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# DARE-DEVIL ACES



**DEATH FLIES WEST**  
*GREAT NOVEL OF WAR WINGS*  
by **JOE ARCHIBALD**

**THE WARHAWKS ARE COMING!**  
by **DAVID GOODIS**  
*KERMIT-RIGONI AND MANY OTHERS*



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FOR POTS AND PANS

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COVER ENTIRE  
TOP

NO CRACKS  
OR  
CREVICES  
TO CATCH  
DIRT

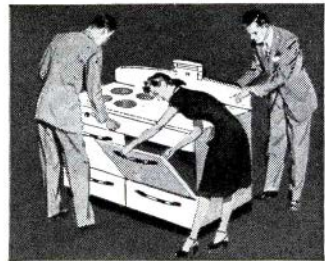
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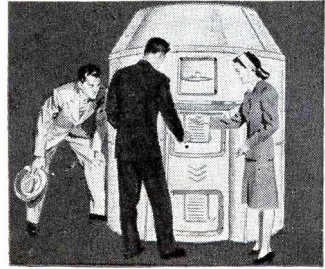


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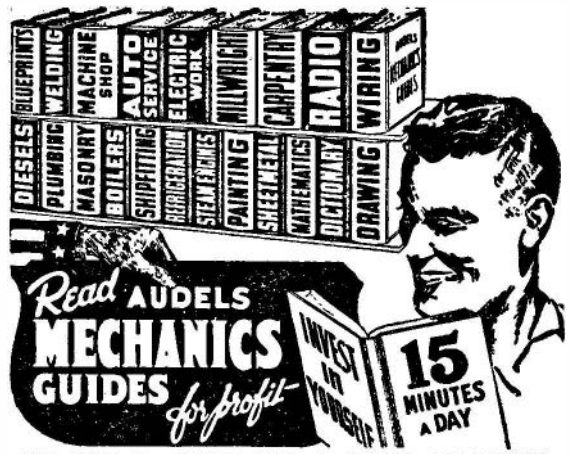
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# DARE-DEVIL ACES

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Complete

Vol. 33

Contents for May, 1946

No. 4

### Two Gripping Air Novels

- DEATH FLIES WEST**.....**Joe Archibald** 8  
"This ain't a movie you're playing in now, hero, and when those Zeros slap you with slugs, there won't be any retakes. Out here, you git—or get got!"
- TRADITION**.....**Orlando Rigoni** 28  
In the Jap-held skies of China, the last of the fighting Brands flew out alone on his fateful mission, with the bitter toast of hell's own squadron in his ears: "Some men choose to die in glory—while rats like you live in shame!"

### Two Novelettes of War-Torn Skies

- THE WARHAWKS ARE COMING**.....**David Goodis** 54  
All he had to fight the greatest Jap offensive of the war was a green and yellow sports jacket, a battered Warhawk—and a girl who'd already signed her treachery in the blood of China's patriots!
- INTRUDER RAID**.....**Stuart Friedman** 74  
When even the grim rules of war are tossed aside, and you think your best pal has sold out to the Nazis, here's one way to check on his loyalty—put your life in his hands.

### Thrilling Air War Short Stories

- THE ACE FROM DOWN UNDER**.....**Robert Sidney Bowen** 22  
An apt nickname for a flying fool—who was heading straight to hell!
- MADEMOISELLE MUSTANG**.....**Lance Kermit** 43  
Side by side in those flaming, flak-torn skies over Normandy rode Danny Carr and the fighting ghost, who showed him that some things, like love and hate—and red-blood courage—never die.
- EAGLE-HEARTED**.....**Logan C. Claybourne** 83  
Out into the grim gray skies of death went this fantastic little chicken—with the slashing talons of a warhawk and the blood of eagles in his wings!

### Departments

- THE HOT AIR CLUB**.....**Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg** 6  
Shootin' the breeze with the inimitable Uncle Nosey.
- STORY BEHIND THE COVER**.....**Frederick Blakeslee** 73  
Yankee wings over Italy.
- AIR HEROES**.....**Lee** 52  
Wing Commander Gibson—Dam Buster!

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# How to Fight the Menace of FIRE

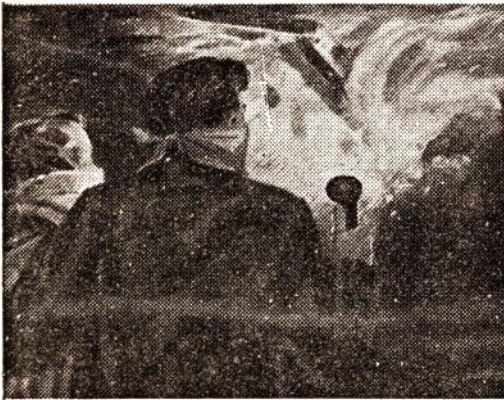
...A Wet Towel and a Flashlight may save your life!  
—says the National Safety Council



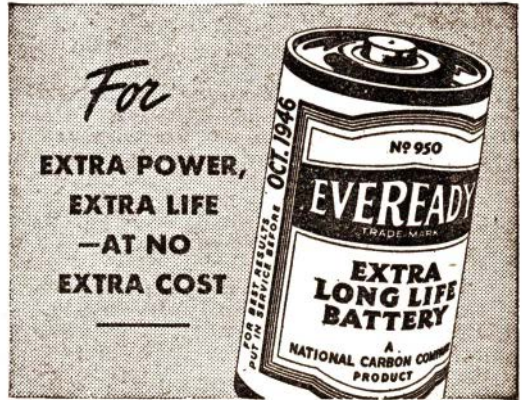
**1** Fire is always dangerous—especially dangerous at night, when you may be asleep. And most fires do occur at night! If you smell smoke, reach for your "Eveready" flashlight first. Feel doors before opening them, for a single breath of fiery air can kill you! If a door is hot, don't open it!



**2** Wet a towel or cloth; cover your face and arms. Close doors to reduce drafts that may fan the flames. If heat is severe, remember that heat rises—crawl! If trapped on upper floor, make a rope of bedclothes. As a last resort only, throw out a mattress and jump down onto it.



**3** To avoid danger, you have to see it—so keep your flashlight with you until you're safe! Watch for collapsing ceilings... But the best way to avoid fire is to prevent it! Your flashlight—with fresh "Eveready" Batteries—gives a much better light than matches or a candle, and it's much safer too!



**4** To help fight fire—or for any flashlight need—rely on "Eveready" Batteries. Ask your dealer for them by name. The days when you had to accept "second choice" batteries—or none—are past. "Eveready" Batteries have no equal—that's why they're the biggest-selling flashlight batteries in the world!

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## Conducted by Nosedive Ginsburg

**P**ULL up your over-stuffed ottomans, chums, and gather around our sumptuous office while old Uncle Ginsy peals off his imported sealskin vest and gets to the business of the day.

Our mail bag is particularly large and odoriferous this trip, so Louie and I will spare our priceless bon mots and let you fellows pretty much have the floor (that's all right for you, Louie says, but I have to clean it up afterwards.)

We give you first that paragon of insulting phrases—Samuel Pell, 110 Mary Street, W., Lindsay, Ontario.

“Liebchen Gut-ripper:

Well, I've just finished your Feb. issue of D.D.T., oh sorry, I meant D.D.A., and I was sure suprised to find nobody gave youse any credit on your Jan. magazine. I've been reading D.D.A. for two years and I have not read any better ones, yet, no fooling. Except for Shotwell's "Dead-End Ace," everything was O.K. Ray had better perk up some.

My two cents have been drawn into the slot and I am going to proceed. First, I want more stories like Archibald's "Lost Flight," because it's at least a change, and Joe's was damn good. Also, how 'bout some stories in the Spanish Civil War or in the rebellations in China or Java.

Also, I've got a farthing left so its disappearing. In them highhat stories, when Zeke is about to shoot down, Nospikyvankee, let Jake, a rookie mentioned perhaps twice come down and spill the beans.

Keep up both "The Story behind the cover" and "Air Heroes." Congratulate Blakeslee for me. I never knew he could draw that good. As for those "Air Heroes," how about using World War I and II men in it. Don't make it all Allied either.

I'd like some more stories like "The Ace from the Main Stem" written by Dennis Maribeaux 'way back in October of '45. She was a super one, no kiddin'.

Here, Ginsy my pal (ha, ha) is a prayer you used to say back in '18 and way down here we can still hear you say it when you're sleeping—

“Lay me down to go to sleep,  
With a case of beer at me feet.  
A bottle of gin, and whisky too,  
And if you'll send me these, mom  
I'll love you. . . .”

Well, since it's eleven o'clock P.M., I may as well scam out of here. But I must enclose a picture of what I think is in your nut.

Your properleapsucker  
Your exhaust funnel man  
SAMUEL PELL

P.S. Do you want any more authors. I could dream up some good eyestrain.

S.P.

\$5.00 in War Stamps to you, Pell old man, never let it be said that a Ginsburg is not big enough to forgive and forget.

By the way, scatterbrains, you fellows better put your street addresses on your letters. We had to throw out two prize-winning jobs because we couldn't find where said geniuses hailed from.

And now we give you John Spalding, 709 Oakes Blvd., San Leandro, Calif., who comes out of an eight-day meditation with the following little gem.

Dear Nosey,

Well was I surprised when one dreary day I strolled into the local pill parlor and saw staring me in the nose (you know darn well what I mean) a copy of D.D.A. Where have you been so long? After fighting my way out of the crowd that had gathered (the smell again) I proceeded to read it from cover to cover.

I was very glad to see some of my old favorites, Bowen, Shotwell, Rigoni and Archi-

(Continued on page 27)

# ILL WIND FOR MATT, UNTIL...



WITH HIS SHOW STORM-BOUND, MATT HALE, YOUNG OWNER OF HALE'S MAMMOTH CIRCUS EFFECTS A THRILLING RESCUE



YOU TOOK A TALL CHANCE. MATT, PUT HER ON THE LOUNGE

OKAY, DOC. SHE'S YOUR PATIENT



YOU'RE A LUCKY GIRL. NOT A SCRATCH

THE STORM'S OVER... BUT WHAT A MESS. WE'LL WORK ALL NIGHT IF WE HAVE A SHOW TOMORROW



WAS THAT NEW AERIALIST ON THE MIDNIGHT TRAIN?

THAT'S ONE ON YOU MATT. SHE'S THE GIRL YOU PULLED FROM THE CAR



SHOW TIME

YOU'RE A PLUCKY KID — SURE YOU CAN DO YOUR STUFF?

OH, I'M OKAY NOW... THANKS TO YOU

NOT MUCH TIME TO CLEAN UP, MR. HALE. "SPEC" STARTS IN 15 MINUTES



SOME BLADE, PIKE! MOST REFRESHING SHAVE I EVER HAD!

THAT'S A THIN GILLETTE. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY-SHAVING

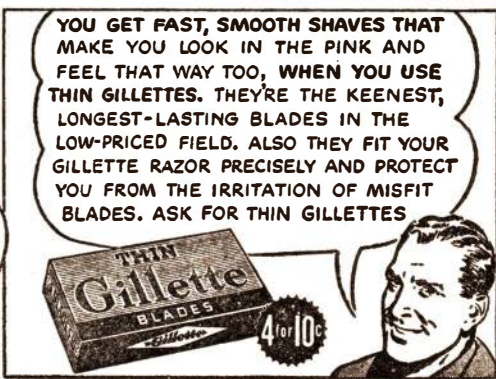


YOUNG LADY, YOU'RE TERRIFIC. CONSIDER YOURSELF ONE OF US

I THINK I'M GOING TO LIKE THIS SHOW

MY HE'S SWELL-LOOKING

A THIN GILLETTE SHAVE DOES A LOT FOR A MAN



YOU GET FAST, SMOOTH SHAVES THAT MAKE YOU LOOK IN THE PINK AND FEEL THAT WAY TOO, WHEN YOU USE THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICED FIELD. ALSO THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY AND PROTECT YOU FROM THE IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES



*"This ain't a movie you're playing in now, hero, and when those Zeros slap you with slugs, there won't be any retakes. Out here, you git—or get got!"*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Flat-Top Graveyard

THREE years in Uncle Sam's Air Force, two of which had been spent hopping on and off the giant carrier, *Gettysburg*, had not noticeably affected Monte Prahl's style as a top-flight newspaper man. Before Pearl Harbor, Monte was the guy who generally went out and got a story when everyone else had failed. Two months after putting his fruit salad into the civilian ice-box, he'd gone out to pick up a story that proved embarrassing to the F.B.I. and most of his contemporaries.

Monte sat in his office, high up in the Seattle *Post-Chronicle* Building, dictating his latest beat to a capable-looking secretary.

"Correction, Miss Jamison," Monte said, crushing out the stub of a cigarette. "Cross out the last paragraph. Start it this way: Brischtein, even as agents of the F.B.I. searched high and low for him for almost a year, appeared in small parts for RKM Pictures, under the name of Peter Brunn. This

Nazi, sought as a suspect in the Aberdeen Arsenal explosion in 1941, was in the company of Pola Benescu, Czech actress, when arrested."

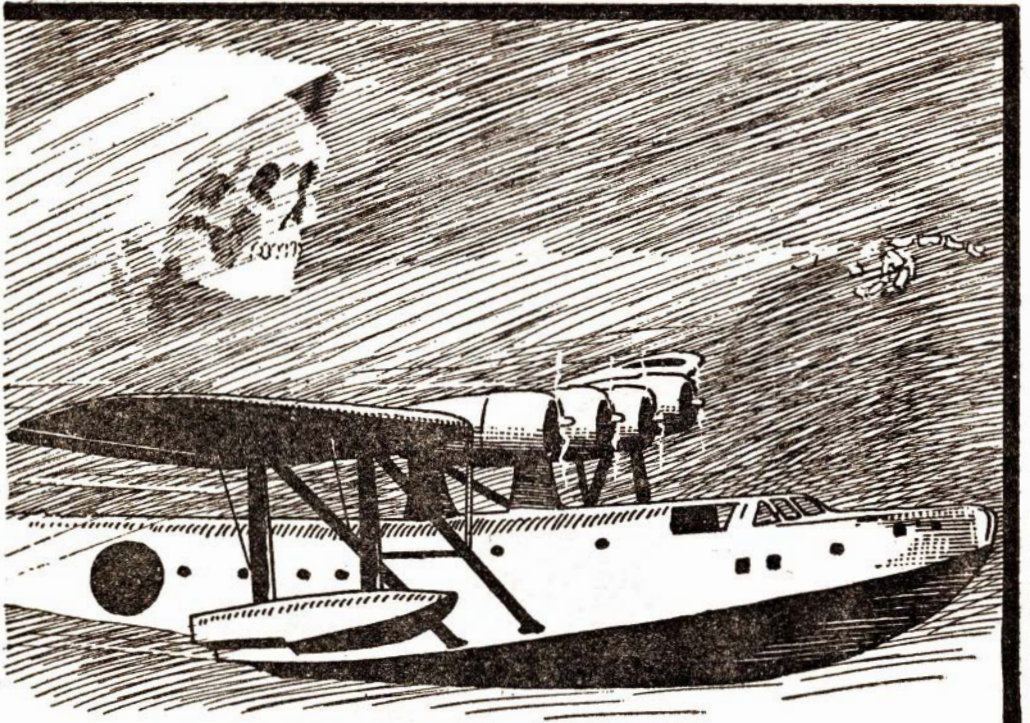
"That's better," Miss Jamison said. "How did you ever break the story before anyone else?"

Prahl said, "Maybe because after what I've been through, anything else seems easy. After the tight spots I've wormed out of, anything is possible. And I got the tipoff that Pola was a pushover, after two cocktails containing certain ingredients. You got to know the angles."

Miss Jamison's pretty mouth lost its softness. Jealousy was in her eyes when she snapped her notebook shut. When Monte grinned, her temper kicked over the traces.

"Perhaps you did not order the right drinks when you tried to find out who murdered Norma Tashman," Miss Jamison snapped. "The public let it drop because a war came and made them forget. Even you—" The color faded from her cheeks for a moment and she got up hurriedly. "I'm sorry, Monte. If that was a sore spot, I—"





*A Great Novel  
of War Wings*

By *JOE ARCHIBALD*

"Yeah," Prahl said. He crossed to his desk and got a bottle out of the bottom drawer. "Touché, Sister," he said. "You got me with that burst." Miss Jamison shut the door softly behind her.

Monte Prahl poured himself a stiff drink. After downing it, he felt as if another was needed. Miss Jamison's words kept repeating inside his head. He put the bottle back and went over to his chair, to stare out over Seattle's skyline. The traffic roar boiled up from the street, a confused sound that poignantly reminded him of days on *The Gettysburg*, with *Condition, Zed*. He thought of men he had flown with, some living and some dead. He could hear the chatter of heavy machine guns, the crazy sounds made by the Jap airplane engines knifing through the scream of Hellcat powerplants, the bursting of A.A. shells, and the faraway dull crumping of naval guns. He looked down on Truck again, on Palau and the Marianas. He told himself he was one of the best newspaper men in the business, and that if he so chose, within the next few hours, could turn loose a story that would come very near to rivalling the affects of the first atomic bomb.

Before the war a big man had told him that a good newspaper reporter got the facts and wrote them as he saw them, unmindful of those who happened to be involved. The story came first; personalities were secondary. The human equation did not enter into the matter at all.

You hewed to the line with a vengeance and let the chips fall where they may.

Men like John Freely—owner and publisher of the *Post-Chronicle*—had never seen Hellcats shot down, Prahl mused, as he considered another drink. Freely had never seen men risk their necks to save another. You pile up a few debts in a war if you stay around long enough; you never forget seeing a guy climb aboard a burning plane to drag a bleeding pilot out of his office, knowing he is racing a ribbon of fire licking toward the high oc-tane. . . .

Monte Prahl went over and got the bottle out again, for he was sorely tempted. Yeah, he knew something that was worth at least a raise of two grand a year. It was locked up inside his head, and when he was tempted to bring it out, he thought of the ugly, healed scar near his ribs.

The afternoon was waning. Monte looked out at the sky with its fleecy clouds, his mind going back—going back. A bird skimmed high over the tower of a tall building and began to circle. From a roof not far away—a flat top—a pigeon took off, and three others followed. Monte Prahl let himself drift back. . . .



THE GETTYSBURG was off the Florida Islands and had released her Douglas SBDs and escorting Grumman Wildcats. The planes were striking at Tulagi, and from where Monte sat in on the show, the carrier was but a speck on the far horizon. A dive-bomber was in trouble below him, trying to get back up after helping to smash hell out of Jap installations. A Zero was making swift and deadly passes at the Douglas. Prahl went down, spurring the Wildcat. He closed in on the Nip's tail, and the Shinto pilot pulled up steeply, did a split S and came down on the Wildcat. Monte had followed right up after the Jap and now both fighters were coming in on a collision course. *A suicide try*, Monte thought, but he held to his position and pressed the firing key.

The Zero's guns were squirting, too. Bullets raked the sides of his little greenhouse, jarring the Cat from nose to tail. The Jap plane hopped upward like a frightened duck, and it was smoking. Prahl heard the explosion as he stalled out of a quick climb. He saw the Zero, with a wing snapped off, spiraling down toward the sea. Black puff balls broke up around the Wildcat, and the Yank pilot felt scraps of the heavy stuff bong against the sides of the Grumman. He got out of range of the muck, winged over and took a crack at a twin-engined bomber glued to the ground.

Tulagi harbor was taking a pasting. Great columns of smoke boiled up, the stink of it fouling Prahl's throat and nose. SBDs poured it on, the crews remembering Pearl Harbor and Bataan. Off to the left a Wildcat blazed and the pilot bailed out. A Jap scorched down and began target practice on the figure dangling from the white canopy, so Monte Prahl teamed up with another Grumman and boxed the law-breaking Nip in a death trap that left both man and plane in scattered pieces. The remaining Japs rid themselves of the sky as quick as their heathen gods would let them and the Wildcats started back to the flat-top.

Three Wildcats had been shot down in his line of vision. There may have been more; there must have been a score of Zeroes over Tulagi. Fighter Five needed replacements. They had been taking it the past two weeks. He easily located the carrier, went in on her

deck for a routine landing. The man with the paddles had to jump for the nets when Mike Dawn, Lieutenant (jg) lost a wheel and jumped the arresting gear. The Wildcat slid against the Island and threw away part of a wing. Mike had to be helped out of his cockpit. One of his legs was bleeding.

Down in Ready Room 3, there was a confusion of talk and a lot of healthy griping. Pilots kept coming in, back from their runs, and the squadron commander had to wait until nerves loosened a bit and talk stretched thin.

"A nice plane, that Wildcat," Monte said. "For a starter. I got me a couple of the slant-eyes! When are we getting some pilots? Any news from Johnny Burnell? That dirty Nip went after him when he hit the silk—"

The squadron commander grinned. "You get a look at the Wildcat I brought back? It should have fallen apart ten miles from this flat-top." He suddenly became grim when he looked at a kid who was crying. He had come all the way from Corpus Christi with Johnny Burnell.

The ensign got control of himself. "I don't think he was alive when he hit the water. He hung from the shroud lines like a dead weight."

"Those *sukiyaki* fiends play for keeps," Monte said. "They went nuts when they saw what the SBDs did to their shipping at Tulagi." He set his teeth. "The dirty lice-bound scum! Up to now I thought there might've been a human being among them. Wait'll I get one under an umbrella!"

A week later, the new pilots came aboard. *The Gettysburg* was churning through the water, turning into the wind. Monte Prahl stood near the forward rail, where he could hear the angry swish of the bow waves. He watched the fly-catcher, Eddie Mustine, signal to the circling Grummans with his paddles. The flag on the Air Control Station warned the pilots that the carrier was not quite ready to take them on. In a little while, the flag was replaced and a booming voice came from the bull-horn loud speaker:

"Land planes!"

A Wildcat charged in and Eddie Mustine flung himself on all-fours to escape the swooping wing. The Grummans hit the deck, caught the arresting hook and jarred to a stop.

"Hook down—wheels down—flaps down!" yelled the signal officer's check-up man as each Grumman pilot announced that he was ready to land.

"That one will never make it," Monte said. "Too low. Sure, they waved him off. I'll never forget the first time I put one down. It was a Wildcat all right."

They kept coming in. No. 7 was a little high and hit the deck violently. He bounced, came down with a force that must have shaken his

teeth loose, but jerked to a stop. The pilot got out and grinned a little ruefully. Monte PrahI nudged Ensign Frankie Mosser and sucked in his breath. "That guy is familiar. Tall and stringy with nice white teeth—a ringer for—say, that *is* Gary Tashman!"

"Tashman?" Mosser choked out. "The movie actor? Come to think of it, Monte—I remember now. He joined the air corps—there were a lot of pictures in the magazines."

"Came to the right place to forget," a Wildcat pilot said, coming up. "The Japs can take a guy's past and bury it quick."

Monte PrahI said, "Don't ever bring it up. Not ever." He wished he could crawl in through Tashman's eyes and explore the brain inside that famous head. Maybe there was an answer there to something a real newspaper man would sell his very soul to get. Tashman walked past, talking to the squadron commander. Monte shook his head. He had talked to Gary Tashman four years ago, and the guy seemed to have known from nothing. Moreover, the movie star had furnished an alibi. He had been eighty miles away at the time of Nora Tashman's murder.

Later that day, with the big carrier knifing her way out to sea, Monte PrahI settled into a chair in the wardroom directly opposite Lieutenant Tashman. The man who had a million members of the distaff side slightly off the beam, betrayed surprise and not a little displeasure.

"PrahI," he said, extending his hand and searching the newspaperman's eyes. "Rather different setting, isn't it? I believe when we met the last couple of times, they were not exactly friendly visits."

"Right," Monte said. "And when you get out on one of these sets, there won't be a re-take, Tashman." He grinned. "You do it the first time or you don't. You get or git got, as we say out here."

"I'm well aware of the risk involved, Lieutenant," Tashman said softly. "I'll try not to ham it up."

"Look, Tashman," Frankie Mosser said. "I got a girl back in Keokuk who swoons when she hears you on the radio. I get your autograph and I don't need to worry about a certain feather merchant no more. What a break!"

Gary Tashman laughed. It was a nice laugh. All the tension went with it, and Monte PrahI hastened to assure the new pilot that as far as he was concerned nothing which had taken place before the war counted aboard *The Gettysburg*. "We're glad to have you with us, Lieutenant," he said. "I'm sure I speak for the entire squadron." He paused momentarily. "By the way, how does it feel to smooch with LaBarr?"

"Not as glamorous as you think," Tashman

said. PrahI noticed a kind of shadow pass across the actor's face. It was as if a mask had dropped down into place. The new pilot became silent, and talk drifted to other channels. Monte PrahI guessed that a man could not soon forget losing a wife like the beautiful Norma Tashman. They always said she had a hair-trigger temper and it had made her husband's life anything but a steady, happy song; Gary Tashman had not been the glamorous star's first. There had been a guy with royal blood in his veins. He had come from Denmark and he had given her a bracelet worth a hundred thousand dollars. The bracelet had been missing from her wrist when her body was found in the parked sedan in Beverly Hills. The motive, according to the majority of investigators, was robbery.

That night, Gary Tashman found out that this was it. With the other pilots of Lieutenant-Commander Joe Aagsman's Fighter Five, the movie idol got last minute instructions in Ready Room 3. He was up at 0630 hours, getting into flying gear. During the night, *The Gettysburg's* high speed had brought her close to the Coral Sea. The morning was clear, save for patches of clouds that strung high across the sky. Above them was a haze ideal for attacking planes.

Fighter Five was ready to take the SBDs over Rabaul. The capture of this objective would mean an advanced base for the operations against Truk. The carrier turned into the wind and the first bomber took off. At regularly spaced intervals, other planes followed and soon, over Rabaul, Fighter Five was establishing contact with Jap Zeroes. PrahI saw Tashman go in at them first, with no more hesitation than if he had been doing this for Zanuck, and not Nimitz or Halsey. During the few seconds in which he had time to think of other skins besides his own, PrahI saw a Zero zoom for altitude, and wondered if Tashman was hep to the trick. The Zeroes could climb 4000 feet a minute and their pilots always prayed that an enemy pilot would stay on their tail. If they did, they would suddenly flop over backwards at the top of their climb and come diving down at the hapless Yank when he had almost stalled, and was easy meat.

"Watch it, guy!" Monte yelled, just before he engaged a Nip of his own. But Tashman had anticipated the Zero's maneuver, and he gave it a quick, vicious burst as it commenced its climb. His bullets hit the Nip in a vital spot. It began to burn. PrahI grinned and weaved a torrid path through a swarm of Zeroes to duck into a cloud. Coming out of the great goblet of vapor, he almost ran into the teeth of a plane splashed with meatballs. He pressed the firing key just before he pulled the Wildcat's nose up. There was a violent concussion behind him. He felt its hot

breath, and the Grumman nearly whooshed up and over on its back.

Rabaul retched fire and heavy columns of smoke. Tracers spit down through the blanket of anti-aircraft bursts and fired planes that could not get off the ground. The bombers wheeled away from the objective when they had unloaded, and the crazed Jap Zero pilots fell prey to the cool and calculating Wildcats as they tried to knife down to smash the SBDs. Off to Prahls left a Grumman broke a Zero to bits. He knew it was Tashman's Wildcat. He could hear the movie man verbally marking the kill.

"Lights! Camera!" Prahls roared. "The guy is a six star production. The critics will rave!"

The planes flew back to the carrier, some of them riddled. Three failed to return.

Gary Tashman found himself plenty solid with the Wildcat pilots. For several days afterwards, with the task force moving steadily, relentlessly nearer to the big Nip bases in the Gilberts, he had proven himself a nemesis to Jap planes. A war correspondent wrote him up: Tashman, idol of American film fans, had proved himself adequate in battle! Throughout the big carrier, men talked of pictures Tashman had made. Frankie Mosser recalled the guy's technique in *Isle of Dreams*. It had been his favorite.

"There was a brown-skinned babe in it," the pilot said. "What a honey! I've seen her in a couple of pictures. They said she was the real McCoy, no sun-tanned siren from East St. Louis. Boy, if they ever knock me down, I hope I find the island where she—"

"Paleeta was the name," a chunky cigar-smoking SBD pilot said. "Just Paleeta. Watchin' Tashman in that one, you got an idea he wasn't foolin'."

"You can say that again," Prahls cut in. "I remember his wife played the lead with him. And she wasn't actin' when she caught him with the native dame behind the bamboo hut. They didn't have to shoot that scene more than once, I'll bet my next Jap."

"Blow it," a man said quickly.

Tashman came in. He seemed to be studying the faces around him for a moment. Then he sat down. He made no effort to open the conversation. Prahls broke the uncomfortable silence. "We were talking about some of your pictures, Lieutenant. Guess you miss Hollywood."

The pilot's head snapped up. "Certainly, Prahls. Don't you miss a city room?"

"Yeah, there was so much excitement there. So dead around here, Tashman."

The movie star grinned. It was a brief change of aspect. He immediately became expressionless and appeared to be thinking deeply. "Prahls," he said, at length, "how

many Jap planes do you figure a guy should knock off so he can really say he's done his job?"

"Huh?" It was Frankie Mosser who answered the unexpected question. "I'd say eight or nine, Tashman. If every pilot and gunner in the Pacific could shoot down that many, the war wouldn't last too long."

"I have about four to go," Tashman said. He got up and walked out, and Prahls sought desperately to analyze the strange hungry look in the movie idol's eyes. Perhaps it was something more malignant than hunger. It certainly must have been hard to take, losing a beautiful creature like Norma Tashman. Maybe Tashman did not care to live too long without her, and it would be easy enough to let a Zero get in close—after Tashman had made sure he had done his share. . . .

"Nice, being a big shot," Cal Purcell said in his Vermont nasal twang. "He's got a pull around here, can get anywhere. They say he's a nut on maps. Sparks told me the guy hangs around Flag Plot a lot."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Curtain Time



NE morning, a peek out of the Island's exit, showed Prahls a beautiful clear sky, exactly the kind that every man in the fleet would have gladly gone without, for an aircraft carrier is safest when running through heavy weather. Not far away was a Jap task force. Scouts had taken the air just before daylight. An hour had gone by without a word from them. On the *Gettysburg* there was an air of grim expectancy. They stood to general quarters in all departments.

At 1810 hours, a scout radioed a contact report. He had flown his ninety degree cross-leg and about thirty miles of his return course when he had spotted the Nips.

"Two big carriers, five heavy cruisers, escorting destroyers, bearing 120 degrees, about twenty knots. Position, 160 miles, roughly northeast!"

The pilots swarmed to the ready room and deck crews began warming the motors. The whole ship was instantly alert. It was "*Condition Zed*." Every water-tight door and hatch was bolted down. All but one Scout returned to the *Gettysburg*. Lieutenant Burt was out there in a spot, alone. His job was to stay alive as long as was possible and cover the Jap fleet.

It was not until 0900 hours that the Admiral ordered the planes of his force launched. The pilots ran to their planes. The *Gettysburg* sent an attacking force of 12 torpedo planes,

ten dive bombers, four scout bombers and eleven fighters to cope with the Nip power.

Monte Prah! checked with the plane captain, got the officer's help with the parachute straps. The torpedo planes and dive bombers were already in the air when he tripped the starter and opened the throttle. Wildcats took off with no slipping, no loss of speed. The flight deck flashed away from under Prah!'s wheels, and he was in the air, taking a wide turn and gradually throwing his Grumman into a steep climb.

Fighter Five's planes, approaching the area where the enemy fleet was steaming along, began to clip along the tops of piled clouds. Here they intercepted the first wave of Jap fighters—wide-ranging Nips who formed the outer defensive screen of the enemy. Zeroes seemed to materialize from all directions. Monte Prah! and three Grumman pilots found themselves in a life-and-death struggle against heavy odds. Always, it seemed, a Zero was making a run at Prah!. He evaded the attack of one and jumped on its tail, set it on fire with a short burst. He was wheeling away from the kill when he heard bullets whip-lash the Wildcat and shake it like a rat in a terrier's jaws. Hell, you couldn't watch all the yellow devils! It was not possible to beat the bony guy forever at a dice-shaking game.

He heard Tashman yelling just as he felt the blow at his side. His vision dimmed for a few breathless smoments, and the Wildcat went crazy, as if it, too, felt the pain.

*This has happened to me. I always said it could only happen to other guys.*

His vision suddenly cleared. He got the Grumman under control, wondering what had happened to the little yellow executioner. He heard voices in his ears. "Hogue, there's a Jap behind you! That Nip cruiser is afire! Agnes to Cora—thanks for the interference. . . .

It was not easy getting back to the carrier. The Wildcat had been sorely stung. Two of its cylinders were cold, and oil pressure was down. The Wildcat fought the controls. Prah! came down out of the cloud haze and saw a bomb hit flush on a Jap carrier's deck. The Nip fleet was scattering, throwing more smoke than should come out of their funnels.

Three Zeros came down from above and overshot. Two Grummans appeared to help Prah!, just in time. Bullets peppered him; one passed through the oxygen tube against his forearm and got it smoking. He heard Tashman's voice. "Eight!" the man yelled. Prah! rode high over a pillar of sea water sent up by a shell, and lined up the *Gettysburg*. Hoses wriggled across her decks and there was wreckage near the Island. Down there, overhead, and all around the carrier raged an inferno. A corner of hell had moved in and

Prah! took the Wildcat down through it. He nearly missed a smearing along with a Jap twin-engined bomber that hit astern with a hissing crackling roar. He came on in, hit hard, and almost went overside. He caved in just after he cut the ignition.

He was down below, on the operating table, when he got his bearings. They were getting ready to knock him out again.

"Easy, we've got to get that bullet out from under a rib," the surgeon said. "Just take a nice deep breath, Lieutenant."

The man's words trailed off as Prah! sucked in ether. The sounds of the battle raging outside fled to a great distance, and soon all was black and silent.

Many hours later, Frankie Moss came into the sick bay. "We beat the Nips off, Monte, but we took a clubbing. I guess you heard about Mike Dawn and Gary Tashman. Three are missing."

"Gone? Tashman gone, Frankie? How did he get it?"

"Don't know," Mosser said. "So many things happened out there all at once. He must have gone down and under, Monte. He never came back."

"A nice guy," Prah! said, a lump in his throat. "I guess he didn't mind so very much, kid. You remember what she was like in technicolor, with that auburn hair and those bluish-green eyes. I guess the guy never got over seeing her in the morgue. She was shot, Frankie, and whoever killed her got the bracelet the Count gave her. They never could locate it, but if they ever do, they'll know who killed her. There were three suspects, including the Count. She threw him over for Tashman—"

"They get in the worst mix-ups in Hollywood," Frankie said. "You know he knocked a couple of Nips off your tail. It would have been bad for you if he hadn't been around."

"It was him?" Monte asked. "I wondered why the Jap didn't finish me."

"The guy was a real star, Monte. Took the real thing in stride, just as though it was only make-believe. A lot of dames are going to be weepy when they get the news."

"How soon do I fly again, Frankie? You heard?"

"Couple months. You lucky stiff."

"You are a liar and you know it, Frankie."

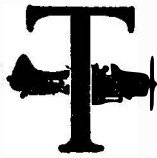
They waited for Gary Tashman another two or three days before they gathered up his things. In the quarters Tashman had shared with a pilot from Ohio, Prah! and Mosser went to work. They found a well-thumbed atlas, which Mosser opened. "Look here," he pointed out. "Flowers crushed between the pages. There's a kind of smell to them, like you get near a grave when the floral pieces begin to fade."

Prahl sat down on the other bunk and said nothing. Lines of perplexity furrowed his brow.

Mosser said, "Don't let it get you."

"It's nothin'," Monte said. "I'm just trying to remember something. . ."

Later, in the wardroom, Monte Prahl wondered if Mosser had noticed a very strange fact. There had not been a picture of Norma Tashman in the pilot's personal belongings. Not a single picture. Well, Prahl mused, sometimes when a hurt is deep enough, you want nothing around to make you keep thinking back, and make the wound deeper. He was sure of one thing. When the war was over, he would go on the hunt again, and find a killer. That much he owed to Tashman's memory.



HE WAR went on. The American flags were flying on outposts to Truk that once had been held by the Nips. They had Hellcats on the carriers now. The actions around Rabaul and the Gilberts now belonged to history. There was very little time in which to think of the long list of dead. The fleet was creeping closer toward mighty Truk, the Jap key base in the concentric circle of defense thrown around Tojo's mainland. Truk was shrouded in a blanket of secrecy and few white men had ever seen it. Its defenses were unknown until two Marine photo-recon planes took off from the Solomons and managed to spend nearly a half hour, 25,000 feet over the mighty base. The over-all command of the thrust at Truk streamlined the great task force which took Kwajalein. It was stripped down to a high-speed fleet possessing heavy striking power. *The Gettysburg* was included in the complement of aircraft carriers. One February morning, on board the flat-top, ten hours flying time from Tokio, the tension of the approaching raid was visible. Shadowy figures hurried down blue-lit passageways, pulling on their flying gear as they went.

"This is the super-production, Monte," a kid from the Ozarks said. "This is big! We're hitting Truk. This is shore as hell goin' to be different than the kind of truckin' I used to know!"

"Yeah," Monte said, his throat dry. He wondered how much time he was borrowing now. He thought back over the months to Gary Tashman and knew the guy would have liked this.

There was an incessant shriek of warning sirens as elevators pumped the fighting planes to the deck, their shiny plungers refracting cylinders of light. Overhead on the catwalks and through the galleries, gnomish figures hurried through their appointed tasks. Monte

Prahl went up the ladder to the Island and looked at the skies of early dawn. Then his eyes wandered to where the handling crews were wheeling the Hellcats to prearranged positions. Other pilots kept pouring onto the flight deck. The bullhorn was giving orders. "Start engines!"

There were noises like bunches of fire-crackers being touched off as the motors went into action. Yellow flames shot from the exhausts and they soon changed to fiery plumes of blue as the engines warmed.

"Engines off!"

The mechanics dropped off the Hellcats, waiting for the pilots to take over. *The Gettysburg* gathered speed; a deep blast from her whistle indicated that she was turning into the wind. The pilots swarmed to the Hellcats. The traffic lights changed from yellow to green and the neon wand began to signal.

The squadron leader was taking off. His plane lifted its tail when there was very little deck left under its scorching wheels. The ship finally faded into the pale light of morning with its wide climbing turn.

Monte Prahl cleared the carrier at approximately 0600 hours. Fighter Five made contact with the Grummans from the other carriers, and soon the Hellcats were around the whole lagoon in a great circle, watching for intercepting Japs. They were riding over Truk at 20,000. Fifteen Zekes fell upon the Hellcats and one of the greatest aerial battles of all wars made the skies over Truk retch and shudder. The Zeros kept coming until Prahl thought Tojo had thrown every last one he possessed into this attempt to hold his precious base.

There were no bombers to protect—it was fighter plane against fighter plane. Tracers threw a weird pattern over the sky, and less than a minute after the action began, planes began to drop out, most of them in flames. Two Zekes flew into Monte Prahl's sights within ten seconds; he shot both of them down. Overhead, just as he was about to turn in under another Nip, a plane blew to bits and sprayed his Hellcat with debris. It was gorging. It was slaughter. The Zekes were being smashed to bits. Parachutes filled the sky and everywhere there were great torches dropping toward the lagoon.

Prahl's brain rocked with the horrible confusion of it all. Hell, how could a man tell how he felt when he was caught in a hellish mess like this. A man fought almost by instinct, wondering, every time he saw a plane burn, if he was going to be next. No words had ever been thought up to fit this kind of business. . . .

A Zeke tried to get on his tail from about eight o'clock; the Jap was scissoring violently and firing short bursts. He fell away quickly,

as if he had seen easier game, and Prah! started down after him. He caught him at about eight thousand feet. "You're my monkey!" He fired, and the Zeke burst into flames.

Hellcats were going low, strafing the Jap planes on a big airfield. This was a Hellcat show. The muck coming up from Truk stopped some of the carrier planes. It slammed into some of the Zekes and kept the retching skies stinking with their bursts. Prah! blacked out after diving on another Jap fighter, and came to at 4000 feet. He climbed quickly to meet a Zeke coming down. Again it looked like a crash, but the Nip rolled over on his back and pulled up. Prah! banked sharply,

started coming around to get at the yellow man, but there was apparently no life in the Zeke's office. The Zero began a right-turn spiral and finally went hurtling down.

Everywhere there was fire and death. Some of the living dangled from shroud-lines and floated down through the maze. Monte Prah! called to Frankie Mosser, but there was too much of a babble in his ears. Japs who could talk English were threatening the Yanks with the tortures of the damned if they dropped down on Truk alive. The pilot from the Ozarks kept yelling as he made his kills. Afterward, a long time afterward, Monte Prah! heard that two hundred Jap planes had been

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destroyed in the sky battle high above Truk.

Monte Prahl went down for a strafing run and heavy ack-ack from the island closed in on him. A shell penetrated his cockpit and exploded, knocking out most of his instruments. Other bursts chewed a wingtip off the Hellcat. He checked frantically as he lifted the crippled Grumman out of there. He had no radio, no compass. At 7000 he headed out over the ocean in the general direction of *The Gettysburg*. He met a formation of Zekes and tried to evade the death that seemed so near. Two other Hellcats screamed down and kept the Zeros busy while he sought shelter in a cloud. Coming out on the other side, he met two more Zekes, managed to get one with a quick burst. The other overshot and Monte Prahl allowed himself a mental lapse that was nearly fatal. A Zero got on his tail, skewering a lot of lead through his office. One heavy-calibre slug creased his temple and for a few sickening moments the Hellcat seemed to fly out from under him and leave him suspended in mid-air, wrapped in a woolly shroud.



