for spring fever—but not for model fever, because building and flying models is the only treatment for that disease.

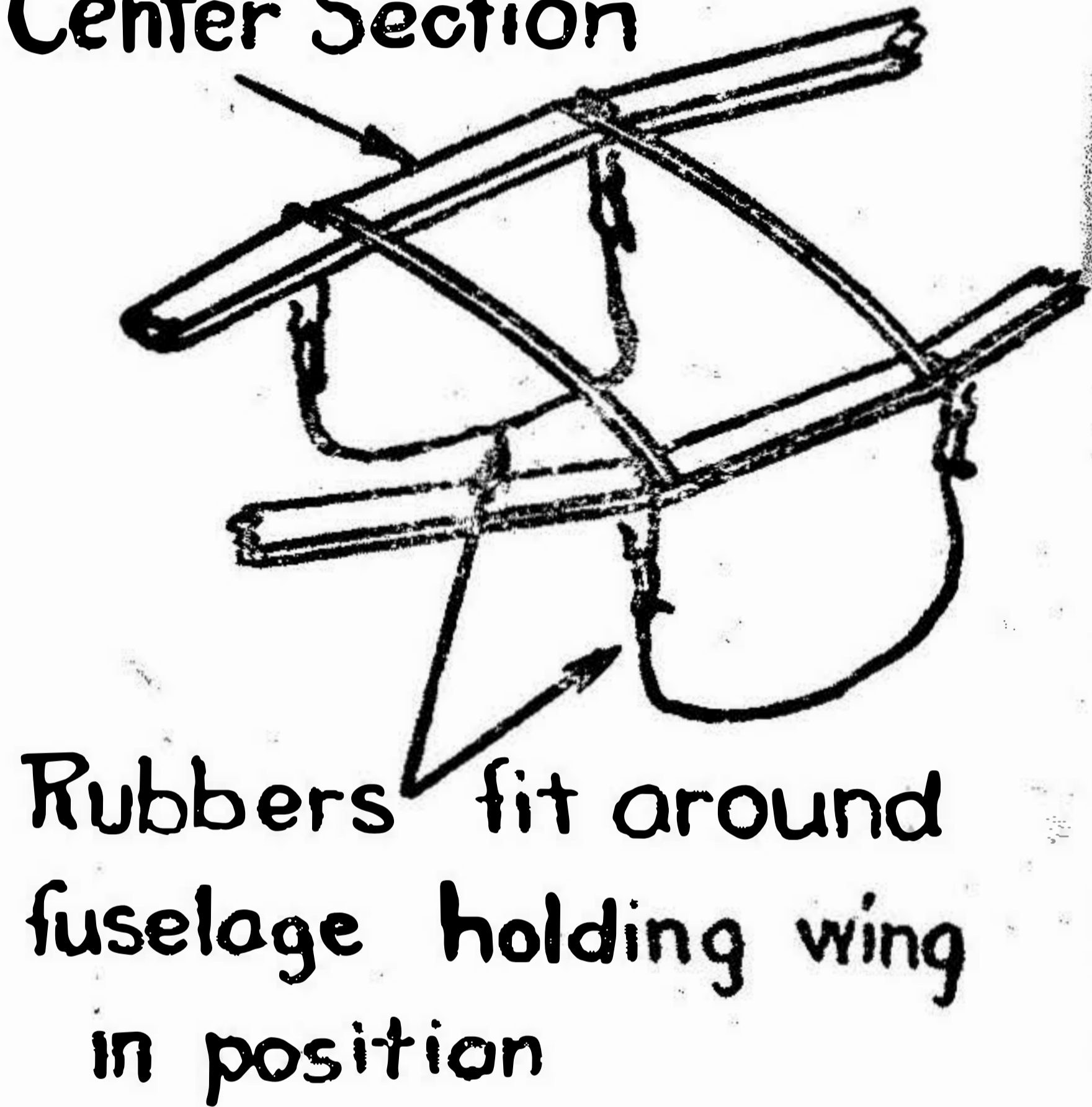


Propeller Block Layout

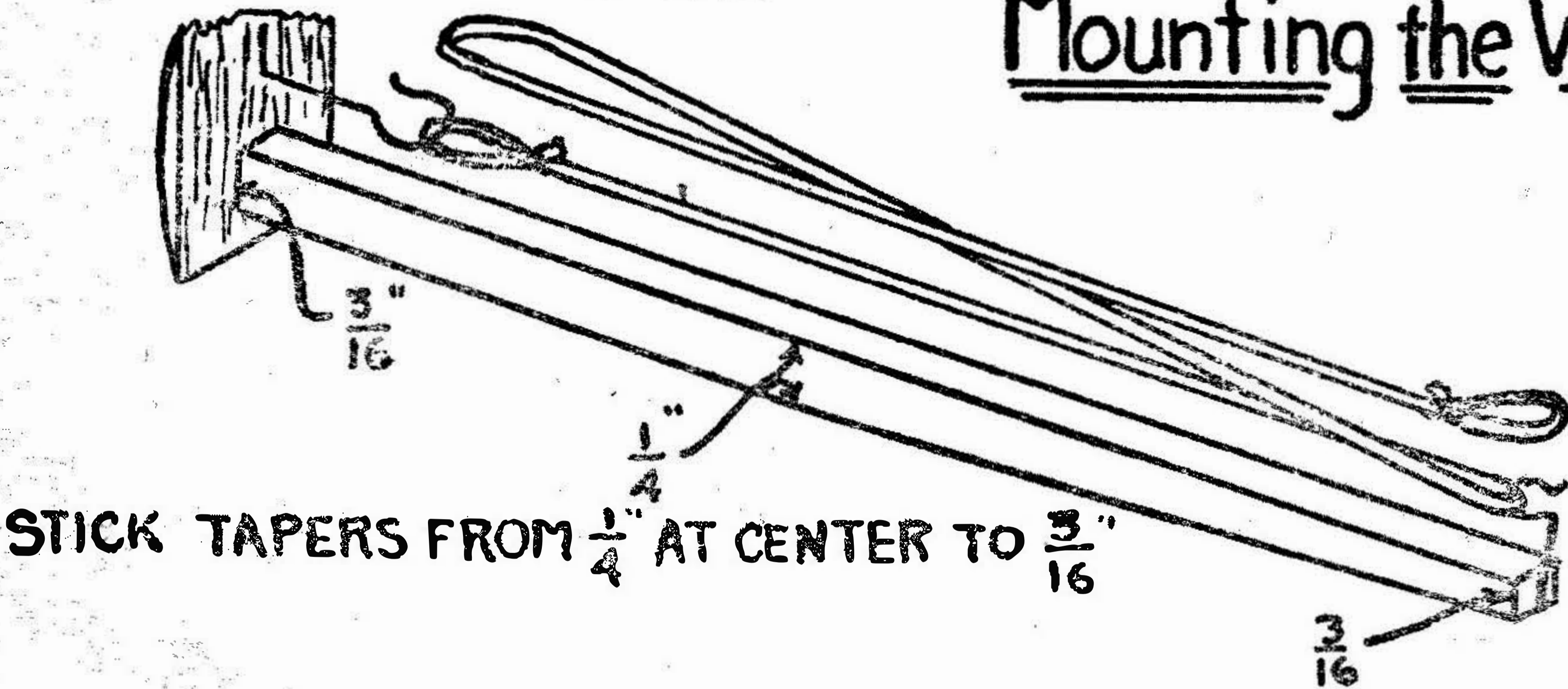


Attaching Landing Strut

Center Section



Mounting the Wing

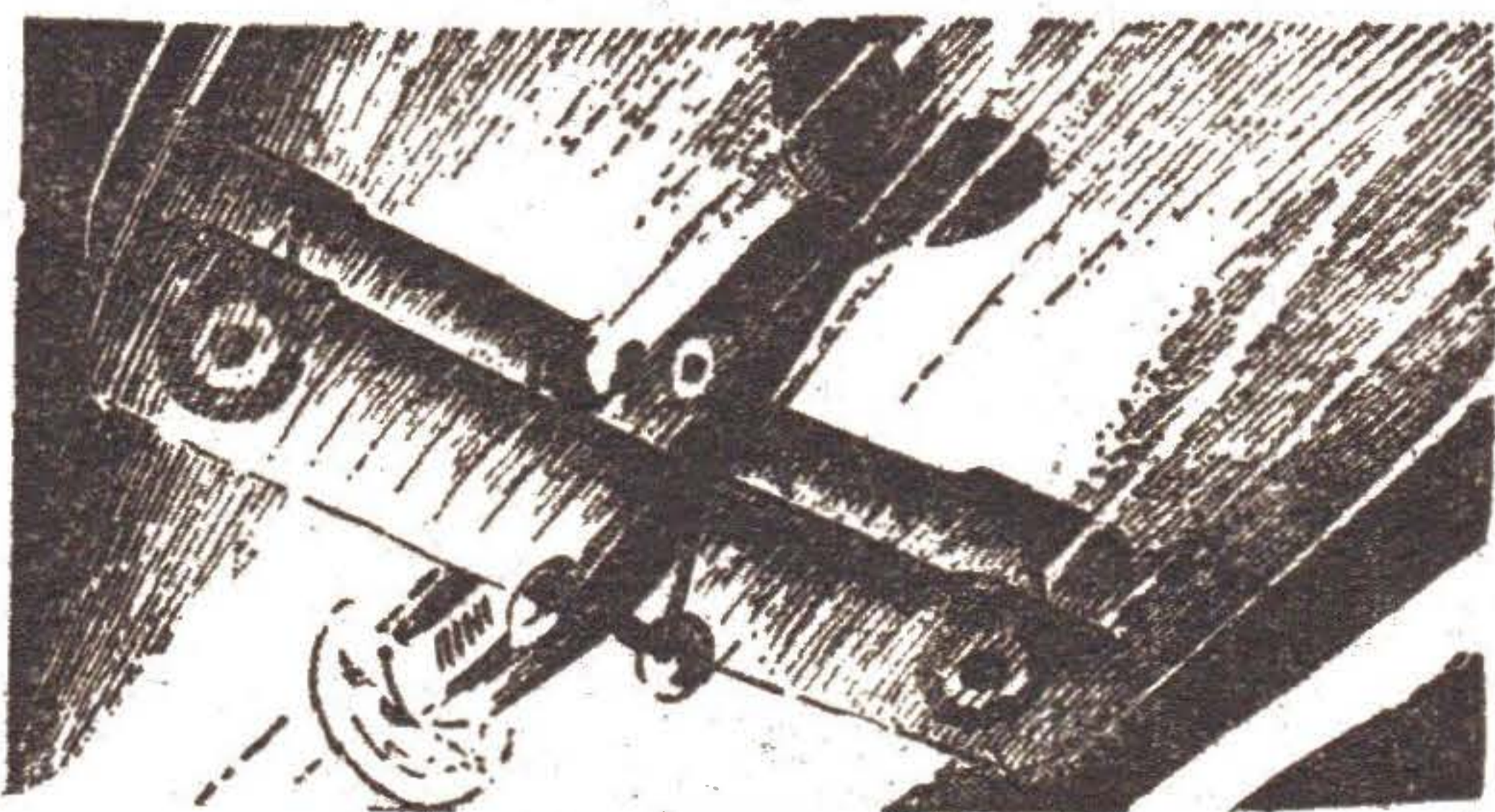


Motor Stick & 3-Strands of Rubber

About our new Wing Commander

CLYDE PANGBORN

Who practically lives in the sky.



UP through his boyhood and early manhood Clyde Pangborn was more or less content to live on the ground, like ordinary people. He walked when he wanted to go places, or else took trolley cars and trains, and in every way showed that he accepted as inevitable the limitations of two legs and the confining pull of gravity. He was a typical young American of his time—landlocked, and apparently destined to spend his days on the crust of humdrum old terra firma.

But only apparently. He reversed all this with a vengeance one bright day at the age of twenty-two—reversed it so completely that some of his friends are always surprised, now, when they see him without a plane near him.

The change took place during the World War, when Pangborn was in the American army. After he had had one too many close-ups of monotonous Mother Earth, after he had seen one too many airplanes skimming serenely through the clouds, he came to the conclusion that the War would be much more thrilling seen from topside.

It would have been.

He volunteered for service with the aviation section of the Signal Corps. Upon qualifying he was enrolled in the School of Aeronautics in California University, took the customary twelve weeks of ground work with the school, graduated to the concentration camp at Dallas, Texas, and then in due course gained his commission as second lieutenant.

But his commission came in 1918, too late to pass him into the air fighting on the other side. Instead, after the armistice, he was sent to Love Field as an instructor.

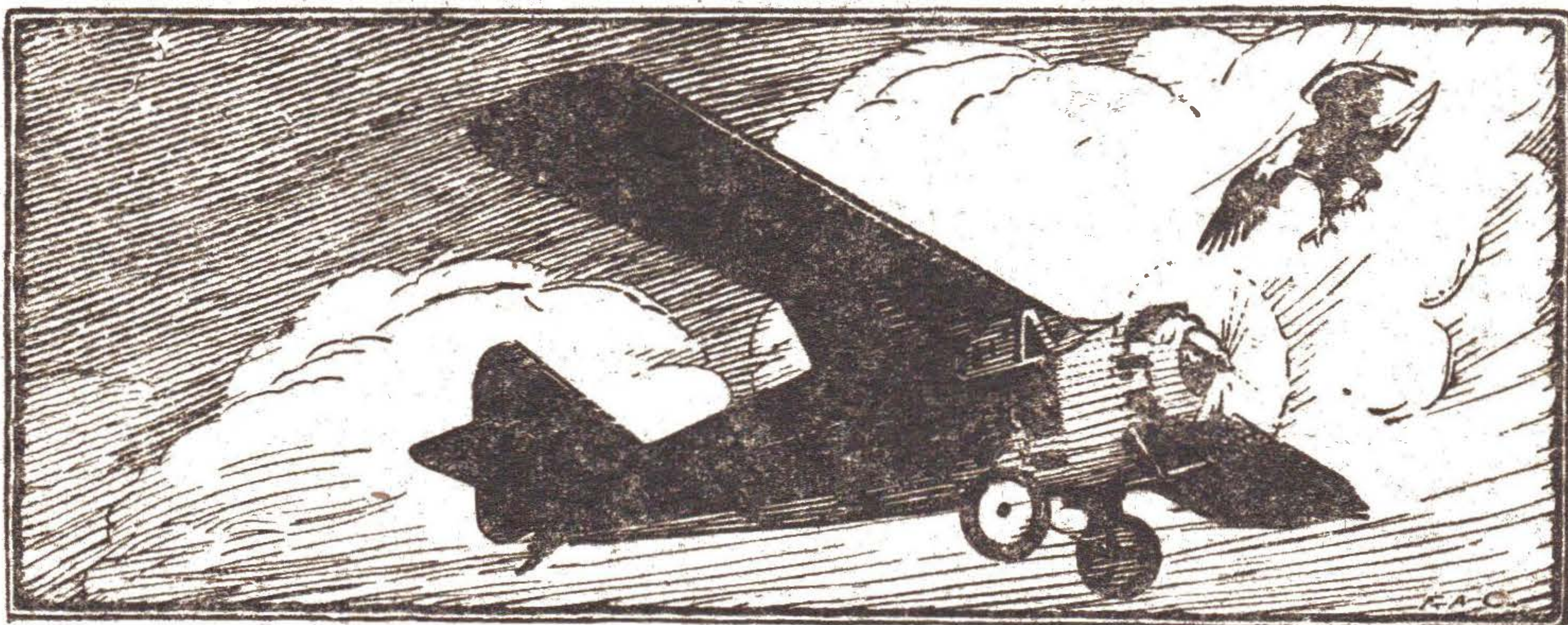
When he was finally demobilized in January, 1919, he had fully decided that his future lay in the air; and in order to make flying support him, he, like so many other great pilots before and after him, went in for barnstorming.

He did the thing right. Pangborn's was no one-horse, or rather one-plane, venture, but a real three-ring "flying circus." It included thirteen planes, and used twenty-five pilots. He did duty both as joint proprietor and working pilot. He estimates that he himself carried fully two hundred thousand of the

million passengers that were taken on joy rides by the whole circus. His machines held four, and sometimes he carried as many as six hundred passengers a day, on one-minute flights at one dollar a passenger. A hundred and fifty flights on such days! A hundred and fifty take-offs, and that many good landings! He covered every State in the Union two or three times over—and in that exacting experience was built the skill and carefulness that made him so popular with American joy riders then, and has enabled him to become so fa-