RAHL could not see out of his right eye when his senses returned. The bleeding was bad. His goggles were fouled with a red mist. He tried to wipe them clean as he climbed the crippled Hellcat. There was a sickness

in his stomach and his sweat had turned to ice. He fought to keep from going out again, expected at any moment to feel the impact of the stuff that would forever end all wars for him. He wondered if Frankie Mosser had come through it all. He thought of Tashman and a lot of men who had died. Their faces were crystal clear and he guessed that was a bad sign. He thought of the padre and a girl back in Indiana. Her name was Susan. He heard a song cut through the layers of cotton around his brain. *Oh, Susanna, don't you cry for me.* Instinct was carrying him along, the powerful will to survive.

His head cleared a little. He could see the rolling mass of clouds above and slightly ahead of him. They began to take the shape of galloping horses with strange looking warriors perched on their backs. He had to shake himself out of this craziness!

The Hellcat swept up over the cloud mass, into a sky where there was no sign of another plane. He knew he had to get his bearings and find the flat-top or there would be no more aceydeucey in the wardrooms, no more drinks with the guys in that joint back in Seattle. He did not dare look for the warning light that would announce a scarcity of high octane.

Prahl tried not to think of anything that might be going on inside the Hellcat. The engine suddenly missed a beat and he said chok-

ingly, "No, Baby. Not now. Not now!" He nursed the Hellcat down to within two thousand feet of the vast expanse of the Pacific and watched the horizon hungrily, trying to figure out his position. Hell, he knew less than nothing about celestial navigation. There were no landmarks, nothing but the endless sweeps of the sea. The wind whistled through the holes in his office and he wondered if he imagined that the shattered wingtip was trying to tear itself loose.

*Jump before it is too late, Monte! You got a rubber boat and enough rations to keep you alive for a couple of days.*

Sure, if I can get into the lousy boat before the sharks get part of me. No, I'll take this baby with me. We've been together for some time. And somehow, he did not relish bailing out. He wiped some grease from a shattered panel, and wondered why. Men do crazy things when they get close to the dividing line. He checked what instruments were left to him, hoping the Grumman would have every chance to fly just a little bit longer. *Show me Hellcats have nine lives, Baby!*

Monte Prahl rode on, losing all track of time, and storing faces in his memory. Mike Dawn. Gary Tashman. Chip Kennard, a hundred others. He felt very tired and once he dropped off for a few seconds in which time he lived a few hours out of the past. . . .

## CHAPTER THREE

### Encore—Death!

**B**ILL JORY was the kind of managing editor you saw in the movies. He worked in his shirt-sleeves and shewed on poisonous black cigars.

"Monte," Jory said. "I thought you had the stuff to break that Tashman story wide open. No story is impossible to get—you've admitted you're licked!"

"I've tried every angle, Bill," Monte said. "This one will go down as unsolved. I've lived with the cops; I've grilled every guy connected with the case. There isn't an alibi you can break. There are perfect crimes—you know that."

"Never. The secrets come out sooner or later. Maybe years afterward," Jory fumed. "I want to see this one come out before I die. You keep after it, understand? Somebody will die and want to ease their conscience. That bracelet is going to turn up. It's no good to the murderer buried in the ground. That bauble is the key, Monte. Listen, you are still working on that story!"

"Sure," Monte said. "It comes above everything else, Jory."

But something had come that was more im-



portant. A war. Monte Prahl locked his desk and took a hand in it. . . .

THERE WAS still no sign of a little ribbon of smoke on the horizon when the Grumman pilot once more became aware of his perilous position. No thin streak in the distance that told of a spit or a reef. A grim smile played on Prahl's face. When Bill Jory got the word, the man would show some genuine grief for a few moments, then curse the luck that had removed his best reporter.

The engine coughed. Monte Prahl felt the icy fingers claw at his chest. There was little time left. The Hellcat had flown hours longer than it had ever been meant to fly. "Good try, Baby," he said deep in his throat and swiftly estimated the distance between himself and the heaving sea. He knew it was useless but he threw his mixture control to full rich and turned on the electrical fuel pump. It was too late to hit the silk. He settled into his seat and let himself go just as he saw something up ahead on the swiftly sagging horizon.

Monte Prahl stiffened in his seat and wondered if men at sea could see things like mirages. There was a streak of white and behind it a long thin swatch of brown that could have been made with a painter's brush. And there was a faint splash of color beyond that which was the consistency of Hooker's green. He kept staring, abstractedly holding what was left of the Hellcat above the white-capped rollers. He blinked his eyes and the effort hurt him. Opening them again, he saw that the mirage was still before him, and more distinct.

All the elation that one man could hold surged up inside of him. He settled down to fight his way in. Life tasted doubly sweet now that he had nearly let go of it. Divine Providence had thrown him a chance and he got ready to make his try for it.

He could make out the coral reef and the sand-spit behind it, the foliage of an island. He gathered his jaded senses with great effort and came in over the atoll, saw a wavering break in the jungle made by a river. He summoned all of his flying skill for a task that could not last for only a few minutes, and the cylinders of the engine were sucking up the last drops of octane as he timed his approach carefully and with deadly deliberation.

"Keep feeding for a couple of seconds, Baby," he said to the Hellcat. "Papa's in a spot. He's got one chance, Baby. He makes it the first time—or else!"

He went in over the sandspit. The river was wide enough, and by the color of its bed, seemed shallow where it began to empty into the sea. The banks were thick with stinking jungle growth. Some kind of bird wheeled over the tops of the trees, then suddenly dived down out of sight.

The atoll seemed to leap up at him just as the Grumman's horses quit. He had his flaps down and his nose up, killing speed, but the Hellcat had no buoyancy left in it and it slid down to the jungle waterway like a hungry bird that has suddenly spotted fair game. There was just room enough, Prahl thought, before the Grumman hit. It struck with a loud splatting and crackling sound, bounced high and came down on the crippled wing and slowly sank into the dark water. Monte Prahl felt like a suit of dungarees in a mangler. He had made his try, he thought, as all sounds out in the world were being choked off along with his breathing.

He knew he struggled even as the darkness enveloped him. He felt subconscious pain, thought he heard a racket set up by a flock of birds. He had the sensation of being slowly strangled, and still he felt that his arms and legs were moving. He came floating up out of a deep pit and suddenly there was a great wash of sound everywhere and brightness flashed against his eyes. He felt himself being pulled down again and frantically caught at something that happened to be there. As if in a dream he fought with all the strength left in him and, aware that he had something solid under him, let himself go.

The chattering of jungle birds began to rouse him. His mind cleared. He began to isolate some of the cries. There was a lyre bird somewhere near. The cockatoo's screech was unmistakable. He opened his eyes and saw the snaky vines of jungle growth undulating a few feet away. He smelled the dampness of the tropical river banks and slowly became orientated.

The ache in his head made thinking painful and difficult, and his eyes were still foggy and there was a horrible thirst in his throat. It soon occurred to him that he was lying on a Hellcat's wing that had crumpled against the great roots of an inundated tree. How he had managed to crawl out of his office and onto the wing was uncanny.

He was alive! He laughed crazily and laid his cheek against the metal. This was something to tell the padre, and the padre could pass it along to other men who might otherwise have many sleepless nights. After awhile, he crawled off the wing and got into the shelter of the trees, where he examined his hurts. The bullet furrow over his right eye was bleeding again. There were cuts on his hands and a bad gash just below his left knee. His first-aid kit was in the seat-pack of his parachute, and this was under water somewhere, having been torn loose during his battle to get free of the cockpit.

The jungle birds were screeching at him. He knew they would bring whatever breed of tribesmen belonged on this island down upon

him before much longer. The natives must have seen his Hellcat swoop down. Perhaps some of them had heard the crash, and were even now peering at him from the shadows of the jungle.

Monte got to his feet, and knew that the weakness in him would prevent him from going far. These isolated Pacific islands were gutted with pig-trails and gullies. A lot of them were ideal for wild boars and poisonous snakes. He slipped when his foot stepped on a dead log, slimy with moss, and he went to all fours, plunging both hands into a mass of crawling ants.

The sun could not penetrate parts of the jungle. The interwoven mass of thick vines and giant leaves sealed in the dampness and the darkness. Somewhere nearby there was a swamp, for he could hear the disturbing drone of millions of insects. He crouched down, listening. He heard a strange slashing sound, a faint murmur of voices. The bird cry stretched thin; there was a beating of wings among the limbs. Whoever they were, they were coming. No use to run. He could not get far. He identified the sounds as they came nearer: native knives hacking at the jungle; native tongues wagging. He conjured up pictures of cannibals with human bones in their ear-lobes, a fire and a mammoth pot. They would have to fatten him a little.

His body ached with weariness and his wounds still bled, but he did not care very much. Out of the frying pan and into the fire. . . .

He stretched out on damp moss and closed his eyes and waited for them to take him away. This would be a story for Bill Jory, he thought, and laughed deep in his chest. It would make Jory forget a girl named Norma Tashman had ever been murdered.

And then they broke out into the clearing to form a semi-circle around him.

"Bird man!" a powerfully-built, squat native said, and the Grumman pilot got to a sitting position and stared incredulously at the aborigine. His body, save for a colorful loincloth, was naked. It was of a rich light brown color. The man's nose was not as flat as those of the inhabitants of many other islands of the area, and his hair was not too kinky; it was dressed with a sort of oil that gave off an unpleasant pungent odor. As he spoke, he flashed even white teeth.

These natives seemed to be a mixture of Javanese and Polynesian. One was very young and one seemed very old; both wore their hair fastened up on their heads. There was a hammered-gold band around the old native's forearm. He carried a long spear. Prah! tried to get up but had lost too much blood. The husky native steadied him and snapped orders to his companions, who immediately be-

gan to hack at the long wooden vines. In an incredibly short space of time they had fashioned a litter. Monte Prah! was placed upon it and carried deep into the jungle. The sun shone very bright when the cavalcade moved out onto a mountainside. Prah! lifted himself up and looked down on the native village. He heard a slow beat of drums, the babble of many voices. And then he saw a man and a woman walking slowly up the winding path to meet his rescuers. Weakness came over him again and made his senses swim. He wondered if there were witch doctors in the village.

The drums pounded against his temples and drove the fever through his blood. Somebody pressed a coconut shell against his lips and water trickled down his chin and he clamped both hands to the crude cup. The sounds blended into a pulsating meaningless drone. Night came and wrapped him in a great robe of forgetfulness.

Monte Prah! awakened slowly. He looked at his surroundings through the slits of his eyes and realized that he was in a native hut. A girl in a simple print gown was bending over a big earthen crock, wringing something out. Her shapeliness quickened his senses and he shifted on his pallet. The noise he made drew the native girl around quickly and then Monte Prah!'s eyes lost much of their lethargy and he sucked in his breath sharply. The girl was beautiful. Her hair was jet black, fastened high on her head and adorned by a single beautiful flower. There was a necklace of pearls around her throat and then, as the Hellcat pilot doubted his sanity, he saw the beautiful bracelet on her wrist.

The girl seemed frightened. Her limpid eyes were fixed upon his own for a moment, and her lips, soft and full, parted to let her labored breath sough out. Prah! saw her eyes flash darkly and she suddenly whirled as light as a cat and ran out of the hut.

*The fever has burned your brain! You're not really here and you did not see that bracelet. The heat and the loss of blood and all that you have been through have you crazy as a March hare!*

He lay back and closed his eyes. The sounds of the native village boiled in through the open window. He loosened every muscle and nerve in his body and fought for lucid thoughts. His mind went back over the years to a night in a movie theatre in Indiana. He saw Gary Tashman in a glamorous picture called *Isle Of Dreams*. There were native huts and blue lagoons and the music from native instruments. There was a girl named Paleeta who danced in the moonlight.

This was not a concrete world. It was delirium where a man's mind wandered—detached from his body. . . .

"Monte!" The voice was faint at first, then increased in volume like the rush of a violent storm. Prahl turned his head on the pillow and saw a man standing near the bed, clad only in ragged khaki shorts. He was gaunt and bearded, and his skin was burned brown by the sun. His heavy mane of hair was brushed back over his ears and glistened with an application of oil. Monte lifted himself to one elbow and stared into a pair of tortured eyes that were incredulously familiar.

"It's me, Monte. Listen—I have so little time."

"Tashman! In Heaven's name—!"



DON'T talk, Monte. Listen. She'll be here any minute. Paleeta. Sure, I fell madly in love with her—remember, she came to Hollywood after we made that picture. You heard the stories about Norma, who was false to any man, but she was my wife, Monte. After she was murdered, I thought of no one but Paleeta, the native girl I thought was soft and kind and beautiful. I flew to the island where we made that picture—not this one, Maloha. She's smart as hell, Monte. Maybe she figured the law might come there, or a picture company. Anyway, when I got to Togani, she rounded up her people and we came to this place, far off the trade lanes. Then one day she put on the bracelet, and I knew. I hated her then. She's a fiend out of hell, Monte!"

"We never suspected her," Monte said, shaking his head. "People back there never saw her in anything except her native sarong, so if she happened to put on a tailored suit one night, who could recognize her? She moves like a shadow. She wanted you—killed your wife! Life is crazier than a movie, Tashman."

"Got to talk fast, Monte. She was for killing you last night, but decided to turn you over to the Japs. They come here every once in

awhile, in a Kawanishi flying boat. They land in the lagoon a mile away from here. They have a fuel dump—the natives are friendly to the Nips and give them pigs and fresh chicken. I expect she'll turn me over to the devils before much longer."

"You never tried to escape?" Prahl asked, his voice tinged with some contempt.

"Only one way off this island, Monte. Without a weapon a man has little chance. If he hid out, he would starve to death. I hadn't the strength, the guts. Look at me! I've been deliberately starved! She carries a Jap pistol, Monte!" Tashman dropped his head into his hands and uttered a little sobbing cry. "When a man loses his self-respect—"

"We can make a try, Tashman. We're as good as dead anyway," Prahl said. "We can take it clean rather than carved up in a Jap prison camp."

"There isn't much strength in me, Monte. You're hurt and sick. We have no guns."

"The Japs carry guns," Monte said. "That's our only chance. When we hear the Kawanishi come over. . . ."

Tashman shook his head. Monte Prahl suddenly remembered the movie idol as he used to be, and it occurred to him that the deterioration of a man 'gone native' is swift and certain. There was no fight left in Tashman. The man was beaten, drained of all hope.

Monte suddenly said, "There's a shadow out there, feller! Don't say another word."

The girl appeared in the doorway, her eyes flashing with suspicion. She lashed at Tashman with a few native words, and the erstwhile Hellcat pilot hurried out of the hut. Prahl kept his eyes closed, let a painful sigh escape his lips. He heard the native girl laugh quietly, waited for several minutes before he dared look to see if she was gone.

The sun was slipping down toward the sea. The shadows of dusk lengthened. A fat native woman brought Prahl some food and water, but he made out that he was asleep. The woman had only been gone a few moments when

**TOPS  
FOR  
QUALITY!**



the small native compound became alive. There was a confused babble of voices, the shrill yapping of native dogs. Prah! started to get up from his pallet, but thought better of it. He needed to conserve his strength for the try he had to make when the night was at its blackest. He had to wait and try to reason his way out of this predicament.

He heard footsteps, slow and measured. A shadow fell across the dirt floor, and Monte Prah! knew his time was up. A Japanese officer, clutching a pistol, stood in the doorway, grinning at him. The man was short and heavy-set. He wore glasses, and there was a carefully trimmed black mustache adorning his long upper lip.

"Ah, good evening, Yankee. We take three pigs with us tonight." The Jap moved into the hut, stood in front of an open window, and dropped his pistol into its leather holster. "You do not care to talk, no? General Yamasho has a way of making stubborn fools talk."

"Save your stinking breath, monkey!" Monte snapped. "Did you see what we did to you at Truk, you squint-eyed water rat?"

The Jap cursed and the hand that strayed toward his holster trembled with his rage. Monte tried to think of appropriate last words and was unprepared for that which quickly transpired. A pair of long arms reached in through the window and wound themselves around the Jap's neck. Monte saw Tashman's bared teeth and flashing eyes just as he lifted himself off the bed. And then Paleeta came in, an automatic in her hand.

Prah! fell back and watched the Jap try to tear loose from Tashman's arms. The native girl screamed crazily at Tashman. She seemed to be weighing her chances of getting the white man without putting a bullet in the strangling Nip. The Jap's fingers were pulling a gun from the holster. Tashman had the Jap bent backward over the window sill, holding on with every last ounce of strength in his gaunt frame.

The Jap got his gun free suddenly; it spat flame. Paleeta uttered a startled choking cry and spun around to face Monte Prah!, the pistol in her fingers dropping to the dirt floor. The girl's eyes suddenly lost all life, and she toppled forward close to Prah!'s pallet. He was on his feet quickly, snatched up the girl's pistol. Tashman let the Jap go. The Nip, fighting for breath, was still on his feet. Monte Prah! calmly shot him through the stomach and then whirled to throw lead at the open doorway. Another Jap crumpled, and a Nambu light machine gun dropped to the floor.

Tashman appeared, hurdling the Nip's body. He picked up the Nambu and yelled, "Come on, Monte! We've got our chance!" then dropped to his knees when a spear sang through the side of the hut.

Monte Prah! saw the natives coming. There were nearly two score of the brown devils, armed with wicked knives and spears. He heard Tashman's machine gun chatter and the natives broke and retreated, leaving four of their band dead or dying in the dust.

"Follow me, Monte!" Tashman said. "One path over the mountain to the lagoon. Some guts left in me, Monte! New man—Monte. Come on!"

Tashman led Prah! out of the hut, around in back and through a thick jungle growth. A path had been hacked through it, which snaked upward and along the side of the mountain of Maloha. The natives followed, hurling fish spears as they ran. Monte turned and fired once and Tashman screeched hoarsely, "Save it, Monte!"

They started running. "Must—have come in last night or early morning—Monte. Didn't hear that plane—it was luck—"

"Luck, hell! Tashman, it took guts to tackle that Nip and slip out of Paleeta's way. You didn't forget, Gary. Once a Hellcat. . . ." He looked back and down. The native village was at least six hundred feet below. Monte could see the river where he had spilled the Hellcat. The going was painful. His leg bothered him, and his lungs began to feel the prick of a million little needles.

"Free as a bird, Monte. She's dead. I didn't have to kill her!" Tashman kept to his grueling pace. "The way—now—goes down, Monte. Get your breath back. They've given it up, those brown babies. They don't like machine guns—look down there!"

Monte Prah! saw the lagoon. The great wide leaves of jungle trees almost screened a Jap plane from view. That Jap landing place was only a quarter of a mile below. Tashman rested, crouched over the Nambu machine gun.

Monte Prah! checked the Jap pistol, found that he had three more shots to go.

"Only two or three Japs down there, Monte," Tashman said, eyes aglow. "Saw one go down with those natives when I poured it on. You think the natives have a way of signalling?"

"We have to go in at them quick," Prah! said. "The element of surprise, always!"

He followed Tashman down the side of the mountain, hugging close to the foliage that grew thick on either side of the narrow path. In a few moments they could hear voices, and Tashman shouldered Monte against the trunk of a lontar.

"Down there on the landing. Two Japs. They look worried. Wait—I think they'll start up to take a look around. They heard those shots. Sounds carry far on this island."

"We can rush 'em, Gary," Monte argued. "Not yet. Wait."

They watched, hardly breathing. One of the Japs came off the makeshift dock and walked slowly up the path. "You take him, Monte," Tashman said. "We don't want to have a sound out of him."

The Jap moved up the path cautiously, drew abreast of the ambush and listened, his head bent forward. Monte Prah! was on him like a cat. He drove a knee into the small of the Nip's back and hooked an arm around his neck to shut off his wind. He dragged the yellow man into the bushes and finished him. He came out onto the path just as the compote of angry voices boiled down the hillside.

"The natives," Tashman said, "We got to hurry it the rest of the way. Come on, Monte!"

They rushed down toward the landing. Tashman poured lead at the Jap who tried to board the Kawanishi, and the monkey toppled into the lagoon, nearly cut in half. A machine gun drove tracers past Monte's head. Tashman almost fell, pulled himself up and cried out, "Keep going, Monte. The only chance!" He unlimbered the Nambu, resting the muzzle between the forks of a tree and poured the 6.5 mms into the Kawanishi's gun position. Monte Prah! reaching the landing, covered by Tashman's fire.

The Jap machine gun stopped its sputtering and he climbed aboard.

There was another Jap in the Kawanishi. Monte shot him without compunction. He yelled to Tashman. He saw the man turn and try to bring his Nambu to bear on the natives swarming down the mountain side. The erstwhile Hellcat pilot reeled, dropped the machine gun and staggered toward the flying boat. Prah! gave him a hand just as a spear bonged off the wing. He pulled Tashman aboard and they went to the control pit and fumbled with the controls.

"You fly it," Tashman said, dropping into the seat beside Prah!. "Hell, all planes are alike. You trip the starter and open the throttle." He got up and went back into the belly of the Kawanishi and pulled a dead Jap away from a machine gun. Prah! heard the thump of the gun and felt the Jap plane quiver under him as he hurriedly scanned the alien instruments. He looked out and saw the brown men scattering. Three of them remained on the landing, riddled with lead. Spears smashed against the flying boat's sides. Tashman kept firing.

A tall native spun around and toppled off a fifty foot cliff, dragging another screaming brown man with him.

Prah! got the engines turning, and Tashman left his gun position to cut away the moorings. The Kawanishi powerplants roared. Monte kept yelling for Tashman to get aboard. The Hellcat pilot stumbled to the cockpit and

sat beside Monte Prah!, a grin on his haggard countenance. "We did it, Monte," he said, when the Kawanishi streaked out of the lagoon and got buoyancy over a knife-like reef that hemmed the island in. Prah! climbed, his eyes cautiously searching the skies around him. He felt a hand on his arm and he smiled. He got to eight thousand and watched the compass needle.

"We're still in a pickle if we meet some of our own planes, Gary."

Tashman said nothing. Prah! became aware of an unnatural quiet in the cockpit of the Kawanishi and he turned his head toward Tashman. The man's head had dropped forward. There was blood on the movie star's knees. The hand that was on Monte's arm slipped off. Monte Prah! knew that Tashman was dead. There was a smile on the guy's lips. . . .

The Kawanishi was close to Hollandia when the land-based planes came up to get it. Monte Prah! decided quickly. He could have put it down into the sea, but somehow he felt that the pilot next to him wanted to ride it out. He made sure that his Japanese-made parachute was firmly strapped to him before he jumped.

"Goodbye, Tashman. That was your greatest role."

Going down under the silk, Monte Prah! saw the Kawanishi fly straight and true over the shores of Hollandia. It flew as if there had been a hand at the controls, and perhaps, Monte told himself, there was—A Hellcat pilot going West. . . . Somewhere the plane would drop and the picture would fade out to the accompaniment of strangely beautiful organ music up in the sky that only men like Mike Dawn and Gary Tashman were allowed to hear.

Prah! would always remember the end of that picture, he knew, as he floated easily down toward a long sandy beach, the brisk breeze driving him ever into shore. . . .



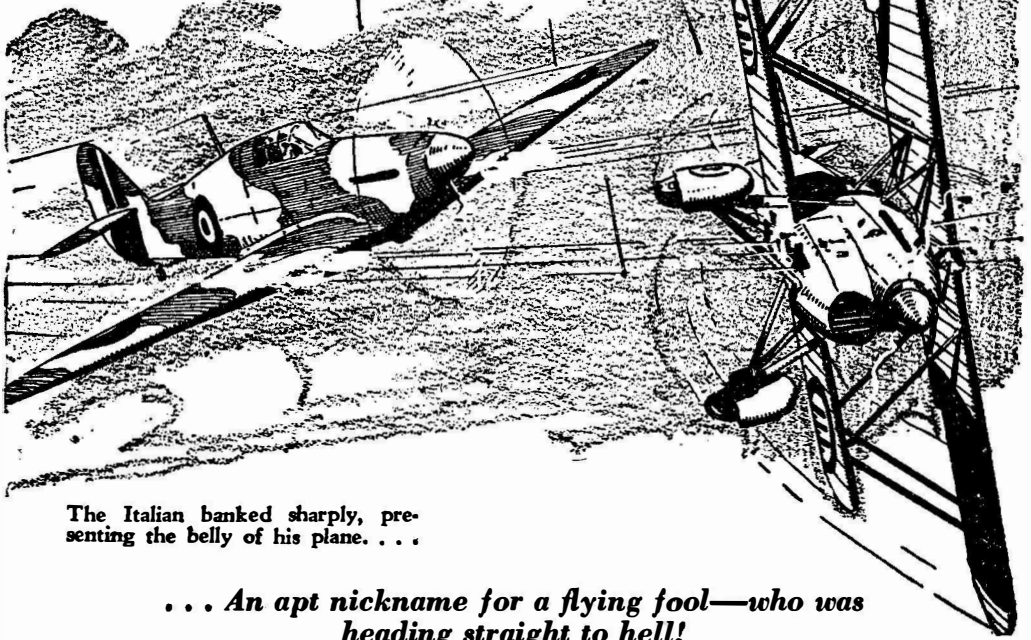
RAHL LIFTED his head and looked out over the city. Lights were on and the traffic roar was at its ebb. The door opened and a man stepped in. Bill Jory said, "You haven't gone yet, Monte? Anything wrong?"

"Huh?" Prah! jumped out of his chair. "No, nothing, Bill." He could have told the man about a story he would never write because after you have been to a war you know there are codes that even veteran newspaper men could never understand. The principles, the stars of the old murder drama were all dead.

*Let them rest, Monte thought. Let them rest in peace.*

# The ACE from DOWN UNDER

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN



The Italian banked sharply, presenting the belly of his plane. . . .

*. . . An apt nickname for a flying fool—who was heading straight to hell!*

**B**RANDON caught sight of the Fiat boring in out of the corner of his eye.

He smiled tight-lipped, and held his course until the Italian's guns began to spit flame and sound. Then, in a flash half roll, he whirled his Hawker Hurricane over and down. Before he was half way through the maneuver he yanked the ship out and zoomed toward the Libyan Desert sun. Caught off guard, the Italian was forced to make up his mind fast and he did the wrong thing. He banked sharply, presenting the belly of his plane as a perfect target for the British Flight Lieutenant.

Brandon could have thrown rocks without missing. His nickel-jacketed lead poured home; the Fiat belched oily black smoke and then disintegrated like a shattered clay pigeon. The R. A. F. ace didn't bother watching the pieces shower down toward the hot sands. After you've seen that sort of thing seventeen times, it becomes a bit boring.

He banked away, threw back his head and

took a look at the rest of the air scramble going on above him. One sweeping glance told him that C Flight had the situation more than well in hand, and was making the Fiat pilots wish very much they had never left the shores of sunny Italy.

Lowering his gaze Brandon stared ahead at the three R. A. F. Wellington bombers that were barging back and forth across the "Cut" in the long plateau that formed a natural defense barrier south of the Libyan naval base town of Tobruk. The Cut was a seventy-yard-wide valley that slanted upward from the desert side of the plateau to high ground on the north side. Its two sides were steep and jugged with rocks, and near the top on each side a slab of rock stuck out to form a sort of protective roof over the cave, or shelf, just underneath.

Upon these two shelf like formations the Italians had set up machine guns and one or two anti-tank guns. In that position they controlled the entrance to the Cut, and until

they were wiped out it was little short of suicide for the British forces to advance upon Tobruk from that direction. True, the British could probably storm the place and carry it by sheer weight of numbers, but General Wavell was not only a smart desert fighter, but a leader who always thought first of his troops, as well. The losses would have been too great. So the job of blasting it clear had been turned over to the R. A. F. Middle East Command.

Three Wellington bombers had been dispatched for the task, and C Flight, of Eighty-Four Fighter Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant Brandon, had gone along to make sure that Italian planes didn't bother the Wellingtons. C Flight was doing its job to perfection, but not so the Wellingtons. They were dumping their eggs and sending tons of sand and splintered rock sky high, but they were not inflicting so much as a scratch upon the Italian defenders. The only way a bomb goes, is down you can't make it curve up under an overhanging ledge of solid rock. So the Italians just sat tight. "A waste of eggs!" Brandon muttered as he studied the scene. "Not even getting close to the blighters. They—"

He cut the rest off short as one of his Flight streaked down past him and went straight as an arrow toward the southern entrance of the Cut. The Hurricane went down until it was less than fifty feet over the bomb-blasted valley. Then it started zig-zagging up the Cut, its guns spraying death along both walls. A furious fire blasted back at it, and Brandon's lips stiffened as he saw the Hurricane lurch drunkenly. A moment later, though, the plane scooted up through the northern end and zoomed for altitude.

Brandon's eyes clouded as he spoke into his flap mike. "Keep clear, Tomlinson!" he barked. "This is no strafing job. Keep clear and give the bombers a chance!"

"Bombers aren't getting anywhere!" came the clipped comment in Brandon's earphones. "Just blowing up sand. Call the bombers off, and the rest of us can strafe the Muzzies out of there."

"You have your orders, Tomlinson!" Brandon snapped. "This is a bombing show. Keep clear!"

There was no further comment. Brandon watched the other Hurricane slide around in a dime turn, then dart at an unsuspecting Fiat pilot with the speed of greased lightning. The Italian probably never knew what hit him. One second the Fiat was flying along, the next it was going down on fire.

Brandon breathed softly, "Perfection, no less. But one of these days Tomlinson will bite off too much. He's too sure, too bloody good at his job."

Just one month ago to the day a tall, hawk-eyed New Zealander had joined Eighty-four Squadron for active duty. His name was Timothy Tomlinson, and like all of the men from "Down Under" he was possessed of a cold reckless courage, and feared neither man nor beast nor high ranking British officers. He was not outwardly disrespectful or rebellious; rather, it was the air of polite indifference in his speech and in his manner. He tackled any job assigned him, and every now and then took things into his own hands and explained about it after it was all over. Not in a boastful way, by any manner of means, He'd simply seen a job that needed doing, and hadn't bothered to wait for some superior officer to spot it and give him the green light.

Brandon admired his flawless skill and his inborn courage, but discipline *was* essential, no matter what you said. And Tomlinson apparently didn't know how to spell the word. Yes, one day the lad would take too big a bite of some crazy notion—and he would be very, very sorry, too late.

Brandon gave his attention once more to the bombers. The Wellingtons were still plastering the Cut, but the Italian defenders were safe and sound, still laughing. Presently the last Wellington dropped its last egg, and the trio of big ships lumbered into formation to fly back to their Libyan border base. Brandon scowled, and stared hard and long at the Cut.

As though the Italians had seen his look, a few bursts of taunting machine gun fire rattled out from the shelf caves.

"Let's have a go at the Muzzies!" came Tomlinson's voice over the radio. "Let's scrape a few wingtips on the walls and give them a burst or two!"

"The show's washed-out," Brandon said coldly into his mike. "Formation, you chaps!"

A snort of disgust exploded in Brandon's earphones, but it could have come from anyone of the other five pilots, although he felt it had come from Tomlinson's lips. However, he ignored it and circled about, while the Flight dropped into formation position. Then he led the way back to Eighty Four's field on the outskirts of recently captured Fort Capuzzo.



QUADRON Leader Saunders met him on the tarmac and gave him a questioning look.

"Luck?" the C. O. murmured.

"Not even by half, sir,"

Brandon said. "The beggars are in there tight as bugs in a rug. Bombers can't get at them."

"That won't make Wavell happy," the C.O. said, and scowled. "The Cut has to be cleared

out by tomorrow morning at ten. The big show starts then. If Air Force doesn't hold up its end, there'll be the devil to pay. Anyway, I'm glad we're not those Wellington chaps. No fun in watching your eggs just blow up sand."

"Why don't you strafe the blighters? Dust them out of there with Browning fire?"

Brandon and Saunders turned to see the tall, lean figure of Pilot Officer Tomlinson.

"What's that, Tomlinson?" Saunders asked.

The New Zealander flicked ash from his cigarette and then used it to point westward.

"A strafe," he said. "Fly right up in there and let them have it. We'd scare the pants off them anyway."

"Not much help, that," the C. O. said dryly.

"A man can still fire a gun without his pants. Besides, they could give us a cross-fire that would do a lot of damage. No, Tomlinson, the losses wouldn't be worth the meager results."

"You want the Cut, don't you?" Tomlinson asked bluntly.

Squadron Leader Saunders stiffened. "Quite!" he said. "But we want it with a minimum of loss. That's the key note of the entire campaign."

The New Zealander was unimpressed. He took one more drag on his cigarette, then flipped it away and shrugged. "I got an idea one man could clean out that place," he said in a flat tone. "But let that go, for the moment. You say Zero Hour is for ten tomorrow morning? Well, can't we protect the tanks and infantry? Can't we strafe the Cut and keep the Spigs busy while our lads rush on through? Seems to me that makes sense."

"Perhaps," Saunders said coldly. "But there happen to be other angles involved. Because of the condition of the valley floor, it will take considerable time to pass through. We couldn't possibly hope to keep the Italian defenders occupied that long."

"But there aren't more than thirty of them there, at the most!" Tomlinson exclaimed hotly. "Thirty of Muzzy's beggars holding us up! It's silly. Look, I can—"

"That will do, Tomlinson!" Saunders cut him off. "I'm sorry, but we're not interested. Go over to the mess and have a drink, Tomlinson."

The New Zealander hesitated and looked his C. O. straight in the eye. Then he relaxed and slowly grinned. "Yes, I guess a drink would hit the spot right now," he said, and turned on his heel and walked away.

"Those Diggers from Down Under!" Saunders breathed when the tall pilot was out of earshot. "Worth their weight in gold as pukka fighters. But, Lord, what headaches when you've got them in your command. What do you think of the strafing idea, Brandon?"

"It has occurred to me, sir," the Flight Lieutenant said. "I think, though, it would be pretty much of a wash-out. Those caves go back a bit into the plateau, and because of the space you couldn't shoot directly into them. We might get a few of the blighters, but not enough to make the Cut clear for tanks and infantry."

"I agree with you," the C. O. nodded sadly. "Took a good look at it yesterday, myself. Something's got to be done, though. Wavell can't go up the sides of that plateau—he's got to go through the Cut. Blast it! I'm going to call the Wellingtons and see if they've got any new ideas. Not much time left!"

"Right you are, sir," Brandon said. "I'll be in the mess if you want me."

Shedding his flying gear and tossing it into the pit of his ship, Brandon walked across the hard-packed sand to the little knocked-together shack that served as the squadron mess. Tomlinson was at the bar, and a glass of scotch was almost lost in his big hand. He turned as Brandon came up, and gave him a steady look.

"Figure out something?" he asked.

"Nothing, yet," Brandon replied. "And by the by, Tomlinson, just remember to follow orders when you're out on patrol with me. When you get a Flight of your own you can do as you jolly well please. Follow me?"

"Sure, and don't get sore about it," the big New Zealander chuckled. "Just thought it was a good idea, that's all. I still do. With bombers, those Spigs will have long beards before we get them out of there."

"Possibly," Brandon said dryly. "This campaign, however, is being conducted all according to plan."

"The way to fight a war, I guess," Tomlinson said with a shrug. "But when a plan gets bopped in the face a chap has got to do something else, hasn't he?"

"It will be done," the Flight Lieutenant retorted, and sampled his drink.

"I got a hunch that maybe I could take care of everything all by myself," Tomlinson said, without any boastfulness in his tone.

Brandon didn't even bother to look at him. "No doubt," he said tonelessly. "But for the present, just be content to fly with C Flight. You know, Tomlinson, one day you're going to come a cropper trying to win this war for us single-handed."

The New Zealander laughed and slid his glass down the bar for the orderly to fill up again.

"Didn't come up here to fight sand fleas and lizards," he grunted, "though the Muzzies aren't much tougher. I'll take my chances on coming that cropper. Got to get some fun out of this war, you know."

Brandon made no comment on that, for the



Squadron Leader came into the mess and over to the bar.

"High Command has put it strictly up to us and the Wellingtons," he said with a grimace. "We're to clear that Cut and not take 'no' for an answer. The Wellingtons are going to have another go at it at four this afternoon. I think the lot of us had better go along to help all we can."

The C. O. stopped and gave Tomlinson a side glance. "If it's still no go for the Wellingtons," he said, "perhaps we'll try a bit of a strafe, anyway."

"Fine!" the New Zealander said, and grinned. "I'd like to see the Muzzies do some shooting without their pants."

"Oh, quite!" the C. O. mumbled and gave his attention to the bar orderly.



AT EXACTLY four o'clock that afternoon a whole squadron of Wellington bombers started shifting the sands of the plateau side of the Libyan Desert all over the place. But that was all they succeeded in doing.

The Italian defenders of the Cut lodged safe and sound on their fortified shelves of rock.

When he was not smacking an Italian fighter plane down out of the sky, Brandon watched the bombing with interest and sad misgiving. The bombers just weren't any help at all. A dozen squadrons wouldn't be of any use, unless by a miracle they could level the entire plateau and cause the walls of the Cut to cave in on its defenders.

The same views were obviously held by Saunders, for presently he heard the Squadron Leader requesting Wellington Command to pull off to the side and out of the way. Then Saunders gave his order.

"In line astern formation!" the earphones of the pilots barked. "Strafing order. Saw your rudders and give them as much as you can as you go through. Right-o. Here we go!"

The C. O.'s plane banked around and went streaking low down for the southern entrance of the Cut. Being senior flight leader, Brandon dropped in behind at a safe distance and pointed his own nose at the Cut entrance. Hunching forward, he braced himself, and slid off the safety catch of the firing button that controlled his four Browning aerial guns. The desert and the U-shaped opening of the entrance rushed up toward him. He heard the yammering notes as Saunders opened fire, and almost a split second later he heard the rattle of return fire from the Italian machine guns. Then he was racing through the Cut on a level with the shelf-like formation.

It was like looking out the window of an express train speeding through a tunnel. Everything was a conglomeration of blurs. As he sawed his rudder to swerve his ship from side to side so that he could drill bursts into the caves at an angle, countless spears of red flame spat out at him. The left side of his cockpit cowling became criss-crossed by a million cracks in the glass. He felt his tail shake and quiver as a burst poured into it, and for a moment his heart zoomed up his throat. His plane and engine continued to function, however, and in a few more seconds he was through the north end of the Cut, zooming for altitude.

Flattening off his zoom, he closed up into formation position with Saunders, and watched the rest of Eighty-Four slice through the Cut. A prayer was on the tip of his tongue every split second of the time. Every ship came through the danger zone safe and sound. He heaved a sigh of relief as the last Hurricane, Tomlinson's, zoomed up into formation position. He glanced back down at the withering fire that was still spewing out from the muzzles of the Italian machine guns. He doubted very much if Eighty-Four had inflicted a single casualty.

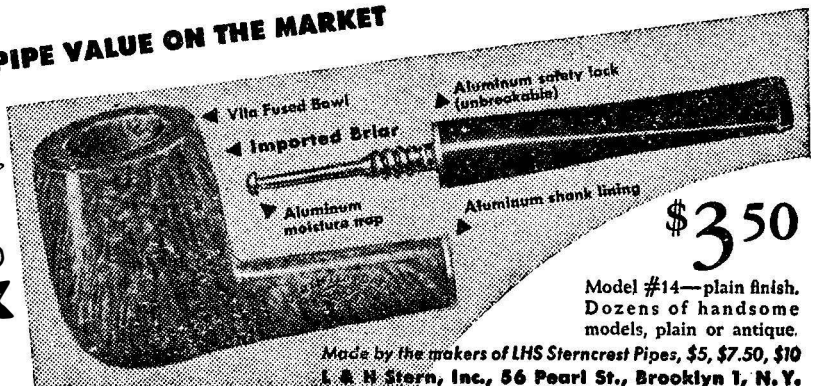
Just wasted machine gun bullets this time, instead of bombs.

"Hold formation!" came Saunders' voice

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in his earphones. "No bloody use, that!"

The C. O. spoke with the leader of the Wellingtons, and the bombers returned once more to their job of egg dropping. An hour later they were fresh out of bombs. The Cut was still there, and so were its Italian defenders. General Wavel was going to be very mad.

Eighty-Four went back to Fort Capuzzo and landed. Brandon legged out and went over to the Squadron Leader's plane.

"A bit of a mess, sir," he said sadly. "I don't think we got more than a couple of the beggars."

"Doubt we got that many!" Saunders growled. He glared at the sky. "Like another Gibraltar, that spot. Something must be done, though dashed if I can think what. I—yes, Tomlinson? You've got something to say?"

The big New Zealander who had strolled up at that moment shrugged and pushed his helmet back on his head. "Maybe I could fix up this thing for you. Seems to me that—"

"Thanks just the same, Tomlinson!" Saunders cut in coldly. "I'm afraid I'm not interested in your ideas. Now, if you'll just buzz off for a bit."

The tall pilot's face went hard for a moment, then he shrugged and grinned good-naturedly.

"Sure, it was only a hunch, anyway," he said, and swung on his heel.

"I'd hate to be in a squadron with Tomlinson as C. O." Brandon murmured as the New Zealander walked away. "Everybody would have gray hairs in a fortnight."

"If they lived that long!" Saunders commented dryly. "Wonder what his hunch is this time? He's always coming to me with them, you know. Probably an idea for two volunteers to crash right into the caves and sweep them out that way. And he'd probably volunteer first."

"That chap certainly has no fear of anything," Brandon agreed. Then in a serious tone, "But what now, sir? Do you suppose the Wellingtons will go back?"

"Lord knows," Saunders groaned. "Getting too dark for another show today. We'll probably have to make one last desperate stab at it at dawn. Little hope of success, though. Wavel will have Air Force hides, you mark my word."

"I'm afraid so," Brandon nodded unhappily.

Shortly after eight that night Saunders' surmise was confirmed. Word came through that a three-hour bombing and strafing of the Cut would begin at dawn. Orders to clear the Cut for tanks and infantry were most emphatic, and they carried a not too well veiled hint of trouble if the Air Force attack was not successful. Saunders read the order to the entire squadron without comment. There was no need for comment. The official military

paper spoke for itself. A cloud of gloom settled over the mess, and nobody felt like talking.

About midnight the sound of an engine roaring into life shattered the silence outside the mess. Nobody paid any attention to it, assuming it was the mechanics checking the engine of some ship. But presently, when the engine roared louder, in the unmistakable sound of a take-off, everybody came alive.

Brandon dashed out the door and over to the tarmac. The ship was now in the air, almost lost to view against the star-studded sky. Brandon grabbed a mechanic and spun him around.

"Who the devil was that?" he barked.

"Pilot-Officer Tomlinson in one of the training ships, sir," the mechanic replied.

"Training ship?" Brandon echoed. "What for? What's he doing?"

"Well, sir," the mechanic fumbled, "I think maybe he's a bit balmy, sir. He says he wants one of the training ships pulled out. When I asks him where he's going, he says he's going up for a look at the stars. Him being an officer, I couldn't very well stop him. But it's a bit queer, sir, ain't it?"

"A joy hop, probably," Brandon muttered, as he walked back toward the mess. "He'd do something like that on a night like this."

If it was a joy hop that Tomlinson set out upon, it was indeed a long, long one. In fact, much longer than the amount of gas in the training plane's tanks permitted. Hour after hour slid by but the tall New Zealander did not return to the field. It was feared and believed that the reckless pilot had probably indulged in some of his solo stunt flying, for which he was well known, and had crashed into the desert. At any other time a searching patrol would have been sent out as soon as it was light, but that couldn't be done this time. Eighty-Four had serious business to make ready for, and there was no time to go searching the desert for a lost pilot. They could only hope that a motorized patrol would find him and pick him up, if he was still alive.

At five-thirty on the dot, Eighty-Four—less Tomlinson—took off and climbed for altitude westward. At a designated spot and time they met the squadron of Wellington bombers, took up top cover position and continued on their way. Seconds and minutes whipped by and eventually they sighted the plateau barrier south of Tobruk, and then the Cut. Checking his guns Brandon glanced about but saw no sign of Italian planes. They had undoubtedly got their bellies full yesterday, and had no desire to seek more of it today. Particularly not when their comrades defending the Cut were continuing to hold fast.

Suddenly Saunders sat up straight in the pit and stared hard at the entrance floor of the

Cut, not more than a mile or so ahead now. "Take a look at the Cut, sir!" he called into his flap mike. "What do you make of it?" There was a moment's silence and then Brandon's earphones exploded. "Well, I'll be damned!" cried Saunders. "Looks like the beggars have surrendered. Some of them there on the floor, and a chap is waving a white flag. Scout ahead, Brandon, but watch yourself."

Brandon fed gas to his engine and went streaking ahead of the formation. Body braced, thumb resting lightly on the trigger button, he dropped the nose and dived straight for the mouth of the Cut. A group of half a dozen Italians were huddled together to one side, but out in the open stood Pilot Officer Tomlinson. He was bare to the waist, waving his shirt tied to the muzzle end of a Lewis machine gun!

Brandon cut his throttle and slid down to a landing as near the mouth of the Cut as he could. Before he had legged out, the New Zealander was herding the fear-stunned group of Italian soldiers ahead of him. Brandon stood frozen beside his machine as they approached.

"Here's all the Muzzies that are left!"

Tomlinson greeted him. "The Cut's clean as a whistle. Anything can go through it."

"What—how . . .?" Brandon gasped for words.

"That hunch of mine," Tomlinson grinned. "Got to figuring on it. Seemed to make sense. So I got me this Lewis and took a training ship, because it would be a shame to lose a nice Hurricane, you see. Buzzed over here last night and bailed out on the north end of the Cut. The ship carried on aways and crashed. Done some climbing down home, and this was a cinch. Crept up on them. It was easy on account of the cooking fires they were burning. Just like popping frozen rabbits. Some died, and some jumped off and died that way. Did the same thing with the lads on the other side. Come dawn, only these few, and mighty anxious to give up. But let them wait here and surrender to tanks. Mind flying me back on your ship? I can ride it horse style."

"I should fly you back for a court-martial," Brandon groaned, "but it'll be a D. F. C., I wager. Get aboard."

"A medal?" Tomlinson chuckled and climbed up astride the Hurricane's fuselage. "I don't want a medal for having fun!"

## THE HOT AIR CLUB

(Continued from page 6)

bald back again. And by the way aren't those two boys Farrell and Wade new? As long as Blakeslee is still drawing for you your mag is pretty good, but there can still be lots of improvements. For one I noticed that there isn't a single W.W.I. story. Why? How about at least two in each issue? Bring back some of the old favorites like the Red Eagle, Three Mosquitoes, the Hellions and Headline Hartley.

I hope by the time this reaches you that some of your other magazines, like G-8, Fighting Aces, and Battle Birds are back on the stands again.

As usual your stories were above average. The way I rank them is as follows:

- (1) Flat-Top Fireball—Very good
- (2) Red Skys Pawn—More of this guy
- (3) The Wildcats Are Coming—Ditto
- (4) Wings of the Dead—Good
- (5) Dead End Ace—Good
- (6) In Hell for Breakfast—Good
- (7) Last Flight—Something different
- (8) Lightnings-Watch Out—Fair

Well I guess I've taken up enough of your time. So long.

John Spalding  
709 Oakes Blvd.  
San Leandro, Calif.

Take a buck, John, and resolve to do better.

Louie, the Lush, just dashed up, excited, with the following letter.

"Dear Slop Shot:

I've read your rag you call a magazine for the past 6 months. I'm not going to write a bit of corn about your bunch of hot air (I could think of better names for it.) How about some racing stories? I'm going to build a racer sometime and if you don't write a story about one, I'll not use your mag to feed my goat any more. He doesn't like it very well now but he's getting fatter all the time, I think it's from the hot air in your book.

All kidding aside, I think it's a pretty good book considering everything. Wishing you all the happy crack-ups, so long Wishful. Regards to the Gang.

L. H. Anderson  
1625 B-E 65th Ave.  
McLoughlin Heights  
Vancouver, Wash.

Personally we don't think this so wonderful, but it's written in nice large writing and Louie can read most of the words so we'll give you a whack at it too. You never can tell—you might like it.

Out of the goodness of our heart we throw  
(Continued on page 90)



# TRADITION

A Sky Novel

By **ORLANDO RIGONI**

## CHAPTER ONE

### Hero Heritage

**M**AJOR MAXFIELD BRAND sat stiffly in the bucket of the P-51 Mustang and studied the strip map clipped to his leg. Not that he needed the map; he had been over the course before, and he remembered that desperate trip only too well. Now he followed the strip from Imphal over the hump and across the bridge spanning the Mekong River on the Burma Road. There he veered sharply toward the east instead of heading directly across Nanchin toward Laopau.

"I'm not afraid," he repeated softly, his gray eyes frozen on the thin line of sky above the gorges of the yellow Yangste. "The Brands have never been afraid."

His rather long jaw tightened as he said that. No, the Brands had never been afraid—neither Ezekiel Brand at Bunker Hill, Thomas Brand at Gettysburg, nor Aden Brand on San Juan Hill. His own father had come back from France after the last war with the Croix de Guerre, the Victoria Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal, cheers—and two severed legs.

The first time Brand had discovered his fear of war was when he had watched his straight,



Squat figures with rifles came toward him.

***In the Jap-held skies of China, the last of the fighting Brands flew out alone on his fateful mission, with the bitter toast of hell's own squadron in his ears: "Some men choose to die in glory—while rats like you live in shame!"***

abnormally strong father remove the artificial legs which held his proud body erect. His father had seen the fear flicker in his son's eyes.

"There 'are things more important than legs, son," his father had lectured him. "If a man has a tradition to live by, and the courage to fight for that tradition, it doesn't matter how he enters the battle. The Brands are always officers and gentlemen. They live up to their rank, preserve discipline, and they never ask another to do what they would not attempt themselves."

Now Maxfield Brand, thinner than his father but with the same straight back and sharp eyes, was flying in another war. He had the Flying Cross and he still had his two legs. He'd been applauded as a hero and

praised for upholding the honor of the Brands. Only he knew he didn't want to be a hero. He wanted only to be whole and alive.

He wanted to be at peace with himself, too, and this he could never be while he wore the Flying Cross. The cross should have gone to Sergeant Andy Simms, Brand's gunner on a reconnaissance flight the month before. They had been forced down at Laopau, where an old wrinkled Chinese woman had given them valuable papers to be delivered to Chinese-American high command on the Burmese Border. They'd been trapped, trying to get out of Laopau, but Sergeant Simms had saved the papers at the cost of his own life.

Major Brand had taken the papers from the dying sergeant just before the Japs came. From hiding he had watched the little bow-

legged sons of Nippon carry Sergeant Simms away to be tortured into telling where the papers were.

Brand had done nothing to stop the Nips and save the sergeant, telling himself that the papers were more important than one life. But he knew the reason he had not tried to help Simms. Fear!

He'd meant to explain upon arriving at Imphal that Sergeant Simms had been the real hero, that *he* should have won the cross. But most of the American and some of the British officers knew the Brand tradition; they cast him in the role of hero before he could object.

After that he couldn't bring himself to deny their implications, because his father had wired congratulations from Washington, where he was serving on the war cabinet.

And then General Drake had called Brand into his office and explained briefly:

"Major, I have just come into possession of information which might interest you. There is an important person in Laopau which we wish to have picked up by plane and flown here before the beginning of our general offensive to free the Burma Road. The information this person has might easily save thousands of lives. I thought you might suggest some pilot to send on the trip. It's a tough assignment."

"One pilot?" Brand asked with raised eyebrows.

Drake nodded. "We feel that a lone plane could more easily make its way to Laopau and back without arousing too much curiosity. If you happen to know of some men with the nerve. . . ."

Brand flushed hotly. He'd never cared much for Drake, and Drake had slurred the Brand tradition.

He might as well have said, "I'm daring you to go back to Laopau, Major Brand, if you've got the guts."

Angered at General Drake's pointed remarks, Brand accepted the assignment without stopping to realize what it would quite probably mean.

Now, he remembered the ghastly victims of Jap torture he'd seen at Laopau, remembered the crawling nights and the fearful days. He recalled Sergeant Andy Simms, and he realized that he had not the guts to go back alone to Laopau.

That was why he had turned off the course so carefully marked on the strip map. He had heard of a Captain Dedman who commanded a suicide squadron which the Chinese called the "Dinghow Salenas" or "Good Lookouts." He'd heard fantastic stories about this squadron, but he had a plan for carrying out his orders, and he believed he could use the tramps of Nachi Lolo.

**H**IS KEEN eyes searched the broken earth below him. He flew above the river, following the yellow snake toward Chungking. Nachi Lolo was south of the river, but the earth there looked so broken and swampy that he was afraid he had missed the outpost drome. He dived lower, buzzing the earth like a huge fly.

Suddenly he picked out the twin ruts sweeping up a gully which appeared to be totally deserted. He buzzed the ruts once and made out the outlines of some straw-thatched roofs so cleverly camouflaged that they appeared to be part of the earth itself. But he could not see the battered P-40's staked out under the mulberry trees at one side of the narrow gully.

He swung back to make a landing, not yet willing to believe this was the place he sought. Recklessly, he horsed his Mustang into the groves and cursed as the ruts almost threw him out of the cockpit.

Climbing stiffly from the ship, he prepared himself for a welcome befitting an officer of his rank. No one came from the mud buildings to greet him, and the fact that his arrival was being so completely ignored irked him. He saw some old Chinese men and women working in the desultory, tireless fashion of the Orient, filling up some rather fresh bomb craters. It would be useless to try and talk to them.

Major Brand's eyes swept the narrow, rutted field, and he spied the planes staked under the mulberry trees. Hopefully he walked toward them, but when he was near, he paused. The men working on the battered P-40s appeared to be little better than the Chinese. They were greasy and unkempt, and he could hear one of them talking with a horrible, rasping voice.

With a shrug of distaste he swung his lean body toward the first of the mud huts on the west side of the gully. It appeared to be the headquarters. He felt sure Captain Dedman would give him a proper welcome.

On the age-rotted stoop before the door of the hut sat a man whittling on a stick. There was a slight resemblance to a military uniform in the trousers cut off below the knee, the faded shirt which was thrown open over the arched, hairy chest, and the battered cap thrust far back on the bristly, blond head.

Major Brand stopped briskly and glared at the man. "Are you attached to the military personnel of this field?" he snapped.

The man looked up. The blue scar which parted his hair and disappeared under the jaunty cap, appeared to grow red. His eyes were flat discs of steel, and his jaw, which had been pierced through from side to side, leaving twin dimples, bulged slightly.

"You might consider me a member of the squadron," the man said quietly.

Major Brand caught the undertone of quiet composure in the man's voice. It puzzled him. Surely this tramp could have no authority!

"Have you never been taught to salute your superior officers?" Brand snapped.

The tramp pulled himself up, heels together, had back, chest out in an exaggerated pose, and saluted smartly. A faint smile twisted his full lips.

"I guess I forgot, sir. We're not much for ceremony out here. I'll try to remember, sir," the tramp said apologetically.

"I shall have to speak to Captain Dedman about the utter lack of discipline on this airfield. Where may I find him?" Brand asked, feeling slightly uncomfortable before the splendidly proportioned tramp who stood stiffly at attention.

"I'm Captain Dedman, sir," the tramp said. "In charge of this airfield."

Major Brand felt the slow flush creep up from his collar and burn his face. Disbelief and confirmation were mingled in his eyes. Of course it was Dedman! Brand had heard about the twin scars like dimples in Dedman's cheeks.

But Brand had not heard of how Dedman had come to hate the Japs so religiously. Dedman had seen the beginning of the Japanese New Order. He had been at Peking. He had seen the road of death outside the city walls of Tungchoo, where the Japs ambushed a refugee caravan and slaughtered every person down to the last child. He had been at Paute where the Chinese had been staked to the ground as victims for the conquering apemen.

He had gone to Chenault not as a defender of China, but as an avenging spirit.

The Chinese came to bless him in their prayers, and they had decorated him with a piece of red ribbon more precious than a medal of gold. The Japs had decorated him three times—with bullets. The one had pierced

his square face, leaving the twin scars; the second slug had laid open his scalp to the bone, leaving the blue, permanent part in his bristly hair; and the third slug was still lodged in his upper leg, and gave him hell on damp nights.

Major Brand said stiffly, "I'm sorry, Captain Dedman, I didn't realize who you were. You wear no insignia."

Dedman's blunt fingers touched the bit of red ribbon pinned to the flap of his shirt.

"In China, this is all the insignia one needs, Major. Come inside if you wish." Dedman turned and walked into the smelly interior of the ancient hut.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Retreat



ITTING across from Dedman at the grimy table, Major Brand realized that Dedman had no intention of respecting his rank despite the captain's display of a moment before. Brand refused the rice wine

Dedman pushed toward him.

"What brings you here, Major?" Dedman asked pointedly, as though to imply that one with such academic ideas of military discipline and dressed in such expensive and showy flying togs, could find nothing of interest at Nachi Lolo.

Major Brand knew he must frame his words carefully, lest Dedman suspect his plan to use one of the Dinghow Salenas as a decoy in his coming mission.

"I have a secret, dangerous mission to complete. I thought it would be possible for me to operate from here with more convenience than across the hump. I presume you can find me a place to sleep?"

Dedman tapped the crude table with his blunt fingers. He nodded. "Of course. You can bunk with Lieutenant Jimmy Cawn. Lau

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Ching, a Chinese mech, is sleeping there too, but they can make room for you. It's a rather big pig barn. Don't worry if Cawn talks to himself. You'll get used to it."

A pig barn! With a Chinese! "I can't accept that, Captain. I'm a field-grade officer!

"There's no other place vacant, unless you want *my* bunk," Dedman said, nodding to the cot in one corner of the room. "You might be troubled by the men coming in at odd times of the night to get *pilau* on saki. I don't mind it, myself. I let 'em talk when they're that way, because I know how this country can grind hell into a man's soul."

Brand was about to make further protest when there was a commotion outside. The door flung open and in poured the tramps he had seen working on the planes under the trees. There were three Chinese mechanics with them. Brand winced at the smell of oil and sweat that invaded the already pungent room.

The men sprawled about the long table, passing the wine bottle around without even the benefit of a glass. Brand felt isolated in the crowd and it irked him, until Dedman said:

"It's chow time, Major. If you care to wash up, you'll find a trough out near the well."

Major Brand, in spite of his effort at self-control, spoke with a tone of outraged authority. "You mean eat here? With those filthy—"

"They're my squadron, sir," Dedman snapped, his steely eyes flashing. "Let me introduce them."

Major Brand clenched his fists. Squadron? That greasy mob of riff-raff bore no resemblance to pilots. He thought he understood how they came to be here. They had been mercenaries, drawn together by lure of Chinese gold, and then the entry of the United States into the war had forced them to be patriots. His impulse was to walk away, but he heard Dedman introducing them, and common decency forced him to acknowledge the introductions.

"This is Jimmy Cawn," Dedman said, indicating the thin, jack-knife of a man whose sunken eyes seemed to be looking out beyond infinity. Cawn talked to himself. He had good reason to talk to himself ever since he had watched the dreaded Yendachi—those Japanese super-spies who considered themselves above even the will of the emperor—cruelly torture his buddy to death. Cawn had escaped during an air-raid on Kwentow but he still bore the scars of that experience on his bony carcass.

Then there was Whisper Lord, pale and slightly stooped, who spoke with a hideous, inhuman voice which formed words in a

throbbing, mechanical monotone. A Nambu slug had ripped through Lord's throat, tearing out his larynx.

There was Clyde Hathan with shaggy brown hair, burning eyes, and the delicate hands of a girl. Those hands had killed more Japs than they had fingers, and yet Clyde Hathan was a poet and Dedman's special friend.

There were others—Copendown, Vance and Baldy Feller, who had had his hair burned off in a crash. Major Brand remembered his plan to have one of these men unwittingly help him on his mission into Laopau. What could he expect of such tramps as these?

"I'm afraid I've made a mistake, Captain," Major Brand said to Dedman. "I don't care to eat in your messhall, or to sleep in your pig barn. I doubt, also, that any of your misfits could be of any service to me."

His words carried around the table and a brittle silence struck across the room. Before it was broken, a Chinese boy ran toward Dedman from the kitchen door speaking rapidly in Chinese. Major Brand, feeling uncomfortable before the glaring eyes of the men at the table, turned on his heel and walked through the door.

Plans formed swiftly in his head. He would fly on to Chungking. What then? The thought of going on to Laopau alone still frightened him. He had one more chance. General Drake had given him a sealed envelope, bearing special secret marks.

"If the situation becomes hopeless," the general had told him, "present this sealed envelope to the first Chinese Authority you find. The orders it contains are of special secret significance but can be used only once. Once this seal is broken they will be of no value, so be sure you keep them until the situation is desperate."

Instinctively he felt of the letter in the pocket of his flying jacket as he hurried across the rutted field toward his plane. Suddenly Captain Dedman's voice bellowed after him:

"You can't go up, Major! Come on back!"

The order angered Major Brand. He didn't turn his head. He had seen enough of Captain Dedman and his Dinghow Salenas. He'd find help in a more civilized quarter. Dedman repeated the order once more, but still Brand ignored it. Then he was at his plane and climbing over the wing. He settled in the bucket, pulled the chute straps up and hit the starter.

The engine was still warm. It caught, coughed once and then let out a roar which drowned every other sound. The mighty blast of power slammed back from the low hills. Then he was bumping down the field and he caught a blurred vision of the old Chinese laborers trying to signal him, but he couldn't



make out what they meant. Grimly he gutted the stick and clawed his way up!

Once in the sky he felt as though he had escaped from something unclean. Not altogether that. He tried to analyze the effect the weird collection of pilots had on him, and came to the uneasy conclusion that he had felt inadequate among them.

He climbed higher. He didn't look back to see the excitement on the field he had just left. He didn't know anything was wrong until he was twelve thousand feet up—and hell hit him proper!

Something smashed into his left wing and gnawed a hole in the dural. He saw a neat row of holes creep toward his Allison and watched them, fascinated. Then he glanced into his rear-view mirror and his blood froze. Two Zeros had him bracketed from behind!

Suddenly he remembered the Chinese boy chattering to Dedman. He remembered Dedman's warning, and the signals of the Chinese. They had all tried to save him, and he had stubbornly flown into a Japanese attack alone!

**H**IS FIRST impulse was to run away, to escape while he still had his legs, his arms, and his eyes. He looked about desperately and saw the black planes above and below him. There was no escape.

Cursing, he dragged the stick into a corner and pushed his right foot. The Mustang lunged and twisted in a gut-jerking zoom! Something smashed into his right arm. He felt the numb shock of it but no pain. Warm blood oozed inside his sleeve.

Desperately he half-looped and rolled flat. He had to fight now. There was no one here in the sky to whom he could hand the magic letter and find deliverance. He hunched low, caught the outlines of a Zero in the pane of his electric sight, and squeezed the trip. He felt the Mustang shudder as his guns spat flame. The next moment the Zero was transformed into a cloud of smoke.

Brand felt a rush of elation at his victory, but the elation was short-lived. A storm of cupro-steel stung his legs and thudded into the firewall. He fishtailed wildly and tried to zoom again, but the sky was full of planes. One of them was screaming down directly in front of him.

He gritted his teeth and rolled. The air about him was filled with death and he knew he could never escape. The Brands would have another hero—a dead hero! When he flattened out there was another Zero on his tail and in desperation he dived. He knew he couldn't out-dive the Zero.

Down—down—down—five thousand feet,

with the wind yowling a hellish dirge through the bullet holes in his cockpit. Down six thousand, with his stiff body shuddering in tune with the screaming plane. His bloodshot eyes glanced at the mirror and at that instant he saw the Zero explode!

For a moment he couldn't believe what he saw. How could the Zero explode? Who was firing at it? He was conscious then of the bud-a-bud-a-bud of fifties and thirties, and he gutted the stick and pulled out. A thousand pounds of pressure smashed him into the bucket. He felt his guts drain into his lap. His face went haggard and the yawning hole of darkness reached up to swallow him. He screamed to tighten his guts and then the Mustang was out of the clutch.

Curiously he looked around. He bit his lip as he saw two Zeros on the tail of a P-40. In the cockpit of the P-40 was the jack knife of Jimmy Cawn. Brand's head buzzed with thoughts. He realized it was Jimmy Cawn who had shot the Zero off his tail, and that now Cawn was in a worse spot than he had been. Deep in his conscience was a small voice urging:

"Go in and help him. You owe him that much. Get one of the Zeros at least!"

But drowning out that small voice was the vast relief of his body at realizing that he was still alive and whole. Without willing it he pulled away, zoomed skyward in a sort of panicky confusion. Then he was aware of the other Dinghow Salenas in the sky, killing the Japs or chasing them away. At that moment a spray of oil hissed from his cowling and splattered against the coop like black blood.

He had no choice but to go down. There was no place to make a landing safely but on the runway at Nachi Lolo. He nursed the Allison carefully, watching the oil pressure decrease. He had to get all the altitude and distance he could before the engine conked out.

He had a long gliding radius and he shut the engine off just before it burned out. He made a flat glide, but even then he missed the runway by a thousand feet and landed in a rice paddy. The Mustang plowed to a stop in the thick mud, slamming Brand against the instrument panel. Shaken, he climbed from the cockpit and slid off the wing into the oozing mud.

It was tough walking. By the time he reached the field, the rest of Dinghow Salenas were coming in for a landing. He stood near the end of the field, watching them. Sickness crawled in his stomach when he realized that Jimmy Cawn was not among them.

Resolutely he walked down the field and waited near the mud shack which he had entered earlier in the day. Soon the men came, and he braced himself to take whatever re-

buke they had to offer. But none of them spoke to him as they filed past and entered the building.

He felt a hot flush crawl up to his scalp. Their silence was worse than any words could have been. His chagrin gave way to anger, and he entered the building after them.

It was getting late, now. Three candles served to accentuate the gloom of the room. The men were already seated about the table prepared to continue the dinner which had been interrupted by the raid. The yellow light etched the grim circle of faces in bold relief.

As Brand entered the room the men stopped talking and his slim hands clenched. He wanted to blurt out that he was sorry for what had happened, but the utter futility of such a gesture held him dumb. Then Clyde Hathan, looking white and thin and as holy as a saint in the flickering light, rose to propose a toast:

Drink deep and break the glasses,  
A throb of silence be our prayer,  
As through the room his spirit passes  
To paused beside his empty chair.

Again we muse the old, old story,  
That time must ever tell—  
Some men chose to die in glory,  
While others choose to live in hell!

They didn't break the glasses because the glasses were milk cans with the tops cut out, but Brand saw Dedman's thick paw crush his can like a vise. Brand knew that toast had been aimed at him and at that moment he was in hell. All throughout his life he had been protected against things like this. The Brand tradition had set him apart from other men who had not dared question his courage.

But out of the depth of the damnation which choked him, came a brave, honest impulse. He walked quietly around the table—the table he had shortly before refused to honor with his presence—and paused at Cawn's empty chair. Without a word he sat down. That simple act did what words could not have done. Dedman pushed him the wine bottle and Brand poured a stiff hooker of the potent drink down his parched throat. The burn of the liquor in his guts loosened the tension.

The men didn't include him in the conversation, but they were no longer so brutally hostile. He ate the boiled pork and unpolished rice with relish. When the meal was over he went outside alone. He had to think. It was dark now, and he stood behind the big mulberry tree at one end of the house. He had come to Nachi Lolo with a sly plan to trick a man into taking the risk of the job which had been assigned to him. Instead of finding help, he had found a strange collection of men with raw passions and one burning aim—to kill Japs. He had become so emotionally em-

broiled with these men that he was confused.

He heard someone leave the mud shack and walk away in the dark. He stood there a moment longer, considering his next move. He came to a grim decision.

He'd sat in Jimmy Cawn's chair. He would sleep in Cawn's bed. Resolutely he walked to the pig barn.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Dare



AS HE neared the pig barn he saw light filtering through the cracks of the slaternly door. He thought that the Chinese, who had shared the barn with Cawn, must be inside, so he shoved the door open and entered. He stiffened as the door closed behind him.

Whisper Lord was seated on the edge of Cawn's bunk looking at a picture of a dark, lovely woman with a child in her arms. Lord's eyes were bright with moisture when he looked up, and the shadows, concealing the hideous wound of his throat, gave to his face a kindly, sympathetic look. Even his mechanical voice seemed more soothing than ghastly when he spoke.

"I-I-I-I a-a-am pa-a-a-cking Cawn's things. I-I-I-I thought you might want to sleep here," Lord's voice throbbed.

Brand was startled by Lord's perception of his feelings. He felt drawn to the man.

"Thanks," he said softly and then nodded at the picture. "His wife?"

"Y-e-e-e-s," Lord said.

"I'm sorry for what happened, sorry as hell, Lord. I wish I had died instead. Hathan was right in that toast he gave. It would have been easier—"

"In war one is not a-a-allowed to ta-a-a-ke the easier way by choice, Major. You said you ha-a-a-d a job to do?"

Then Brand found himself unburdening himself of the hateful secret he had meant to keep to himself.

"I have a job to do—a damned hard job. I've got to go to Laopau alone. They chose me because I know the country and I've got the flying cross. But I'm not a hero. The cross shouldn't belong to me. I'm afraid. I came here hoping to trick one of you into doing the job for me."

Brand had expected Lord to chastise him for a coward, but instead, Lord said simply.

"You sti-i-i-ll have time to go."

"But I haven't got the courage."

"It took courage to do what you did in the mess tonight. It took courage to come here. Courage is something a ma-a-an doesn't know

he po-o-o-sesses unti-i-i-l he ne-e-eds it," Lord insisted.

"But my plane's mired down, the engine burned out," Brand said desperately.

"My pla-a-a-ne will ta-a-ake you there, Major. I'll have Lau Chong fill the ta-a-a-nk."

Lord's voice was a challenge. Lord was daring him to test his courage. For a long moment Brand was silent. He heard Clyde Hathan's words tumbling through his head: "While others chose to live in hell!"

"Have the plane ready, Lord. I'll sleep awhile. Don't tell the others I'm taking off," he said.

Lord gripped his hand and Major Brand forgot about rank and tradition and thought only of the strength of spirit in the scarred man before him.

It was an hour before dawn when Brand walked across the narrow runway. A thin moon washed the earth with silver. He was startled to find Lau Chong keeping faithful watch by Lord's plane. The Chinese had hot coffee and brandy in a thermos and he offered it to Brand, who drank it thankfully.

"*Dinghow, parn yau,*" Lau Chong said, wishing him well.

Brand slid into the bucket seat, felt of his chute harness and pulled the canopy shut. Then he kicked over the Allison and warmed it briefly. Flipping his tail, he signalled the chocks away and kicked off the brakes. The silver moonlight flowed past him. Then he was climbing up toward the stars.

He used the river as a guide until he reached Hupeh Province, then turned south toward the mountains which lay like sleeping camels in the half-light of dawn. He picked out landmarks in the murky haze. When he reached the wide break in the hills, he knew he was over Laopau. He headed down. There was the field south of the town near the house of Yenping, the Chinese family who had befriended him before.

Brand cut his motor, slid into the field and sat tensely in the cockpit listening. He climbed stiffly to the ground. Through the river haze he saw the house and started toward it. He was near the straw pile beside the dugout barn when a jangle of voices held him rooted to the earth.

"*Iku nin.* Now many men are there?"

"*Tomare—tomare!* Halt!"

"*Anata no namae wa nan desu ka?*"

Brand felt a rush of panic which held him rooted to the spot. How had the Japs come to be here? Of course, they were in the town and in the barracks near the river, but he had not expected to find them at the house of a humble farmer. Squat figures with rifles came warily toward him and he knew that to try and run would be suicide. He stood still, the blood draining from his face.

A Jap petty officer with a monkey-like face and gimlet eyes, came forward with more courage than the rest and at sight of the squat, ugly figure, Brand felt the terror drain from him.

Pride stiffened his back.

"Please to putting the hands up," the Jap said in English.

A momentary hesitation caused the Jap to snarl something that sounded like, "*Inu jigoku!*"

Brand stalled because he remembered his sealed envelope. If he hoped to get out of this alive, he must save that. For the moment it would be safe, because these Japs would not search him until he was taken to their commanding officer.

"I have come from the Yendachi," Brand lied, and the mention of that dread name brought a look of sly fear into the non-com's eyes.

"That we shall discover soon enough. Must take you to house. *Hayaku!* Quickly!"

Brand's body felt clammy with instinctive fear. He had come here expecting to pick up the person he had been sent for, and now he was hopelessly trapped. He could do nothing but play his string out. Above all he must preserve the sealed envelope. But how? He walked stiffly after the non-com, two armed guards following him. As they entered the covered porch on the back of the farm house, Brand remembered the bird house which Sue, Yenping's charming daughter, had kept there. As they entered the deep shadows of the porch, Brand slipped the letter from his pocket and into the small door of the bird house.

The non-com pushed open the door; the hot smell of vile cigars and saki struck Brand in the face. He entered the familiar room with its hewn-timbered roof and huge fireplace. The copper pots, in which Mrs. Yenping had taken such great pride, still hung from the hooks; and the oil lamp with its hand-painted shade stood upon the plank table under the cracked window. Everything was the same, but Brand had a feeling that tragedy stalked in the musty corners of the room.

At the table sat a Japanese officer, rapier-thin and taller than ordinary. He had deep eyes which suggested a touch of some foreign blood. The officer's bony hand fingered a glass of imported red wine.

"*Gomen kodasai*—excuse me, excellency. We have captured this man who claims to come from the Yendachi," the non-com said.

The thin officer, who held the rank of colonel, said with a shrug, "Very interesting. I suppose the Yendachi sent you to collect their graft for lying to me about finding an important spy at this house?"

Brand felt the cunning cruelty of the man as though it were a whip upon him. "You're

Colonel Nomuja, aren't you?" he said in a steady voice. "Part Gypsy, and aide to General Yamakatsu."

Nomuja's swarthy face flushed darkly. He leaped up with a catlike movement. Drawing the gold-hilted sword at his side, he struck Brand on the side of the head with the flat of it.

"*Damare!*" he snarled.

The cold slap of the steel ignited Brand's anger. Without thinking of the odds, he leaped and struck Nomuja in his thin, cruel mouth.

"So *sicha ikemasen*—you must not do that!" the non-com cried. With the two guards, he leaped upon Brand. Nomuja stood snarling curses and wiping the blood from his mouth with a silk handkerchief.

**B**RAND WAS no match for the combined attack. A rifle butt beat him to his knees, and a kick in the head from the sentry's thick boot sent him sprawling.

"*Okinasai*—get up!" Nomuja in his anger reverted to Japanese, forgetting his precise English.

Brand shook his dazed head and lay still. He realized, suddenly, that he was on the threshold of hell. Nomuja was a sadist and torturer. Brand wondered what had been the fate of Yenping and his family.

"*Hayaku*—hurry!" Nomuja ordered impatiently.

The Jap guards dragged Brand to his feet. "Strip him to the waist!" Nomuja said.

Brand stood stiffly and made no further resistance as his heavy flying jacket was yanked off. Soon he stood bare to the waist, his body unmarked except for the flesh wound in his arm which he had received during the dog-fight.

Nomuja regained his composure. A cold smile twisted his mouth.

"I see no mark of the Yendachi on your woman's skin, Major. Perhaps, now, you'll tell me why you came here," he said calmly.

"I got lost," Brand lied. He was trying desperately in his mind to find some way to escape torture and not tell the truth.

"I am not a fool," Nomuja retorted, his slim hand playing with his sword. "You came here to pick up a spy whom I have trailed all the way from Paotin. A spy who knows too much about certain trouble brewing in Pekin—a trouble which reaches all the way to Burma. If you name the spy and tell me where to find him, I can make it quite pleasant for you."

Brand, fishing for information himself, replied, "Why don't you ask Yenping and his family?"

"They appeared unable to use their tongues, so we tore them out. Yenping and his stubborn wife are buried in their own rice field."

Brand caught his breath. The hint of the torture the loyal Chinese had gone through made his skin crawl. Nomuja's words were a warning of what he himself must endure. And what of Sue? He realized the fate to which the Japanese would consign a beautiful girl.

"And the girl?" Brand asked.

A look of annoyance flickered in Nomuja's hollow eyes.

"She is still alive," he said.

And wishing she were dead, Brand thought. In the little moment of silent hesitation before Nomuja's next question, Brand heard a subdued snivelling and hacking as if some diseased body was striving to throw off accumulated poison. He realized that someone was in the low, back bedroom of the house and the fact that the door was partly open, warned him that the questioning was being listened to by the hidden person. A look of uneasy repugnance flicked across Nomuja's cruel face.

"We're wasting time, Brand," Nomuja said, learning Brand's name from the dog-tag they had taken when they'd stripped him. "I have asked you a simple, direct question and you have evaded it. For every lie you tell me, you shall do penance. I do not need your answers except to corroborate the statements of the American we have in custody. Perhaps he is a friend of yours. It would be better for you both if you told the truth."

Brand tensed. Who could this other American be? Or was Nomuja telling him a lie to force him into talking?

"I was lost," Brand repeated grimly. "I had been at this farm before and knew I could land here."

"*Asa-a-a-a!*" Nomuja hissed angrily. "You came here to pick up a spy. Where is he?"

"*Gomen kudasai*, excellency," the non-com said apologetically. He stepped up to Nomuja and spoke rapidly in Japanese. Then he bowed and stepped back.

Nomuja studied Brand quietly for a moment and then he said with conviction, "So you were at this farm before! You sacrificed one of your men so that you could escape with some papers which have cost us many lives. I see direct questioning will get us nowhere. Let me show you what happened to Sergeant Simms, whom you deserted."

Brand clenched his fists. The ghost of Simms was coming back to haunt him. Perhaps Simms was still alive? Perhaps it was he whom they claimed to have in custody.

"*Watakushi no yuu tori ni itase!*" Nomuja said swiftly to the guards.

CHAPTER FOUR

Respite

Brand was seized; his arms were tied behind his back. His legs were tied together and he was bound to a chair. The non-com stirred up the coals in the fireplace and shoved the slim poker among them.

"We shall give you a mark," Nomuja smiled, "a mark more easily read than the mark of the Yendachi."

Brand felt a rush of the old terror at being maimed and disfigured. What harm could come of telling them the truth? The spy was not here. If he lied and they killed him, he could never return with the spy, but if he remained alive. . . .

The non-com came forward with the cherry-red poker. Nomuja took it from him with a look akin to delight in his sadist eyes. He reserved the pleasure of torture for himself. Brand sought desperately to stave off the hot iron. He felt the heat near his bared chest, and sweat stood out on his forehead. He tried to speak but his throat constricted and choked him.

Then the hot iron bit into his breast bone, and Nomuja's thin hand drew it delicately downward.

Brand let out a hoarse cry of pain, and at that moment the door to the low bedroom flew open. A figure dressed in a gaudily decorated military uniform rolled forth in a wheelchair. The man was small, incredibly wrinkled, but the fleshless hands which clutched the rims of the wheels like claws, had the power to thrust the chair forward with remarkable precision and speed.

The shriveled man's entry into the room had an electric effect. Even Nomuja bowed and moved backward, holding the smoking iron. The stench of burned skin filled the room, and Brand was getting over the first shock of the pain.

The shriveled man looked at Nomuja with his marble eyes, then faced Brand.

"I am General Yamakatsu!" There was the sharp authority in the voice of a man who destroys opposition with a word.

**B**RAND FELT revulsion at the thought of such a dissipated, ineffectual body containing the cruel, cunning mind which had made the name of Yamakatsu one to be feared and respected.

Even the Japanese stood in awe of him, and in many things he considered himself superior to the god emperor. As Yamakatsu hacked and snivelled to clear his flabby throat, Brand said fiercely:

"I'm Major Brand. I'm a human being among savage apes. Of course you can kill me slowly, but every crime against an American is a crime against Japan for it will surely increase by tenfold the price your misguided people will be forced to pay in expiation."

Yamakatsu hacked and said with a shrug, "*Shigata ga nai*—it can't be helped. Nomuja, here, lets his ardor get the better of his judgment. Only a fool would scar a man unless he meant to kill him, because the scar is proof of torture with which the torturer might someday find himself convicted."

"My only wish was to follow your orders, Excellency, and force him to speak," Nomuja said with superbly veiled fury.

"Dead men do not speak, Colonel," Yamakatsu reminded him.

"He is not dead—not yet," Nomuja objected.

"He is not going to die," Yamakatsu said definitely.

Brand looked up with renewed hope at these words, but did not believe them.

"I'm just going to suffer, is that it?" he asked hoarsely.

"You are not going to suffer. So sorry, Major, for the inconvenience you have been put to." Yamakatsu bowed slightly.

Yamakatsu spoke sharply to the non-com, and to Brand's surprise he was untied com-

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pletely. Suspicion flared in his mind as he realized Yamakatsu must have some sly, deceptive reason for treating him thus.

Brand was handed his flying jacket and marched outside where it was now bright sunlight. He heard guttural laughter and Japanese voices near the barn where some Japs were indulging in a cruel sport. There was a hunchbacked, limping Chinese boy whom the Japs had kept at the farm to feed the few head of stock, and the Japs were pelting him with rocks as he hobbled for the protection of the huge straw stack. Brand's sympathy went out to the boy who darted awkwardly through the hail of stones.

As he passed the bird house, Brand looked for the envelope he had concealed there. It was gone! He was pushed along to one of the three big root cellars which had been dug into the clay soil centuries before. He was given some boiled rice, a candle and some matches, then was locked in the cellar alone.

He lit the candle, and in the yellow glow, he inspected the interior of the musty cellar. It was empty except for the big pile of straw in one corner. Sorting out some of the cleanest straw, which had evidently been used to further protect the stored vegetables against frost, he made a bed.

He wondered if, as Nomuja had said, there was another American imprisoned on the farm. He wondered what had become of the precious envelope he had hidden in the bird house. If he had the letter he might contrive to bribe one of the Jap guards to deliver it to the Chinese leader of the district. But he did not have the letter, and this fact depressed him because it decreased his chances of getting out of Laopau alive, even if he did contrive to escape from the dugout.

The burn on his chest pained him fiercely, but through lack of sleep the night before, he managed to doze off after having extinguished the candle.

He was awakened when a guard opened the door to bring him more boiled rice and some weak tea. Through the door he saw that it was dusk outside. Before he could engage the guard in conversation, the Jap slipped outside and closed the heavy door.

Brand ate some of the sticky rice and drank the tea because there was no water. Then he composed himself once more upon the straw bed. There was nothing to do but wait. He dozed lightly again, and was unaware of how long he had been dozing when he heard something moving in the pile of straw in the corner of the big dugout. He rose stealthily to a crouching position, groped for the matches. The rustling continued. He backed away toward the door. Could there have been some animal concealed in the straw? It seemed unlikely that the Japs would not have dis-

covered it if there was. Or—could it be a man?

Brand crouched against the earth wall, hearing the straw being moved stealthily aside. His fists clenched. He had no weapon with which to ward off an attack, so his only hope was to strike a match and rush the intruder at the same time. Then the straw stopped moving. Brand heard someone breathing as though with exertion.

He struck the match.

He stopped his rush halfway, for standing before him was the hunchbacked boy he had seen in the barnyard. His hand shaking slightly, Brand lit the candle.