In 1931, backed by Mr. E. H. Herndon, he took off on a round-the-world flight, to beat Wiley Post. He made good time until he was forced down in a bad storm over Eastern Siberia; and when he eventually flew on to Japan he was held up there for two months.

But he came out of this attack of hard luck brilliantly—and with another “first” in his bag. He was the first airman to make the dangerous nonstop flight over the Pacific Ocean from Japan to Seattle, Washington. For it he received a prize of twenty-five thousand



mous throughout the whole wide world to-day.

PANGBORN soon began to do outstanding things.

He was the first man to make the change from a speeding automobile to an airplane. Symbolic, that—a walk to the running board, a ride in the car, then a dart through space itself in a plane.

He was the second wing-walker. The man who was first, Locklear, is now dead.

He was the first man to use upside-down flying as a specialty. At one time he was known as “Upside-down” Pangborn.

In 1929 he set a record of nine days for sustained flight in an open ship. He seems to like to go up and stay up!

BB-8

dollars, offered by a Tokio newspaper. Twenty-three men had already lost their lives in trying to make that flight.

His next venture came in December, 1932, when he combined aeronautics and economics in the opening of an overnight air service between New York and Los Angeles.

When he heard of the Centenary Air Race from London to Australia, with a prize of ten thousand pounds, he was the first man to enter. After his flight around the world, a little hop from England to Australia seemed only a trifle. Life was looking very good indeed to him those days—and then his backers backed down, and left him grounded.

Pangborn does not care much for the ground any more, to judge by his record!

He was not a man to be forgotten,

however. His old friend of ten years, Colonel Roscoe Turner, had a ship in the race, and offered Pangborn a place in it. He snapped at the chance, and became co-pilot and navigator. The whole world knows how brilliantly they performed to come in third. Every plane in that race got lost at least once and was forced down to ascertain its position; but, although Pangborn was lost twice in the air, he found his destination each time without landing.

There are only two men in the world who have spent more hours in the air than he—E. Hamilton Lee and Jack Knight, both of this country. He has fourteen thousand flying hours to his credit!

This figure is a little beyond imagination. It might be better digested if put this way: averaged up, he has been in the air eight hours every day, seven days every week, fifty-two weeks every year, for almost five solid years. For five years out of the seventeen he has been flying!

An extraordinary total—and even more than extraordinary when one considers the great amount of stunt flying he has done.

Pangborn is the only man who has ever made nonstop flights over both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans!