"Where did you come from, *paun yau?*" he demanded.

The boy looked up calmly. Brand was immediately conscious of the look of composed confidence in the young face. In spite of the dirt smeared upon it, the face was as beautiful as a girl's. It was a pity that the boy was deformed.

"It was quite simple, Major Brand," the low, full voice replied. "There is another way out of this cellar."

"But didn't the Japs see you?"

There was a familiar laugh that shocked Brand. "The Japs are fools as well as devils. I shall make them pay for what they did to me. Give me your hand."

The small hand took Brand's fingers and placed them upon the hump behind the slim shoulders. Brand was astonished that the hump felt so artificial. The small figure straightened: there was no crook in the supposedly lame leg. White teeth flashed in smile.

Do you not know me, Major Brand?" the low voice asked.

Brand gasped, "Sue! Sue Yenping!"

"*Dinghow*, Major. The Japs believe I ran away, but I came back to avenge the cruel death of my parents. There is not much time to talk. Come with me."

"But where? The Japs will not let me escape so easily. They have let me live for a purpose," Brand insisted.

"Quite so. They are using you for a decoy, Major. They have turned your plane around, ready to take off, and they have sent word among the Chinese that you are here, hoping to bring out the spy you were supposed to pick up. The Japs are keeping hidden here at the farm. It's a foolish plan one would expect of the Japanese. Now come, hurry!"

Brand followed her small figure as she burrowed through the straw, and found himself in a small tunnel in which he had to crawl on hands and knees. They came to a branch in the tunnel. The girl took the left branch. Soon they were burrowing through another pile of straw. Brand expected to emerge into the open, but to his surprise, he

found himself in another dugout where a candle guttered in puddle of grease.

"Here is another you must know. The two of you can arrange what must be done," Sue said softly.

Brand rose up and moved around her. The other American was hunched down near the candle. At first Brand thought it was a trick of his imagination and that he was seeing a ghost. Then Jimmy Cawn's jack-knife frame unfolded as he stood up.

"How in the hell did you get here, Major?" he asked.

Brand rushed over and put both hands on Cawn's bony shoulders. At finding Cawn alive, a great load seemed to lift from his heart and mind.

"I might ask you that," he said, "but right now I'm thanking God that you're alive. I went through hell when I let the Nips take you, but I couldn't make myself act. I was afraid."

"Then why did you come here?"

"It was my job, and Whisper Lord and the others gave me the courage to face it. I thought you were dead. So do they."

"I cracked up all right," Cawn said, "and was knocked out in the crackup. Next thing I knew I was in a Jap bomber being flown here for questioning. They play rough."

Cawn, extending his mashed fingers in evidence, told how he had been tortured.

"And all for nothing," Brand said fiercely. "The spy is gone."

"No, my friend, Sue said. "He is here. You two must make a plan to get him away."

Accepting the remarkable girl's statement as fact, Brand said quickly, "That's your job, Cawn. Only two can possibly squeeze into the P-40 and take off. I'll distract the Japs while you—"

"It was your job and it still is," Cawn insisted.

Now Brand pleaded, not for Cawn, but for himself. "I'm asking you to go as a favor to me, Jimmy. I ran out of here once before and left a buddy to die."

"And now you want me to do the same," Cawn protested.

"I'm not your buddy, Cawn. I'm the guy who fed you to the Japs. Do you think I can go back to Nachi Lolo and say, 'I found Jimmy Cawn in Laopau and left him there to die?' I'd rather you tell them that I redeemed myself."

"If you promise to make the plane if the spy doesn't show up," Cawn said, "I'll fly the P-40 out of here."

"It's a deal," Major Brand replied promptly.

"Come, *parn yau*, you must return to your prison before the Japanese miss you. Before dawn, I shall return to bring you all together. The ancient root cellars on this farm were

connected by tunnels years ago. The Japs do not suspect this," Sue said.

Brand turned and followed the girl into the tunnel while Cawn rearranged the straw over the opening. Back in his own dugout, Brand looked at the slim figure of the girl, and he forgot the faked hump and the dirt smeared upon her beautiful face. He marvelled how one so small and so charming could be so brave; he came to understand better the indomitable spirit of China which no conqueror had ever found the energy to destroy.

"You are a brave girl, Sue," he said softly. "I am sure the spirits of your dead parents rejoice to know how you are defending China."

He placed his hands upon her soft cheeks and kissed her gently upon the forehead.

"I am honored," Sue bowed slightly. Then she slipped away and Brand pushed the straw up around the entrance to the tunnel.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### No Escape



THAT night, Major Brand did not sleep. He knew what he must do in the morning and that he could not possibly live until the sun was high. He thought of what he had been told about his forebears, how

gallantly they had lived and died. He had not lived gallantly. He had leaned always upon that tradition which had clothed him like armor. But here in Laopau, that tradition was nothing. Here life was stripped to the naked impulse to live and wreak revenge upon those who had defiled the land.

He slept fitfully, unaware of time. Once a Jap opened the door and flashed a light into the room. Brand tensed because he believed he would be led forth to more torture, but the sentry closed the door, satisfied to find the major in bed.

At dawn, a hand shook him gently. Brand leaped up, unable to believe it was not part of the ghastly dream he had had. He heard Sue's low voice:

"The time has come, Major Brand. Yamakatsu is *ngu-how*—bad. If you choose to help the spy escape, he will surely kill you. Kill you slowly and painfully."

"The spy must escape," Brand said grimly. "You must tell me how to make certain of that."

"You could distract the Japanese."

"How?"

"Here are more matches. I have kept some for myself. We shall emerge from the tunnels under the straw stack behind the barn. If you and I create enough confusion—say a big fire

—the Japs will not notice Lieutenant Cawn and the important man he is taking with him.”

“Good,” Brand said quietly. He couldn’t help wonder if his father would ever hear of how he had died.

“*Fy chow*—hurry,” Sue said. “It will soon be daylight, and we must emerge just when it is light enough for Cawn to take off from the small field.

“Is the spy ready?”

“Yes.”

Then Brand thought of the sealed envelope he had left in the bird house. If the Japs had taken it and opened it, they would be convinced that he had come on an important errand and had not been lost as he had told them. The fact that they had not confronted him with the evidence was proof of how sure Yamakatsu was that he could not escape.

He followed Sue through the straw once more. At the branch of the tunnels Cawn was waiting for them.

“I’m sorry as hell we can’t all get out of here,” Cawn said.

Major Brand thought a moment. Then he replied slowly, “I’m not exactly sorry, Jimmy. You see I have a tradition to live by, and I’m sure none of the Brands gave their life for more than I believe I am giving my life for. If the information this spy has can turn the tide of battle in Burma and China, I will have accomplished more than I had hoped for. If you can send a message to my father in Washington, tell him I was not afraid to die.”

The three of them crawled down another tunnel. Where it emerged under the straw stack, they found the important man waiting. Brand could not see this man for whom he was giving his life. He knew only that the man was not large. There was sincerity in the man’s voice when he spoke.

“The girl has told me of the difficult situation here, gentlemen. I’m sorry I cannot send you both back to the American lines and remain here myself. The truth is, the things I know are important and many. I lived with the Yendachi, who have secrets even the Jap high command does not dream of; to write such things down and take a chance on them falling into the Jap’s hands, would be foolhardy. Therefore I have kept them in my mind and I must go with one of you.”

“It has all been settled,” Brand said evenly.

“Major,” Cawn said in a disturbed voice, “you’re bigger than any tradition in which you were reared. It takes guts to do what you’re doing. The Japs will make it damned unpleasant for you when they find they’ve been tricked.”

“We’re not away yet,” the spy, who gave no name, reminded them. “The Japs might yet stop us.”

Sue said, “Wait here, under the straw until

I have one more look around. If the Japs are near, I shall not return.”

Brand watched the girl limp from the small hole she had fashioned in the center of the big straw stack. He realized that it was through her cleverness and courage that any of them had a chance to get away.

Minutes passed, long minutes, in which Brand tried not to think. He had little dreamed on his flight over the hump how weird the ending of his adventure would be. Curiously enough, he felt no fear. He was impatient only to have the thing over with.

“There must be trouble,” Cawn whispered huskily, shifting his jack-knife body in the cramped space.

“You Americans are too impatient,” the spy grunted. “You should learn the patience of China. Eight years of war have not broken her spirit.”

The straw moved stealthily as Sue reappeared. “The Japs are not suspicious. There are sentries, but we must distract them. Here,” she said, handing Brand a Nambu automatic, “you might have use for this. And here is something else,” she added, handing him the sealed envelope he had left in the bird house.

With a catch in his throat, Major Brand took the envelope, and the knowledge that he had it once more in his hands gave him hope. But the hope was short-lived. There was nobody now, to whom he might appeal for aid.

“Where did you get this envelope?” he asked Sue.

“I saw you hide it in the bird house. I took it for fear the Japs would find it, *parn yau*,” Sue replied.

Brand turned and gave the envelope to Cawn. “If you get in a tight spot, give this envelope to some Chinese official. It will insure your getting all possible aid.”

“Thanks,” Cawn said, “and good luck, Major.”

“We go now,” Sue told them. “When we emerge from the straw, the two men must run directly for the plane. There is sufficient fuel left in the tanks to reach safe territory, but the ammunition has been removed from the guns. Major Brand and I will set fire to the barn and the straw stack.”

“But the Japs will discover this tunnel if we burn the straw and it will be of no further use to you,” Brand protested.

“The ashes will cover the small opening, *parn yau*. Come, *fy choy*! It is getting daylight.”

Brand and the girl emerged from the straw pile first, in order to begin their work before the two men were discovered racing for the P-40. With the pistol shoved into his belt and his hand clutching the matches, Brand leaped into the open.



Just as he reached the barn, a Japanese sentry cried: "Tomare! Halt!"

Brand dodged around the corner of the barn, and tossed a lighted match into the dry straw near the wooden partition which divided the mud walls.

"Koi—koi! Shageki yoi!" The Japs took up the cry, calling for swift action.

Brand saw short, bowlegged figures emerge from the house and outbuildings and run wildly across the yard. Then he tossed a match into the thatched roof of the barn and watched it explode into flame. He dodged through the smoke, determined to live as long as possible and do what damage he could.

He leaped into the clearing between the house and the barn, then froze in his tracks. Through a rift in the smoke, he caught a glimpse of the field where the P-40 crouched in the gray, thick light. Jimmy Cawn was having trouble getting the cold engine started. At the same time he saw a Jap with a sub-machine gun running toward the P-40.

The ghost of failure stared him in the face, and Brand had the horrible knowledge that his sacrifice might be all in vain. He recalled, too, the picture which Whisper Lord had held on Cawn's cot in Nachi Lolo—the picture of the dark, lovely woman with the child in her arms.

Cawn *must* live!

Major Brand ran toward the field with the Nambu clutched in his fingers. Many things were happening at once. The Allison coughed and sputtered. Coughed again. The Jap was firing at the engine of the P-40, hoping to cripple it. Brand brought his gun up and fired. His first shot spun the Jap sentry around, then Brand heard a vicious curse screamed at him from the direction of the house. A bullet tore through his thigh, knocking him down. He didn't turn to face the new danger because the sentry was on his knees, still firing.

Brand's next bullet killed the sentry, just as the P-40 started down the field. At the same moment a gun blasted from his left. Brand

turned to see Colonel Nomuja charging him. Nomuja's next bullet hit Brand in the chest and filled his body with a numbed, delicious sense of lethargy. He lifted his hand slowly, as pain lanced the nerve centers of his brain. He could see Nomuja's thin, evil face over the barrel of the Nambu. Then he pulled the trigger!

He saw Nomuja fall as in a dream, and then the dream ended and unconsciousness swallowed him in a gulp.

## CHAPTER SIX

### No Quarter

**T**HE next thing Brand heard, was the vulgar hacking and coughing of General Yamakatsu. He felt his body shudder with the spasms of pain which emanated from the wound in his chest.

He was lying on the table. The lamp glowed from the mantle above him. A hot, burning iron seared the wound in his chest and he almost passed out again.

"So sorry, American," a soft, expressionless voice said near his ear, "but we have no other anaesthetic. The Nipponese soldier does not require it."

Dimly Brand saw the twitching face of the doctor who was treating him. He saw the evil face of Nomuja in the glow of the lamp, a red gash where Brand's bullet had furrowed his jaw. He had not killed Nomuja, and he realized how eager Nomuja was for revenge and how lasting and thorough the tortures he would devise.

"So the plane did get away," he gasped.

Yamakatsu's voice answered furiously, "You should mourn that fact, Major Brand. You did not get away—and neither did the girl!"

Brand painfully turned his head and gritted his teeth. Sue was half suspended from one

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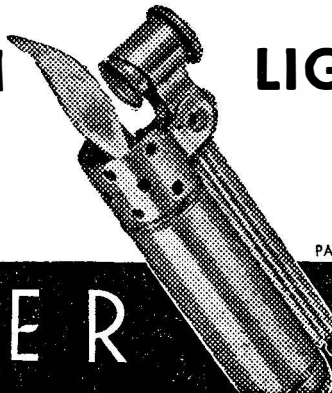
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of the rafters by a rope which was bound around her wrists. Just the balls of her small feet touched the floor.

Brand shouted in impotent rage, "You dogs, let her go!"

"Do not excite yourself so early in the evening, Major," Nomuja purred, smiling coldly. "No one can help you. We have waited all day for you to regain consciousness so that you might enjoy our hospitality. Let me give you a sample. First I must test the iron."

Nomuja plucked one of the hot irons from the fireplace and turned upon the girl. Her body twitched, but there was no change in the expression of her face, unless it was the hate in her eyes growing more intense.

Suddenly the roar of planes surged low across the firm, and Nomuja was startled to the extent that he burned a hole in his immaculate new uniform.

Yamakatsu propelled his wheel chair forward, excitement on his shrivelled face. "*Wakarimassen! Shageki yoi!* I do not understand this. Prepare for action!"

Brand felt a rush of hope. The planes sounded familiar. But there was no outcry from the sentries, and the roar of the planes died away. Nomuja breathed easier, an evil smile splitting his thin lips.

"You see," he said, noticing Brand's expression of hope, "you have no friends."

Yamakatsu spun his chair in front of Nomuja. "You could still live if you would be truthful."

Brand had given up all hope of life, but thinking of the girl, he said, "And what about her?"

Yamakatsu's evil face clouded. "What affair is it of yours what becomes of the girl? She is a Chinese, and you are American."

"Perhaps I can help you make up your mind," Nomuja broke in, picking up one of the razor-sharp knives which the doctor had used for scalpels.

Nomuja once more turned toward the girl and in a frenzy of horror and anger, Brand forced himself up from the table. At that instant the door to the room flung open and a deep Yank voice barked:

"The show's over, bums!"

Brand was stupefied to see Captain Dedman, Whisper Lord and Baldy Feller slip into the room. How had they come here without arousing the sentries?

Nomuja, with a vicious curse, crouched back against the table, drawing and firing his gun with one movement. Yamakatsu, screaming orders, upset his wheelchair and crouched behind the bullet-proof back of it.

In the exultation of the moment, Brand found the strength to reach for the other knife at the foot of the table. He drove the knife into Nomuja's back. Then Brand slid from

the table, staggered to Sue's side, and cut the rope holding her off the floor. Her wrists were raw and bleeding from the ropes.

Dedman's strong hands caught Brand. Whisper Lord helped the girl. The roar of planes could be heard once more above the excited shouts of the demoralized Japanese troops outside.

"Come on—we've got to get out of here!" Dedman growled.

As they made their way toward the field, Brand heard the P-40s roaring back and forth across the farm, covering their retreat. He knew it was the Dinghow Salenas. Dedman signalled them with a flashlight, and Browning slugs snarled and battered into the Jap troops milling about the farmhouse.

On the field was a Lockheed 14 which the Japs were too demoralized to try and stop. The engines were ticking.

As the men climbed aboard, Sue refused to go with them.

"I am useful here," she said quietly. "This is my battleground. I have many places in which to hide. But before you go, Major Brand, I wish to recognize your courage."

She tore a whisp of cloth from her tattered shirt, and soaking it in the blood on her wrist, she gave it to Brand.

"Thank you, *parn yau*," Brand said humbly. He now had a bit of red cloth to match that which Dedman wore on his chest, and this simple decoration was stained with the blood of China itself.

Back at Nachi Lolo, propped up on a couch by the table, Brand listened while Jimmy Cawn told how he had delivered the spy to the big field near Chungking for the long hop into India.

"When I showed them the letter, they insisted I take the old Hudson," Cawn explained.

Dedman went on to tell how he, Lord and Feller had parachuted from the Hudson the first time the planes had swooped across the farm. They'd killed the sentries.

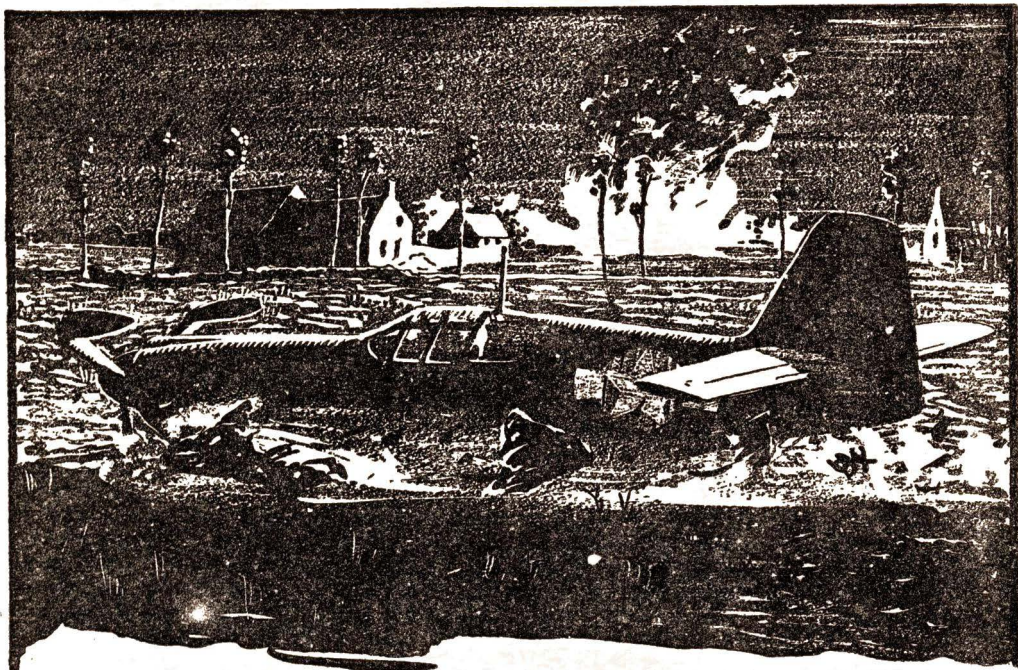
"But what made you take the risk just to save me?" Brand asked. "Was it something in that sealed envelope I gave Cawn?"

Cawn, with a wry smile, handed him a piece of paper. "This is what was in the envelope," he said.

Brand stared at the paper. It was perfectly blank. "General Drake made a fool of me," he gasped bitterly.

"No," Dedman said quietly, "he did not make a fool of you. China is a strange land in which a bit of red ribbon is more precious than a cross of gold, and a blank piece of paper, which is properly sealed and marked, might command the services of Chiang himself. China is a land of tradition, Brand, and it respects courage above everything."

*Side by side in those flaming, flak-torn skies over Normandy rode Danny Carr and the fighting ghost, who showed him that some things, like love and hate—and red-blood courage—never die. . . .*



# Mademoiselle Mustang

By LANCE KERMIT

WE WERE in the Nissen hut, working up a binge on the stuff Link Caswell had got in a package from Vermont. We forgot our Mustangs out on the strip and feasted on lobster meat and liverwurst spread, saltines and sardines and fruitcake. They know how to pack up a box in Vermont. There was also some maple sugar. We washed the tasty morsels down with prepared coffee that came in a little glass jar. We got our stomachs full and started shooting the breeze, talking about everything—the difference between Yankee and Rebel girls, if a Focke-Wulf was or was not the toughest baby to handle over the lowlands, if the dogfaces really thought they could win a war without the air corps.

"My old man was a dogface last time," I said to Willie Tripp. "For years I've heard about *Chateau-Thierry* and *St. Mihiel* and the *Argonne*, and how he practically scared the

Huns out of the war. You got to humor a forty-five year old guy. I guess he was right when he said the flyers didn't give his outfit much help in the first war. I reminded him more than once that planes were only rattle-traps then. You couldn't compare the air stuff in this one and the last one. But he told me the Infantry always had to mop things up, and said not to get too snooty about being a flyer. At times I got awful sick of his talk, even if he is my old man. I told him once, 'To hear you talk civilization and me wouldn't be here if it wa'n't for you.'"

"Yeah, I know how it is," Link said. "I got an uncle."

"That crack cost me a new shotgun," I said. "Think we'll drive our kids nuts tellin' them how we won this one?"

"When I go home, I want to forget it all," Willie said. "I'm gonna concentrate on new

kinds of ice cream sundaes and hair-do's on the dames back home. Birds and bees, maple syrup and butterflies, that will be my speed!"

We were going out in a couple of hours, we guessed, to play hell with Nazi railroads. It was nice at times to watch your heavy stuff dig into an engine's boiler and blow it up. I guess my old man has a right to call that last thing a war—it's all a matter of perspective. I wish he hadn't said that corny stuff, though, the night before I left the States. "Go out and hit 'em hard, Johnny. Like your old man. And don't forget that I'll be with you, every minute. When you was a kid and got into a tight spot, you always yelled for your old man to get you out of it."

I never told that to the other guys. Back home, right now, the old man would be pouring over war maps and telling Ma what he would do in a certain spot if he was Eisenhower or Patton or Hodges. I guess when you get as old as forty-five, you need to live on memories. If those old guys had flown a Mustang or a Thunderbolt, they wouldn't want any memories. Here I am three thousand miles from home and my old man tells me to call on him if I need help. I laughed inside as I helped myself to some more of Link's liver-wurst spread. Willie asked what was so funny.

"Nothing," I said. "Ain't a guy entitled to his thoughts?"

"The next time I get lobster meat," Link said. "I hope it is just shells. I would get just as much out of it." He went over and turned our portable radio on and we heard a voice that starts us swearing. It is Lord Haw Haw, telling us we're just over in Sussex to help the English extend their empire; we won't get a lousy dime back from the British, and we should not think for one second we will get bases in the West Indies.

"The hell with that snake," I said. "Let's have music. Tune in that gal who sings on the BBC about this time, Link."

"If you get the long way to Tipperary, shut it off," Albie Honchmeyer said. "I had an uncle in Canada who never knew any other war song. Those old guys should forget their war and let us fight this one."

"An hour before briefing," Link said. A lot of the sparkle went out of his eyes. "Let's hope there's an epidemic of mumps at Abbeville and Amiens!"

Willie Tripp was anything but subtle. Willie always came right out with what was on his mind. He never bothered straining his thoughts. He was as blunt as the rear end of an axe. "I wonder do they beat the hell out of flyers that drop down on them. The radio said there have been atrocities—"

"Shut up!" Link snapped. Only a week ago, a friend of his had hit the silk not far from Hamm.

"My big mouth," Willie said, and drained his cup. "But I guess you can't blame the Frogs for bein' sore the way we've plastered Rouen and Lille and Dieppe. I guess the French could get rough, too, if they caught a couple of us guys, especially those Frog collaborators who get paid for turnin' in U.S. flyers."

I went out of the Nissen and looked over toward the old English manor house where the high brass lived. The mist was pretty heavy, like you see on the Maine coast back home on a November night, and the stuff was getting thicker.

Link came out and said, "No flyin' tonight, sweetheart."

And there wasn't. We were called to the Operations room, though, and listened to what they called critiques of recent "shows" we had put on over the continent. Then we got some lectures on armament, as if we didn't know already what to do with the guns in those Mustangs. There was some kind of an expert who brought us up to date on the Russian front.

The colonel was a good Joe. He came from a place out in Ohio called Harleyville, and he has been on 124 missions. He talked about the new pilots who were not quite ready yet, and he told us he would not soon forget how lousy we all were during our first few weeks with the Mustangs. The colonel was quite a guy. They said he trained a whole flight of bats to fly formation over in the barn.

My old man always told about the C.O. he had, how he had been looking for him nearly twenty-seven years so he could knock his ears down. Also a sergeant he had saved a couple of rounds for.

Why was it everybody in the last one got picked on if he was anything less than a major?

The skies cleared up next day just after 1400, and we knew we'd be up in a few hours. Along with Link Caswell, I went over and looked at my ship. I asked a mech about the metal groove in the canopy. A couple of days before I had almost had to bail out; I would have if the canopy hadn't stuck.

"It's okay, Lieutenant," the mech said. "Get in and try it."

A flyer with brains checks everything. I got in and found that I could slide the canopy back easily. I sat in the Mustang for awhile because I liked the feel of it. It is one hell of a ship. It has got a Merlin engine, equipped with two-speed, two-stage superchargers. Four hundred miles an hour is easy for one of these babies.

Five hours later, my Mustang was doing every bit of that. We were somewhere between Amiens and Rhiems, pouring the heavy

stuff into one of the Nazi-controlled French trains. We picked it out by the glow from its fire-box and raked it from cow-catcher to tail-light. The engine blew up, and all the cars jumped the rails and tumbled over into a French field. I came up again and around with Willie Tripp, and just as we read each others thoughts, we flew toward a Nazi air strip not far from St. Omer, and proceeded to blast some grounded Messups. We counted four bonfires before we got the word from Link Caswell up high that the Abbeville Kids were coming up to cut us off.

My old man talks about the last war! He never tangled with Krauts in Focke-Wulf's. They were Goering's own all right. They were hellions. I climbed the Mustang and felt the concussions of the stuff thrown up by a German flak towers, and they were too close for comfort. I thought one nailed Willie. His Mustang kicked up as if it had struck an invisible wire and nearly turned over on its back. But it screeched louder and shot up again. Then we saw the exhausts of the Focke-Wulf's, saw the tracers striking out at us. I looked over my shoulder when something bonged against the side of the Mustang. There was a Nazi back there, lining me up in his sights.

I scrunched down in the cockpit, trying to make myself as small as I could. The bullets were beating against the Mustang. I dived fast and tried to get in under him. The Nazi was not fooled; I heard pieces of metal fly off the ship. I choked the throttle and the German over-ran me. When he came back I got in a burst that sent him streaking away with a plume of smoke coming out of his engine.

I kept yelling at Willie and the others. In a few minutes we had seven Mustangs battling it out with the Focke-Wulf's. Once I had to take violent evasive action, and I went down until I was staring right into the faces of some Krauts in a flak tower which I swept over with only the width of a saltine to spare. A Nazi plummeted down past me, a sheet of flame coming out of his pit—he had no time to get out of his office. I almost sliced him with a wingtip.

The compote of hell thickened. The flak bursts mingled with the pattern of tracers and the cordite was digging into my throat, stinging my nostrils. A Mustang scorched over me, chunks of metal flying from it, while I hung on my prop and poured it into a yellow-nose that was bent on burning Link out of the sky. The Kraut plane whooshed up, stalled, and stood on its tail until the gas tank exploded. The pilot dropped down, spinning through the bursts of flak. I saw the blurred outline of a 190's tail assembly rocketing up above me and gave chase, pretty sure that Willie was protecting my own tail. I was

closing in, did not bother with the reflector gunsight. I pressed the button blind and saw the converging stream of heavy calibre stuff smash right into the Abbeville Kid.

The 190 toppled out as if it had been strained through a very rough sieve, all in pieces. Who was the guy that had said a pilot never had time to think of anything but the work at hand when he was scrambling with the Huns? Hell, between bursts, I thought of the village store and wondered if Abe Manson had shot any deer this season. I thought of the night I went down in the cellar to get sweet cider out of a barrel. There'd been no light and I couldn't find the hole I'd pulled the bung out of. All the cider ran out, and I got the living be-jimbers knocked out of me. . . . Right now, I thought, as I heard the Nazi lead smash into me, Ma would be knitting, and the old man would be tracing a pencil over a map and cussing the brass hats for being so stupid.



SOMETHING hit me with a thud you hear when somebody whacks a sack of meal with a piece of two-by-four. Chunks of the perspex hatch flew to the four winds, and it got colder in the pit. I took a quick look around as I twisted and climbed the Mustang. Three 190's were coming in at me from a wicked, tight angle. Where was Willie and Link? Where was Tex and Honey Beasley? There was a flamer in the sky and the brief silhouette looked sickeningly like a Mustang. I rammed the throttle up the gate to full, pulled the stick back and the Mustang responded, howling like a Harpy out of hell, the Merlin's scream pouring out of the pipe-organ vents. I curled the Mustang over on her back and looked down and saw the Abbeville Kids blaze past. I came around hard, completed the somersault, blinking my eyes and yelling like hell to lick the blackout.

I caught the Huns undecided. I guess they figured I was crazy or hit or something. I treadled my sight on one of them and let go with the firing power, the Mustang vibrating with the recoil of the guns, and the speed pressure. A man can take a physical beating in one of these fighters without running into battle. I felt like I had that day when the coach took me out in the third quarter of the game against Purdue—bruised and dehydrated, and aching. A 190 blew to bits and the explosion blinded me for a few seconds. I plummeted through the debris and split the other two babies apart, and then, coming around for more fight again, I saw a Mustang's tracers cut through a 190's office. The Nazi plane sheered off, flying on its own, a deadly risk to anything down below.

How long do these rhubarbs last? Nobody ever rightfully knew. Goering's boys seldom came up short-handed. Lightning speed jets from Nazi 7.92 guns sliced past my window and a cannon shell burst somewhere on the Mustang's right flank. I kicked the rudder hard and wrenched the fighter around. A 190 jerked upwards like a startled quail to avoid a wing-tip collision. I heard Willie Tripp's voice cut through the hell of the action. Willie was almost sobbing and cursing at the same time, and I wondered which one of us had taken it.

A few seconds later I remembered what the old man said to me. *Don't forget that I'll be with you every minute! You always yelled for your old man when you got in a tight spot.*

Okay, Pa, get me out of this one. It looked as if this was it. I don't know where that lousy Abbeville Kid came from. It did not matter. I got about everything he threw at me where it hurt the most. Pieces of the Mustang flew away and the Merlin was on fire. The crate rolled over and headed toward the Normandy countryside. My oxygen mask was shot off, so it was a good thing I dropped fast, I thought, as I tried to open the canopy. The thing stuck, and I mentally relegated a certain groundman to hell. I was scared sick. The sweat was ice-water when it poured out of me. I grabbed the controls, knowing I had to stay with the plummeting Mustang. Hydraulic fluid was spattering me as I killed the motor. The plane responded when I pulled up in a stall, and when it slipped off, the fire went out.

Death was still close, and I thought of the folks. Maybe the old man knew and had blown the fire out. I had to ask him when the war was over. Kid, it is all over for you now, I told myself, when I held my breath and started the engine again. It caught, even though it smoked, and I checked the altimeter. Three thousand feet.

A funny thing happened then. Maybe the Kraut pilot had read some flying mags when he was a sprout. He got melodramatic and flew down close to me and waved, and shook his head. Then he lifted the 190's nose and climbed and I knew what was on his mind.

The Nazi did not get me. A Mustang came down from up high and hosed him with the fifties and he screamed down past me, making a great roaring bonfire when he hit. The fire lighted up the terrain and I saw a small cluster of buildings, a road that knifed straight through rows of those tall aspen-like French trees, a couple of those prettily-moulded Normandy straw ricks. There was a big field down there and that was where I had to go, as soon as the prop had wound through the last few gills of octane.

You have to think fast when you have a banged up Mustang only 500 feet from the ground. You had to look fast. Okay, pa, lend a hand to your loving son. The field did not look too good. I got set to put on the brakes, and I have to admit I did not think of saying a prayer. I peeled up and put the flaps down full, made my bid at stalling speed. The landing gear went, first crack out of the box. I banged my head against the gun-sight, and on the way out, I heard the P-51 ripping herself apart across a bumpy field. I did not stay out long. I soon knew I was breathing and I could smell gas and oil, so I instinctively slid the canopy back. This time it worked! I swore and slammed it with my fist and shook blood out of my eyes. Then I got out and got down on all fours and kissed the ground. I thought of a song. *When It's Apple Blossom Time In Normandy.*

I listened for a few moments and then sat and held my head in my hands. The shakes did not leave me for quite a while. The blood was on my hands, clotting on my eyelids, and I felt like hell. But I had to make a move. I was not out of the mess yet. The Nazis were overrunning this country, and they seldom were far away. I got up and moved into the shadows of a line of trees, then looked up at the sky. I couldn't see a sign of battle anywhere, and guessed the guys were sweeping toward the channel, and home. There were some searchlight beams over that way. I started walking again, and then I saw three figures right up there in front of me. I heard a man say, "*Aviateur, Americain.*"

I moved closer and said, "*Oui. Americain. Ou est la Boche?*"

One of the Frenchman had a pistol in his hand, and it looked very much like a Luger. The three of them looked at me, and I began to get a cold lump under my breastbone. Where was it I heard the French could get five thousand francs for an American flyer? I guess it must have been Willie Tripp who said it.

The tall Frenchman gestured with the gun and pointed toward a distant light. I cut through the trees and across a road and then I could see a church steeple outlined against the lesser darkness of the sky. I was not far from a village. I held back, trying to think up some of the French I had learned, got a good look at the trio, now that my eyes had become used to the darkness. One looked very old and I wished it was he who had the Luger.

It meant something bad, I knew. Frenchmen are not allowed to carry any kind of pistol, unless they're *certain* Frenchmen. Pa, can you hear me? Get going, because your son is soon going to get strung or get the calves of his legs, battered by the Nazi

equivalent of a baseball bat. It must hurt like hell to get strung up for hours by the thumbs.

"*Regardez!*" I said to the Frenchman with the Luger, frantically trying to remember some words in the phrase book. "*Je suis votre ami.*"

No, I was not their friend. The man wearing the cap and heavy boots shoved me out into the stubble of wheat field and said angrily, "*Allez vite! A votre droite.*" I angled that direction and climbed a stone wall and found myself on a narrow road that curved up over a small knoll. The road led to the village. I slogged along, keeping my mouth shut. All at once it started to rain. If you've ever been in Normandy you know the lousy climate. The dust becomes mud in a few minutes, and you sink ankle deep in the stuff. Every once in awhile I got the command to stop, and I knew these Frogs were not worrying about Germans.

It was the loyal French they had to watch out for!

We walked into the village. Every house seemed dark. It was a narrow street that was paved with cobbles, and it dropped sharply and took an abrupt left turn toward the waterfront. So I knew this village was on the banks of a canal or on the Seine. I was grabbed from behind and suddenly thrust into a doorway. I looked up a flight of stairs and saw the glimmer of a light somewhere above. I stumbled up the stairs and when I was on the landing, the big Frog shouldered past me and knocked on a door.

An old woman opened it and peered out. She reminded me of Madame DeFarge in a *Tale Of Two Cities*. Her face was a skull with some wrinkled brown tarpaulin stretched over it, and she had no teeth. Her eyes fluttered like an owl's when you shoot a light beam into them.

She gave the Frenchmen a toothless grin and nodded her head.

They shoved me into the room. It had a timbered ceiling and an old open fireplace, a table and bed and a few chairs. There was an iron stove in one corner. There was a lot of guarded French gibberish and a lot of gestures the Frenchmen always use when they argue. They kept looking at me.

After a while I managed to get the general idea. This bunch of Frenchmen had found it easier to join with the Boche than work against them. A downed P-51 pilot would bring them certain commodities their stomachs craved, and favors from the conquerors. I figured I was cooked, so I wanted to tell the scum what I thought of people who worked against liberation.

I caught the old Frenchmen's eye and said, "*Oui—Pierre Laval.*"



T STRUCK home. I saw the old codger flinch. Then I got slap on the jaw by the guy holding the Luger. I knew I was of no value to the Nazis as a corpse so I got up and handed the Frenchman a real American right hook that dropped him, but the others had the Luger before I could pounce on it.

"All right," I said. "Keep your dirty hands off me!"

When the tall Frog got up, I thought he was going to blast me full of holes. Maybe it was a good thing for him I could not understand the names he was calling me. I couldn't see a chance for a break. I felt a little sick and tasted blood from a cut that had broken open. From the one window I figured it would be a long drop to the cobblestones. There was only one door and the key was turned in the lock.

*Pa, I'm in a tight spot. Get me out of it.* I had to smile. It wasn't much of a smile. In a few hours the Krauts would have me, try to question me, then take me out and hang me from a limb.

The old woman began dishing out soup from a kettle. She brought me a bowl of it, and I knocked it out of her bony hand.

"I don't eat with skunks," I said, and wished they understood English. The old man said something and then two of the Frogs came over and frisked me. They found half a package of cigarets and acted like crazy, only not enough to give me a chance at the Luger.

The knock at the door stiffened me. The old woman crossed the room and leaned against the door for a moment. She said something I couldn't understand. I heard a voice answer her, and then the door was opened and a middle-aged French woman came in. She looked at me, grinned, and walked over to the fire and held her hands out. Suddenly she turned and stared at me again; the expression on her face changed. In the firelight, she was not a bad-looking woman. Some years ago, I thought, she would have been an attractive wench. I stared back at her, wondered why her mouth dropped open. The old woman called her Marie.

Marie came over and looked at me close. "*Votre nom, Americain?*"

I couldn't understand why she wanted to know. I said, "Carr. Daniel Carr."

Marie sucked in her breath and turned and walked away. She accepted a bowl of the soup, sat down at the table, and gulped it slowly. She kept looking at me. The old woman watched a clock and finally she shrugged and spoke to the old man. A small argument followed, and then I began to get the drift of

what was going on. They had made up their minds that the Nazis were not coming to the village this night. They would have to put me where I'd keep.

They put me in a damp cellar in the house, where rats kept running around. There was a heap of straw for a bed, and not a single window in the dark hole. The only means of ventilation was through a crack where the foundation and the house itself made contact. It was a dungeon that would have tested all of Houdini's powers. There was no way out for me. It would have been much better for Danny Carr if he'd taken it for keeps up there against the sky. Sure, I thought of home and mother. And my old man. He'd be telling the guys at the lodge, maybe, about the last war, and how he helped save the world for Democracy. Another war all that last bunch had willed to their kids.

*You were hot shots, sure. If you'd finished the job the first time, your loving son would not be in this kettle of fish! You and the cognac and the mademoiselles. Nuts!*

I tried to sleep but could still hear a rat rustling around. You lose track of time in the dark; it seemed I spent a year in the cellar before I heard somebody lifting an iron bar. The heavy door opened slowly, letting in a big breath of sweet air. I saw a woman outlined against the doorway. She shut the door behind her.

"*M'sieu,*" the woman said in a low hoarse voice. "Be veree quiet!"

It was Marie. She spoke English! I kept my mouth shut and just listened. "Follow me, *M'sieu,*" she whispered. "*Vite!*"

I did not stop to ask why. She led me up a flight of wet stone steps and out through a door that led to the banks of the river. It was not raining, but the mist was heavy. We walked along a little path on the river bank, saying nothing. I could see the high chalk cliffs across the river and a small boat sliding silently upstream. The path became steep and went up to the brow of a hill where there was an old two-story house and a couple of tacky outbuildings. Marie took me into the house, where I stood very still in the dark while she lit a candle. I could see she ate and slept and lived in this one room. There was an old fireplace with a mantel, over which was a crucifix. Then I saw something that snapped my mouth open, and drew me across the stone floor.

It was a picture of an American soldier, vintage 1918. Yet it was more than that. It was a picture of my old man when he was about my age! I stared at it, wondering how soon I would wake up. I was still back in that cellar, dreaming. I turned and looked at Marie. In the candle light she was smiling.

"You are *votre pere* all over again, *oui,*"

Marie said. "It was near Apremont I meet Jean Carr, *M'sieu.* Few years ago, I come to thees town. *Votre pere,* he say to Marie, he has the mademoiselle in America. If she has not waited for heem, he come back for me, *oui.* I know he weel not come back. He was the good man."

Any other time I would have laughed. I would have been in stitches. My old man, he had been a wolf! Cognac and mademoiselles. But now I had a lump where my heart should have been. There was the softness of memory in Marie's eyes.

She got bread and cheese out of a cupboard and told me to follow her upstairs. I saw a wooden ladder leading to a trap in the ceiling.

"You hide there, *M'sieu.* There ees not much room, but enough. Until Marie comes for you."

"What will happen to you? The Boche? The other Frenchmen?" I asked her.

Marie smiled, shrugged her shoulders. I went up the ladder, shoved the trap up and found myself in a small attic. I could not stand up straight. I heard Marie taking the ladder away and I was in total darkness. My heart was pounding; incredulity, I knew, was still showing in my eyes. I lay down on the floor and must have fallen quickly to sleep. I was lifted up off the floor, hours later, by a com-motion down in the village. There was a lot of crazy shouting and yelling, and some gunshots. There was a beam of light sifting through a crack in the boards. I looked out and down into the square of the little village.

There was a man on his knees, a small crowd around him. Some Frenchmen were dragging something away, and it looked like a body. Then I saw the people beating the man who was down. There was another shot, and he clamped his hands to his head and rolled over. I tried to get the real picture, was sure I had it. Marie had turned in the col-laborationists! I knew the Nazis would arrive before long and the sweat began to ooze out of me. They would comb the countryside for the pilot who had put that Mustang down. Maybe they would beat the truth out of Marie, then shoot her.

Funny, what a guy will say. I said to myself, "Pa, you old dogface, you knew how to pick 'em."

It was an hour later when the Germans got to the village. The French had been pretty smart, the way they'd cleaned up after their little purge. I knew it was safe to bet the Nazis would not find a body anywhere. After a while, a car came up the hill and I knew they wanted to talk to Marie. I hoped she had a gun of some kind. I hugged the floor, and tried to listen to what went on downstairs. All I could hear were muffled voices and the shuffle of feet. I waited, my teeth biting deep



into my lower lip, my fingernails dug into the palms of my hands. I kept waiting for the sound of a ladder being placed against the wall just underneath me, for bullets to spit through the boards and sink into me. But the Nazis did not come upstairs. I heard the engine of a car, then the roar of the machine as it went down the hill.

Marie came up at dusk with some more bread and cheese, and a raw onion. She had something else—a Luger.

"*Merci*," I said, and got one of her hands and squeezed it. "Next to my mother, you are the best girl pa ever had, Marie."

"I have been a wicked woman, *M'sieu*." Tears almost came to her eyes. "I was alone and afraid. I weel make it up to my France."

I understood. I felt sorry for her, for everybody in the lousy beat-up war. "Sure," I said. "You'll make up for anything you've done." Then she told me she would find a way to get me out of the country. But I would have to be patient; it might take a long time. I wished I had some cross-word puzzles or some pocket thrillers to read. There was one back in England I had not finished. *Murder Is A Sissy*.

Marie went down the ladder, and I dragged an old iron-bound trunk across the floor and put it on the trap. I went to the crack in the wall and looked out. After a while I could see part of the Mustang. There were some guys fooling around it. I figured the plane was about half a mile away. Late the next day, Marie came and told me that the Boche were fixing up the P-51.

"Yeah," I said. "They'll put a Nazi in it and go over and drop it down on the Prime Minister." This time Marie had some hot soup for me, and it tasted good. I was getting sick of going around on my hands and knees

like a monkey and was tired of sleeping. I wanted to stand upright like any human being and stretch my muscles, but it occurred to me after a lot of griping, that I could be worse off, by far. I was still alive. Thanks to pa. Yeah, that 1918 dogface.

I stayed in the attic for a week. Marie came up the ladder one night and told me the Nazis had the Mustang fixed. They had put petrol in it, and she guessed they were going to fly it to an air strip somewhere. And she said something else that scared the shirt off me for a minute. She was going to get a Boche or two up here this very night and tell them she knew where the American flyer was.

"Look, Marie. *Mon pere* give you ze brush-off, *oui*. But I have nothin' to do with it, *comprenez?*"

"I do not say to zem it is here you are, *M'sieu*," Marie said. "There are maybe a score of Nazis come here *ce soir*. Most of zem weel be looking for ze American aviateur, *oui?* Zen we go to ze airplane. I take you zere weeth a rifle, an' when we get zere, Marie shoots the Boche. You have the Luger, *M'sieu*—"

Yeah. It was a long chance. Somebody was going to get hurt. But I knew I had to take the chance.

**N**OURS later Marie came up and told me it was time. She had sent a lot of Nazis down the river to pick me up. Marie had an automatic rifle. It looked strange to me. It must have been French. She was going to take me down to where the Mustang was. When I got down out of the attic, I stretched like a tired cat and the feeling was good, out of this world. Then I looked



## The Man at the Throttle Was Casey Jones

Casey was catapulted into glory when his engine hit a caboose near Vaughan, Miss., just before dawn on April 30, 1900. His name is a symbol of adventurous railroading. Another such symbol is

### Railroad Magazine

founded six years after Casey's death, which comes out monthly with 144 pages of fact articles, pictures, true tales. Twenty-five cents a copy, \$2.50 a year—  
—at news stands or

205 E. 42nd St., New York City 17

out through a window and saw a two-wheeled cart loaded with straw, a big bony horse hitched to it. It looked better to me now.

I said to Marie, "What will happen to you? Even if I—"

Marie shrugged. She looked over at the picture of my old man, then back to me. I took her in my arms and kissed her, and when I let her go, I knew she did not much care what happened after. Not that I feel I'm that good. I wasn't holding her in my arms at that moment; it was my old man. . . .

"*Merci, M'sieu,*" Marie said. "But we mus' go."

I got into the cart, burrowed under the straw. The French woman climbed up and picked up the reins. It was getting pretty dark and the Normandy mists were closing in as usual. The old two-wheel cart moved slowly down the steep, narrow road. I lifted my head and looked around for Nazis. It wasn't long before we stopped, about twenty yards from the Mustang. The baby looked as if nothing had ever happened to her. Those Krauts! Sure, it was fixed up with mongrel parts, but it looked ready. I was hungry to get my hands on it.

There were six Huns around the Mustang. Then there were four, just after I heard the automatic rifle sputter. A third man crumpled and I stood up in the wagon and killed number four with the first shot from the Luger. The Nazis were firing now. I heard Marie give out with a choking cry, and I dropped another Nazi with my third shot. The automatic rifle cracked a couple of times just as I jumped off the wagon and then there was only one Hun reeling around, trying to get in one more shot. I was three feet from him when I fired my last slug. He doubled up, and fell over on his side.

I ran to where Marie was crumpled beside the cart. She waved me away, told me to get out of there.

"Go—*vite—vite, M'sieu!* Tell Jean Carr that Marie—Chauvenard—"

There was nothing to do but get away. I knew I could do very little for Marie. She'd known all along what the price was. I jumped into the Mustang and closed the canopy over my head, just as I heard the roar of a high-speed Nazi car. A searchlight groped for me, splashed me with light just as I tripped the Merlin. It sucked in octane greedily and responded quickly when I opened the throttle.

Bullets raked past the window as I sent the P-51 across the bumpy field. The searchlight kept picking me up and heavy-calibre bullets spanged off the Mustang's wings. One chugged into the instrument panel and I felt bits of steel dig into my chin. Sure, I knew the *Luftwaffe* was going to get a phone call. If I got upstairs, I still had to fight through

Goering's 190's or a flock of Messerschmitts.

*I'll make it, pa. You got me this far, and I ought to be man enough to go the rest of the way. You could pick 'em, pa. That Marie must have been a slick chick at one time.*

I had a lump in my throat when I finally got the P-51 off. I felt a terrific jar as I tucked the wheels under, and wondered if I smashed them clearing the tops of the trees. I guessed Marie was dead. I had to get out of this and fight through the war and get back home so I could tell the old man. He had to know, or Marie had done all this for nothing. Pa had to know that Marie had died to save his son. Yeah, they fought a good war last time. Those dogfaces. The slogging infantry. They got around. I guess wars are all alike, fundamentally. They just think up quicker methods of killing and destroying.

The Nazis are clever hellions. They had made a nice job out of the Mustang. But when I tried the guns, I found out they were as empty as a Hitler promise. I climbed to fifteen thousand and no more, because the oxygen mask I'd worn was somewhere in a French wheat field. Here I was again, just where I'd come in, but without firing power, and you know what the 190's have to work with! Two machine guns and four cannons.

The flak towers started throwing stuff up at me when I figured I was half way to the channel. I came down in a hurry and shook myself loose from the muck, pouring the coal on. I flew over a big place I judged to be Lille at not more than two thousand feet. I got more flak and some of it punched holes in the wings. Then I knew my flying speed was not what it should be. That lousy Nazi gasoline! I looked up when the Hun searchlights stabbed crazily at the skies. There were about five Nazi fighters coming in after me. Again I could hear them getting ready for the final curtain.

A 190 heated its cannon and a shell broke up somewhere behind the cockpit, making the Mustang check its stride. Even my teeth rattled. I had a time of it keeping the baby from looking down her nose at me. I executed all the evasive tricks I knew, climbed the P-51 to about ten thousand, with Nazi guns weaving a net of tracers around me. It was hot. I wondered why I had kept alive so long. Marie was going to be sore if I failed to make it all the way. Maybe where Marie was, prayers are heard much quicker, because they are offered up closer to where you get the answers. Maybe Marie brought the Thunderbolts over.

I could see a group of heavy bombers. They were B-26's. The searchlights stabbed through the formation. Nazi fighters buzzed in and through and around them. They were there one minute and gone the next. The arc

of fire from the heavy planes was burning the hell right out of them. Thunderbolts shot over my head and I heard it let go with its wing-guns. Something blew up in the dark sky behind me, and I knew it wasn't the P-47. I rocketed to the fringe of the rhubarb and kicked the rudder hard when a big torch came down from overhead. I saw a Nazi cross on the wing of the burning plane. A couple of Thunderbolts stuck to me as I made for the channel. They swung away when I saw the dark outline of the French coast.

"Ah, *oui!*" I said, and grinned for the first time in many days. "Sweet Marie!" I wiped the grin off when I spoke her name. I thought of her back there in a wheat field, surrounded by dead Nazis. A Frenchwoman had never died more gloriously. Who was this Joan of Arc?

I guess the tears came out of my eyes because I could not see too well through the goggles. I guess my old man has a right to fight his war over again.

The fog was thick over England, but it was no hazard as far as I was concerned. I knew, after what I had been through, I could have put the Mustang down in Trafalgar Square without as much as hitting a stone lion or a pigeon. Over the drome I circled a while, so that the guys could hear that I was goosing a Merlin. The lights went on down there, and I slid the baby down and greased the strip with a belly landing. Sure, I had made a mess out of the gear back in France. I hit my head on something again, and they had to lift me out.

I opened my eyes in the emergency dressing station. Willie Tripp and Link were

looking down at me with their mouths open like hungry goldfish. "We packed your things, Dan," Willie said. "We wrote you off."

"Have some maple sugar," Link grinned. "It's a good thing it was your head you hit. If you'd smacked your other end, you would've got hurt. Well, was you out gettin' oriented on the Russian front?"

The Colonel waved Link off and stared at me. "It beats me, Carr," he said. "That Mustang was cracked up somewhere and fixed with German stuff. I've seen some cock-eyed things in this man's war I never understood, but this one—"

"Remind me to tell you about it sometime," I said. "Anybody got some beer?"

It was a few days later, and the ache had gone out of my head. "I got a letter from my uncle," Link said, smearing liver paste over a K-ration biscuit. "He wrote me the brass hats were fightin' the war the wrong way. We won't beat the Nazis with just air power. I wish those old guys would get wise—"

"Yeah?" I said. "Who's got a better right to shoot the breeze?" I guessed I snapped at Link. "Those old dogfaces in the infantry got around. A lot of things they did last time helped us more than you think in this one. I can't wait until I get back home and help the old man brag. There's one story I won't ever get tired of telling my kids. About their grandpa. That is, when their grandma isn't around."

Willie looked at me funny. "You better get another checkup, Danny boy. And quick!" He looked at Link and slowly shook his head.

What those two guys didn't know!



## THE SILKEN SCABBARD

By Sidney Herschel Small



Major Llewelyn Davies, just returned from Stateside furlough, was all for reviving Nippon's devastated silk industry but not to the point of letting the Japs use it as a means to disrupt Asia once again. Which was just what they were planning under the noses of the JCCA—until Davies became Koropok once more and began to untangle the silken skein that curtained the contemplated crime.

Plus: a smashing new Captain Carter novelette by WILLIAM DU BOIS; a tale of the Caribbean, *Beyond the Shoal*, by WILLIAM A. BREY-FOGLE; *A Mug at Charley's* by GIFF CHE-SHIRE; *The Private Debacle of Editor Wood* by NARD JONES; and the next smashing installment of *White Javelin* by NICK BODDIE WILLIAMS.

**Adventure**  
  
 25c

May issue on sale April 10th

# AIR --

## WING COMMANDER GIBSON (DAM BUSTER)



GUY PENROSE GIBSON, THE BRITISH ACE ENTRUSTED WITH ONE OF THE WAR'S MOST DARING, SPECTACULAR-- AND IMPORTANT-- FLYING MISSIONS WAS BORN IN SIMLA, INDIA.

LEAVING OXFORD AT 17, HE ENLISTED IN THE RAF IN '36 & PILOTED A FIGHTER THROUGH THE BLITZ. CREDITED WITH 7 NAZI "KILLS" AND 175 SORTIES, HE TRANSFERRED TO BOMBERS AND FLEW IN 75 RAIDS OVER THE CONTINENT WITHOUT INJURY.

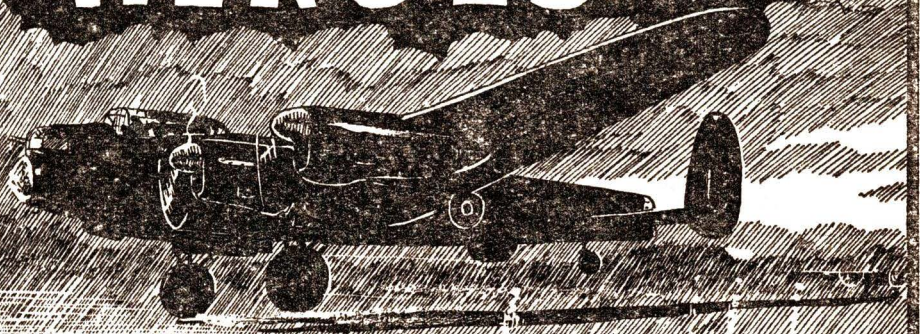
HOLDER OF THE DSC AND BAR, THE DFC AND BAR AND REGARDED AS ONE OF BRITAIN'S MOST EXPERIENCED & RESOURCEFUL BOMBER PILOTS, EARLY IN 1943 WING COMDR. GIBSON WAS TOLD: "THE MOEHNE & EDER DAMS ARE YOUR OBJECTIVE. DO ANYTHING YOU LIKE--BUT GET THEM."



HAND PICKING A SQUADRON OF ENGLISH, ANZAC, CANADIAN & AMERICAN BOMBER CREWS, FOR OVER 2 MONTHS THEY STUDIED MAPS & MODELS OF THE HUGE DAMS THAT FURNISHED POWER & TRANSPORTATION IN THE RUHR VALLEY. PRACTICED PRECISION FLYING & RAIDS ON ENGLISH DAMS UNTIL THEY COULD LAY THEIR EGGS WITHIN 15' OF THEIR TARGETS FROM 50' UP

# HEROES

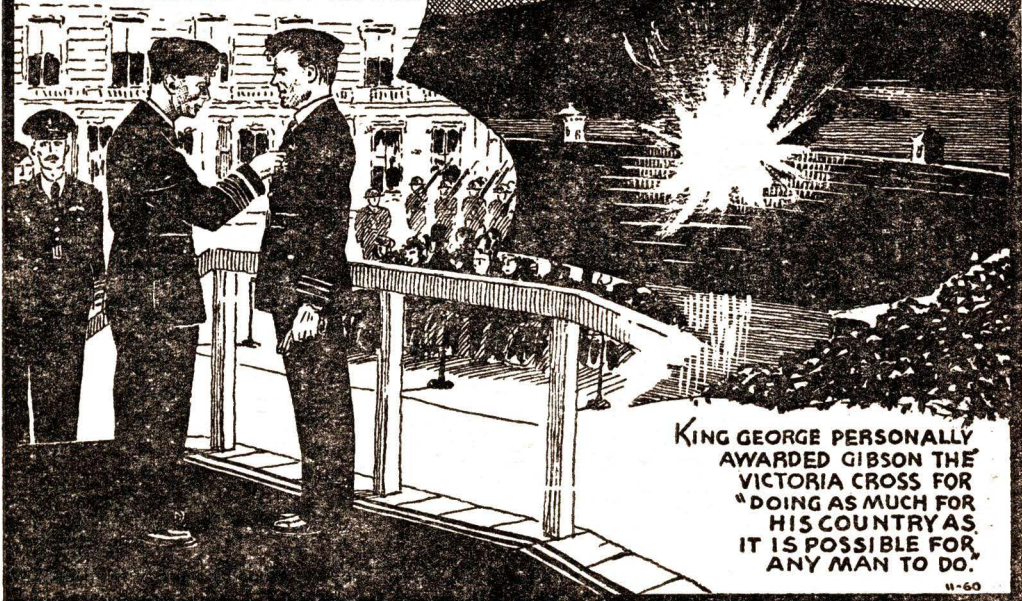
by LEE



IN THE MAY 16<sup>TH</sup> TWILIGHT 19 4-ENGINE LANCASTERS TOOK OFF FOR THE RUHR. THREE TURNED BACK OVER THE COAST. ANOTHER CRASHED IN THE HAIL OF FLAK. ONE BY ONE, SO LOW SEARCHLIGHTS ALMOST BLINDED THEM, THE REST SWEEPED IN DROPPING BOMBS & MINES THAT FLOATED DOWN TO THE SPILLWAY.

SEVEN MORE SHIPS WERE LOST BUT THE MINES, PLACED WITH DEADLY ACCURACY, TORE AWAY 100 YDS. OF MASONRY, RELEASING 134 MILLION TONS OF WATER IN A FLOOD THAT DROWNED THOUSANDS & LAY WASTE INDUSTRIAL AND POWER PLANT

REPEATING THEIR PERFORMANCE AT THE EDER DAM, 8 RUHR RAIDERS LIMPED BACK TO BASE, HAVING RENDERED 2 OF GERMANY'S GREATEST DAMS USELESS FOR 3 YEARS.



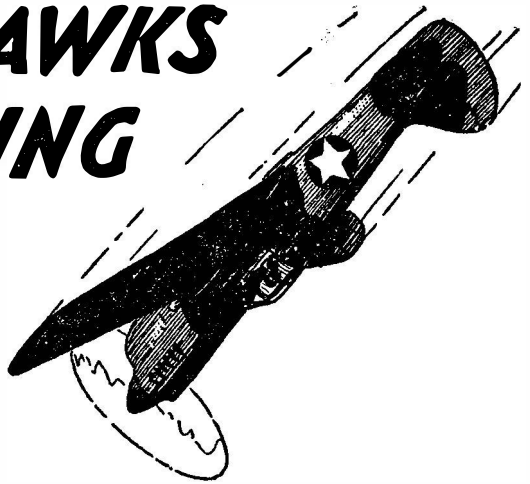
KING GEORGE PERSONALLY AWARDED GIBSON THE VICTORIA CROSS FOR "DOING AS MUCH FOR HIS COUNTRY AS IT IS POSSIBLE FOR ANY MAN TO DO."

11-60

# The WARHAWKS ARE COMING

by DAVID GOODIS

A Novelette  
of China Skies!



## CHAPTER ONE

### Mission—Death

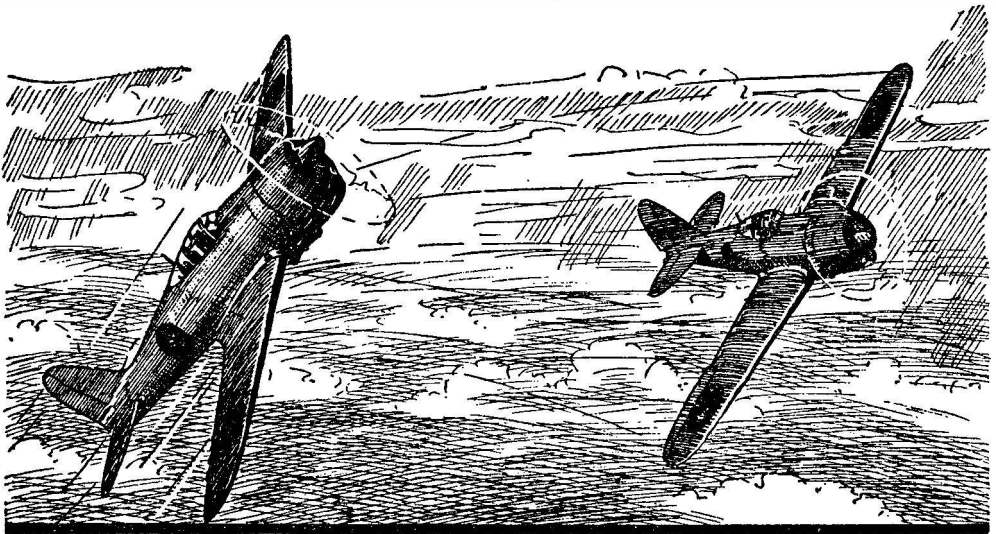
IN THE gleaming yellow sky above Chungking, a group of Curtiss P-40F Warhawk fighters zoomed arrogantly, made a wide turn and streaked toward the Japanese lines less than a hundred miles away. Soon they would be strafing the Japs, making it difficult for them to halt a flanking infantry operation by a Chinese division that had marched out of Chungking six days previously.

From one of the narrower, dirtier Chungking streets, Grant watched the Warhawks as they flew eastward. He kept his eyes on them until they were lost in the broiling, endless sky. Then he looked down at the stone-paved street that was scarred with the impact of

bombs and stained red with the blood of the Chinese people. Grant rubbed a hand across the back of his neck.

He wished that he could be up there with those Warhawks. Only now that was impossible; he was a captain in Intelligence instead of a 2nd lieutenant in the Army Air Force.

As a lieutenant, piloting a Warhawk, he had smashed eleven Jap planes to the Chinese earth that they were trying to destroy. Finally he had volunteered for a perilous mission—landing his P-40F behind the Jap lines east of Lanchow, and obtaining certain information from Chinese guerillas. He had obtained the information, hopped back into his Warhawk, returned to Chungking. Subsequently the information resulted in an important and completely successful undertaking by American medium bombers. Grant was praised and deco-



The Warhawk flipped itself back and came down with its belly facing the sky.

***All he had to fight the greatest Jap offensive  
of the war was a green and yellow sports  
jacket, a battered Warhawk—and a girl  
who'd already signed her treachery in the  
blood of China's patriots!***

rated. It was decided that, despite his fine record as a fighter pilot, he would be even more useful as an Intelligence officer. Before he could think of an effective argument, he found himself wearing the double silver bars of a captain—on the ground.

He frequently grumbled about it, when he was alone. He rubbed the back of his neck and that was all. That was the way he expressed himself, and it was part of his rigid, self-disciplined way of doing things. He was an extremely energetic and thorough individual. He had been diligent through school and college and training. He'd shown skill and courage in his first fight high above Changsha, and through all the other fiery engagements with the worried, enraged Japanese.

He was built along square, compact lines, about average height and 170 pounds. And despite two years of China and unfortunate months when the food was very bad, his health was excellent. There was no sign of gray in Grant's thick, shiny black hair. His eyes were black and bright with constant interest and alertness. He had straight, evenly-carved features, a deep tan complexion and a small patch of a white scar when a 7.7 mm. slug had sized against the right side of his forehead. He was twenty-nine years old. His plans for the immediate future involved an interview with his chief, Colonel Milford.

The colonel had telephoned him at the hotel, telling him to hurry. The colonel always told everyone to hurry. Aside from that, the colonel was a good fellow to work for, gentle-mannered, considerate and generous with tobacco.

Tobacco was being transferred from pouch to pipe as Grant entered the office. The colonel—a short, round man of forty or so—had already filled his calabash pipe. And now his tobacco was about to be tested by a well-built blond man who had an ancient meerschaum. The blond man packed the meerschaum, put a match to it and took a mouthful of smoke. The colonel and the blond man didn't see Grant. Neither did the third man.

The third man was a Chinese guerilla, who wore a mud-splattered steel helmet and stood holding a rifle, behind the colonel's desk. Grant had never seen the guerilla before, nor the blond man. It was confusing. The blond man wore a blue-gray suit of tropical weave, a blue shirt with a white silk tie and white buckskin shoes.

Smoke made a trip to the ceiling. The blond man said, "A very fine tobacco, Colonel. Mix it yourself?"

"My very own formula," Colonel Milford said. Then he noticed Grant.

The colonel said, "Captain Lawrence Grant—Mr. Howard Stratton."

Grant shook hands with the blond man, wondering what it was all about. He took another look at the Chinese guerilla, who had not budged or moved a face-muscle.

"Mr. Stratton is under arrest," the colonel said.

"What's the charge?" Grant asked. He gazed straight into the dull blue eyes of the blond man.

The colonel was smiling, tapping a forefinger against the pudgy chin. "No specific charges, except suspicion," he said. "Mr. Stratton was taken in custody by a platoon of Chinese guerillas who stopped his automobile forty miles north of here. He was on the road coming down from Chingtu. The platoon leader—" The colonel nodded toward the Chinese soldier who stood behind the desk. "—brought him here."

"Excuse me, Colonel," the blond man said. "I have a correction of that statement." He smiled at Grant. "I asked to be brought here."

"Why?" Grant said.

Stratton tugged at the meerschaum. "I have certain information that will possibly be of interest to this office."

Grant and Colonel Milford looked at each other. Grant said, "Sir, have you already questioned Mr. Stratton?"

"No, we've just been discussing pipes," the Colonel said. "I was waiting for you to arrive before I opened investigation. I'm going to let you begin the questioning."

Grant smiled inwardly. The colonel was using an old Intelligence trick, designed to throw a suspect off guard. It was a simple method of allowing the suspect to assume that Intelligence attached little or no importance to the case.

Folding his arms and leaning against the side of the desk, Grant regarded the blond man. "Mr. Stratton, you must excuse my ignorance of Chinese geography. Where is Chingtu?"

Stratton took the meerschaum from between his teeth and said, "About two hundred miles northwest of here. A ragged little town."

"What were you doing there?"

"I stopped for breakfast. I'd been driving all night."

"From where?"

"Kan-chau."

Grant rubbed the back of his neck. He walked across the room, toward a glass-topped table, under which was a closely detailed map of China. Grant moved his finger across the glass, saying, "Kan-chau is approximately seven hundred miles northwest of Chungking. It rests in the path of a caravan route bordering the Great Wall of China. It must be an old city."

"A very old city," Stratton said. "Virtually deserted."

"What were you doing there?"

"I'm a petroleum engineer," Stratton said. "I've been working in China for almost nine years. For a long time my activities were sponsored by the Chinese Government, but when I failed to find oil for them, they gave me the pink slip. I made up my mind that I would stay in China until I found what I was looking for. I had the conviction that there was oil, an incredibly vast amount of it somewhere in inner Mongolia, north of the Great Wall and south of the Gobi Desert."

"Were you working alone?"

"Yes," Stratton said.

"Did you eventually find oil?"

"No."

"And that's your reason for leaving Kan-chau?"

"Not entirely," Stratton said. "Naturally, I must admit that nine years of fruitless geological labor is enough to discourage any man. And yet I would have been willing to remain in Kan-chau, except for the fact that certain things happened."

"What things?"

Stratton took several puffs at the meerschau. He seemed a bit nervous. Grant glanced toward Colonel Milford. The colonel was forming smoke rings and sending them up to the ceiling.

"What things?" Grant repeated.

Stratton frowned and said, "I'm afraid that you're not going to believe me, but—the next major Japanese offensive will come from the north, from Kan-chau!"



**G**RANT TOOK time out. He walked back to the desk. He opened an ostrich-leather cigarette case, lit a cigarette. "All right, tell me what's happening in Kan-chau. Tell me what you saw. Everything."

Stratton said, "A few weeks ago some white men came to Kan-chau. There was a woman with them. They set up an office near the place where I was established, and after a day

or so they came in and said hello. I didn't know what to make of it. One of them talked with a Chicago accent. Another was from Alabama or Georgia, I guessed. Then there were a few from Missouri and Kansas and around there. The girl had Frisco written all over her."

"What did they do for a living?"

Stratton was looking at Colonel Milford's smoke rings. "At first they claimed to be show people on special service volunteer work, entertaining American troops in Burma and China. Later on I asked several questions that they couldn't answer, and finally they came out in the open and admitted that they were working for Japan."

"Doing what?"

"Espionage. A clever set-up. One of them, the boss, had lived in China for a good many years. Spoke Chinese, had contacts in the principal cities. And more important than anything else, he was closely acquainted with many guerilla leaders. Now, his knowledge of China and his social standing are paying dividends. He's pretending to be working for China. He's gathering information from the guerillas. Japan is paying him plenty. Very shortly Japan will be in possession of sufficient facts to warrant the big push."

"How did you get in on this?"

"I gambled," Stratton said. "When I realized I was in the company of professional traitors, I saw the need for playing a slow and careful hand. I asked them if they could use another man. For awhile it looked as if I was going to get my throat cut. Finally they signed me up. As soon as I learned their scheme and their method, I skipped out."

Grant took a deep drag at the cigarette. "When did you leave Kan-chau?"

"Two days ago. I stole their car—a big Renault phaeton with a huge auxiliary gasoline tank. They were getting their gas from the Japs, too."

Grant walked back to the table. For a relatively long stretch he was quiet, studying the map. Finally he said, "Any Japs in Kan-chau?"

"Not as far as I know," Stratton said.

"Fletcher meets the Jap agents somewhere outside of town."

"Who's Fletcher?"

"The boss," Stratton said.

Grant pressed the cigarette stub into a hammered brass ashtray and said, "Here's what I want to know, Mr. Stratton. Are there any Jap troops in the Kan-chau vicinity?"

"Not yet. But there will be—I got that straight from Fletcher. Jap figures to use at least 200,000 men. Big mobile guns and swarms of tanks and tremendous aerial strength. They're resolved to finish up this business with China once and for all."



"Can you give me an idea of the general plan?"

"Fletcher explained it to me this way—when the Japs are completely informed as to the placement of guerilla units in the west and south of China, the drive will start. The Japs intend to take Chungking. They expect to rip through Chungtien and Sadiya and ultimately trample all allied resistance north of Burma. And you know what that means!"

"It could mean India," Grant said.

"Certainly it means India," Stratton declared. His voice was getting louder, he was definitely excited. "You've got to stop them! You've got to go up there and erase them before they can get started!"

Grant put his hands in trousers pockets and gazed at the tips of his well-polished tan shoes.

Stratton said, "Japan isn't satisfied with the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. They're not satisfied with Thailand and French Indo-China and Burma. Japan wants all of China and all of India. They've got big dreams in Tokyo. There's only one way to stop them. Step on them and squeeze the life out of them before they can start crawling."

Grant nodded slowly. "That's good advice, Mr. Stratton. You seem very much in earnest."

"I'm an American," Stratton said. "For almost two hundred years the Strattons have lived in Vermont. If you know your colonial history you'll remember reading about a Major Stratton who was one of the heroes of the Revolutionary War. It was at the battle of—"

"All right, Mr. Stratton. I get what you're driving at. You want the Allies to win this war and you're willing to do everything in your power to help."

"That's correct," Stratton said.

Grant smiled. "Coöperation is a wonderful thing," he said. "Sometimes it calls for temporary inconvenience, but I'm sure you won't mind."

Stratton was frowning. He was nervous again. "Of course I won't mind, but I don't see why—"

"Look, Mr. Stratton, it's like this. You've made several interesting statements. Maybe it sums up to something sensational. The only way to make sure is to check up on certain things you've said. While the check-up is taking place, we want you to remain here as our guest."

"In other words," Stratton said, "you don't believe me and you're putting me in a cell."

"Not at all," Grant said. "You can pick your hotels. We'll handle all expenses. All you've got to do is remain in Chungking and report to this office once or twice a day."

Stratton looked uncomfortable. "Is there—anything else?"

"Nothing that I can think of at the mo-

ment," Grant said. "Unless Colonel Milford has something to add."

The colonel was gazing at the ceiling, shaking his head.

Stratton's voice was eager. "May I leave now?"

Grant shrugged. "No reason why not," he said. "Just drop in sometime this afternoon and tell the colonel's secretary the name of the hotel where you've registered. I recommend the Shi-nan. Best accommodations in town."

Stratton gestured toward the Chinese guerilla. "Is he coming with me?"

"I don't see why he should," Grant said easily. "Do you?"

Stratton shook his head quickly. He walked to the door and he said, "Thanks for—for everything, gentlemen. I know I seem sort of jittery but I've been through a lot these past two weeks and now it's working on me. I'm sure a cold shower and a drink will be just the thing to fix me up."

"No doubt about it," Grant said. He watched Stratton go. He waited a few extra moments, then turned to Colonel Milford. "Saw him go down the side-steps." Colonel Milford lifted a telephone and spoke quietly into the mouthpiece. "J-9 and L-14," he said. "A blond man in a blue-gray suit and white shoes is leaving the building by the side stairway. Get on the track. If he attempts to leave town, grab him."

The colonel put the telephone back in its place. He looked at the guerilla, and said something in Chinese. The guerilla saluted, turned briskly, shouldered the rifle and walked out of the room.

For slightly more than a half-minute the room was quiet. Then the colonel stood up, went over to the glass-topped table. He moved a thick finger across the map, on an oblique line running from the vicinity of Chungking over to Kan-chau.

A few moments later he turned and smiled at Grant. "Well, what's your opinion?"

Grant said, "If it's a fairy tale, it's a good one, and he's drawn it up tight. I can't see any openings. And if he's telling the truth, we'd better get busy."

Colonel Milford turned and again he was examining the map. He murmured, "Seven hundred miles is quite a distance. We have no air bases in the Kan-chau area. We have no radio contact with guerillas up there. It's wild, desolate country up around that Great Wall. Perhaps Stratton will start monkey business and we won't have to go up there."

Grant looked down at the map. He said slowly, "It shapes up as a question. Stratton is either a fool, a liar—or he's completely sincere. We've got to find out. I don't think we should waste any time."

The colonel walked back to the desk, leaned against the edge and said, "All right, Captain, what do you advise?"

Grant continued to look at the map. After several quiet seconds he said, "I'll go up there."

"Alone?"

"There's no other way."

"It's a long hike," the Colonel said. "There aren't any railroads running to Kan-chau. The roads are awful."

Grant smiled. "I wasn't thinking of trains or automobiles," he said. "And I certainly don't intend to walk."

Colonel Milford frowned, then grinned. "I figured you'd begin to get homesick for the clouds."

Grant said, "With a Warhawk I'd be there in a little over two hours. On the return trip I'd have enough gas to get back as far as Chingtu."

"It's sort of early to talk about the return trip," the colonel said. "At present I have strong doubts as to the feasibility of a flight to Kan-chau. You might possibly run into Jap planes—"

"That's possible, Colonel. It's also possible for me to walk out of this room and fall down a flight of stairs and break my neck."

Colonel Milford seated himself at the desk, tapped the calabash against the ashtray. "If you take a plane up there, and if there's really something doing in Kan-chau, and they see you—"

"They won't see me," Grant said. "I'll fly low during the final forty or fifty miles. I'll land at least five miles outside of Kan-chau and walk the rest of the way."

The colonel clapped his hands together, rubbed his palms. "All right, Captain. I'm going to give you a Warhawk. I'm going to give you forty-eight hours. If you're not back inside that time I'm sending a flock of planes up there." He leaned back in the swivel chair. "When will you be ready to leave?"

"I'd say an hour. I'm going to buy some civilian clothes and put an automatic in one of the pockets. I'll put some lunch inside me and I'll be all set. Should I report back here when I'm through?"

"No. I'll call the C.O. of the 116th Fighter. At exactly one hour from now you'll report on the field and there's be a plane ready for you. Nobody will ask any questions. I wish I could go with you, Captain. And maybe I would, except that I've got a funny feeling about this job. I'm guessing that it's the sort of thing that calls for one man. Only one man." The colonel stood up. "Be smart about this, Captain. Be careful and don't get your feet wet. That's all."

Grant saluted smartly and walked out of the office.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Sky-Devil

**H**ERE it was—the wide and wonderful ocean of space, the huge white rollers of clouds edged with gold. Grant could feel it coming back to him, the mastery of a flying machine, the taste and the sensation of flight.

He had the Warhawk working at 8000 feet as he cut northward from Chungking. He pushed the Rolls Royce Merlin up to near-capacity, held it there and listened to the eager pounding—the whirring and howling and singing.

Whizzing over Chingtu, Grant reviewed matters and underlined each factor, one by one.

There was Stratton, a place called Kan-chau, an ancient and almost deserted village, neighboring the Great Wall of China. . . .

He had an automatic in the side-pocket of his jacket, a yellow tweed affair with a bright green block design. He wore bright green slacks, and his sport shirt was yellow. He carried a wallet with a thousand dollars in United States currency. And over all of this finery was a suede sheepskin-lined coat.

The Warhawk climbed to 9500 as clouds floated off to the right and more sunbeams came slanting down. He passed a river, a plateau of white-yellow earth, a stretch of rice fields. The soil of China swept underneath the American plane. China had been fighting this war for a long time—guerilla method. It was mainly because of the guerillas that the Japs had been held back, because the guerillas knew how and where to hide. They knew when to come out of their hiding places, and where to strike. All through the grinding, slashing, bleeding years the Japs had been trying to find them and catch them. The Japs had been seeking to organize a purely mechanical strategy whereby the guerillas would find it impossible to hide.

Grant thought of what Stratton had said concerning the white men in Kan-chau. And the boss, the man named Fletcher, who spoke Chinese and had the confidence of Chinese guerilla leaders and a cash stipulation with Tokyo.

All right, maybe it was a lie, a trick of some kind. Maybe this Fletcher didn't exist. But that was why all this was taking place. That *maybe* was the big thing—the big reason why Colonel Milford had allowed him to take the Warhawk and go out alone.

Grant gained another 500 feet of altitude, upped the throttle to capacity. His lips moved,

rehearsing the act. The act would be very important. He had to make it good.

An hour rolled by. Another thirty minutes. Now he could see the Hwang river valley. Next, the river itself—a green-silver python curled lazily against the mocha-colored earth. He consulted a small map that he had attached to the instrument panel. The Hwang river was just about two hundred miles south of Kan-chau, which wasn't much to a Warhawk. Grant was beginning to anticipate the arrival. His mind tingled with the uncertainty of what rested ahead. He watched the Warhawk's propeller beating the sun-filled air into a golden liquid that spun off the blades and went sliding onto the wings, glimmering for an instant and then dripping away. And there was something else that glimmered. It wasn't part of the Warhawk. It was high in the blue and over to the left.

Four points of silver moving over from the left, coming in and down from the front.

Grant didn't want to be hasty in reaching a conclusion. He held onto his flight-line and capacity speed, watching the four winged shapes become larger. When they were quite large, he saw the orange-red suns on their wings. Zeros! They were coming in to bite him. He braced himself for a fight.

Even as he readied the six fifty-calibre wing guns, cleared them with a short burst, he wondered what Jap fighter planes were doing in this area. There was no military activity up here, no Yank air bases. For a moment he juggled the theory that the Japs had been expecting him.

One thing he knew. The Japs were anxious to get started. They were coming in with terrific speed, four of them spacing it wide, the two Zeros at either end of the attack-pattern shoved out in front so as to create a sort of flying pincers.

They were about a thousand feet above Grant when the separating distance was approximately 800 yards. Another hundred yards and they started to fire. Wing-cannon were hurling 22mm. shells and nose-guns pitched 7.7mm. fire. Grant pulled the Warhawk over to the right, leaned the ship on its right wing, then went down in a twisting turn. The Zeros streaked toward him, still firing. Their aim was way off, but it would get better at closer range. He knew that he mustn't let them get too close. Not yet, anyway. These four Japs were bad news, and he had to get rid of them if he was ever going to get through with this Kan-chau affair.

The Warhawk described a sharp pull-up and a wide, graceful turn at 8000 feet. It looked like a foolish move. It brought the Japs in close, put the P-40F in an apparently helpless position. But in the next moment the American plane was performing an outside loop,

riding above the oncoming Japs, then sketching a smooth wing-over and taking the initiative.

Grant was streaking down upon the Zeros—frenzied things that jumped and tumbled, trying to get out of the way. The four slant-eyed pilots were changing their minds about the Yank pilot's combat ability. The Warhawk's abrupt switch from frantic defense to flaming offense had been a masterpiece of single-seater technique.

The issue was simple and plain. Grant had seen the Japs at close hand. His reasons for wanting to kill Japs were based on seeing them and seeing their work and the way they worked. He had seen some ghastly things. He never liked to talk about it. He never liked to think about it except when he was facing the enemy. Then it became a process that was crazy and dreadful and delightful. The sight of Japs was delightful because it meant an opportunity to hit back.

Now he had the spine of a Zero in his gunsight. The Zero veered and he lost firing position. He turned, cut back, turned again, and the Zero came in again, rolling over. The belly of the plane showed up in the gunsight. Grant knew that he had to do this fast because the other Zeros were already riding out from behind defensive screens and sizzling toward him. He stabilized his aim, and at 150 yards he pressed the button. The Brownings sent a six-lane straightaway of purple-orange fire across emptiness. There was a split instant of waiting. Then there was a white glow, followed by a flash of red and a flood of thick black smoke. That meant a bullseye—a hit in the belly tank.



THE ZERO was acting like a mad winged beast trying to kill itself. It seemed to be tearing itself to pieces. There was another explosion and both wings dropped off. There was a third blast, a flare of more red fire, and the fuselage split up.

Grant coaxed the Warhawk, pulled up and over and away from the three Japs that were now spearing in from the left side, trying to exact a fast payment for the wrecked Zero and its dead pilot. They came in shooting and they were willing to use up a lot of shells and bullets, even though they were wide of aiming position. Grant tossed them off his tail at 7500 feet, got rid of them again at 7000, then started upstairs once more, figuring that it was time to knock down a second Jap.

But as the Warhawk zoomed, the enemy demonstrated his gift for learning by experience. They were going to make up for their mistake of a minute ago. They talked about it over the radio line. They told each other that

they wouldn't give the American leeway. Instead, they would run up at him, get in as close as possible and tear away at the Warhawk's underside.

They did it that way. They were making yardage at 9000 feet. At 11,000 feet, they were in close again shooting at Grant. He heard the unpleasant sound that told him the P-40F was getting thumped and thumped hard. He knew the extreme necessity for cancelling his offensive plans and doing something to save his plane.

He began a split-S, worked out of it as he approached the second curve. The Zeros tried to stay with him, but he swerved the Warhawk, rolled it over on its right side, shot past the astonished Japs and kept streaking down until he was in a comparatively safe area.