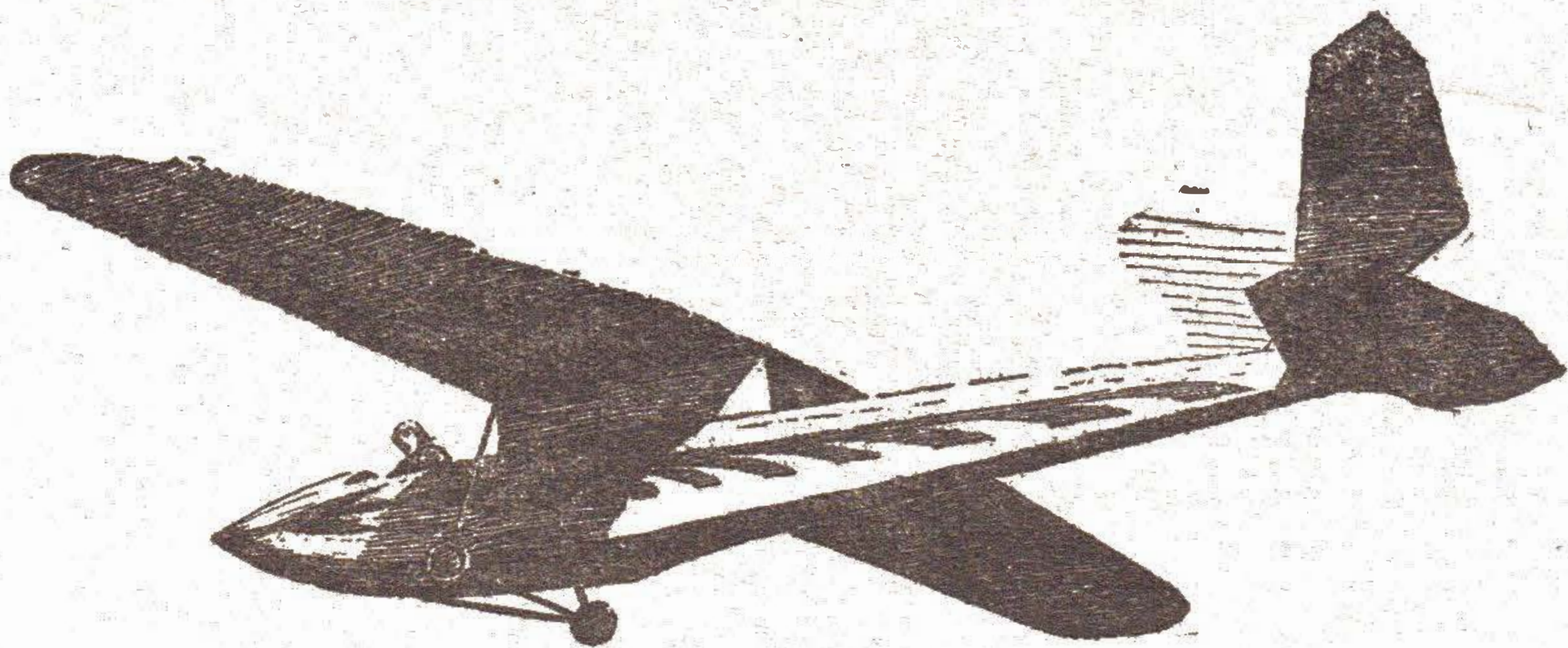
HIS present plans include a nonstop flight around the world, refueling in the air. He intends to start from San Diego, California, refuel over New York, Moscow, and Cheeta, in Eastern Siberia, and make the whole trip in one hundred and ten hours.

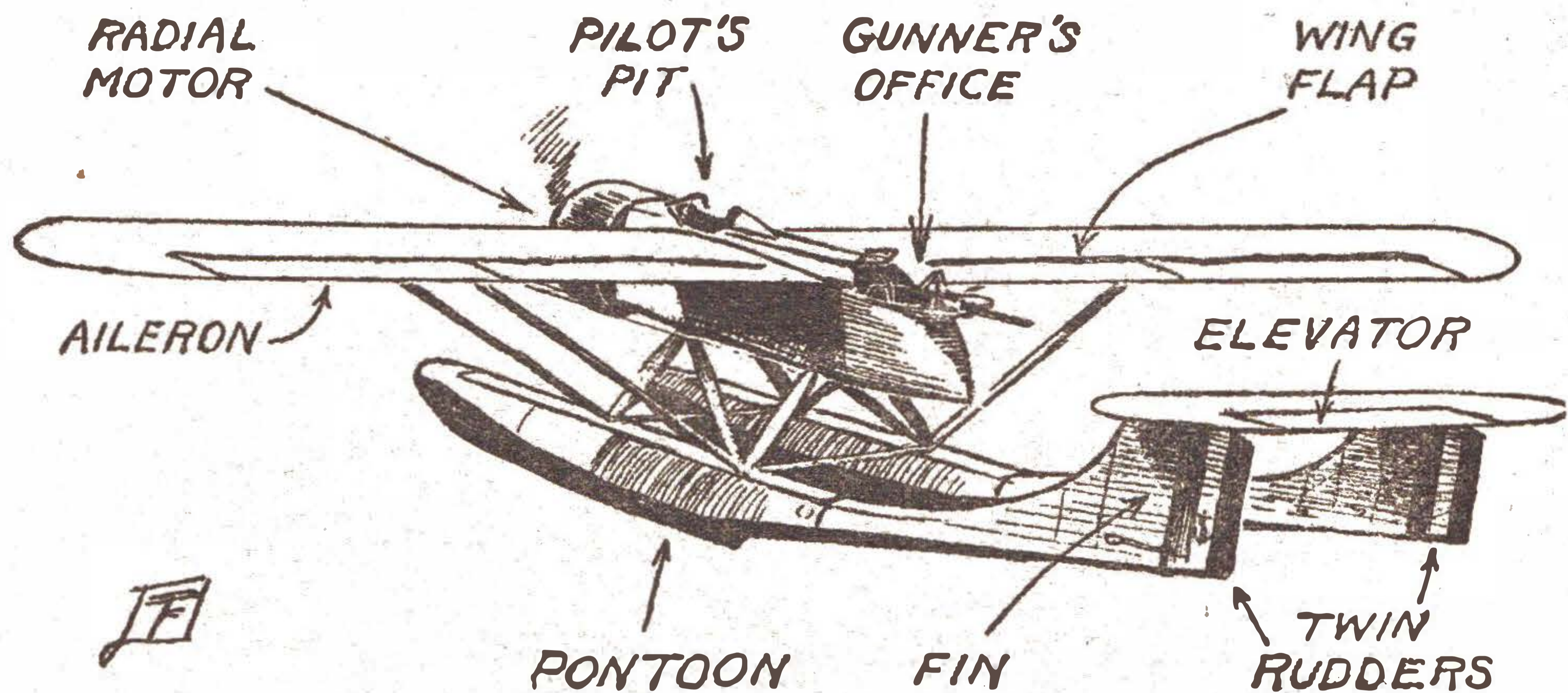
How he likes to get up in the air—and stay there!

The announcement of the great American Air Derby may force him to postpone this flight for a year, however, for he is not one who could stay out of such a race. It will be every bit as difficult and dangerous as the Australian Derby, and about ten thousand miles longer. Already, approximately two hundred thousand dollars has been offered in prizes. The start is expected to be made at Washington, D. C., on October 8th next, and the course to take the fliers south to Buenos Aires, across the Andes to the West Coast, north to Panama, up through Mexico to California, and then east across the continent to finish at Washington.

If ever there was a thorough Air Adventurer, his name is Clyde Pangborn!

Members of our own Air Adventurers Club will follow his flights with great interest, and, of course, we all wish him the best of luck!





The Plane on the Cover

by FRANK TINSLEY

THE cover painting this month was done from a press photo showing a group of French naval seaplanes. The unusual design of one of the ships in the background interested me very much and I commenced a search to discover its identity and details of construction. My quest proved to be a vain one, for although I went through all the year books and French aviation magazines with the proverbial fine-tooth comb, there was not a single photo or reference to be found on the subject of this mysterious ship. Being ignorant of even the name and designation of the subject of my painting, I was forced to go back to the original tiny press snapshot for a careful study of the unusual features that make this seaplane design such an interesting one.

The ship, a twin-pontoon naval observation type, is evidently one of the new designs that the French air ministry is being so secretive about. It is an externally braced monoplane powered with an air-cooled radial engine, probably a Gnôme-rhône "Mistral."

The motor, covered by an N. A. C. A.-type cowling, is mounted in the forward end of a streamlined nacelle that is just

large enough to seat the pilot and observer with room between the cockpits for the gas tank. The pilot's office is placed just forward of the leading edge of the wing with excellent visibility in all directions but down. The gunner is in the rear end of the nacelle where he has an almost perfect field of fire for his Lewis guns.

The landing gear of this interesting seaplane consists of double pontoons connected with the body of the ship by two sets of stout N-struts. The floats are separated by streamlined spreaders and a pair of inclined struts spring outward on each side to brace the wings. The rear ends of the pontoons continue backward in a graceful curve to form the twin vertical surfaces of the empennage. The stabilizer has been placed at a height where it forms the smallest possible impediment to the rear gunner.

There's what the photo tells us about this new plane that the French think they are keeping so secret. She looks fast, clean and highly maneuverable, a sturdy, well-braced ship that has the look of a fighter. Where is that guy who said that the French air forces are equipped with ancient, obsolete crates?

Here are the plans for

The NEW EAGLET

*Bill Barnes has redesigned the Eaglet
and the new one is a big improvement*

by FRANK TINSLEY

IT WAS the voice of Tony Lamport on the wire, calling from Barnes Field that sent me scurrying out to the world-famous American aviator's private airport. And besides, it was a beautiful spring morning. Far too beautiful, I thought grimly, for me to waste time indoors at an easel.

Through my big studio windows overlooking the East River I could see great masses of fleecy-white clouds sailing majestically across a sky that was more transparently blue than any sky I could ever hope to put on canvas. So you can see I was more than willing to lay aside my smeared palette and brushes and climb into my car for a quick rush out to the field.

I thought of "Sandy" Sanders as I drove along. How happy and excited he must be! To-day Sandy was to make the first test hop in his own beloved and reborn Eaglet. I remembered how, several weeks before, the cocky little kid pilot of the Barnes gang had almost wept as we stood in the big construction hangar and watched the mechanics strip off the shining skin and begin to tear apart the very bones of Sandy's beloved ship. Even Bill Barnes' elaborate plans for a new and improved Eaglet were forgotten as Sandy saw his own little fighter literally ripped to pieces before his eyes.

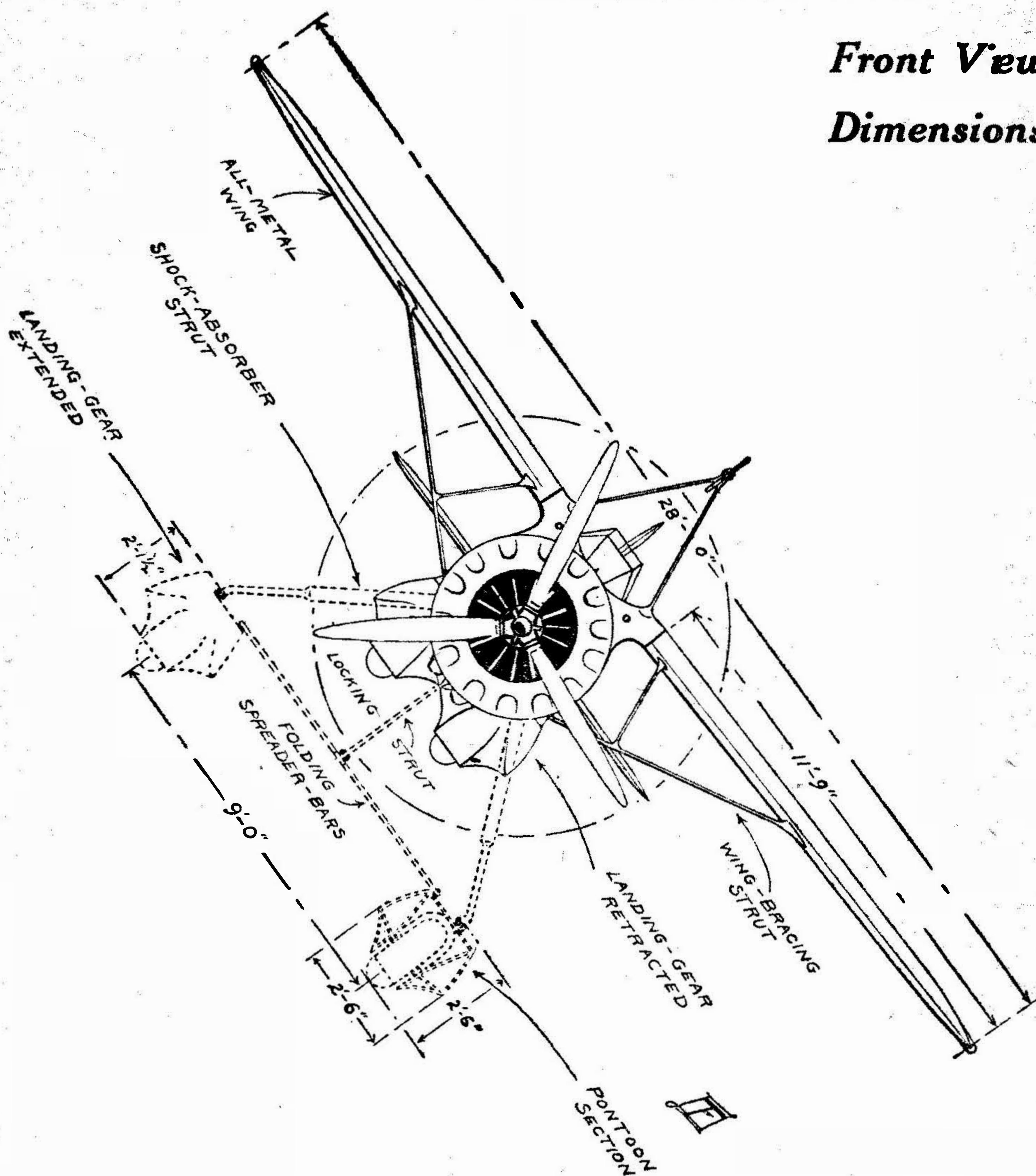
Bill and I had left him standing alone,

clenched fists buried deep in the pockets of his oil-stained coveralls. Miserable! Bill and I had made our way to the boss pilot's office in the east wing of the administration building. There, Bill Barnes had told me of his ambitious plans for a new Eaglet. I knew, of course, that the famous little ship had been equipped with one of the new Twin Wasp air-cooled radial motors only a month or so before. Naturally, I was curious as to why she was being redesigned again—and why so soon!

For several excellent reasons, Bill Barnes had told me. First of all—the new motor. It was a swell grinder in itself but the mechanics had already noticed that in spite of the fact that the Eaglet had been beefed up to take the added power, nevertheless, the tremendous pull and vibration of the 800 or so horses seemed to be racking the tiny ship's frame to a dangerous degree. Bill Barnes had thought so, too.

After carefully observing her performance in the air he had come to the conclusion that the gallant little ship was dangerously overpowered for her weight. He felt, Bill had confided to me with an embarrassed grin, an almost fatherly responsibility toward Sandy. And he would be hanged if he'd ever let the kid take any unnecessary risks! Bad enough, Bill had pointed out ruefully to me, to be dragging the youngster all

Front View Dimensions



over the world to be shot at—without further handicapping the boy with an unstable and dangerous ship!

Another thing made a new design for the Eaglet seem advisable at this particular moment. Bill had worked the bugs out of the folding pontoons on his Stormer and was convinced that the gear was a complete success. For a long time now, he had been anxious to fit the Eaglet up for amphibious landings. So he decided to incorporate this new and perfected gear in the redesigned

little ship. The job would take a lot of trouble, inasmuch as Sandy's plane would have to be rebuilt larger and heavier to take the big P and W engine.

Small as it was, the old Eaglet had been a pretty tight fit in the flying hangar of the carrier transport. Which meant, in turn, that the big flying headquarters of the Barnes fleet would also have to have her fuselage widened.

Bill Barnes had promised to release the plans of the brand-new Eaglet as soon as she passed her rigid tests. I

was particularly anxious to get hold of these plans for a personal reason. When the original plans were published in the October 1934 issue of Bill Barnes Magazine, the measurements of a totally different ship were printed, by error. Boy, it sure put me on the receiving end of some tall kidding from the good-natured gang out at Barnes Field.

And that's not even to mention a ream of letters that came in from you model-building fans who were quick to detect that same printer's error in making up the magazine. So you can easily understand why the thought of getting the mess that had been wished on me straightened out—boy!—it made me so happy I was singing a spring song all the way out to the airport on that gorgeous day I've been telling you about, when Tony Lamport called me up and whispered the magic word: "Test!"

SO there I was, turning the battered schnozzle of my old crate down Leland Lane. As we rumbled down toward the side gate my ears picked up the rich hum of a powerful motor. I slowed my car down and squinted at the sky for a sign of the ship. At last, peering past my thumb, I located the plane among the thin, wind-blown tendrils of a belt of clouds about 15,000 feet up. The ship itself was almost invisible and only an occasional flash of sunlight, reflected from the metal surface of a banked wing, enabled me to spot her at all!

Giving the wheel of my car a twist, I drew in close to the side of the road to watch. The shining speck in the air had disappeared momentarily behind a wisp of cloud; but the hum of the motor sounded clearer to me. Now the ship sprang suddenly into view again. Nearer, larger! The whine was rapidly deepening into a roar as the 800 horses in that booming radial joined forces with the pull of gravity to plummet the little plane earthward.

My body tautened with instinctive strain as my eyes fixed themselves hypnotically on that falling bird. Sandy, of course! Who else but Sandy? In the very midst of the most nerve-racking of all aircraft tests—a power dive with the engine full on! A consciously directed dive to determine the terminal velocity of the new Eaglet; to determine—and this was more important—whether or not the wings of the little craft were strong enough to stand the enormous punishment of that high velocity.