For a few moments he thought about a breakaway. He figured that the Warhawk might be able to make good on the run. And then, on the other hand, the Japs would probably follow him, pester him, maybe leap down and chop the life out of him before he could even come in sight of Kan-chau.

He had to stay here with the Japs and bang away at them and push them off the path. Three-to-one wasn't any picnic, but that was all right. No part of this war was a picnic, and nobody would ever know it better than the men who did the fighting.

Grant's eyes took on the wild glow that can only come into the eyes of an extremely hot fighter pilot. He grinned, showing two healthy rows of white teeth.

"Come on, Japs—let's quit the boxing. Start slugging!"

The Japs preferred to box. They formed a stretching triangle, with Grant in the middle. When he tried to break the triangle, the Japs would retreat. They did this four times. They went screeching back and away, keeping him in the middle. When he dived, they dived, but they wouldn't attack. At 6500 feet he tried to suck them in by means of a wingover and left vertical turn. They refused to come in. They followed him and stayed clear.

He leveled at 6000, turned his head slowly from left to front to right, studying the zone of combat. He started forward and the three Japs moved in accordance, in what looked like a perfect ratio. The Jap out in front was falling back, retreating gracefully. The two other Japs were very wide on either side. Grant increased speed. The Japs did the same. It was tournament stuff. A terrific strain on the nervous system, this waiting, testing and watching, wanting them to come in, knowing that they wouldn't come in until they were good and ready.

The Warhawk kept moving ahead. And that Jap out there kept moving back. Grant was thinking that if there were spectators for this

show, the sky would be filled with booing and pop-bottles would be dropping into the ring.

"Come on, Japs," Grant said. "Come on and—"

He noticed something. He was gaining on the Jap. Not to any great extent, but it was encouraging. The distance of separation was somewhere in the vicinity of 1100 yards, and it was decreasing yard by yard. It was 900 yards. . . .850 and Grant began to jab. Single-second bursts at first, and he wondered if the Jap realized that the Brownings were throwing stuff.

Obviously the Jap didn't have any idea of what was happening. The Zero was retaining its flight-line. The range was reduced to 800 yards. Grant poised his thumb above the black button, soldered his gaze to the cross-hairs of the gun-sight. There it was.

Grant's thumb came down on the button, stayed there. The fifty-caliber slugs were making an 800 yard dash, hitting the Zero, ramming along the top and sides of the fuselage. The Jap pilot was surprised and very much excited. The Jap decided to dive. Before he could work the stick a fifty-caliber bullet came along and went into the base of his skull. Two more hit him in the same place and just about tore his head off.

The Zero went up in a crazy, wriggling sort of climb, then it flopped over on its right wing and stayed in that position as it plunged down across the sunlight.

Grant kept the Warhawk on its forward path. He knew that the two remaining Japs were considerably agitated by what had just taken place. He had the feeling that they were jabbering over the radio line, trying to agree on another plan of battle. He reasoned that possibly it would take them quite a while to make up their minds, and he certainly wasn't obliged to wait. They had been able to play the triangle trick when there were three of them. Now that there were two, it made a great difference.

The Warhawk started a climb. Both Japs turned and leaped up and in.

Watching it, analyzing it, Grant turned his memory back to something he had learned during advanced training from one of the wild men who had fought for money during the Chaco argument in South America. He'd been one of the lucky guys who received the benefit of this sky veteran's experience. And one of the more difficult tricks was a design known as a double-bladed counter lunge.

It called for an extraordinary plane and an extraordinary pilot. It called for super-timing and an extremely special brand of coordination. It had to be done fast and the shooting had to be sure and consistent. If it wasn't done correctly, the result was doom.

Grant began the maneuver at 7500 feet. The

Zero on the right was already firing at him. Over there on the right the range was about 400 yards. On the left, a confident Jap was getting ready to fire from 300 yards. Both Japs were approximately 500 feet below Grant's flight-line, and they saw the Warhawk pull up on a steep basis, flip itself back, come down toward them with its belly facing the top of the sky, its Merlin engine shrieking.

The Warhawk veered toward the right. Both Zeros were throwing shells and bullets. The Warhawk came in. Six Brownings talked for exactly two seconds. Then the Warhawk changed its course as it lunged, shooting toward the left. Again the gun sextet offered a two-second burst.

That was all. Grant had already passed the Zeros. The maneuver was completed. It was time to look back and see what the trick had accomplished. As he turned the P-40F, placed it right side up, he tilted the rear-view mirror and the silvered glass showed him a Zero that was burning and another Zero that was falling in a death-spin.

Grant didn't smile. He didn't purr his satisfaction. The four Zeros had been in his way and now they were eliminated. It was pure arithmetic. Now he had to steer his mind back to this Kan-chau situation. He thought about the air battle only in the sense that it constituted a loss of time and precious high octane.

The Warhawk made a turn. Again it was running on the oblique path. It stayed at 6500 feet until it was fifty miles south of Kan-chau. At that point, Grant took it way down. He was bringing it in, skimming the flat gloomy earth of northern China at an altitude of sixty feet. Grant could see swampland and several stagnant lakes, dark green and timeless. A minute later he saw hills; he had to use seventy feet in order to leap over them. Then he was down to forty again.

Grant glanced at the map. He'd make his landing here, on the level and fairly hard soil bordering the woodland. Then he'd take a walk seven miles through the woodland to Kan-chau.

He parked the Warhawk beneath overhanging branches that made a convenient, natural hangar and camouflage. He took off the suede flying coat, flipped it in the cockpit. He examined the automatic, patted it affectionately. Glancing at his wristwatch, he saw that it was 1400 hours.



T 1530 hours he emerged from the woodland on a strip of baked yellow earth near Kan-chau.

There weren't any streets. The houses looked like blobs of mud. Off to the right was a wide, whitish path—the ancient caravan route.

And over on the left the horizon was obstructed by a solid, purplish-gray barrier—the Great Wall of China.

It was a fascinating thing, that Wall—immense, incredible. At the same time there was something sad about it, something futile. The Chinese had built their Wall centuries ago, in the expectation that it would keep out the Mongol invaders from the north. They didn't know that hundreds of years later another invader would come in from the east.

Grant lit a cigarette, walked into the village. He saw some children, some old people. There were a few shops with the wares stacked neatly and humbly on either side of each small doorway. Grant entered one of the shops. He had picked up enough words and phrases to make himself understood in Chinese, and now he talked slowly, haltingly to the aged proprietor. He asked for rice cakes, for which he paid with a silver dollar. The proprietor was very grateful, but not extremely surprised.

This meant something. The proprietor had seen other silver dollars. Grant was about to ask a question when he became aware of a shadow that had stretched itself across the floor of the little shop. Someone was standing behind him, in the doorway. He turned slowly.

He saw a man of his own height, but much heavier. The man was about thirty-five and had light brown hair combed flat across the top of a roundish head. The man's face was inclined to be round and his complexion indicated that he didn't spend much time in the open. He wore a tan gabardine suit and thick-soled shoes. After Grant made a silent count of twelve seconds, the man took a cigarette from between thick lips and said, "Do I know you?"

Only four words, but they signified Chicago. They were spoken in a mild, relaxed tone. Grant knew that they came from a shrewd individual. He told himself that it had started much too soon. The first ball had been pitched before he had a chance to step into the batter's box. He put a grin on his face.

He said, "Maybe you carry a flask. At this particular moment I could use a drink."

The round-faced man pulled a small, flat sterling silver flask from the inner pocket of the gabardine coat. Without saying a word he extended the flask. Grant stared at it, grabbed at it. And thought *Not too fast, not too anxious. Spread it thin and keep him guessing. Be every bit as smart as he is.*

The round-faced man threw the cigarette away. Grant looked at the flask.

He took a long pull. Expensive Scotch flowed down his throat. He licked his lips appreciatively.

The round-faced man re-capped the flask, but it back in his pocket. "Where you from?"

"Frisco, but let's not talk about it here,"

Grant said. He gestured toward the aged proprietor.

The round-faced man nodded; walked out of the shop. Grant followed. They were walking deeper into the village. Grant put his hands in the spacious pockets of the loud yellow and green sport jacket, touching the automatic. Grant wound his fingers around the weapon, then slowly took it out of his pocket.

He stepped smoothly behind the round-faced man, placed the muzzle against tan gabardine and said, "Don't bother to put up your hands. Just keep on walking."

It didn't seem to annoy the other. Certainly it didn't astonish him. He kept moving along at the same pace. He wasn't saying anything.

Grant had edged forward, now walked at the side and just a bit to the rear of the round-faced man, still allowing the automatic to touch gabardine. Several seconds skipped by, and then Grant said, "Got more cigarettes on you?"

"All you want."

"I don't want any," Grant said. "I want you to have one. I want you to light one for yourself. Keep your hands high while you're doing it. I'm easy to get along with until I get annoyed. Behave yourself and you won't die."

The round-faced man was behaving himself. He lit the cigarette. Grant reached into a tan gabardine pocket and took out a wallet. It was thick with money, but he didn't look at the money. He scrutinized the identification card under the celluloid flap.

This was good. This was a lot of luck.

The round-faced man was Fletcher.

Grant said, "Fletcher, you've got a lot of money."

"That's right," the round-faced man said. "What's your name? What have you got?"

"I'm Grant. I've got a gun. That's all I need." He paused, then said, "Look, Mr. Fletcher, I'm in a hurry and I don't have time to count this haul. How did I do?"

"You did fine," Fletcher said. "There's about seven thousand dollars in the wallet. And there's a few cards and small papers that you won't be able to use. I need them badly. I wonder if you'd let me have them back."

"Sure, Mr. Fletcher. I'm a good guy that way." Grant took cards and small, folded papers from the wallet, placing the paraphernalia in Fletcher's coat pocket.

"Thanks," Fletcher said. "Is this where we call it quits?"

"Not yet. I don't want you running to the police before I have a chance to skip town."

"There aren't any police up here," Fletcher said. "There's nothing up here, or haven't you noticed?"

"I haven't had a chance to notice anything," Grant said. "All I know is, I'm in a hurry to get out of China. I need all the money

I can put my hands on. Money can buy anything."

"Except friends," Fletcher said solemnly.

"I don't want friends," Grant said. "When you have friends, you hear a lot of promises. That's why I've got troubles now. I listened to promises."

"What kind of promises? Or should I mind my own business?"

"I think you'd better mind your own business," Grant said. He waited a few seconds. "On the other hand, maybe this is your business. Maybe you're one of the boys who's been looking for me."

"It's possible," Fletcher said. He shrugged. "Tell me anyway. You can't lose anything. You've got the gun."

"That's true." He realized that all this was sinking in, and he had a feeling that the act was going over big. He said, "You see, Mr. Fletcher, it's this way. I broke out of San Quentin a few years ago. I was doing a life sentence there, and naturally, I was anxious that they shouldn't grab hold of me and take me back. I did some fast travelling. I was in a lot of places and a lot of things happened to me. Finally I found myself in Chungking."

"Doing what?"

"Making a bankroll. I'd bought up a few carloads of merchandise, the kind that's got to sell. Clothing. And food. I was selling it for steep prices. I was getting thirty bucks for a plain cotton shirt, sixty bucks for work-shoes. A dollar for a chocolate-bar—"

"The Chinese can't afford to pay that kind of money."

"Some of them can. But mainly my customers weren't Chinese. Right now, there's thousands of Americans and Englishmen in Chungking. Newspaper people and volunteer hospital workers and construction laborers. The place is a beehive. It's overloaded and naturally there's a shortage of food and other essentials. That's where I cashed in. They had to eat and they had to have clothes. They didn't have any choice in the matter. I was making a fortune and then—I stepped in hot water. Somebody recognized me."

"Somebody important?"

"He was important as far as I was concerned," Grant said. "A former cop from San Francisco. He spotted me right off the reel. I had to get out of town and I had to make it fast. I had most of my dough tied up in stock, but I managed to pick up a grand in cash and get in my car and shift into first."

"Is your car here?" Fletcher said.

"No, I wrecked it. I went off the road a couple hundred miles north of Chungking. Messed up the engine and busted the rear, and I started walking. Now and then I'd hitch a ride on a Chinese supply truck. I crossed the Hwang river with a boatful of guerrillas. All I

had to do was tell them I come from the States. They would have given me the boat if I'd asked for it. After we crossed the Hwang, the Chinese kept moving north where they met another unit, and I got another ride. About twenty miles south of here they changed their minds about something and they headed west. I got off and started to walk."

"A long walk," Fletcher said.

"You're not kidding. There's nothing I hate worse than walking, but now it looks as if I'd better get into the habit. I don't see any other means of transportation. Or maybe there's a few used-car lots on the other side of town."

Fletcher actually laughed. "There's nothing in this town."

"I get the idea. It's a summer resort for tired business men."

"Call it that. Call it anything you like." All at once Fletcher was tense. "Tell me something, Grant. What's on the calendar? What do you intend doing with me?"

"Nothing much," Grant said. "I've got your money and that's all I want. Now I'm interested in getting rid of you. You're no good to me now."

"What's the play?" Fletcher asked.

"It's simple. Just keep on walking. I'll stand here and keep you covered until there's a safe distance between us. Then I'll duck out of this town and take my chances on the caravan road. Maybe a wagon will pick me up.



He stood there in the wide space between two rows of mud-and-bamboo huts, watching Fletcher walk away.

Maybe a few months from now I'll be on the water."

"Going back to the States?"

"Do I look crazy? I'd be grabbed less than an hour after stepping off the boat. The place for me is Central America. I got a few connections in Honduras. But that's all in the future. Right now I think we'd better wind up our little chat. Start walking, Fletcher."

He stood there in the wide space between two rows of mud-and-bamboo huts, watching Fletcher walk away. His eyes were unblinking, but his ears were doing most of the work. His ears told him something. Footsteps behind him, moving in upon him. Possibly someone intended to kill him here and now.

He couldn't turn around. He couldn't spoil the act. He was bidding all his chips, and hoping, and now he had the feeling that there was more than one person behind him. He couldn't let on that he knew. He had to stand there, concentrating on Fletcher. At this point Fletcher was about thirty yards away.

Grant put the automatic back in his coat pocket. A moment later something came down on the back of his head and he was swimming in a black pool.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Wings of Terror



It was a dream, it wasn't at all bad. For one thing, there was the room. It was a big room. It looked like part of a palace from way back in Chinese history. There was elegantly carved furniture and bright green enamel with a thinly-drawn gold design. Ankle-deep rugs and ornaments of jade and pale purplish quartz.

And there was the girl. She was small and trim and she had platinum blonde hair that looked genuine and flowed down to her shoulders. She had pale green eyes and her skin was very white. Except for orange lipstick she wasn't wearing any paint. Her get-up was a plainly-cut pastel green summer dress.

She was bending over the couch, applying a wet cloth to Grant's head. Someone else was extending a bottle of smelling salts. Now Grant was sure about it—this wasn't any dream.

The other person was Fletcher.

There were others in the room, all men, leaning against the far wall. One of them was built like a tub and another resembled a broomstick. The third guy could have doubled for a weasel. The fourth one was the pretty boy of the outfit.

Grant grinned at all of them. Then he sat up slowly, and his eyes rested on Fletcher. He

said, "You're the winner. Now I'm going to ask for a break. Who do I talk to?"

"You talk to me," Fletcher said.

"Do I get the break?"

"It depends." Fletcher put flame against a cigarette. "What's the hurry? It's comfortable here. There's plenty of food, and unlimited cigarettes. I think you'll like it."

Grant frowned, allowed a trace of the grin to remain on his lips. He said, "Sounds as if you figure to keep me here a long time."

"That also depends," Fletcher said. He placed the bottle of smelling salts on a small table carved out of white quartz.

Grant looked at the girl and said, "Hello."

"Hello," the girl said. She didn't smile.

"Her name is Vera," Fletcher said. "Take a look at her fingernails."

Grant looked at Vera's fingernails. They were long blades, polished orange like her lips. Grant said, "With those things you could put scars on a man's face."

"I've done it," Vera said. "More than once." She didn't smile. She dipped the cloth in a porcelain bowl, rung it out and gently pressed it against Grant's head.

Fletcher was making further introductions. The man who looked like a tub was Hoskins. The broomstick was Rittner. The weasel-faced guy was called Noodle. The pretty boy was Wally. Two thin scars ran down the left side of his face and almost spoiled his prettiness. Grant thought of Vera's fingernails. The grin on Grant's lips became wide and open.

Wally came across the room. When he was a few feet away from the couch, he stopped and said, "What's funny?"

The grin became wider and more open. Grant pointed at the scars on Wally's face, then he pointed to Vera's fingernails.

Wally's features remained expressionless. He turned and looked at Fletcher. He took a mother-of-pearl switchblade from his coat pocket, pressed the button and the blade came out. He said, "I don't like him, Fletcher. I'm going to carve him."

"I don't think you should," Fletcher said mildly.

All at once Wally's face was twisted and he screamed, "I'm going to carve his eyes out I'm—" He turned and the glittering blade started toward Grant's face. Grant rolled quickly, went to the floor on the other side of the couch. Grant was trying to get to his knees as Wally came at him with the knife. Vera screamed. The blade whizzed.

Grant was fast and frantic. He was under the blade, but Wally was going to try again. Vera let out another scream. Wally laughed a bit hysterically and showed Grant the blade that was going to slit his face. Then a fist hit him again—a short one that went into Wally's stomach. Wally doubled up.



Vera gasped, "Please, Fletcher, don't—"

The round-faced man didn't hear her. He seemed to be having a good time; he was beaming at everyone.

Grant was perplexed and his face showed it. He watched the round-faced man walk in and straighten Wally with two short, stiff upercuts. Wally's arms went up and back. The pertty boy went to the floor. Fletcher reached down, took hold of his greasy hair, lifted him and said, "One thing you must learn. In this game it's very necessary to put your personal problems aside. Always keep your anger under a lid. Look at me. Do I seem angry?"

Wally was sobbing. He was cringing. His jaw was horribly swollen. "Don't hit me anymore. I—"

"Be quiet, Wally. And listen to me." Fletcher's voice was a flow of syrup. "I've talked to you about this many times. I've told you that some day I'd be weary of talking and I'd use another method to impress me. Isn't that correct?"

"Yeah, Fletcher—" Now Wally was shaking. His teeth were chattering. He said, "Don't, Fletcher. No more—please—please!"

"You've got to learn, Wally." Fletcher smiled, shook his head slowly. "You've got to learn." He cracked the side of his right hand against the side of Wally's mouth. He made a fist, thudded it against Wally's mouth.

Vera kept right on screaming, but nobody paid any attention to her. A big, hard fist thudded against Wally's mouth and he lost two teeth. He tried to go down. Fletcher wouldn't let him go down. Fletcher still had hold of his hair, keeping him upright that way.

Grant looked at the other three men. They had moved out from the wall and now they were at ringside. They were watching it as if they had paid good money to see it. They didn't want to miss anything. And their faces wouldn't give the slightest hint as to what they were thinking.

Fletcher was working on Wally's ribs. Wally doubled over again. Fletcher let him stay doubled for a few moments, allowed him to catch his breath, then pulled him up straight and bashed him in the mouth. Wally's face looked awful. Blood was coming out of his mouth, dripping over his swollen lips. The same blood was on Fletcher's knuckles when he turned and exhibited the fist to his audience. Then he brought the fist to his shoulder and he brought it up and down, chopping it against the tip of Wally's chin. At the same instant he let go of Wally's hair. Wally toppled backward, hit and floor and stayed there.

Facing the three men, Fletcher pointed to the motionless figure on the floor. He said, "Take Wally upstairs." Turning to Vera he added, "You go with them."

Noodle and Hoskins each took hold of an

arm. Rittner took hold of Wally's legs. And together they carried Wally out of the room with Vera following them.

Fletcher used the damp cloth to wipe blood from his fist. When it was clean, he smiled at Grant and said, "You had luck. Wally is very good with a knife."

"I figure it'll be a long time before he uses that knife again," Grant said.

"Wally is a fine boy, and he comes in very handy. But he gets angry too quick. I've been trying to teach him to stay cool. In my line of business it's very necessary for a man to stay cool."

Grant shaped a question, but not the one that Fletcher was waiting for. Grant said, "Got a cigarette?"

"Sure." Fletcher lit two cigarettes.

Grant said, "Nice lay-out you got here. An antique dealer would give his right arm for some of this stuff."

Fletcher dragged at his cigarette. He said, "I don't own the place. It belongs to a general in the Chinese Army. An old chum of mine. The rent comes free. Same goes for food. And I've got some liquor here that money can't buy. Care for a drink?"

"I could use a shot."

The round-faced man took glasses and a bottle from a carved bronze-and-ivory liquor cabinet. He poured a pale-yellowish liquid into the glasses.

It was powerful water. Grant said, "Two more drinks of that stuff and I wouldn't need to worry about transportation to Honduras. I'd go off like a rocket."

Fletcher laughed. He said, "Help yourself. There are a few more cases in the cellar. Later today I'll show you the cellar. It's an interesting place, a few centuries old. There's the liquor collection. And some other things. But you'll find out when you see it. Right now I'm going upstairs to see how Wally is getting along. Stick around until I get back."

"Sure," Grant said. "Sure, I'll stick around."

The round-faced man walked out of the room.



GRANT WAS sitting there on the edge of the couch, doing a lot of thinking. After a short while he went through his pockets. The automatic was gone, also Fletcher's wallet. But his own was there. He opened it and saw the thousand dollars. He put the wallet back in his pocket and then he brought fingers to the back of his head. There wasn't any pain, and the dizziness was practically all gone. He knew that an expert had tapped him on the skull. In all probability it was a blackjack caress. But that wasn't important

now. His head was okay. He didn't need to think about what had happened, or why it had happened. He had to guess at what was going to happen. He had to plan accordingly.

One thing was emphatic. He couldn't take a stroll. He had to stay here and follow through on what he had started. Besides, he sensed that it wouldn't be at all easy to take a stroll, even though it looked ridiculously easy. He wasn't tied, he wasn't chained. There was a wide doorway. There were two big windows. Nobody was standing over him with a gun.

Somehow it was uncanny. It was as if Fletcher could know what was going on in his mind. The thought of it frightened him, and for a bad fifteen minutes he was catering to fright. Finally he poured himself another shot of the pale yellowish liquor.

It helped. It went to his head and washed the worry and fear from his brain. He was debating the advisability of a third drink when he heard someone in the doorway. He turned and saw Vera.

She was looking at him, her face a complete blank. She came over to the quartz table and slowly poured a double of the yellowish liquor. Her eyes remained on Grant as she put the drink down her throat. When the glass was empty she put it on the table and filled it again. Grant was amazed, watching her take another double. She took it without a sound, without a grimace.

Grant said, "That's a lot of liquor for a little girl."

She walked across the room, to one of the windows. For the better part of a minute she stood there, looking out. Then she turned slowly and faced Grant. "Wally's dead."

Grant stood up. He wondered what he should say. He mumbled, "That's tough. I knew the guy was hurt bad, but I didn't think he'd die."

Vera said, "Fletcher hit him too many times on the jaw. That did it. That did something to his brain. There was a hemorrhage."

"Too bad," Grant said.

"Yeah." Vera was staring at a pattern in the center of the rug. "Wally was an all right guy, except sometimes he acted like a child. He used to cry when Fletcher bawled him out." Her voice was low. It was as if she was talking to herself. "I remember the time we were in Hankow and a mob of hijackers walked in on us after we'd made a cleanup in jade. I remember the way Wally got started with his knife and put four of them on the floor. He thought Fletcher would pat him on the back. Instead, Fletcher lectured him. Fletcher said that it was the wrong way to discuss matters with hijackers. Wally couldn't understand. That was the main trouble. He was stubborn and he couldn't understand. But he was straight. That's one thing Fletcher

won't be able to forget. Wally was always straight."

She looked at Grant. There were tears in her pale green eyes.

Grant said, "You liked Wally."

Vera nodded. "Sure I liked him a lot. The same way as I'd like my own brother. That's what he couldn't figure out. He was a good looking boy and he had an idea that there wasn't a woman who wouldn't idolize him. That was a wrong idea. That's why I had to use my fingernails on him."

"Your fingernails dig deep," Grant said.

"I didn't want to hurt Wally," she said. "I just wanted to put him in his place. He didn't mean any harm. He was young, that was the main trouble. He was so young."

Grant leaned back against the couch pillows and glanced sideways at Vera and said, "You're not exactly a grandmother."

"I'm 23. I'll be 24 next month."

"I'll get you a birthday present," Grant said.

"Yeah—if you're around."

"I'll be around," Grant said. He told himself that he was off the track. It wouldn't do to put himself in as a topic of conversation. He had to get her into a relaxed mood, so that she'd be talking about herself, and then he'd manipulate the words and steer her over to where she'd be talking about Fletcher.

Grant said, "I'm not kidding. I'll get you that birthday present. What would you like?"

"A grand piano."

"Are you being funny?"

"No. That's what I'd like, really. I've always wanted a grand piano. You see, I—I used to sing." Her voice was actually shy as she said it. "I was getting steady bookings in clubs that paid good dough. Then I had trouble, and I had to get out of Frisco."

"In a hurry?"

"Somebody got killed," Vera said. "Some dirty, double-dealing hyena who never imagined I'd use a gun on him. But I did. I put four bullets in his head. Then I packed my bags and left town. I met Fletcher in Las Vegas. He was also on the run. Federalers were after him, with enough charges to send him up for life. He was anxious to get out of the country. He had his boys with him, and when I told him I could sing he said he might be able to use me. The six of us managed to get on a boat. We came to China and I sang in a lot of clubs. It was a good cover-up for Fletcher. He was supposed to be my manager. Hoskins and Noodle and Wally and Rittner did the actual rough work."

"The stealing?"

"At first it was stealing. Then we found easier ways to make money, a lot of money. And finally Fletcher made this deal with the Japs and—"

Her mouth stayed open. Her eyes were wide.

And then gradually her eyes narrowed. She said, "I've got a bad habit. Every once in a while I open my big mouth. Now you know something that Fletcher didn't want you to know."

Grant smiled easily. He said, "Don't get yourself excited. Fletcher's already told me—"

"You're lying," Vera cut it. "Fletcher is always slow and careful about those things." She leaned toward the purplish quartz table. Grant didn't know what she had in mind. He wasn't going to stop her. He was going to play dumb. She said, "Fletcher never takes chances. He always keeps people in the dark until he's sure about them."

"He's sure about me."

"That's your story," Vera said. She acted quickly. She opened a small drawer in the purplish quartz table and took out a pistol. She pointed it at Grant's chest.

"What's all this foolishness?"

There was a trace of sadness in Vera's eyes. She said, "I'm sorry, honey, but I'm not going to risk anything. I can't let you walk out—"

"Who said anything about walking out?"

"I'm saying it." And now, for the first time, she smiled. There was considerable brainwork behind the smile. She murmured, "Fletcher told me you claimed to be from Frisco. You claimed residence in San Quentin. Listen, Grant, I know the San Quentin type. I know how Frisco roughnecks talk and the way they act. Your act was good, but it wasn't good enough."

"You ought to stay away from potent liquor," Grant said. "It makes you crazy."

"You've got it all wrong, Grant." She gestured toward the bottle of yellowish liquor. "That stuff takes its time, but when it starts to work, it works very well. It does things for me. It clears my mind. You came up here to collect information. Now you've got it. But I can't let you go home with it. And I can't let Fletcher know that I made a slip. I'll tell Fletcher that I caught you sneaking out and—"

Grant struck like a copperhead. His arm streaked out and he knocked the pistol from Vera's grasp. It thudded on the rug. Vera then went for it, but Grant caught her wrist and made her stand straight.

"I'm sorry, sister. I hate to do this, but it's just one of those things—"

There wasn't much drive in the way he socked her. Actually, it amounted to a fairly light tap. But it was in the right place; it caught her under the chin and put a dark blanket on her senses.

Grant carried her to the couch, then turned fast as footsteps moved in from beyond the doorway. He snatched at the pistol and just as he grasped it, a voice said, "All right, drop it!"

Hoskins and Needle were in the doorway. It was Hoskins who had spoken, and it was the weasel-faced guy who pointed an automatic at Grant's head.

Grant shrugged, smiled sheepishly. But he didn't drop the pistol. He pulled the trigger and at the same moment he threw himself sideways. There was a twanging sound a few inches away from his head and a bullet hit the wall behind him. He looked up. Needle was trying to shoot at him again. But the odds were against Needle. The bullet in Needle's chest didn't help his aim.

Hoskins took up where Needle left off. Even though Hoskins was a tub he knew the meaning of speed. His pudgy hand flashed toward a shoulder holster, came away holding a gun. He fired.

It was a miss. Grant was moving fast. Hoskins tried again and missed. Then Grant stopped veering and rolling just about long enough to raise the pistol and use it. A slug entered Hoskin's forehead. The tub took a few steps forward and dropped the gun, tripped over Needles dead body and died upon reaching the floor.

There were shouts from upstairs, then running feet, thumping along a hall-way, down the stairs. Grant couldn't be bothered. He raced across the room, opened the nearest window and saw a drop of fifteen feet. He climbed out, jumped and landed in reasonably soft bush. He was on his feet again, sprinting toward a field of high grass. For a few minutes, he hid in the grass. After he got his bearings, he could see the Great Wall of China. And the caravan route. The combination was better than a compass. He maneuvered through the stretch of high grass and as he entered Kan-chau, he glanced at his wristwatch. It was 1745 hours.

That was good news. The summer sky would remain light for a few more hours and if nobody bothered him he'd be climbing into the Warhawk again within another ninety minutes or so.

Nobody came after him. And it wasn't difficult to find the reason. Fletcher was discouraged. Fletcher had seen the dead bodies of Hoskins and Needle. Further chase would mean further bullet-talk.

Grant had to smile. The dice were working for him. He was getting his numbers. Every now and then he turned and gazed in all directions without seeing anything that resembled trouble. He was walking through, then away from Kan-Chau.

He trotted across the strip of baked yellow earth, entered the woodland. At intervals of thirty minutes he rested. There was an instance when he felt as if he could use a cigarette. He had it in his mouth and was about to flick a match, when it occurred to him that

this was a luxury. And luxury didn't fit in with what he was trying to accomplish. He put the cigarette back in the pack. Twenty minutes later he came out on the other side of the woodland area and climbed into the Warhawk.

The engine was just as eager as Grant. It seemed overjoyed that he had returned. All cylinders were hitting with an efficient, surging blend of smoothness and power. When the rev-up process was completed, Grant faced the Warhawk out upon the field, took it rolling across and picked up speed for the take-off. Then he rode it away from the ground, lifting it and giving it a lot of throttle.

If there had been room for dancing, Grant would have done so. He was that happy. Now there was the best sort of an excuse for calling on Allied troops and aviation to take over the Kan-chau area. The Japs hadn't moved in yet. The Japs were going to be very much surprised. There was an extremely good chance that 200,000 Japanese would tumble into a trap. It was a downright treat to anticipate the rage and wailing in Tokyo.

Grant climbed the Warhawk to 5500 feet, then turned southeastward. As he did so, he saw the Zeros. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Drink to Kan-chau



INE Zeros were coming after him. They already had him in the net. It was painfully evident that they had been expecting him. They were working in elements of three, leaping from three sides of the net.

That left the fourth side open, but Grant knew that he wouldn't be able to slide out. The Japanese planes were approaching at capacity throttle, and by now they had piled up a tremendous amount of dive-momentum. They had him exactly where they wanted him.

He thought of Fletcher. The round-faced man had undoubtedly made radio contact with a Jap airfield. There couldn't be any other reason why the Zeros were knocking on the door.

Grant pushed the thought of Fletcher out of his mind and told himself that there was a way to handle this. There had to be a way. The sky and the Zeros became related parts of a problem in combat geometry. Grant was working on it, thoughtfully biting his lip, his eyes darting to the left, to the right—he spied an opening.

On the right, the three Zeros were spaced rather wide and their approach-line could have been a bit more stabilized. The Jap pilots knew better, but they weren't particularly concerned,

because this was a sure thing. On a party of this sort they could afford to make mistakes.

Grant measured the separating distance. On all sides it was just about the same—600 yards. He turned the Warhawk toward the right, sent the plane directly at the oncoming Zeros. They reasoned that he was faking, and they were correct. Without throwing any bullets, he turned again, sliding off to the left, exposing himself to fire from the frontal trio.

The fire arrived, but Grant wasn't there. Again he was turning, again he faced the Zeros on the right side. Only now he had them puzzled. They weren't quite sure as to whether he intended to attempt a getaway or a suicide attack.

Grant was going to attack, but he wasn't thinking in terms of suicide. The three Zeros swerved to meet him. He turned away and then came in again.

The gun sight showed him Zero fuselage. He waited an instant, and the cross-hairs lined up the enemy cockpit. He thumbed the button, and six Brownings went to work. The Jap pilot received three bullets in the chest and a fourth in the head. The Zero began to fall crazily. Grant remained on the attack-line, and the other two Japs realized that the Yank had helped himself to an offensive status, and they were worried. Grant knew it, enjoyed the sensation of realizing that the enemy was uncomfortable. He ran at them, sent out a three-second greeting, held fire for a few moments, then ripped it in again. The Japs were no longer worrying. Now they completely understood the arrival of doom. One of them was breathing smoke and watching flames creep into the cockpit. The other Jap had two bullets in the abdomen. Both Zeros did a lot of whining as they went down.

Pumping away furiously, the remaining six Jap planes closed in on Grant, and the Warhawk quivered in the grip of gunfire. Grant used a roll-out, tried to regain a semblance of offensive status. The Japs were relentless, and at the same time, they were wary. They weren't giving any openings. The Warhawk lurched as a 22 mm. shell banged into the fuselage. Grant spurred the ship, sent it through a flipper turn and the initial stage of an outside loop. The Japs were forced to give ground. Grant was out of the loop, twisting a wing-over, attempting to drift underneath the enemy, came out on the other side and make a run for it.

The Warhawk tried very hard. It made a downward run of 500 feet, lost another few hundred on a vertical left turn. At 4000 feet Grant was underneath the Zeros. There was a clear sky directly ahead. The Warhawk was level and it was ready for the sprint. Grant gave it total throttle. The Warhawk was on its way home.

But the Japs were following. Two of them had anticipated the Yank's move and had planned accordingly. They came down on Grant, tossing fire from less than a hundred yards.

A 7.7 mm. slug smashed the instrument panel. Two more slugs went into the Merlin engine and then a 22 mm. package came in and finished the engine. The propellor made a few lazy turns, became nothing more than an ornament. Grant was already thinking in terms of landing. He looked down, sighted the same level field from which he had taken off. The field seemed to leer up at him. He went down, with the Japs accompanying him.

They didn't shoot at him. Instead two of them stayed behind him and two more flanked the P-40F on either side. The remaining Zero duet wasn't going along. The two Jap planes seemed to have plans calling for a fast trip to Kan-chau.

The Merlin threw smoke as Grant brought the wheels down. And the Warhawk was burning brightly when Grant leaped out of the cockpit. Three Zeros had landed by this time; their pilots were waiting for Grant. He saw their three revolvers, and he raised his arms.

One of the pilots came forward, grinning at him, saying in precise English, "You should have landed immediately upon sighting us. In that way you would have saved yourself a lot of trouble."

"I don't mind the trouble," Grant said. "Especially when I'm killing Japs."

The Japanese pilot took a quick step toward Grant, brought the back of his hand across Grant's face. It was the first time anything of this sort had happened to Grant, and yet somehow he wasn't thinking of himself. He was thinking of what other Americans had been forced to take from these slant-eyed fiends. He told himself that the Japs enjoyed watching Allied prisoners die slowly.

He kicked the Jap. With all the strength in his body, he put a foot in the Jap's belly. The Jap went riding back arms spread wide, fell flat, then rolled over and doubled up and began to make gurgling sounds.

Grant waited for the other two Japs to use their revolvers. It was evident that they were itching to pull the triggers, yet something was holding them back. In a few moments Grant knew the reason. The fourth Zero had landed, and now its pilot came running across the field, barking orders. This Jap was in command and obviously had special plans for Grant.

The Jap flight commander used an even better brand of English than the pilot who was still squirming on the ground. Folding his arms slowly and looking at Grant, the flight commander said, "You are going back

to Kan-chau. I assume Mr. Fletcher will be rather pleased to see you again."

"Yes, Fletcher and I are great chums," Grant said.

The Jap turned and glanced toward the far side of the field. A reconnaissance car was turning off a small road that bordered the field. Within another minute Grant was in it, with hemp tied around his wrists. The car headed toward Kan-chau.

**T**HE big room again. There was the broomstick, Rittner, pouring a drink for himself; and Vera, using a file on her fingernails. The Jap flight commander, wearing a thin smile, stood with Fletcher.

The round-faced man lit a cigarette. He took his time about it, letting the smoke out in a series of small clouds. Then he looked at Grant and said, "I might as well tell you, I'm very much disturbed about this."

"You're not telling me anything I don't know," Grant said. He was sitting on the couch. He looked at Vera, winked at her and grinned.

Vera's face was white plaster.

Fletcher said, "I've got to know a few things, Grant. You're going to tell me."

Grant leaned back, made himself as comfortable as possible. "I doubt it."

There was a long silence. Fletcher walked to the doorway, came back again, took a few more slow puffs at the cigarette. His face was devoid of expression as he said, "Grant, I'm not the type of man who makes a lot of noise. I believe in doing things quietly, with a minimum of excitement. Also, I believe in getting to the point quickly."

"That's a sure road to success."

Rittner walked up to Fletcher and said, "Don't waste time with him, Boss. He's a wise guy. He needs special treatment."

Fletcher turned and looked at Rittner. The broomstick completely understood the look, turned and put distance between himself and the round-faced man. Fletcher faced Grant again and said, "Tell me this—who sent you here?"

"The United States Government."

"And what were your orders?"

"To collect income tax."

There was another stretch of quiet. Then Fletcher asked, "When did you speak to Stratton?"

"I don't know anyone named Stratton."

"That's a lie," Fletcher said.

Grant shrugged. He said, "I'm not going to argue with you."

The round-faced man examined the orange tip of his cigarette. "Can we make a deal?"

"I'm afraid not," Grant said, "You're rep-

representing Japan. The only way to deal with Japan is with bullets and bombs and bayonets."

The Japanese flight commander moved toward the round-faced man and said, "It is my opinion that we are wasting time. Obviously we must use other means of extracting the needed facts."

Fletcher looked at Grant. "I promised to show you the cellar."

Rittner came forward, pulled Grant from the couch, shoved him toward the doorway. Fletcher followed. Then Vera. And then the Jap. They walked down a narrow hall. Nobody had anything to say. The hall curved as it widened to lead into a stairway. There was a side window, showing Grant the six Zeros parked on the field. It wasn't a pleasant picture. The gallant and aged earth of China and the winged fighting machines of the Japanese invader. Grant lingered by the window, but he wasn't looking at the field or at the planes. His eyes focused upward, taking in the gold-pink expanse of a late afternoon sky. He had a feeling that this was the last time he would ever gaze at the sky.

Rittner shoved him. It got sort of dark as they walked down the stairs. Finally it became black and remained that way until a clicking sound was followed by a green glow, floating out from wall lamps. Grant noticed that the walls were stone. Big blocks of jagged stone. The stairway curled, eventually giving way to another narrow hall and a low, wide doorway.

It wasn't really a cellar. It was more of a subterranean chamber. On the walls were iron chains and spikes and long knives and various other instruments for purposes of butchery. Farther on down the immense room, there were rows of machine guns and mortars—small bombs and stacks of grenades—mounds of rifles and knives. And endless coils of bullet-belts. All that was very interesting and significant, but there was something else, something that made Grant's stomach turn.

Corpses and skeletons—heaped against the wall on the right side of the room. Without waiting for an invitation, Grant walked over to get a closer look. He got a whiff of a strong chemical, and he knew that an acid was at work on the corpses.

At Grant's side a voice said, "You will notice that they are all Chinese."

Grant turned to Fletcher. "Guerrillas?" Fletcher nodded.

"Your friends—the people who liked you and trusted you."

The round-faced man said, "Who told you that?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

"I'm going to know," Fletcher said. "Perhaps it will take a little time, but ultimately, you'll be giving me all the information that

I require. Several of these corpses were likewise stubborn when they discovered that I was employed by Japan. I was forced to use drastic methods."

Grant seemed unimpressed. He gestured toward the far end of the room, where the weapons and the ammunition were stored. "Looks as if you're expecting trouble with the local police."

"There won't be much trouble," Fletcher said. "Initial Chinese resistance in Kan-chau will be rather furious, but disorganized and without a semblance of strategy. Within two days this town will be an armed camp, with 200,000 Japanese troops preparing to strike southward. Within two weeks, the Japanese flag will be flying over Chungking."

"Two days, two weeks," Grant murmured. As if he was taking part in a conference he said, "We're moving along fast, aren't we?"

"Very fast," Fletcher said. "The Jap troops are mostly motorized. They're coming in by way of the caravan route."

Grant felt someone behind him, then—it was Vera! She had edged toward him, moving quietly, getting close enough so that she could work on the hemp. He felt the coolness of her finger against his wrist. Her long, blade-like fingernails were, for probably the first time, helping instead of destroying.

Those same fingernails had put the scars on Wally's face. Grant didn't know why she was going to bat for him, and he wondered about it. But then Fletcher moved toward him.

Fletcher said, "Let's try again, Grant. When did you see Stratton?"

Grant said, "Once I went to a carnival and there was a guy who dived a few hundred feet into a barrel of water and I remember—anyway I think his name was Stratton."

"All right," Fletcher said. "I'm going to use a hammer on you. I'm going to flatten a few of your fingers. It's an extremely painful process."

Grant said, "I promise not to yell, doctor."