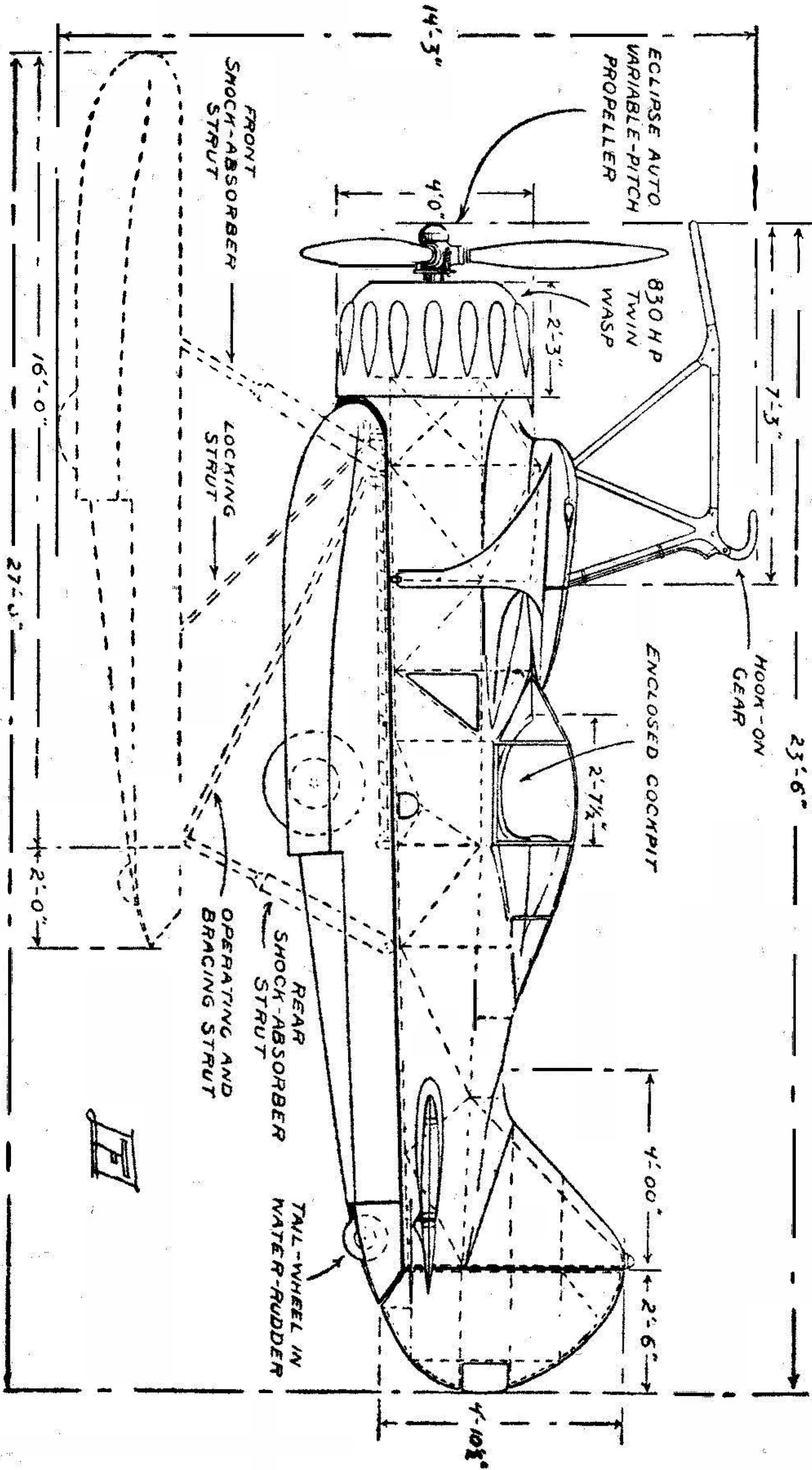
The Eagle's nose was now pointing straight down at the neat white circle in the very center of Bill Barnes' flying field. Sandy, I thought dazedly, must be standing bolt upright on the rudder bar, with a ship at such a steep angle. The speed was prodigious. He must be doing at least 400 miles an hour!

I caught my breath sharply. The plane was beginning to straighten out. Here, now, was the test! Slowly—oh, so slowly—the nose fought to come up. Higher and higher it rose while the baffled gale tore and shrieked at the stout bracing struts. Now the tiny ship was almost level and—*whoosh*, like a weight lifted from my heart!—I realized that Sandy had done it! He had pulled the Eaglet out of that terrific dive and was safe.

My sweating palms dropped from the steering wheel of my car and I relaxed in my seat, weakly cursing that kid pilot of the Barnes gang for the scare he had given me. By the time I had collected myself sufficiently to drive through the side gate of the airport, the trim little Eaglet had let down her landing gear and was fish-tailing in for a landing.

She rolled up as I reached the apron. I ran forward and joined the rest of the gang that immediately surrounded her.

As Sandy Sanders climbed slowly out and divested himself of his 'chute harness, I got my first close look at this new Eaglet. What did she look like?



Well, in general appearance she seemed to be a smaller edition of Bill Barnes' personal pride, the Scarlet Stormer. Same fuselage design. Same retractable pontoon gear. The nose, however, was entirely different, with its new type N. A. C. A. cowling that completely covered the big Twin Wasp radial motor. I noticed, also, that the same old Eaglet folding Gull wings had been retained in the new design; as well as the hook-on apparatus for landing and taking off from the trapeze aboard the big carrier transport. Watching this brand-new air infant I was quite convinced that she was a honey, a lallapalooza—or anything you want to say when you mean pretty darned good! Cleaner and faster than the old Eaglet. Huskier, too.

Sandy seemed to think so, apparently. He was grinning from ear to ear with happiness and pride. Smirking like a wizened little monkey as he bustled around, falling over his own feet from pure joy! Mechanics were now checking over every part of the plane in a careful and painstaking search for any possible flaws resulting from a dive at such velocity.

I shook the kid by the hand and congratulated him on the swell piloting job he had just completed. Sandy was still stuttering with excitement. All he could mutter was: "*What* a ship! Huh? What a *ship!*" I don't think the little bozo even recognized me. Usually, he's a bit shy when I kid him. But this time? Wild horses wouldn't have fazed him to-day!

I could see that Bill Barnes, too, was feeling pretty good about the test. He was almost garrulous as he strolled about, slapping people on the back, joining boyishly in the loud laughter of the crowd on the apron. There was almost a faint note of hysteria in their jokes—and no wonder! Suddenly I realized how worried and nervous the whole Barnes organization must have been

while the beloved kid pilot of the outfit was roaring down in that breath-taking power dive. At last Martin, the chief mechanic, pushed his way through the group around Bill and made his sober and low-toned report. Success so far. The new ship had stood this test remarkably well. No trace of undue strain. No weakness.

AND NOW the Eaglet was ready for the balance of her tests. Sandy was buckling on his double parachutes when Bill approached the youngster.

"How do you feel, kid?" he asked gruffly.

Sandy grinned. "I'm all right now, Bill," he replied. "But—gosh all grandmother!—when I started to pull back on that stick it surely felt as though my brains and everything else above the waist were going to end up in the seat of my pants."

Barnes' face remained serious. "Cut the comedy," he said bluntly. "Did your sight black out when you pulled out of that dive?"

The kid nodded. "A little bit," he confessed. "You see, I was going down the chute pretty fast. The accelerometer read 418 m. p. h. at terminal velocity."

Bill Barnes whistled softly. "That's even more than I figured she'd do," he admitted. "I'll tell you what: I want you to do five hard pull-outs, starting at one G. and jumping two at a time until you finish at the nine G's required by army and navy specifications. And remember what I told you this morning, Sandy. Keep swallowing as you come down to equalize the air pressure on your eardrums. Pull out hard as soon as you reach velocity—and holler at the top of your lungs when you do."

Bill Barnes turned away with a worried look that he tried in vain to conceal. Sandy climbed into his tiny cockpit and, almost before I realized it, was jazzing the Eaglet down the runway.

I stood by the dispatcher's booth and

watched those magnificent and breathtaking dives. I'm sure that every man in that crowd on the ground was sweating blood each time the kid came roaring down the slide. I know I did. Yowsuh, and I'm not kidding!

After the fourth successive trial, the grease monkeys gave the little ship a last going-over and slim young Sandy Sanders took her off again for the final test.

The Eaglet came roaring earthward from an 18,000-foot elevation in a vertical power dive that squeezed every ounce of speed out of the gallant ship. Then Sandy horsed back on the stick with both hands clenched together and did a pull-out that almost wrapped the little crate around its own tail surfaces.

A groan went up from all of us as the plane snapped sharply around like a chip in a hurricane. Then—*wheeeew!*—a low sigh of profound relief. The plane had leveled off safely and was circling the field. All over—and nobody hurt!

When the Eaglet rolled to a halt, we all marched up one by one and solemnly shook the kid's dirty hand. And don't you think for a minute that he didn't have this tribute coming to him! Holy cats and goldfish, what a dive!

Afterwards, Bill Barnes, the famous American ace touched me on the arm and we slipped away from the party and

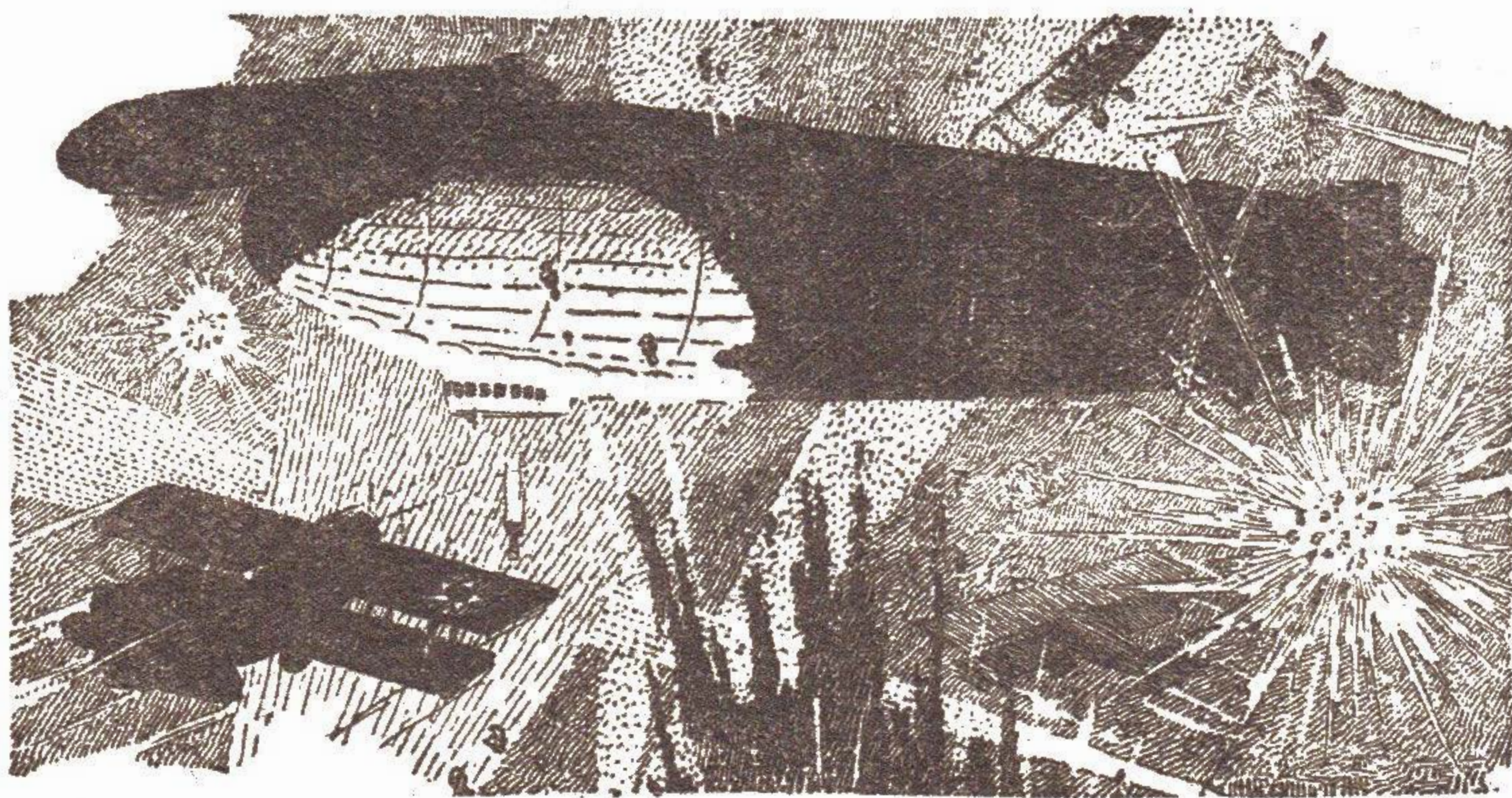
made our way to the secret study beneath Bill's private office. There we went over the plans of the new and gloriously successful Eaglet; and Bill Barnes gave me all the details of her construction. You can see it for yourself in the plans I have drawn.

And here's a little something to whet your appetites, fans! Bill expects to have the alterations on the fuselage of the transport ship completed in about two or three weeks. And he told me to promise you faithful readers that the new plans of the famous big carrier will be in the very next issue of Bill Barnes Magazine.

Looking back over this article, I realize that I have written a lot more about Sandy Sanders than I have about his new tailor-made Eaglet. Sandy won't like that! But I feel sure that you readers will all agree with me that no matter how perfect a plane may be, it can never be any better than the man in it. Am I right?

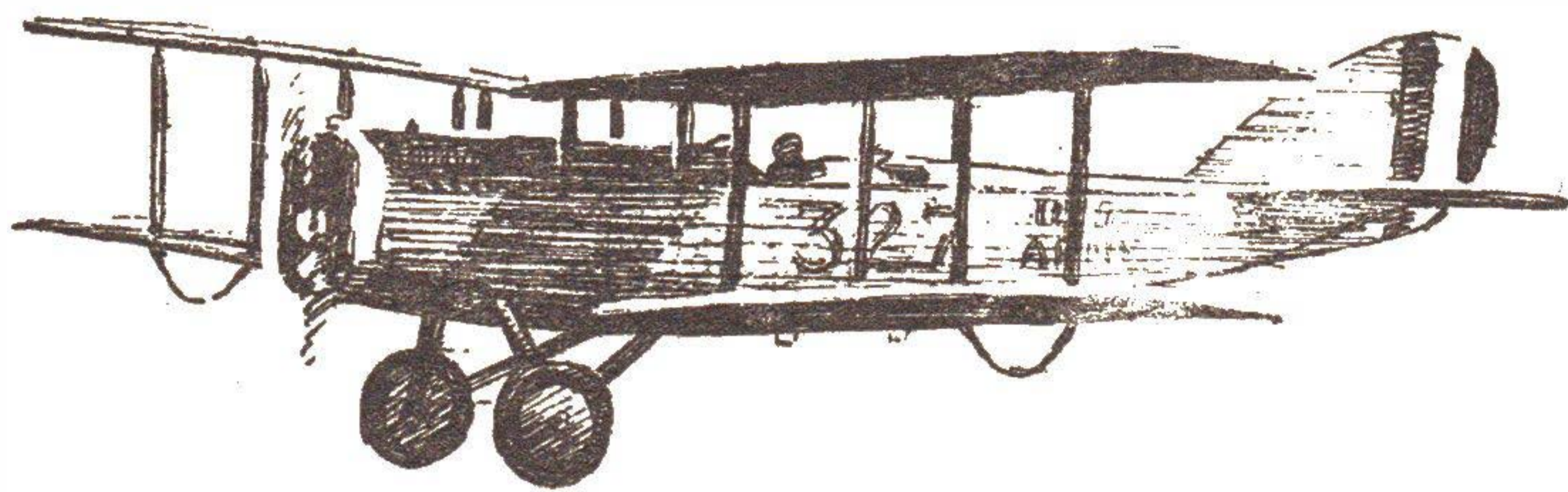
At any rate, there's no doubt in my mind—or in yours either, I'll bet—that Sandy Sanders is a rare and plucky little soul. A kid who transforms the Eaglet into the living wings of youth. Wings that can never droop so long as there are kids like Sandy. Wings that will roam forever the clean blue skies of high adventure!

A toast to Sandy, folks!



Hostesses of the Air

*There is a future for women
in the skyways—a big one*



IS there a future for women in aviation? Yes, a tremendous one! There are two names that immediately come to mind—Amelia Earhart and Ruth Nichols. They have done wonders and have helped greatly to put American aviation in its present place.

Just a year ago, one of the largest Eastern colleges granted the degree of Aeronautical Engineer to a young woman—the first of her sex to be so honored.

On the last day of 1934, Helen Richey landed at Detroit completing a flight from Washington on which she acted as co-pilot—the first woman in America to be given an active pilot's rating on a regular passenger and mail run.

These are the jobs that command the headlines, but there is another place that demands as much and where woman is supreme—the stewardess. She is a regular member of the flying personnel of many air lines and is the direct contact between the company and the passengers.

The United Air Lines started employing stewardesses in 1930 and the move was an instantaneous success. At that time there was still a newness about air travel and the company felt that traffic would increase if they could demonstrate the comparative safety of the air. Statistics were available but not many peo-

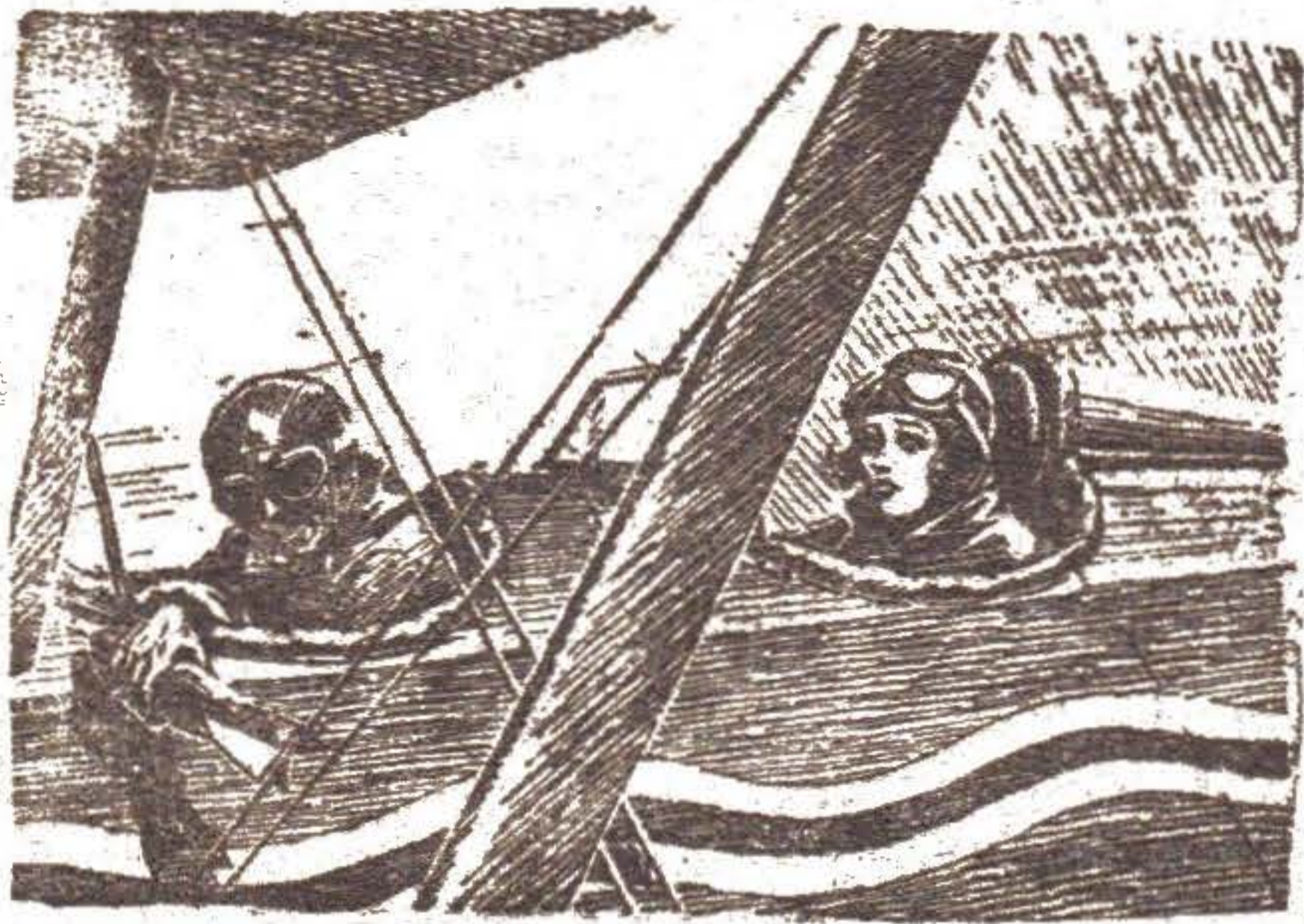
ple were interested in figures. Somebody thought of the psychological effect that stewardesses would have, and there began a new story.