The round-faced man turned to Rittner, gestured toward Grant and said, "Chain him up against the wall, and—" Fletcher turned again. He looked at Vera, saying, "What are you doing?"

"Nothing, Fletcher," she said. "I'm just making sure that the rope is tight. That's all."

"Is it?" Fletcher said, and he reached out, he grabbed Vera's wrist, twisted hard. Vera screamed and went to her knees. Grant knew that the hemp was very weak. He pulled with all his strength against it. He could feel it getting weaker—

Fletcher smiled at Vera as he twisted her arm. "You were trying to cut the rope!"

Vera screamed again. "Fletcher, you're breaking my arm—"

Once more Rittner came forward. The broomstick said, "I'm going to make sure about that rope, Boss. I'm going to make sure we don't have any trouble with this wise guy." He took a short automatic from his coat pocket.

Grant summoned more strength, collected it in his arms and wrists and used it. The hemp parted. Rittner let out a yell and started to aim the revolver. But Grant leaned in on the broomstick and shot a straight left that caught Rittner on the side of the jaw. Rittner fell back and Grant went along with him, hitting him again. Rittner took a hard left to the mouth, sagged and dropped the revolver. Grant picked it up. Rittner came up, screeching and trying to put his hands around Grant's throat. Grant took a step backward, pulled the trigger twice. Rittner opened his mouth to yell but died before he could make a sound.

Grant heard another shot. The Jap had pulled a revolver and put it in play. A bullet whizzed past Grant's ribs. Another bullet almost tagged him in the shoulder. The Jap was crazy with failure. He shrieked a curse, aimed for the third time, but Grant had already let a bullet fly. And it entered the Jap's throat. The Jap went to the floor slowly. He made a few ghastly sounds and then died.

Turning again, Grant saw that Fletcher was paying no attention to the bullet activities. Fletcher continued to twist Vera's arm.

Grant pointed the gun at Fletcher's head. "Let go of her arm."

Fletcher looked up. He was breathing hard, but his voice stayed low and level as he said, "All right, Grant. I guess I know when I'm finished." And even as he got the last word out, he shoved Vera at Grant. She bumped into Grant, throwing him off balance. The round-faced man came forward, smashed a fist against Grant's jaw. Grant went back, his head spinning. But he held onto the revolver. Fletcher walked in, readied another blow. Grant raised the revolver. He was trying to aim. But he couldn't aim, he was too dizzy. Fletcher hit him on the side of the head.

Grant was down, and Fletcher came in, took the gun away from him. Fletcher smiled

and turned, showing the gun to Vera. She shivered. Her eyes widened, filled with fear of death. The gun went off. Vera closed her eyes and sagged to the floor. At the same instant, Grant came up from the floor. He launched a right hand that caught Fletcher on the temple. The round-faced man stumbled sideways, and Grant followed him, ripped two short rights to the kidney, slashed a left hook to the jaw. The gun slipped out of Fletcher's hand. At it hit the floor, Grant made a grab for it.

He picked up the gun and said, "You're just about cooked, Fletcher."

The round-faced man didn't hear. He rushed. Grant took a step backward and pulled the trigger. Fletcher had a bullet in the chest, but he wouldn't go down. He kept moving in. Grant took another step backward and fired again. Fletcher staggered forward. A third bullet. And a fourth. Fletcher was dead standing up. When he finally went down, his skull made a cracking sound against the stone floor.

Grant walked over to Vera. She tried to raise herself from the floor. A thin line of red ran down from her lip. He saw the wound in Vera's side.

She knew she was dying. She said, "You can't do anything for me, Grant. But you can do something for yourself—scram!"

Grant was looking at her fingernails. "Why did you cut the hemp?" he asked.

"You want me to make a speech?"

"No speech," Grant said. "Just give me the reason."

She said, "The reason will sound phony, coming from me. But here it is anyway. I like China. I like the Chinese people. Took a long time for me to find it out, but as soon as I did—I decided to work on the hemp. Now I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"Because I'm going to die." She was sobbing. "I never thought—"

She was dead.

Grant walked out of the chamber. As he ascended the stairway, he was moving faster. He made his exit from the palace by means of the front door, then circled the palace and



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came upon the field where the six Zeros were parked. The five Japs were gathered at the side of the field, using up cigarettes as they waited for their flight commander to come out of the palace. The pilot who had been kicked in the stomach was sitting on the ground, doubled over and massaging the injured area. All at once, he let out a yell, pointing at Grant.

The other Japs turned and saw Grant, dashing across the field. They watched him climb into a Zero.

It happened very quickly. By the time the Japs used their revolvers, the Zero's engine was pounding away, warming itself. The Jap with the injured belly was going crazy, and although he was still doubled up he came running at the Zero, intending to grab hold of a wing and lunge at the cockpit. Grant leaned out of the cockpit, lifted the revolver and sent a bullet between his eyes. The other Japs raced toward their planes. Grant saw the necessity for erasing all of them. He couldn't allow one of them to get away and warn the army of 200,000, that was marching toward Kan-chau. If the tables were going to be turned completely, the turning had to be done here and now.

He released the wheel-brakes, took the Zero across flat earth, juiced the engine and lifted the plane in a steep ride that brought him 700 feet above the field. Then he made a turn and he came down upon the four Zeros that were preparing to take off. He worked the wing-cannon, the 7.7 mm. guns. One of the Zeros burned—exploded.

Grant zoomed, turned again, came in for another attack. Now the three Zeros streaked across the field, extremely anxious to get off the ground to start a counter-attack. Grant came at them like a comet. He caught one of them in the gunsight and he hurled fire. A 7.7 mm. slug entered the Zero cockpit and everything ended for the pilot.

The two remaining Zeros whizzed away from the ground, turning to meet Grant as he came in once more. It was fast and frantic fighting. Grant rushed and threw full firing power and the two Japs veered, climbed to 1200 feet, looped and ran down to tear him apart. But he didn't wait for them. He was climbing in the fact of their fire. They pitched heat at close quarters. Grant pulled the Zero up and over on its left wing, then flipped it around, and as the two Japs galloped past, he came at them from the side. He used the guns again, and one of the Japs died.

The other Jap turned neatly, faked a zoom, then made another turn and lunged at Grant. The Jap wasn't using guns, wasn't trying to dodge the fire that Grant pitched. It seemed as if the Jap were trying for a collision. That was the way it shaped up—a suicide crash.

It was going to happen in another few seconds—Grant saw the Zero getting larger and larger in front of his eyes. Grant pulled back on the stick, sent the plane up and over on its back. The Jap came in—Grant expected to hear the crash.

But there wasn't any. The Jap missed Grant's plane by only a few feet. He kept on going, and the palace rose up in the path of this diving Zero. Grant watched. The Zero, went crashing into the palace. There was noise and splinters and then there was flame. Bright green flame, sweeping up, spreading across the sky. Bright orange flame, coiling itself around the palace, tearing through the walls, into the vitals of the elegant structure. The flame made its way down into the subterranean chamber, tagged the ammunition boxes and the explosives.

At 6000 feet, Grant saw the blast—the blaze of white light followed by soaring columns of thick smoke.

He smiled and turned southward. Ninety minutes later, he landed the Zero in a field near Chingtu. A group of Chinese guerrillas waited for him as he climbed out of the cockpit. He talked to them for not much more than ten minutes, then they provided him with a jeep and plenty of gas.



OLONEL MILLER filled his calabash pipe. Stratton accepted some of the Colonel's tobacco and filled his meerschau. Grant wasn't smoking. He was too busy with his after-dinner brandy.

They were in the dining-room of the Shinan Hotel. It was the colonel's treat. He was very happy and very excited tonight. A flash had come in during the afternoon, stating that the Japanese forces, advancing toward Kan-chau had been smashed by a surprise attack of Chinese infantry and tanks and Yank planes. The Japs were annihilated.

Colonel Milford grinned at Grant and said, "You're going heavy on that brandy, Captain. Your sixth, unless I'm mistaken."

"You're mistaken, sir," Grant said. "My seventh."

"You hold it very well, Captain," the colonel said. He added, frowning, "It's extraordinary—you're not a drinking man."

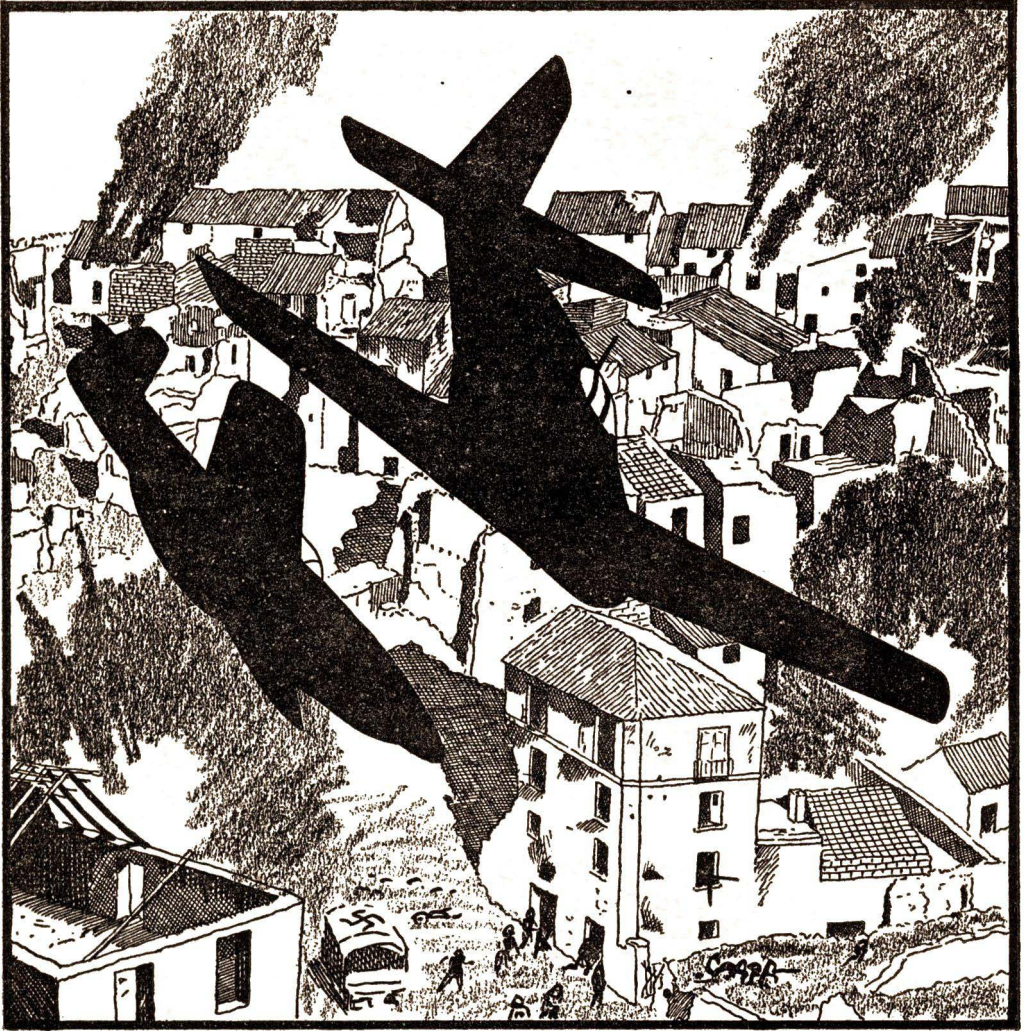
Stratton thumped his fist on the table and said, "Let's join the Captain on this round. Let's make it a toast. To Kan-chau!"

They filled the glasses and they drank to Kan-Chau. Grant didn't finish his glass. He left it about a quarter full, and then he raised it again and as he brought it toward his lips, he murmured something that the colonel and Stratton didn't hear.

"This one's for you, Vera," he whispered.



# STORY BEHIND the COVER



*This month's cover is based on official war photos of San Pietro, Italy. This little town was defended fiercely by the Nazis before it was captured by the Americans on December 15, 1943. The ruins of San Pietro are the result of both American and German artillery fire.*

*North American P-51s were used as cover in protecting ground troops, and were designed for low-flying strafing missions.*

*The Mustang is one of the most well-known planes of World War II. It was acclaimed the world's best army cooperation single-seat fighter when it appeared and won its spurs during the Ranger Commando raid against Dieppe, and later in Italy; and when the Allies invaded France. The only disadvantage pilots found with it is the fact that the general outline closely resembles the Messerschmitt Me-109 which led to some confusion over Dieppe.*

*Frederick Blakeslee*

# INTRUDER RAID



Joe was catapulted forward out  
of the cockpit.

**T**HE BASE was alerted when the jeep deposited Joe Varr at the C.O.'s office. "You sent for me, Major Grigg?" The C.O. nodded. "I have a special mission for you tonight, Lt. Varr." Joe smiled faintly. "Special Mission" was the major's pet phrase.

Major Grigg paused and looked up, his blue-gray eyes catching and ignoring the smile. "You are to follow Lt. Chandler," the major said. "Observe his flight, and report exactly. He is not to know. Do you understand, Varr?"

***When even the grim rules of war are tossed aside, and you think your best pal has sold out to the Nazis, here's one way to check on his loyalty—put your life in his hands. . . .***

"You mean I'm to spy on Mike Chandler?" Joe said, startled. "I—I don't understand, sir."

"Interrogation of Lt. Chandler after his last several flights has revealed certain discrepancies," Major Grigg explained. "He hasn't flown where he claimed, nor attacked the Jerry bases he went after—"

"Mike Chandler is straight, Major," Joe said. He stared at the C.O., frowning. "Hell, he's got the best record in the squadron!"

"Six months of Intruder Raiding is a lot," Major Grigg said. "Maybe it's been too much for Mike. He's got mule pride enough to hide things."

"You think he's been taking off, flying his gas out and heading home?" Joe asked slowly. "But Mike Chandler's not yellow. If he'd had too much, he'd face it straight!"

"A man who's had too much isn't himself." The major shrugged. "The Flight Surgeon doesn't believe this is a case of fatigue," he said pointedly. "I hope the Flight Surgeon is wrong. I hope it is fatigue."

Joe Varr laughed aloud.

"Do you think," the major asked coldly, "that it's impossible for Lt. Chandler to be selling out his country? Believe me, Lieutenant, if I'd had the faintest notion he was such a good friend of yours, I'd not have given you the assignment."

"You know me better than that," Joe said quietly. "The idea of his being a spy shocks me, that's all. I want the assignment, Major."

Five minutes later he climbed out of the jeep at the dispersed hardstand a quarter mile from Base Operations, and walked to one of the two P-38s parked there. The engines were idling, spreading a core of warmth within the shelter of hedge and revetments. Lt. Mike Chandler was in the other plane. He yelled over at Joe:

"What's wrong with Control, Varr? We're the last planes on the ground—oh, here's the Controller in my ears now."

Joe didn't answer. He climbed in his cockpit, shifted his chute packs and harness till he was comfortable. He plugged in his ear-phones, and waited. Chandler switched on wing and tail lights, throttled his engines half-full and moved out of the hardstand onto the taxiway.

Joe knew the vectors Chandler would get. The radarscope showed a formation of 27 German heavies and five escort fighters home-bound after a heavy-loss raid on Southamp-

ton. They were flying at 25,000 feet. Lt. Chandler's job would be to join that flight of Jerries, tail them to their base, presumably in France. Arriving with the formation, Chandler was supposed to bomb and strafe the base.

Every pilot in the 374th Intruder Squadron was on a similar mission. Most of them would come back. Not all, of course. There had never been a night when they all came home. The Intruder Squadron had the highest replacement record in the Air Force. It wasn't a group to make friends in—Joe had learned that during his first month in the outfit. You make friends, and soon there aren't any of them left. . . .

He heard the roar of Chandler's take-off. Then the Controller was talking in Joe's headphones.



THE CONTROLLER had vectored him up into the range of the Jerry formation, flying at 25,000 feet. The bombers showed as bright greenish pips, surrounded by a blur of hair-lines on the rectangular radarscope of Joe's A1. The planes themselves were not visible, but their frosty trails of exhaust in the icy upper air stretched out far behind.

Joe switched to Auto-Pilot. After three months of night Intruder Raiding, he had no trouble relaxing. He breathed comfortably through his oxygen mask, seldom looking at the maze of fluorescent lighted instruments on the panel. It had been a hard trick, learning not to stare, but combat was a good teacher. With a split-second scan he knew instantly if any of the ninety clocks, gauges, meters or indicators was off. With a pair of 1520 hp engines hurtling this twin-tail supercharged Lightning through the air at 450 miles per, a second was as long as eternity.

Joe Varr was keen and quick, with the sharp eyes of a natural bird of prey. His long slender body was strung with a high-tension network of nerves, but like every Intruder pilot, he was a hot pilot. He was hot in the best sense of the word—a damned good pilot. On the other side of the coin was a full share of arrogance.

Intruder pilots worked alone, they had to be good; and they couldn't help knowing it. But lately, Joe Varr had felt some of his own cockiness slipping away. It worried him. Without confidence he'd be lost. Neverthe-

less, every time he took off he wondered how much longer his luck would last. And he often found himself resenting his job. The reason lay in the fact that each pilot in his outfit had to fly for himself. There was no unity. Somehow they all seemed to be carrying on individual wars with the Jerries. It made the odds seem too big—a hopeless sort of feeling.

Joe wondered if those things had got Mike Chandler. Mike was a quiet, moody guy. On the ground he moved like cold molasses, and what little he said to anybody sounded as though it had been thought out for a long time. If Chandler had ever given him a sign of encouragement, Joe would have made friends, but he was glad now that he hadn't. If Chandler had sold out, it would hurt like hell. The idea was frightening. A guy with Mike's brains getting so fed up that he lost all sense of purpose and loyalty—how long could Joe Varr keep his bearings . . . ?

The Channel was blotted out by deep clouds at 10,000 feet, but Joe estimated he was across, flying over occupied France. He switched off Auto-Pilot, gave the plane a little more throttle, and closed up a few hundred yards on the flight of Jerries, keeping closer watch on his radarscope. If Mike Chandler had a rendezvous with the Germans he might drop off at any point.

The blob of light on the scope began to descend gradually. Joe elevated the plane's tail and ruddered delicately, to adjust to the cut of altitude and slight NE shift of the bombers' course. The formation was lowering altitude in a body, which meant that Chandler was concealed up there somewhere within it. No pip on the radarscope separated from the larger blob of light. So far, Joe thought with a lift of spirit, Mike was in there doing a job. He hoped Major Grigg was talking "for the birds" about Chandler, and that Mike would go on down and lay his eggs where they'd hurt. Joe's plane wasn't loaded with bombs for this flight, and as he drew nearer the 10,000 foot overcast, he began to regret it. Two surprise bombloads—plus a few thousand rounds from their machine guns and cannons—would be worth talking about.

Five hundred feet above the top of the overcast Joe felt a hard jolt of air. He peered down and saw what looked like an enormous live field of lava, with massive black craters from which violent smoke erupted. It was the deceptive action of cloud and strong winds, and Joe realized there was a very unstable condition within the cloud mass. The enemy bombers and Chandler were deep into it when Joe entered.

He was respectful of clouds, but not overly wary. He was flying a tough, powerful job. He hadn't been in the clouds two seconds

when the plane fell in a hole. The nose dropped sharply in the downdraft, with jarring abruptness. It was unexpected and stimulating, and Joe grinned as the controls sliced the plane easily out of the dive. He was ready when he hit the next pocket. In fact he played it, nosing up into it just enough to check his forward speed and ride down as if in an elevator shaft. It was horseplay, but it amused him.

However, the mass was deeper than he thought, and a damned sight more dangerous. He expected an updraft to balance off the slower downdraft; he didn't count on what he got. He felt the edges of the updraft, nosed down and throttled a little wider. Then suddenly he was in it. It got under the nose and cockpit and engine nacelles, and blasted the P-38 up like a feather in a geyser. In one second he climbed nearly 300 feet! He gave the engines full throttle, but his forward speed remained zero.

Then the props took hold, and Joe was able to move to the edge of the updraft—into real trouble. He was caught before he could do anything about it in the airman's worst weather hazard, turbulence. Directly on the edge of the updraft was an equally strong downdraft. He was caught as between sheers; and the plane was helpless, its power and controls useless.

Two hundred mile an hour winds smashed down at his right wing and up at his left. The plane spun around its longitudinal axis. A roaring torrent of rain drove at the windshield and dome above Joe. It found openings and came through in sheets. The wind slapped down, shot upward, driving with an unearthly screeching that drowned the sound of engines.

Joe was thrown violently back and forward, one instant glued in his seat by the force, the next hurled up to the limit of his safety belt. The props windmilled, the engines alternately droned and whined. Their waste power shuddered through the entire frame of the plane. The smashing forces and pressures threatened to rip the plane apart.

Other planes caught in turbulence had had their wings torn off. Planes much bigger than this nine ton fighter had been tossed and battered helpless. For minutes Joe resigned himself to the hell. It came to him that this was a fight he wasn't going to win. It would be a lousy deal, he remembered thinking, for a high-speed guy like Joe Varr, a son of the super-scientific 20th Century, to be killed by anything so old-fashioned as weather.

The plane was hurled clear of the turbulence, the props got a grip on the air, and Joe was able to pull clear. He knifed down through the remaining mass, under the 3,000 foot ceiling, where it was raining. He had

lost the formation, and there was no chance of picking them up on his scope. His A1 was out of commission.

Joe headed back on the course he had been flying. The cabin was hot and moist from the rain that had been lashed in. He pulled off his oxygen mask and scanned his panel clocks worriedly. The storm-beating had left the plane with a tendency to list to the right, and an ague-like vibration ran through its frame. The feathering mechanism for the right prop was not working, he discovered after a few moments trying for adjustment. There was a 100 rpm difference between the tach reading of his left and right engine. Synchronizing meant a loss of power that he might need badly. The flap position indicator showed one of the flaps had been bent or sprung.

He looked back along one then the other tail boom, unable to see with any certainty through the rain and darkness. The plane wasn't at peak, but it was not badly hurt, either. He bent nearer the windshield, stared past the faint lume from the panel out through the dense curtain of rain. There was a very small blur of light at a point about 30 degrees left of his flight path. He headed for the light.

It grew rapidly into a large hazy ball, and he recognized it as a flare-lit landing field. He tuned his Radio Direction Finder into the German frequency, followed the beam. The bombers were making their landings at fairly short intervals. Their ME fighter escorts would still be aloft.

Joe came to the edge of the field, nosed down for a closer look. He saw the dark shadow of one of the big Heinkel bombers making a landing. Two others were taxiing toward the line of parked planes at the far end of the field. A fighter plane was making a cross-field landing. About half the flight was already down.

He looked again at the fighter, noting more carefully its twin tailbooms and general silhouette. At first he thought it was one of the ME's, one of the five escorts detected by the big regional Radarscope back in England. The plane wasn't an ME. It was a P-38.



ISIBILITY through the rain was poor. Joe watched for another second. The P-38 was down. It taxied toward the parked Heinkels. The Germans let it ride in. Why not? They didn't shoot their friends or

employees—not too often. Not when they were valuable. And Chandler was obviously a valuable man.

Joe Varr took a deep breath against his sudden feeling of nausea. He spotted another bomber heading for a landing. He banked

sharply, opened the throttle, lined the bomber in his sights and began firing. The big Heinkel swerved up out of its glide path, tried vainly to gain altitude. Its guns burst into life, fired wildly off target.

Joe's tracers made five bright ribbons from the P-38's nose to the fuselage of the German plane. He held the fire another second. His four .50 caliber machine guns and one 20 mm cannon fired armor-piercing, incendiary and tracer ammo alternately. As his third stream of tracers buried in the big plane, one of its engines burst into flame. A moment later the bomber pitched out of control, plunged toward the ground streaking flames.

Searchlights began to probe the sky, their long rays blurring and dimming through the rain. He wasn't afraid of ack ack as long as German planes were aloft with him. But there were fighters above. His plane would be silhouetted from below just as the bomber had been. He fell off sharply on the left wing, then the right. He saw the bomber crash, mushrooming fire.

The sky was a glistening orange color from the burning plane. The sweeping searchlights weren't doing much good, but they were trying hard to cut through the rain to find him. Joe was all over the sky, trying to shake the fighters somewhere above. He maneuvered steadily down, toward the cover of darkness beyond the field, planning to cut back in for a strafing run at the parked and abandoned planes.

He looked up suddenly. A winking line of lights moved down at him—wing guns and cannon firing. Tracers came streaking at his face. He dove and banked. A second plane was on his tail, and for an instant there was a live fence of tracer standing upright to the left of the cockpit. He felt the slugs strike the wing surface between him and his left engine. He pointed the nose straight down and dove at full throttle.

The field raced up at nearly 500 mph; the bullets of the German fighters tore down past him. He held the dive grimly. This was a kill-or-cure remedy. It meant measuring his pull-out point with precision, which was almost impossible with this sort of visibility; it meant diving so near the ground that the planes roaring down at him wouldn't dare follow. He was at 400 feet, at 300. Cross lines of tracer fire slashed down from either side, intersecting almost exactly in front of him.

He could feel the next rounds of fire pepper the engine nacelles on both sides, striking with thin whines against the coolant bulges, kicking and battering fins and flaps and rudders. The bullets began to saw into the dome above his head. Joe was at 200 feet. His engines were deafening, and the shearing of the plane

through the rain-filled air made a nerve-cutting screech. His prop tips were traveling at supersonic speeds and bucking a dangerous compressibility. The plane itself was approaching the danger zone of speed, and if a shock wall piled up on the wings destroying the air-flow, he was done.

A solid sheet of water stretched in front of him. He couldn't see the field at all. He knew he was within a hundred-fifty feet of the ground. But the ME fighters were still diving on top of him. Suddenly their fire cut through the plexi-glass dome. Power jets of water drove through the bullet holes at his helmeted head and face. The new shrillings of sound through the riddled dome, added to the roaring and screaming cacophony, were like needles.

He pulled the nose up—or rather, the power controls took hold. The plane shuddered violently. Joe felt his body caught under crushing tons of pressure. The blood drained out of his head and upper body, pushed into the vessels of his legs and abdomen. For a thousandth of a second he could feel the skin of his lower body as if it were tissue paper into which a load of steel had been dumped. Then he felt nothing. It was a blackout.

He came out of it weak and faint, his arms and hands motionless in his lap. He yawned uncontrollably, and his eyes began to tear. He wasn't crying, but he wanted to cry. He was so weak he couldn't make a sound. He thought he was paralyzed from the waist down. Then the blood began to withdraw, and he could feel it creep warmly up through his body, and his heart seemed suddenly to explode as if had been in the tight grip of a strong hand and had burst free. The straining pull of muscle sent a pain through his chest that frightened him. He yelled again and again for no reason he could have explained. Finally his iron-weighted legs were no longer dead, and enough blood was coursing through his brain to make him aware that he was in a plane and flying above an enemy airfield. The hell of it was he couldn't make himself care where he was or what might happen. He was sick, very sick.

He was trembling, and his head began to throb terribly. He managed to make his arms work. He'd automatically locked his controls for a climb just before the blackout, and he didn't need to fly. But he needed oxygen—he couldn't stop yawning. The rain sieved through the bullet gaps and touched his face coldly; chill tremors ran through his body. He felt like a man risen from the dead—not yet alive, not yet recovered from the nameless, overpowering terror of death. He clamped the oxygen mask to his face, opened the flow and skued in the oxygen in great, deep draughts. It was food and fuel and his blood cells

grasped it and raced off, carrying it through his clamoring, starved body. It sparked him to warmth and life and courage again.

Joe Varr rebounded with something more than he had ever known. It was reaction against the awful feel of death. It was fright and fury combined. It seemed as if he had never understood before. He had understood, actually, but each time he brushed death it was new, brand new. He would never become hardened to it any more than any man ever could. He would forget, because the memory is too much to carry, because it would spread a deadening pall over him. He had to be free of it and he had to strike now, strike harder than he had ever struck. It was his life—it was his war—he must kill and wipe out every threat. . .

The sky had come brilliantly alive with light. He looked abruptly overhead. They'd dropped a parachute flare. It drifted toward him, its light burning intensely. In the next second another appeared, then another. It was like a nightmare. The flares made a huge descending circle of vivid light, and his plane stood out clearly in it. Several planes at points around a giant circle were releasing the flares. He was trapped. To fly down meant bucking a waiting battery of ground fire. They'd be set for him by now. Above the light the fighters waited in darkness. Any move he made would be seen and countered. A dozen armed bombers were up there as well as the five fighters. He considered and discarded every possibility for escape, zig-zagging meanwhile toward the edge of the vast circle of lights.

They came at him from above and behind, power-diving. One after another they roared at him, guns blazing. The first plane's fire missed him entirely. The second and third riddled him from tail to nose. The fourth or fifth—Joe had no idea which, for the thunder and hell of the violent, unbeatable attack moved too fast—killed his left engine. They shot the dome completely away, from over his head. His face was cut and bleeding. By some miracle no bullet struck him. There was no control left to his plane. He released his safety belt and grasped the D-ring of his chute. There wasn't a chance of climbing out, but he might fall free. The right engine quit. It was something to be thankful for. As the nose pitched, Joe braced his legs, thrust against the floor and was catapulted forward out of the cockpit.

He pulled the D-ring as his plane dove to a crash under him. The small pilot chute caught the air and hauled the huge nylon umbrella free of the pack. The abrupt pull wrenched his back slightly and yanked his head back, but after a second he was floating smoothly down. He was drifting toward the

edge of the field, and he tried manipulating the shroud lines to lengthen his glide path. But he wasn't a parachutist, and the big canopy had a surprising resistance. Besides, even if he got past the field, the Germans would track him down without much trouble.



JOE DIDN'T get his feet on the ground before two German non-coms grabbed him. The rest of the half dozen who had run along waiting for him, collapsed his chute. In moments they slipped him out of the harness, relieved him of his pistol and knife. A short, squat sergeant stood a few paces away with a powerful flashlight aimed in Joe's face. He held a machine pistol in the other hand and watched in silence as his men searched and disarmed Joe. Then he thrust his chin in the general direction of a low, roof-camouflaged building, and fell in behind as the men, one on either of Joe's arms, started for the building.

They took him to a room that had the smell of a dispensary, where he waited for several silent minutes with his two guards after the sergeant left. The guards were in raincoats and hats—a wet, scowling-looking pair who stared at him incessantly and exchanged grumbled remarks in German. Shortly, a natively uniformed, strutting officer came in, accompanied by an orderly with first aid supplies.

"Swab the cuts on the face," the officer said curtly. He looked contemptuously down at Joe. "Lt. Chandler is a fool. You are a fool! Your name, please—"

"Lt. Joseph Varr," Joe said, dodging back away from the moistened cotton swab the orderly held.

"Do not resist the medical attention, Lt. Varr," the officer said. "What is the game with you and Lt. Chandler?"

Joe looked at him blankly. "Game?"

The officer turned to the sour pair of guards. "Take him to the cell," he said in German, then turned back, looked down at Joe. He waited till the orderly completed swabbing the cuts. "It is one matter, Lt. Varr, to be taken prisoner of war. It is another to be captured as spy. I will give you time to reconsider your decision not to answer my questions."

Mike Chandler was in the cell. He stood up slowly from the cot as the door was closed back of Joe. Joe clenched his fists at his side, compressed his lips.

"What the hell are you glaring about?" Mike demanded.

"Don't talk to me!" Joe said. "And don't get too near me. I might beat the hell out of you—and I don't want to waste the energy."

"I'm in the same place as you are, mister," Mike said with sudden bitterness. "I don't like it either."

"Don't you?" Joe laughed harshly. "Listen, Chandler. I saw you land—so don't try to pal up to me. And don't ask me any questions, because I won't tell you any more than the rest of the Nazis. We're in this cell together because this is your job—pumping captured pilots for your heel-heel pals. Right?"

Chandler sat down heavily on his cot, braced his elbows on his knees, and buried his face in his hands. "So that's why Grigg sent you to tail me. They'll pin a medal on Major Grigg," he said. He lifted his face abruptly and said harshly. "Damn that brainless jack-ass. How *dared* he?"

"He got the goods on you, all right!" Joe laughed. He sat down tiredly, shook his head. "But you should have heard me, Mike. Should have heard me defend you."

"Thanks, Joe. I'm not blaming you—"

"I'm blaming me," Joe said hotly. "Don't you get it? I'm *sorry* I defended you. I'm not coming over to your side—the hell with that! But, dammit, how'd it happen? A guy like you. An all right guy, I'd think. What happened? They capture you on some other flight? Did you make a deal then? You weren't a spy from the beginning were you?"

"What's the difference now?" Mike said. But as he talked he looked at Joe intently, and shook his head in denial. "But I'm finished. Your coming spoiled it for me. Now the Germans see I'm suspected. They can't risk sending me back. So where am I, Joe? No side wants me now. They'll kill me—the Germans. They think now that I'm a counter-espionage agent, that I've been feeding them lies and carrying German secrets back to the Allies," Mike said. Then, quickly he bent toward Joe and whispered: "That's the truth. I am counter-espionage. I'm in OSS."

"Major Grigg would know that," Joe said.

"He knows," Mike said, his voice low and intense. "But he thinks OSS's function is to investigate our own commands, and that I'm in the outfit to report on *him*! He resents me because my individual orders come from over his head. I don't account to him, and if he can confirm what he'd like to believe—that I'm doing nothing, or doing something out of line—he'd be able to bring me to heel. He's justified, partly, in trying to check me. But something's happening now, Joe. A piece of major strategy that *can't* go wrong. You've got to trust me and play along."

"What's the strategy?" Joe said cautiously.

"If I trust you, Chandler, it'll be because you tell a helluva good yarn—or because I'm dumb. My orders come from Grigg—"

"I know," Mike whispered. "And before I

tell you, I want a promise. If the Germans put the pressure on you, you must insist you know nothing. . . .”

“I know the procedure—” Joe began.

“Listen,” Mike whispered fiercely. “After the Germans have made it tough enough, I want you to break down and admit you know the Allies are *not building up* their main materiel stockpile in England. You must confess that the shipping of supplies and troops is being diverted to the south—to Italy, to North Africa. We want the Germans to be convinced that the preparation for invasion across channel is a sham, and that Southern France is the real invasion point.”

“My word’s all they’ll need,” Joe said wryly. “Besides, Chandler, if the High Command wanted to spread that sort of stuff, the pilots and bomber crews would be told to confess it if they were shot down. . . .”

“That wouldn’t do,” Chandler told him. “The enemy isn’t nuts. They know the High Command’s strategy is unknown to most enlisted men and officers—not one general in a dozen would know. If a bunch of captured personnel started saying the Allied plan was to break through the European Fortress from any one particular point, the Germans would see through the strategy. But the Germans have been given a thousand signs—through every channel from their subs to their spies in Lisbon, Cairo, Buenos Aires—to make them believe. I’ve reported to them that the intensified air and naval Allied assault on the U-Boats served a double purpose. We had to drive them away from the shipping for obvious reasons, but also because troops and supplies were coming by ship and air from Australia and the Orient and across Siberia—and those routes are the real invasion supply line! The Germans know of those routes, through their own agents and the Japs. They think I’m giving them good stuff. Just as a lot of other Allied sources are giving the Germans the same sort of dope. And we’ve had results. Outside this airport, right now, Joe, the Germans are massing hundreds of B&V Troop Transports. They plan to pull out several divisions from the French Channel sectors, fly them south.”

Mike paused, glanced hurriedly at the cell door. “I’ve got to get this information back to OSS—tonight. Will you help?”

“Sure, sure, I’ll disarm a thousand men and get you a plane—after busting down this cell,” Joe said contemptuously. “What else?”

“Start a fight,” Mike said. “Maybe you can convince them I’m on their side, still . . . if so, they’ll let me fly back. I’ve told you all this so you’ll give them the right answers if they try making you talk, Joe. If they let me go, it’ll mean a lot to the High Command to

know the Germans *are* falling for the scheme!”

Joe leaned back, watching Chandler speculatively. “Maybe you had another reason for telling me,” Joe said. “I don’t know. You’re somebody’s spy, Mike. If you’re on the wrong side I’m not starting the fight. If the Germans want to shoot you. I certainly don’t want to interfere. I’m not sure I’d like to see you get across the Channel—”

“Joe, you aren’t in a spot to hurt me with the Americans—right? And you’re sure as hell no friend of the Germans. They wouldn’t believe any statement you made voluntarily. From either angle, Joe, you can’t hurt me. But, by telling you all I have, I’ve laid myself open to you—for what reason? Because I want you to know, as a friend. And as a soldier. You’ll be doing a job if you help me with mine—a job for all of us. What will you gain by *not* doing it?”

Joe got to his feet slowly. “You lousy stinking traitor, you!” he cried. “Stand up—come on, Chandler. And you can tell your yellow Nazi pals that Joe Varr doesn’t sell out!” Joe winked, as Mike got to his feet.

“Don’t hit me,” Mike warned, “you’re not in England. Remember that.” Mike returned the wink. “I gave you your chance. Now you can take the consequences.”

Joe hit him in the chest.

Mike yelled: “Guard! Guard!”

The door burst open. Two guards rushed in, grabbed Joe.

“Get Colonel von Eyvart,” Mike demanded in German.

Col. von Eyvart was in earshot, and he appeared instantly.

Mike strode quickly to him. “Use your own methods, Colonel,” Mike said, glaring at Joe, who writhed against the guards’ grip. “I suspect this Varr has more reasons than we guessed for refusing to talk.”

“I suspect so. But we have ways of prying secrets loose . . . and now, Lt. Chandler, good news for you. The commandant is inclined to accept your word that you are still one of us. As you pointed out, Lt. Varr will not be returning, and there will be no report against you. I want you to fly back to your base, now. We are shooting a few rounds of ME fire into your plane, to alibi you. You are to report to your commander that the Germans shot down Varr. Also we would like it believed that we’re redoubling fortifications from this field to the Channel. We’re removing this base entirely to another area, and setting up dummy installations for them to waste their bombs on. To complete the illusion of strategic importance, we’re installing extremely heavy anti-aircraft protection.”

“I understand,” Mike said. “The Germans have a sense of humor after all, Colonel.”



"The 'flak' as you call it, will be real. I judged the pilots and crewmen of the Allied forces won't consider it humorous. I suppose you've never considered what true fighting airman go through, Lt. Chandler."

"So I'm not a fighting airman, Colonel?" Mike Chandler said edgily. "Perhaps you think I have to take your insolence? You may believe otherwise if I speak to friends in the Gestapo. Now, lead me to my plane. . . ."



OLONEL VON EYVART'S face became icy. Harsh lines appeared around his mouth and nostrils. Joe watched, holding his breath as the Colonel stared silently at Mike Chandler. Mike returned his stare with a sardonic lift of one corner of his mouth. The

Nazi colonel broke the tension.

"In a moment," he said in sharp, clipped words. "I'm going to have Lt. Varr injected with scopolamine—"

"Truth serum?" Joe cried.

Van Eyvart smiled and looked at Mike Chandler. "When he is under the drug I shall ask his opinions as to where the Allies plan to invade."

"I don't know!" Joe cried. "I don't know anything about it! You can't make me talk—"

"If you don't know," Von Eyvart said, shrugging, "you cannot tell. That is simple, Lt. Varr. This violent reaction on your part suggests you *do* know. We shall see. . . ."

"You don't dare. The Geneva Convention forbids it. I demand my rights as a prisoner of war. . . ."

Von Eyvart laughed aloud, and looked defiantly at Mike Chandler. "You will wait, Lieutenant, before taking off. I also have some questions to ask Lt. Varr about you . . . rather a long period of silence was noted when you were in this cell with him. Perhaps there has been some exchange of confidences. Perhaps you are a more complex man than our Commandant believes. I am sure your friends in the *Geheim Staats Polizei* will not object to routine."

"My friends in the Gestapo," Mike said airily, "would not take your unconfirmed word for the time of day, Colonel. As you know."

"My word will be confirmed—by our commandant. He'll witness what Lt. Varr says under drugs."

Joe said: "I'll tell you anything about him—without drugs. I hate a traitor worse than—worse than an outright enemy. But you've no right to ask me about High Command strategy. Colonel, I appeal to you as an officer and gentleman," Joe said, his eyes earnest and fevered.

Joe Varr was strapped down on a hospital cot in a dim room in which sat half a dozen German officers. Enlisted soldiers and non-coms were on guard outside. Joe turned and twisted his body, pulled at his arm bindings, kicked against the legstraps. He swore and begged alternately. No one spoke. An orderly brought a hypo needle. Joe felt it stab his arm.

"Don't let me come to, afterward—kill me—kill me!" he cried. He strained to lift his head, saw Mike seated beside the Commandant, and cursed him. Mike's brows puckered in a warning frown, and Joe shut up—Mike seemed trying to warn him not to overdo it. They both knew the truth serum had no mysterious properties. It was Nazi propaganda, aimed at a man's morale, through psychology. The drug had a numbing effect, to give a victim the sense of helplessness. Joe felt it begin to take hold as Von Eyvart came to him. Von Eyvart began to drone at him like a two-bit hypnotist. Joe answered the Nazi questions drowsily. Throughout the grilling he didn't lose consciousness.

He heard Mike talking heatedly: "General, isn't it obvious that Colonel von Eyvart's petty inquisition was directed against me? A matter of personal spite, and unforgivable in its stupid waste of time. He had proved only that he's a fool. I must get back to England without further delay!"

"Yes," the Commandant said. "Your ship is ready."

Mike said: "Von Eyvart, you'll hear more of this. I consider your actions insulting, if not treasonable to the Third Reich. You are well aware of my connection with the Gestapo—and you shall be much better aware of it tomorrow. *Auf Wiedersehen*, gentlemen."

Someone was shaking Joe roughly. A voice whispered.