Men felt that if these girls could do all that flying, the air certainly must be safe. Women passengers also felt more confident with another woman on hand.

The first requirement was that the girl must be a graduate, registered nurse. This qualification was imposed, not because passengers would require a nurse in her professional capacity, but rather because of her training. She has been schooled to obey orders and to serve the public. She knows how to meet people and be pleasant to them and that is very important when she is the representative of a large company.

The stewardess must be young. She can't be over 5 feet 4 inches tall nor weigh more than 120 pounds. This weight requisite is important because poundage means so much more in an airplane than it does on the ground. She must not be over twenty-five years of age—there is a certain zest to youth that is contagious and makes a trip so much more interesting.

She must have tact and intelligence. She is the hostess and in charge of the cabin. She enters into conversation with



the passengers and has to know what they are talking about.

The last requirement was that stewardess must not be married. Her job takes her away from home much of the time and there must be no distractions to take her mind from her work.

Let's meet some of the stewardesses. Mary Kelly is Irish, 22 years old, pretty, a curly-haired blonde, intelligent, 5 feet 2 inches tall, weighs 105 pounds, is a good mixer, unmarried.

She thoroughly enjoys her work. She has met a great many important people; business men, movie stars, celebrities, and even members of President Roosevelt's family. Each has interests differing from the others and, as part of Miss Kelly's duty is to entertain, she must be able to discuss many subjects.

On one recent trip, Miss Kelly discussed the Supreme Court's gold clause decision with a banker; baseball prospects with a sport writer; politics with a politician; and the question of girls wearing shorts on the golf course with a society woman. She was on the way to her pantry when another passenger stopped her and asked:

"What makes holes in the clouds?"

Naturally, she thought that he was kidding her and tried to pass it off as a joke. But he was serious and asked the question again. Miss Kelly said that she didn't know but would ask the pilot. The pilot told her to tell the man that the Department of Commerce made the holes.

A stewardess is really a combination conductor, ship steward, hostess, entertainer, information bureau, and messenger boy. Before the passengers board the ship, the stewardess has to inspect it and see that everything is clean and in order, and that supplies are on board. They carry sandwiches, soup, coffee, ice cream and other foods. The hot things are packed in thermos jugs.

When the passengers come aboard, the stewardess meets them, makes them comfortable, disposes of their baggage, and gives out newspapers and magazines—or sets up a table if they want to work. The biggest task is to make "first fliers" feel at ease.

The person who has never made a flight before is easy to spot. He either looks nervous or is trying mighty hard not to look nervous. When the plane gets into the air, the look usually changes to one of disappointment. That's because he expected to be thrilled and there are no thrills in riding a big, enclosed cabin plane.

When lunch or dinner time comes around, they serve a light meal. If you have never eaten while flying, you don't know how good one of these meals can be. It is an elaborate picnic. After eating, if there are enough passengers not otherwise occupied, a bridge game is started. These girls are all good players. Time passes quickly and pleasantly.

AGNES HURT, another stewardess, is a Kansas girl; a beautiful brunette with an endearing smile and an infectious laugh. You can't help liking her and feeling that it is going to be a most enjoyable trip. I asked her what her most thrilling experience was.

"It really has to be divided into two trips," she said. "Recently, I had a mother and her fourteen-day-old baby flying to New York. The mother had absolute confidence in me and turned the baby's care over to me. We were a little worried as to the effect altitude

would have on my charge. You see, babies' eardrums are very delicate and any rapid change in air pressure might injure them.

"However, I arranged with the pilot to let me know when he was to start a landing and to take the descent slowly. When we started coming down, I fed the baby a few drops of water every hundred feet or so. He had to swallow the water and the swallowing opened the ear passages and equalized the pressure. He came through in fine shape and seemed to enjoy the trip a lot."

The other half of Miss Hurt's thrill came on the return trip. A ninety-two-year-old man and his son were passengers and they sat beside each other. The stewardess caught bits of their conversation from time to time.

"Father, look at that sky off there. Aren't those pinks and blues gorgeous?"

"Yes they are, son. They look like a Maxfield Parrish painting."

"Those clouds look too beautiful to be real, don't they, father?"

"You can never actually see and appreciate clouds from the ground."

"And those fields down there, did you ever see anything laid out in such perfect rectangles?"

"Son, this is a great trip. It teaches you that there is a plan to everything."

A little later, Miss Hurt took around

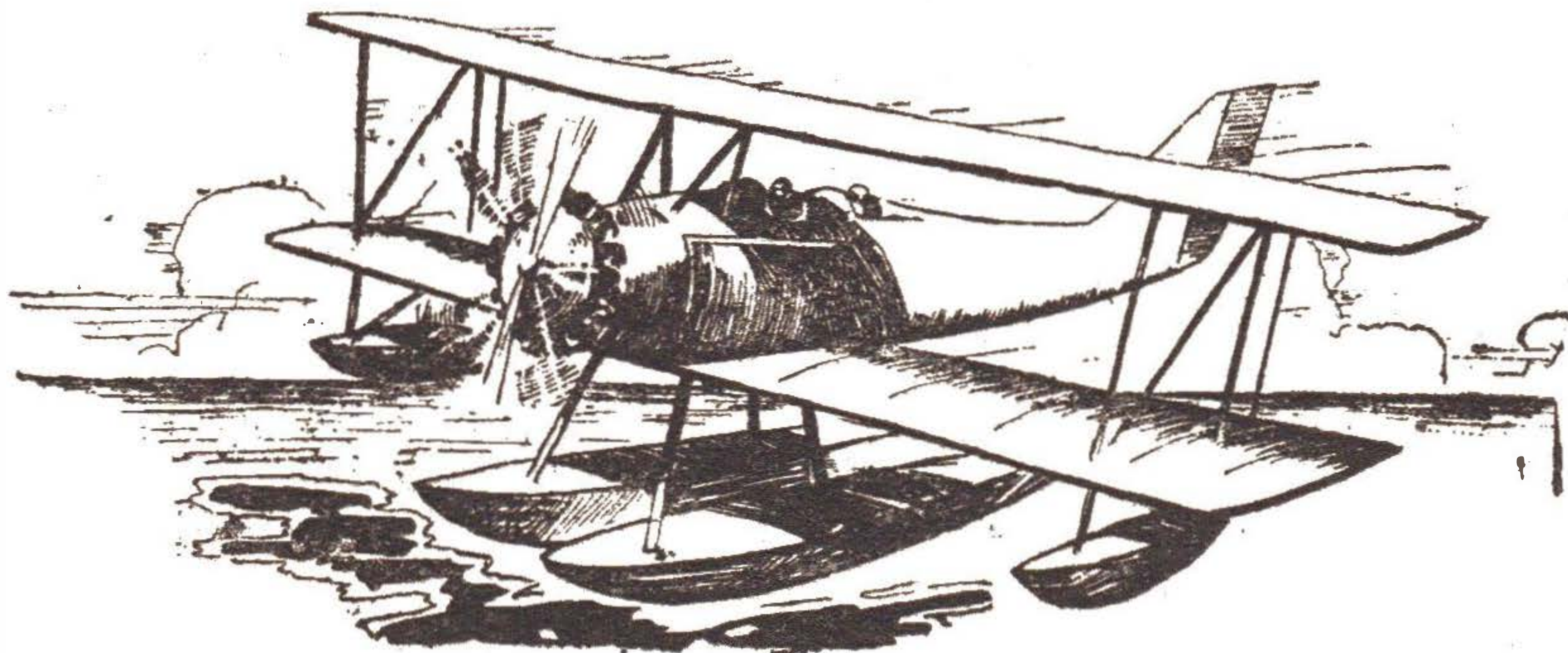
lunch trays. When she came to the father, she said that she had a tray of lunch for him. He started a bit and reached out for the tray but his hands only groped in thin air. Just then his son arose and took the stewardess aside.

"Father has been blind for ten years," he said. "He is very sensitive about his misfortune so we always act as though he could see perfectly."

That was an experience. Miss Hurt feels that she must hold some kind of a record—two passengers, one fourteen days old and the other ninety-two years old. That is a run of the gamut of life and we won't doubt her record.

Her most amusing experience occurred when the former governor of one of the Eastern States boarded the plane at Cleveland. At that time, he had his ticket, but five minutes later, when he was supposed to surrender it to the hostess, it was lost. After some innocent fun in which Miss Hurt was called a "ticket snatcher" and she countered by calling the ex-governor a stowaway, a mock trial was held. The ticket never came to light so we don't know which of the accusations was correct.

The pay of stewardesses averages about \$125 a month and all expenses while they are away from home. As they are away quite a bit, this mounts up so that they average a good salary. They have anywhere from 18 to 48



hours off between trips and this enables them to keep their home ties and social life.

YOU would expect the holder of the record for the greatest air mileage to be one of the better-known fliers. Such is not the case. The holder is Miss Ida Novelli who has traveled the equivalent of more than twenty-six times around the earth. She was one of the first United Air Lines stewardesses and has been flying continuously on the Oakland-Salt Lake City division. She is still there and flying approximately 15,000 miles a month. That is some mileage. No wonder she feels that she has the perfect job.

The stewardesses are not often called upon to perform nursing duties but once in a great while this training comes in handy. On one trip, the plane had taken off and been in flight about half an hour when one of the passengers called the stewardess.

"I feel terrible," he said. "This isn't nervousness because I have flown a lot. But I have a rotten headache and feel mighty sick."

The stewardess became professional at once. She saw that he was flushed and evidently in very great pain. He had a fever and she asked him if he had any pains in his side or abdomen.

"Yes, I have terrible cramps in my right side."

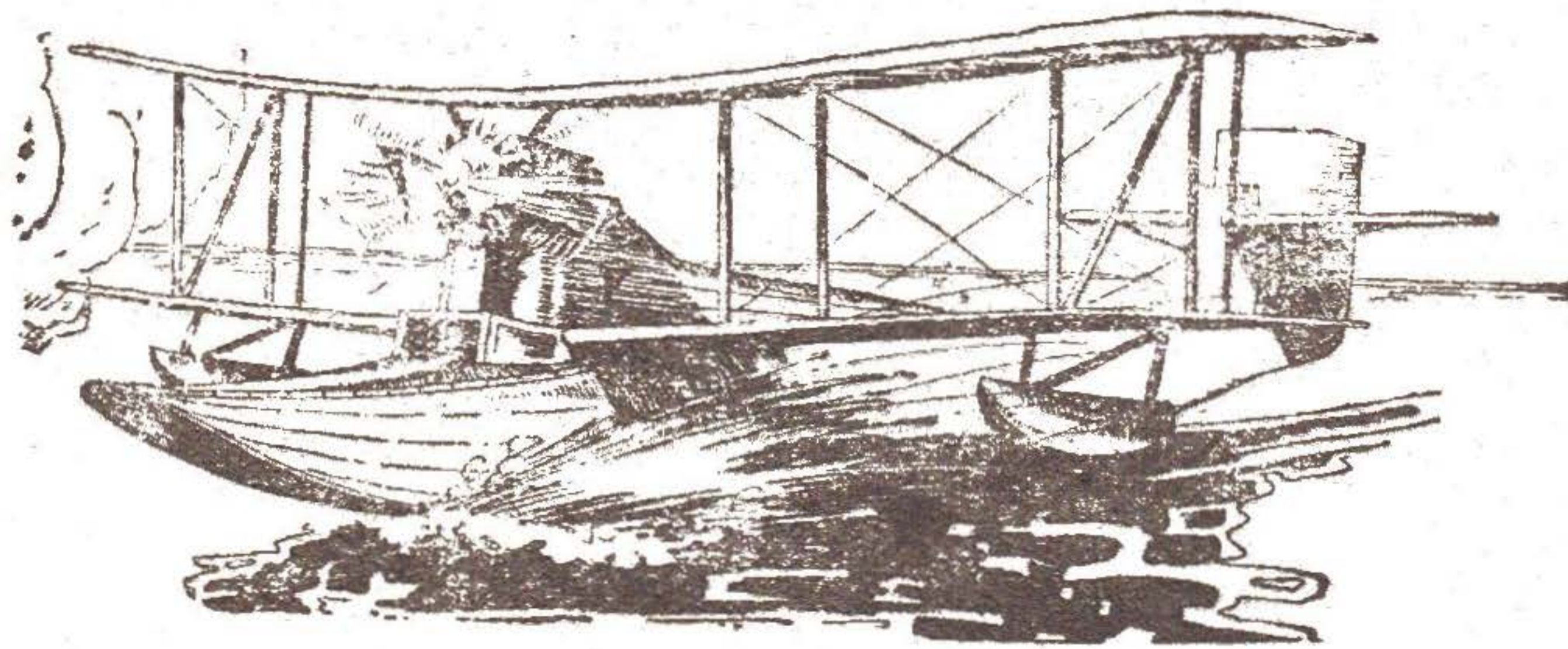
That meant one thing to the nurse—appendicitis!

She lowered the seat to a reclining position, erected a temporary screen around him and made him as comfortable as possible. There was no ice on the ship but there was plenty of ice cream. She rigged up an ice bag and stuffed it with the ice cream. Placing this on the patient's side, she went forward to the pilot's cockpit and reported that they had an emergency case and it would be necessary to remove him at the next landing.

The pilot immediately got into radio communication with the field, told the field manager of the emergency and asked that he have an ambulance and physician waiting. The plane landed ten minutes later, the patient was removed to the ambulance and rushed to the hospital where he underwent the operation.

The company has a letter on file of which they are very proud. It is from the doctor who performed the operation praising the foresight and skill of the nurse-stewardess and stating that her prompt action had, in all probability, saved the man's life.

The stewardess is the newest of women's professions. The girls are all proud of their positions and are striving for public recognition. As yet, there are only about 200 of them but they have been such a success that it appears other companies will soon employ them.



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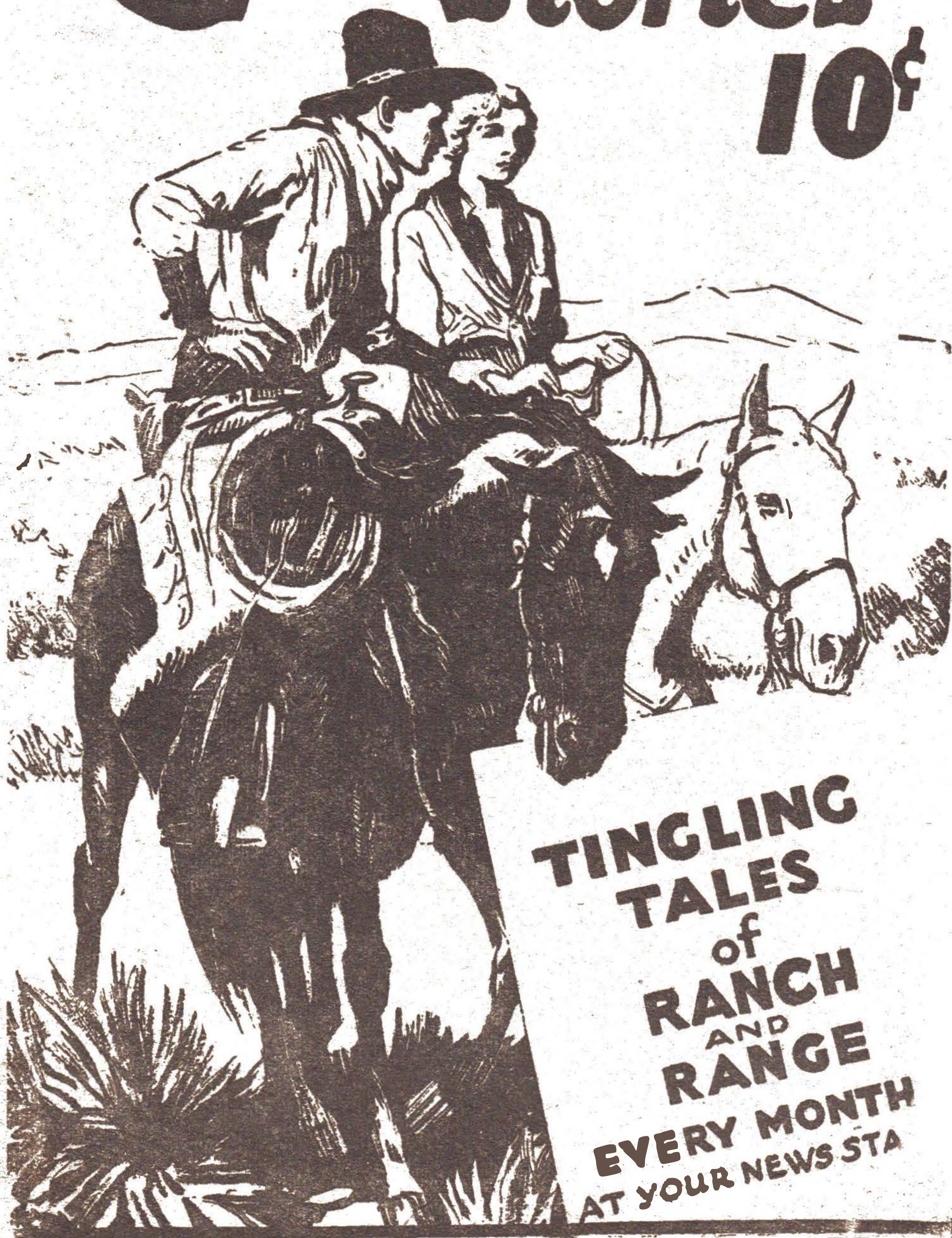
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