"Wake up! Wake!" A flashlight shone in his eyes. Otherwise the room was dark. The floor and the walls were vibrating, and outside the building the air was filled with a thunder of airplane engines. The flashlight arced around to the open door of the room, and a hand gripped his arm tightly.

"Come with me," the man whispered.

"Mike?" Joe asked softly, then recoiled. It wasn't Mike—it was Von Eyvart! They hurried through dark corridors and out across a deserted orchard. The sound of planes warming up came from the field beyond the buildings at their back. Suddenly Joe saw the P-38, engines idling, standing on an auxiliary landing strip.

"Go with him," Von Eyvart ordered. "You know he is a traitor. You tell your commanders. You hate Chandler. I too hate him. I give you freedom to do your duty, Lt. Varr."

Joe was aloft, cramped in beside Mike.

Mike kept muttering: "Too easy. Too damn easy. It was one chance in a thousand that Von Eyvart would fall for my scheme of getting you free, Joe."

"But he fell," Joe said jubilantly.

"He only wanted to get rid of me," Mike said, watching the field below. "He could have done it without the Commandant knowing—and done it without letting us free. Notice anything about those transports?"

Massive B&V transports moved ponderously out along the taxiways in a steady stream, sending up an ominous drone of hundreds of powerful engines. The big planes took off from two runways. Joe watched a pair of them roar for the take-off.

"They use a lot of runway."

"They're loaded heavy, with troops. That's what I think," Mike said. "So *mein General* lied to me. Looks like he no longer trusts me."

"He wants you to report to the Allies that the Germans are weakening their Channel defense," Joe said. "But if those transports down there are loaded it means the Germans are *strengthening* the Channel."

"If these planes are headed for the Channel," Mike said, "they're reinforcing, all right. We'll tag along and make sure. . . ."

Mike found the spearhead of the flight and stuck to them. It was aggravating, maneuvering to hold down to the pace they set and to keep them spotted on the plane's radar. Both Joe and Mike were tired and strained in the cockpit that had been designed to hold one man, snugly, at that. But in half an hour the first of the big planes set down, and two minutes later Joe and Mike knew. Troops began to disgorge from the Transports.

"I'm radio-ing our position," Mike said tersely. "I'm going to ask the Big Brass to get a skyfull of fighter-bombers here—now! We'll surprise those crates down there. The Germans will intercept my radio and come up looking for you and me. They took my ammo, we'll be easy pickings."

Mike radioed and went on upstairs to 40,000 feet, to wait. They sat silent behind their oxygen snouts as the plane circled in the deadening cold. Minutes crawled away agonizingly. They both knew it would take time for the Allied force to arrive. Mike had been instructed to stay as guide, just in case the Germans jinxed their radar or made any sudden countermoves. Mike knew as well as Joe that even if the Germans hadn't intercepted his radio signals, they'd detect him on their own radar. As soon as the last transport had set down, the Germans would find the sky still had a plane in it. They couldn't get their flak up to the P-38, but Me's could reach it.

A blurred dot appeared and began to move on the PI scope. The blur dissolved into 3 separate dots, and in seconds they saw the

racing dark shapes of the three Me's coming up. Mike shifted uneasily, felt out the P-38's super-sensitive controls, then gave the ship full guns. Joe leaned forward, trying to push the plane one up above its ceiling. He was barely using his oxygen. His body felt taut, almost brittle. The P-38 had no fire-power. Joe felt helpless. He hadn't so much as the control wheel for comfort.

The rate of climb had dropped almost to nothing when the Me's began to empty their machine guns and cannons at them. Tracers cut viciously across the P-38 from three sides. But the range was long, and the Germans had only minutes of firepower. The P-38 power stalled. Mike dipped her nose, picked up speed—but lost altitude. German bullets smashed into them, burning and cutting and tearing. Mike dove and banked and spun and looped all over the sky—but the German planes had their guns open. The P-38 was getting hurt. An easy kill for the 3 Me's.

*I'm killing him,* Joe thought. *My dead weight in here is just the handicap the Me's need.*

It was then he thought of the flares. He found the flare gun. He loaded, fired, and reloaded time and again. The flares hurtled at the Me's, at the sky, at the earth, at nothing at all—blazing white and red comets. The Me's fired at the P-38 wildly then. But Mike was hot—piloting for their lives, and ammunition was thrown away. One of the Me's fired itself out, then another. The third took a suicide rush at the P-38's nose, guns open—and fired its last into the spaceless void far above the P-38 as Mike dove.

Something else was pulling the Me's down. Bombs were falling below—fragmentation and incendiary. Allied bombs smashing at the base below in deadly wave after wave. . . .

Mike and Joe didn't wait around. Flying home, they went down to breathing and talking altitude.

"Flares!" Mike laughed explosively. "Trying to shoot down Me's with flares."

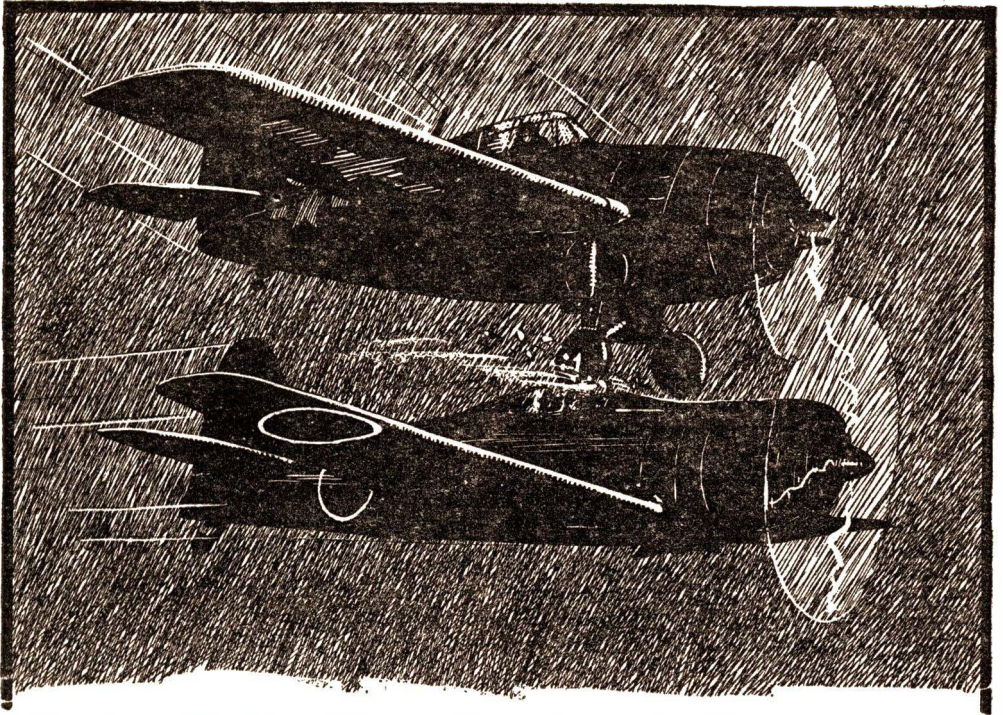
"Think it's funny?" Joe bristled. "Well, I wasn't trying to shoot them down. That was psychological warfare. Those kraut-heads got confused. They thought those flares were some kind of signal, so they wasted a lot of bullets trying to do a hurry-up job on us. They thought those flares meant something!"

"They *did*, didn't they, Joe?" Mike said with a grin. "They meant you were scared—"

"Scared? No. I was just sorry for you, Mike. You tried to pilot us out of it, and you did your best. But your best is just so-so."

"In my own class I'm good, Joe," Mike said. "It's just when I'm compared with a pilot like you I look bad."

"I admit it, Mike," Joe said. "But I'm a helluva liar."



# EAGLE-HEARTED

*By* LOGAN C. CLAYBOURNE

*Out into the grim gray skies of death went this fantastic little chicken—with the slashing talons of a warhawk and the blood of eagles in his wings!*

**W**E LIMPED into the big lagoon at Manaka, with the forward end of our escort carrier smashed into a tangle of steel plates, pipe lines, and electric cables. There was a hump along the front edge of the flight deck as though a caged monster had rammed his fist from below and left the wooden deck cover sticking up like broken toothpicks. But down in the officer's country was the real mess.

I felt somehow to blame for the whole business, but it was one of those happenstances which pick hell up and lay it right in your lap. I was circling the CVE in my Wildcat when the Nip roared out of nowhere and made a dead run for the ship.

I stiffened my left leg and slammed the stick over, hoiking the Wildcat over my shoulder. I came out on the Mitsu medium bomb-

er's tail, but my guns were lined up dead on our flight deck, and I knew my fifty's would smash hell out of my buddies who were scurrying about the deck or manning the forty millimeters in the forward turrets.

I couldn't make my thumb squeeze the teat. I was screaming prayers that the Nip wouldn't drop his egg until I had got down below him and could shoot up through his guts. The Nip seemed to know what I was after. He got nervous and let his egg go too soon—at least I thought it was too soon. A shout of relief tore from my throat.

The bomb dropped upon the forward deck of the CVE at a flat, glancing angle. It struck the steel side of the small elevator shaft, bounced against the anchor winch, and went skidding into the passage leading into the officer's area just under the overhang of

the flight deck. Then it exploded. I fancied I could feel the heat of the flame which vomited from the ship's interior.

The Bofors guns on the fantail chopped the Nip down, and I came in for a landing. My hook caught all right, and I tumbled from the bucket and ran for the forward end of the ship. I tore off my crash hat as I ran.

I heard Bill Carey, the signal officer, shout: "Hey, Blondy (at my straw hair) you can't get in down there!"

I didn't hesitate. I had friends down there, Higgins and Blythe in airplot, and Lieut-Commander Marshall, not to mention Lieutenant Carstairs, who had come out of Pensacola with me. He'd missed flying with me that day because his engine had balked at the last moment, after his Wildcat was on the catapult track.

I knew that the bulkhead leading from the hangar deck would be sealed off to keep back the fire, so I slid over the side to the catwalk and made my way into the officer's country through the passage which led directly under the bridge. I fought my way through the dim, smelly crush of working men, until I was in the passage leading to airplot.

The hot-poppas had got the fire out—there wasn't much to burn in that part of the ship. I saw the pharmacist mates scraping up the remains of Lieut-Commander Marshall who had stepped from his quarters into the passage at the sound of the approaching Mitsubishi. Some other men were carrying out the limp, lifeless bodies of Higgins and Blythe. The door to airplot had been open at the time of the explosion; they had been killed by the concussion. The bulkhead on the one side of the radio room had been caved in, and much of the equipment had been destroyed.

For a moment I stood there, stunned, feeling an overpowering sense of guilt because I had failed to down the Nip before he had loosed the bomb. I couldn't breathe well; I imagined the fingers of the dead men were tightening about my throat. I tried to speak, to deny my guilt, but my throat wouldn't open. Then a wave of nausea swept up from my stomach.

I felt a hand on my shoulder, looked up into the gray, stern face of Captain Reed, the skipper.

"What are you doing here?" Reed snapped. "Get the hell out of here!"

I groped my way to the catwalk outside and gripped the edge of a Bofors turret, where I got sick. Carstairs found me there. He had been in the hangar deck helping the mechs check his engine at the time of the explosion.

"What's the matter with you, Blondy?" he asked, putting an arm over my shoulder.

I tried to tell him, and finished with, "If I had taken a chance—if I had done my job, those men wouldn't be dead!"

"Don't be a fool!" he said. "You've been in this business long enough to know how the breaks run. War is like that."

After dragging me down to the galley of the officer's mess behind the machine shop, he gave me a stiff lecture, topped off with a four-finger slug of Scotch. But it took some time for me to overcome my feeling of guilt.

Because our CVE had been selected to play an important part in some hell-pie which was being cooked up for Tojo, the skipper refused to make the long run back to Pearl for repairs. Higgins and Blythe had to be replaced, too. There were two other carriers in the task force, which was accumulating somewhere to the west. The failure of our ship to reach the rendezvous on time would necessitate a change in the whole strategy which had been so carefully planned.

That was why we steamed into Manaka where "Subpac" had installed an auxiliary repair unit which the skipper believed could make sufficient repairs to the CVE to allow us to go on. There is a difference, of course, in repairing submarines and carriers, but what we needed most was some radio equipment, and at least one operator.

Commander Hoyte, handling the base, put his men to work on the carrier, and most of the damaged radio equipment was reconditioned as well as possible. It still had some kinks in it, and our skipper said doubtfully:

"Where in blazes am I going to get a radio operator who can work around those kinks?"

Hoyte didn't bat an eye. "I can't get you a regular service man, there's a fellow here who has been begging for a chance to get back at the Japs. Seems they killed his family in Manila, and he's burning up for a chance to get back at them."

That's how we met Fiesta Camillio, the Filipino. When I first saw him, I had the strange sensation that I was looking at something which was neither flesh, fish, nor fowl. He stood under five feet, and couldn't have weighed a hundred pounds. His short, black hair stood up like bristles on the head of a porcupine, and there was an utter lack of expression or emotion in his thin, pointed face.

Fiesta reminded me of an unborn chicken, something alive, yet that had never touched life. He smiled and the smile seemed as elusive and meaningless as the quickly disappearing fog made by one's breath upon cold glass. But the smile did reveal his eye-teeth which protruded sideways, giving the effect of miniature tusks.

After that first shock, I laughed out loud. "Do you expect this to take the place of Higgins and Blythe?" I said incredulously.

"Me know all about planes," Fiesta said in a rather nebulous voice which formed big lumps in his skinny neck when he spoke.

The skipper muttered, "We don't need any more pilots. We need a radioman."

Hoyte grinned like a man who doesn't expect anyone to believe what he says. "You've got yourself one, captain," he said. "Fiesta picks things out of the air which aren't even there. At least none of the other operators can catch them. It's almost psychic."

I began to feel a little angry at the thought that this ineffectual curiosity could hope to replace Higgins and Blythe, men whom I had trusted and loved. I was hoping the captain would turn the offer down, because every time I looked at Fiesta I wanted to laugh out loud, and that made me madder.

"Can he fly?" I asked, referring to his statement that he knew all about planes.

Hoyte laughed, and shrugged his big shoulders. "He flew from Mindanao and landed at the controls of a PBY."

That stopped me. The nearest route to Mindanao from Nanaka was at least fifteen hundred miles, and over water all the way. Hoyte evidently saw the disbelief in our faces. He went on earnestly:

"Fiesta was helping run a portable sending unit in the jungle near Zamboanga. A PBY had taken refuge in one of the numerous water channels near the station, and the crew billeted in the same hut with the radio operator and Fiesta. One night the Japs sneaked in on them with a small gunboat, and a direct hit from a five inch shell killed the radio operator and all but two of the crew of the patrol plane. The gunboat missed the plane, which was out of sight up the twisting channel. By crawling through the jungle, Fiesta, Captain Wardlaw, pilot of the PBY, and Pete James, the rear gunner, reached the PBY and took it off. Fiesta handled the radio, Wardlaw, though badly wounded, piloted the flying boat, and James kept a lookout for Nip planes. When the PBY arrived here it made a sloppy landing on the lagoon so far to the left that it cracked up on the reef. The hull was stove in, but none of the three men were hurt by the crackup.

"We rushed to the flying boat," Hoyte continued, "to find Fiesta at the controls, Captain Wardlaw unconscious from loss of blood, and James staring at Fiesta with the fear of God in his eyes. 'Let me out of here!' James cried, 'he's haunted.' When I asked James what he meant, he told how Fiesta had taken over the controls of the plane and flown it directly to Manaka—a feat impossible for a normal man!

"When I questioned Fiesta he just said that he picked up our carrier wave and got his directions from that. The hell of it is, we never use our radio for sending, just for receiving, because we want to keep the Nips out of our hair. Now you know what kind of pilot he is," Hoyte finished grimly.



WE STEAMED out of Manaka unescorted, with our shattered deck planks hewn down close to the steel, our radio equipment patched up nearly as good as new, and Fiesta as one of our

two radiomen.

It was a rather ticklish business, and as dawn gave way to daylight, we felt like a clay pigeon ready for the buckshot. Every time I looked into airplot and saw the ludicrous figure of the Filipino filling in for Higgins and Blythe, anger boiled in me.

Every minute of his free time, Fiesta spent wandering about the carrier. He'd poke his fish-like face into the torpedo room, his eyes staring with a strange kind of wonder at the tin fish in the racks. Or he'd stop to admire the huge TBD props in the slings near the entrance to the officer's country. Once he watched two mechs tinkering with a radial on the testing block, and in his ineffectual voice, he told them just what was the matter with the big engine. The mechs would have found the trouble during the routine checkup, and Fiesta's interference didn't set well with them. In fact, the queer native, with his bulging eyes and his superhuman instincts, became thoroughly unpopular with the crew who, like me, felt that he was something from an unreal world.

The second night, toward dusk, Fiesta turned over the radio to the relief operator and went in his noiseless, unobtrusive way to the old man's office on the bridge.

"Me think Japanese carrier maybe close already. Bimeby they catch close on us. I'm tellin' you is feexin for bad troubles."

The skipper, worried because it would take every ounce of speed our carrier had to get us to the rendezvous on time, snapped:

"What the hell you chattering about?"

"I t'ink thees Japanese carrier is mak' for catcheen with us, capteen. Why for you no send planes to seein' for yourself where is she? Maybe northwest feefy miles. . . ."

"Rot!" the skipper stormed, chewing his unlighted cigar so savagely that he bit the end off. "If there's a carrier that close it could intercept the task force and play hell with it. We haven't time to send out patrols."

I happened to be on the bridge at the time. I watched Fiesta slip out of the skipper's office in his ethereal way, but somehow his warning seemed to linger in the air. It filled the deadly silence until Commander Reese, slim, thoughtful, and full of common sense ordinarily, said:

"Remember what Hoyte told us? Maybe the Filipino did pick up something. If there's a carrier lurking about, we've got to stop it before it suspects what's up!"

The skipper snorted, "And am I supposed to lose good time, jeopardize an important operation, and take a chance on damaging my own ship on the word of pint-sized Filipino, who might not be just right in the head?"

"You could check with Phillips, the relief operator," I suggested. "See if he can pick up anything."

"Hell, the radar could get them—"

"Not if they're playing dead," Commander Reese interjected.

"Then how could the radio get them?" the captain stormed. But he couldn't bluff himself out of the uneasiness Fiesta's words had left with him. He called Phillips. After a long pause, he said flatly, "Phillips can pick up nothing."

The way he said it convinced me that he was still thinking of the story which Hoyte had told.

I said, "Lieutenant Carstairs, Pinky Hogan and myself could make a patrol, sir, without slowing you down. We're heading into the wind, and we could catapult off and land without interfering with the course of the ship."

"I'm a damn fool," the skipper growled, "but go ahead."

It was dusk when the big elevator at the stern lifted the Wildcats to the flight deck. I watched Carstairs climb into the first Wildcat to be wheeled to the catapult track. The track was built flush with the deck, with the launching mechanism on the deck below so that there would be nothing to block the limited landing space when planes came down.

Carstairs was built of long bones and stringy muscles pinned together with wire. He shambled when he walked, dissolved when he sat down, but when he tumbled into the bucket of a Wildcat, he seemed to pull himself together. There was nothing loose about his flying.

Carstairs shot off with a roar. Pinky Hogan came next. He was a little fat, but without the fat he would have rattled around in the cockpit. He was short, good-natured and everybody liked him because he could chase the blues away even when liquor failed.

I crawled into my plane, gunned the engine at the signal, and braced my body against the crash pad, waiting for the vicious force to blast me into the air. The signal officer's arm moved. I felt the tons of pressure smash against me. For a moment my head went black, my lungs collapsed, and I felt as though I was encased in concrete. When I shook off the awful force, I was in the air.

We angled up to eight thousand feet—nine—ten thousand. Then we formed an element of three with me in the lead. A slight haze closed in around us; visibility was poor and getting worse. I felt a little foolish, going

to so much trouble on the hunch of a strange native. I led the patrol northwest, but when we reached fifty miles, we saw nothing but haze and water. I was getting mad, but I flew on to a hundred miles, then fifty miles more.

"Looks like a bum steer," Carstairs growled over the inter-com.

"The soup is getting thick," Pinky chimed in. "If there was a Jap tub in the drink, we'd miss it if it was five miles off our course."

I gritted my teeth, turned west, parallel with the course of our carrier, and zig-zagged, losing altitude all the time in my eagerness to scan the water thoroughly. I had no thought of danger and, I suppose, neither had the other two pilots. We were so intent upon watching the ocean that the possibility of Jap planes stalking us never entered our heads.

Suddenly my ear phones jumped to the excited voice of Fiesta Camillio. The voice didn't seem real, and I had the impression that I was dreaming, for the carrier was observing strict radio silence.

"Look out, Blondy—coming over your head, a Jap!" The voice cut off as suddenly as it had started, and by instinct alone I tugged the stick against my guts and kicked the bar. As my Wildcat Immelmanned up and over, Mitsu stingers laced a row of holes in my left wing, and a 20mm slug tore a hole near my aileron hinge.

I skidded flat in the murky soup, saw Carstairs slipping off at a crazy angle, while three Nip Zeros were fighting themselves out of an 11-G dive. Pinky didn't fare so well. Like a startled chicken taken by surprise, he tried to make a vertical turn, and slammed his Wildcat smack into the concentrated firepower of two Zeros.

I screamed, "For God's sake, Pinky," then my voice clogged, and I felt a hot sting under my goggles as his plane burst into flame from prop to trim tabs. My flesh crawled with the imagined heat of the fire, and I prayed that Pinky had died from one of the Nip bullets before the fire had trapped him.

The burning plane flew on weirdly, like a bird whose head is severed so suddenly that its body remains alive for seconds. In the horrible light of the burning plane, I saw the Nips squaring around to get the rest of us, and lust to kill blotted everything else from my mind.

I hurled my Wildcat at the nearest Zero, squeezing bullets at him until the recoil almost stopped my plane. I smashed that Zero to pieces, and Carstairs, coming up from below, hammered hell into another Zero until it burned. The third Zero zoomed around after Carstairs, and pumping bullets into his Wildcat.

Desperately I got above and behind the Jap, but found that my gunfire would hit Carstairs if I missed the Zero. Somehow a

man's mind acts instinctively in a clutch like that. I kicked out my landing gear, gunned the huge radial engine, and slammed the Wildcat down upon the Nip. My wheel smashed into the flimsy coop of the Zero. I could feel every shock and quiver of the crash. For a moment I thought the Wildcat would become entangled with the Zero and perish with it. There was the crunch of metal, the screech and zing of breaking up. The Wildcat lunged ahead as my wheel ripped free of the shattered cockpit, and then I felt the Nip's blades smashing themselves against my landing gear. I fought the Wildcat up—up—up until I was free. Looking back, I saw the Zero plummeting for the water. I couldn't fold my wheels because my oleo gear was jammed, but I didn't give a damn. We had downed all of the Japs!

"Three down, and a hundred and fifty miles to go!" Carstairs voice cried over the intercom.

I jerked a look at my instruments and cursed. We had just enough gas left to get us to our flat-top.

"There's a carrier out here someplace," I said into the mike.

"Sure," Carstairs replied, "but they won't know what knocked their beetles down. And our carrier is still safe."

But was it? I remembered Fiesta's flash of warning, and realized that the Nips, usually on the alert, must have picked it up. I thought of Pinky, closed my eyes and fancied I could see the flash of his burning plane against the blackness. A stark, unreasoning fury against Fiesta Camillio took possession of me. The runt had jeopardized our carrier and the crew by his radio flash. We knew nothing of the position of the Nip carrier, and if they had picked up our position they could attack us before we could change our course enough to escape. I beat the last mile of speed out of my Wildcat because I wanted to get back and warn the skipper. It was dark when we reached the carrier, and I flashed my light and got an okay from the blinker. I let Carstairs go in first because I knew how ticklish my landing would be with my mangled empenage.



CIRCLED once while Carstairs was run off the deck, and waited for the lights to make a white patch of the flat top. I made my approach flat, saw the signal officer's neons cut down in an okay. The fantail flipped under me and the white faces of the gunners stared upward. I had my engine cut; the prop feathered. Then I hit with a dull, crunching sound. The brakes had no effect, and the Wildcat skidded toward the

island on the starboard side of the deck.

I braced myself for a crash, but the second cable caught the hook. I came to a stop with my left wing hanging over the catwalk. For a moment I sat frozen in the bucket until everything that had happened flooded back to stir up the anger which I had forgotten in the excitement of the landing.

I rolled out of the bucket, asked for Captain Reed and was told that he had gone below to catch forty winks after twenty hours of watch. I swung down into the officers' country with Carstairs at my heels.

The first person I met in the narrow passage was Fiesta Camillio!

I didn't laugh at him this time. Rather I felt a red blur of anger. "Damn your yellow hide!" I cried. "I believe you're in with the Nips. You sent a message by which they can locate us!"

Then I struck him—hard. My fist crunched into his frightened, startled face. He shot sideways with the force of the blow; his head banged into the steel bulkhead. He seemed to crumple into a heap of clothes as I stood there waiting for him to get up so I could hit him again.

Carstairs caught my arms from behind. "Stop it, you fool! He saved your life!"

Fiesta didn't get up. As I stared at the pitiful heap he made, the truth gnawed at my anger. Fiesta *had* saved our lives, for, had it not been for his warning, the Japs could have burned all three of us from the sky. I found myself wondering how Fiesta could have known of the Zeros. I recalled Hoyte's words, "He picks things out of the air that aren't there." Perhaps it was possible that the sound of the Nip planes had carried louder through our mikes and back to the carrier than they had carried to us in the cockpits. If we had been on the alert, we might have heard the Nips ourselves.

I looked up. The skipper was standing before me, with the crumpled body of Fiesta between us.

I said contritely, "I'm sorry, sir. I was so afraid for our ship." I told him the whole story before he could jump me. I explained about Fiesta's broadcast from the carrier. "We've got to change course, sir," I finished. "The Nips won't miss a chance like that—"

"We're too close to our destination to change course," the skipper said flatly. "We haven't got time to dodge anything. We'll keep a sharp lookout. Pick him up, and take him to sick bay."

I picked up Fiesta, and he felt like a child in my arms. I had a curious feeling that I was carrying some fragile thing which had not been quite alive. I hoped he'd live because I felt a deadly need for apologizing to him. I began to realize that my act had been cow-

ardly and brutal, and must certainly be atoned for.

I didn't apologize that night because the Filipino failed to respond to the medico's efforts; I had a frightened feeling that he might die. I stumbled back to the flight office where Carstairs was giving a description of our fight, to which I added my two-bits worth. I stressed the fact that the Nips could have picked up Fiesta's flash message.

Captain Reed paced the floor. "The Filipino was in the radio room the whole time you were out, his phones glued to his ears. I didn't hear him send the message and it's possible he did it in such a way that it got by the Nips. All we can do is pray and watch."

I don't know how much praying was done, because men don't talk about that. But we watched all right. The head wind increased, cutting down our speed, and the skipper was worried. It went on that way most of the night. Near morning, I slept and awoke rather late.

Nothing had happened while I slept, and it appeared that my fears were groundless. The wind was whipping up the sea. Fog, interspersed with rain, hemmed us in. I went down to the hospital, but the medico wouldn't let me see Fiesta.

"He's out of his head—running a bit of a fever. Probably a touch of recurrent malaria. He keeps talking about how the Japs bayoneted his mother and father," the medico explained.

I went top side. Everybody was restless, and the weather a bit thicker. The planes were all below. The CVE was fighting the wind with all the knots her turbines could make. I drifted down to the hangar deck and was glad to find that the planes were ready for immediate use.

Later in the afternoon, I went again to the hospital because the need for apologizing to Fiesta Camillio preyed on my mind. I was puzzled to find both Fiesta and the medico missing. My first presumption was that Fiesta had been moved to his own bunk, but as I turned to leave the hospital, I bumped into the doctor.

"Where's the Filipino?" I asked.

"Isn't he in bed?"

"No, he's not."

"Well, I'll be damned!" the doc turned on his heel. I followed him down the passage, and we skirted the hangar deck and made for the radio room. Our hunch was right. Coming out of the radio room, his hands groping along the bulkheads, was Fiesta.

"What do you mean, getting out of bed?" the doc demanded.

"I must to see the captain already, queek," Fiesta said in his ethereal voice.

"See hell!" the doc said, thoroughly angry. He reached for the miniature man's arm, but

Fiesta jerked free with more strength than I had suspected he possessed.

"I must to see the captain. How do you know about thees? The Japanese carrier, he ees but saxty miles by the north," Fiesta cried. Before we could stop him, he'd scurried through the bulkhead.

When we reached the bridge, Fiesta was telling Captain Reed the same thing, and Reed was blowing up.

"How the devil do you know where the carrier is? Our radar hasn't picked up anything. . . ."

"Saxty miles by the north," Fiesta insisted. "You send wan torpedo plane—mebbe two is more better."

"Get that man back to bed where he belongs!" the captain stormed.

I tried to get near the Filipino and get my apology off my chest, but he acted as though I didn't exist, mumbling something about the Jap carrier when the doc led him away. For a moment after Fiesta had gone, the captain was silent. Like me, he remembered the Filipino's warning of the day before. True, the carrier hadn't been spotted, though I had flown out a hundred and fifty miles, but it had been out there somewhere, and we all began to suspect that it was trailing us.

Finally the captain gave orders to have a TBD fully loaded, and two Wildcats hoisted to the flight deck. I insisted on Carstairs and I having the Wildcats because we knew just about where the Nip should be. Three other men were detailed to handle the TBD.

While the planes were being prepared, the captain checked with Phillips in the radio room.

Phillips said: "I can't pick up a damn thing. The Filipino is in here again with the ear phones glued on. He gives me the woofits. I wish they'd tie him in his bed!"

The captain cursed. The weather was getting rougher by the hour, and the wind was now a gale. To stop and engage a carrier would delay us past the time for the rendezvous; but to sink the carrier would be worth more than that. In fact, if there was a carrier that close, it *must* be sunk!

When I got into my flying togs and went topside, the soupy grayness enveloped the carrier. My Wildcat was on the catapult; crouching on the aft elevator with its nose against the terrific wind, was the TBD, with the handlers trying to keep her on the boards. The captain himself was on the flight deck, his wiry body bent tight against the wind, trying to decide whether to risk planes and time on a wildgoose chase, or to keep right on toward the rendezvous. I watched him, with my neck pulled down into the collar of my leather coat—and I could have sworn that I saw Fiesta Camillio darting across the deck!





FINALLY the captain called us over. "I think we had better call the flight off. Nobody could find a carrier in this muck, and neither could the Nips find us. If we make the rendezvous—"

His words were cut short by a sudden blast from the idling engine of the TBD. The huge torpedo plane seemed to rear back on its tail, and then lunge forward, knocking the handlers about like tenpins. It smashed right down the flight deck without the benefit of the catapult, and we held our breath while we watched it.

It was a trick to take off even in a small plane from the short deck of a CVE, but the terrific headwind worked a miracle. The TBD lunged over the bow, dropped nearly to the water and then clawed its way up through the mist!

"Who's in that plane?" the captain roared. Nobody answered. But I had a hunch, for the picture of Fiesta darting across the deck lingered in my mind.

"I'll head him back, sir," I cried, and ran for my Wildcat which was grumbling over on the catapult. I scrambled into the bucket, gunned the engine, and gave the go signal before I had the coop shut. I whanged into the air with the kick of the discharge paralyzing my body. I had no clear idea of how I could find the TBD which had disappeared in the fog, but I flew in the general direction which Fiesta had dictated. It was the superior speed of my Wildcat, as well as luck, which finally disclosed the backwash of the TBD churning up the swirling mist there below me.

"Fiesta! Fiesta!" I yelled into the mike. "Turn back, you fool! There's something I want to tell you—"

"I'm sorry, my fran'," came the determined response. "You had better spik now."

"You can't do anything if you do find the carrier," I pleaded. "You don't know how to release the bombs, or the torpedo. I'm sorry because I struck you yesterday, and I intend to make up for it by saving your life—by forcing you back to our carrier!"

Into my phones came a voice so filled with poignant desire, fierce resolve, and determined courage, that the figure of Fiesta Camillio grew to gigantic proportions in my mind.

"If you weesh for to do me the favor, señor, then do not turn me back. I have the war to fight myself, and I forgive to you everythang eef only you do not stop me. There ees wan Jap carrier—and I shall make it pay!"

I felt the hair on my neck crawl at the sound in his voice. I realized, suddenly, what a load of poison a small body could hold. Without the aid of such a plane as the TBD,

Fiesta Camillio could never harvest the revenge he desired.

At the same time I saw the TBD nose down. There was no way to stop it, then, without shooting it from the sky. I could see nothing of a carrier as I stared into the tunnel which the diving TBD bored into the mist. I was drawn into that tunnel by curiosity and a desperate hope that Fiesta Camillio, with what help I could give him, might emerge alive from this suicide attack. I fiddled with my radio, trying to discover just how Fiesta knew he was above the carrier. If there was a carrier, the Nips must feel confident that the mist would protect them, for they sent no planes to intercept us.

We were howling down at a steep angle. I wondered how Fiesta hoped to loose the torpedo and bombs by himself. He had boasted that he knew all about planes. He must know, then, how impossible it would be. . . .

On that thought I felt numb. Not until then did I realize just what Fiesta meant to do. I should have known, but it seemed incredible that such an ineffectual appearing person could aspire to such a sacrifice. With a resolve to save him—to give him back his life as he had given me mine—I gunned the Wildcat.

But I was too late. The soup suddenly thinned, and directly below us lurked a big carrier of the *Okubi* class. Its deck was a mad scramble as planes tried to take off, too late, to divert the danger which was now upon them. Like a huge bolt of thunder the TBD roared directly upon the side of the carrier under the tower.

There was nothing I could do but get out of the way, and pray. "God help you Fiesta!"

I heard his "*Alo-o-o-ha!*" Then the TBD struck. There was a roar, then a blast of flame! Like an echo of the first blast, redoubled a thousand fold, the boilers of the carrier and her high-test fuel tanks exploded. I was hurled upward three thousand feet by the concussion, while the smoke and heat belched up about me. So vast was the disturbance that the mist was split apart and the red bear of the flames reached skyward for thousands of feet.

I circled the carrier and watched her sink, a total loss. Suddenly I saw before me the vision of Fiesta Camillio and in death he had become a giant whose vengeful hand had crushed the enemy with a single blow. In life he had looked like an unborn chicken, but death had proved him to have the heart of an eagle.

I turned back toward my carrier, but I knew the story would not be news to them. They would have seen the sheet of red stretched across the sky. They would know how it was.

(Continued from page 27)

a dollar your way L. H.—don't spend it all in one place.

We now find our horrified eyes fixed on a letter written in bloody red ink with a lot of gory weapons drawn on the border. There's no reason why the rest of you shouldn't suffer too, so here it is.

"Bird Brain!

I hereby notify you that I join the ranks of Hawkins, Smales & Outlaw Bridges and (that drip) McGovney (or have you forgotten those jerks?) I think you and your column are lousy (you're swell) your articles and you stink with blasphemous unadulterated saying (they're swell & I get a kick out of them.) I accidentally stumbled across the column when reading some of the swell mag. All this was some time ago and the gas from the letters, etc., made me almost mortally ill.

(In spite of the stuff before this, I expect a brand new drawing SEE!)

Greg (Vicious) Lindemer  
St. Paul, Minn.

(Print this or else—enclose is my version of you)

Tuck a buck in your fur coat, Lindemer. If you think the letters make you sick, what do you imagine they do to me!

In a more serious vein we find a note from a guy whose really been around in those blue skies yonder.

Dear Sir:

It was only about six or seven years ago that I was never without a copy of the Dare-devil Aces and I enjoyed them very much. I have just finished reading the first copy I've bought since being out of service and find that several of the writers do not know what they are talking about when they refer to various type planes.

Having been a gunner on a B-17 or 'Fort' I was very surprised to note, while reading "Wings of the Lost," that the navigator's table was in the radio room as I always had the silly idea that the navigator's place was in the nose, also the engines on that Fort must have been underpowered since they were only able to attain an altitude of 15,000 feet with a full load. We often flew as high as 27,000 feet with a full load under the same conditions of bad weather, also the Army forecasts on weather are never uncertain, either it's good or bad. It also seems that there are only 9 men on a crew when flying two waist gunners. (10 brother 10) and the radio man is operating the upper turret. Who operates the radio guns? And where in heck is the engineer? He is supposed to run top turret. It also seems that the bomb bay doors slide open or so the writer says. Since when? Also in case they stick or are shot out there are hand cranks to crank them down with. Well so much for "Wings of the Lost."

Now for Decoy Maneuver. This isn't too

bad EXCEPT I have yet to meet an Officer Gunner. Except for a certain actor. The formation that they were in was attacked by twenty Me.109s, yet when the smoke had cleared away 18 Me.109s were clearly stated to be down besides quite a few others, not counting the remaining Jerries that fled. This story reminded me of the old Western pictures where the hero fires 15-20 shots without reloading his six-shooter. When a small formation of ships are attacked by a larger force of ships they do not assume a spread out formation but assume a small compact formation to insure greater fire power and enable themselves to protect one another.

It would be a good idea for a few of your writers to study the combat ships of the Air Forces. Also to brush up on Army tactics in combat and out. But all in all you have a good Mag. and I will continue to buy, read and kick about errors. So till then, best of luck.

Sincerely,

Lerreck F. Minnis  
Saginaw, Michigan

The last buck of the day goes to you Minnis. We have to admit that your points are well taken. Remind me to get some of those writers up on the mat.

The following letters were close, but no cigars. Keep 'em coming, little slugs, and someday you too may walk off with an award.

Dear Nosedive—

First of all, I'd like to tell you that I saw the body of a pal of mine who had been in a head-on, mid-air collision and he looked better than you do now!

Now that that's off my chest, I'd like to tell you about your magazine. It's still the same old rag. I see no improvement—absolutely none. On the contrary, it has fallen into a spin and I doubt that it will recover in time. The only reason I buy the magazine is to look at Blakeslee's work—and that, too, is in need of improvement.

I've been reading Dare-Devil Aces since 1933, and I'd hate to see it fall into such a slump. What ever happened to Hal White, O. B. Meyers, Steve Fisher, Darrel Jordan, William Hartley and others who used to contribute such swell yarns? Why don't you revive the trio of Molloy, McNamara and Breadon? I don't know why I should waste my time giving you such valuable advice. Maybe I'm being a little selfish, but I figure I might as well give you a break.

I remember a story that was titled "The Flight of the Branded Ace" by O. B. Meyers. If you ever bump into the cookie, tell him that I said it was one of the finest stories I've ever read. I think he also wrote "The Ghost of Shane McGann" for Battle Birds several years ago. That novel rated very highly in my estimation. How about more like it?

A thought that I'm trying to get across is that there should be more stories about the first World War. Take the average reader; he likes romance and adventure. Both can be

## The Hot Air Club

found in those old stories of the first Great War. I'm sure that it can't be found in stories of the Jap war. No! That war has just ended. It is still too recent. Most people are trying to forget it. This war was hard work and sweat. No glamour. I don't consider it as good basis for writing stories of romantic, reckless adventure. I've become prejudiced, in that respect, in order to make a point. I hope you will give it consideration.

If you're wondering about my nickname, I got it in Primary and it stuck with me through Advanced. I've never stopped to figure out how I got it—unless my buddies thought I flew as easily as the bird. Or maybe it's just my face. I was hit with a baseball bat several years ago. What excuse have you to offer, Nosepiece? It's a shame that you didn't see that idling propeller!

Before I close, I'd like to ask a favor of you, Ginsie. I would scream with joy if you were to send me a Blakeslee WW-I original. I had one, but while I was in service, it became lost. Could you do this for an old reader? I say good-bye with tears in my eyes. (It's from the smoke of the DDA which I just burned.)

Just,  
"The Hawk"  
Bill Telsenfeld

"Hi, Bulbnose,

Sure enjoy your mag. Feel it's my duty to pass on info that Richard Lemoine was seeking on one-arm MacLachlan. In 1944 he was assigned to do a series of talks on a tour of airdromes in the U.S. At the completion of this tour he was to return to England. I had the pleasure of meeting & talking with this chap at No. 1 B.F.T.S., Terrell, Texas. His courage & devotion to duty are only excelled by Douglas Bader, the legless wonder.

L.M.

Former member of the American Eagle Squadron, R.A.F.

P.S. If you publish this, just publish my initials.

Greetings, Ginsburg,

Will wonders never cease? When DDA left the stands some months back, I fully expected never to see or hear of it again. Little did I realize that the mighty Ginsberg was made of sterner stuff. When, wandering into the local news emporium, my eyes fell upon that familiar masthead, radiant in all its former glory, I reeled. Ginsy, old man, I absolutely reeled. When I realized that, out of the score of air pulps kicking around before the war, only three remained, and one of those was staging a comeback after a prolonged absence, I was staggered. I grabbed the mag, paid that exorbitant extra five sous that those profiteers who are running the thing slapped on it, and took it home, to dwell for some time on auld lang syne. As I rambled through the pages, my eyes saw not the P-40s, Zeros and B-17s that adorned the



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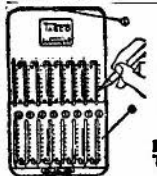
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## Dare-Devil Aces

literature within, but saw instead the Spads, Fokkers, SE-5s and Camels of old. Where are they now, Ginsberg? Tucked away in some remote corner of Blakeslee's brain, waiting to be dragged forth if, and when, the fickle public changes its mind? Ah, those were the days, mon ami. And, fully cognizant of the fact that the foregoing sentence was a trite and hackneyed expression, I give vent to another. Them days, apparently, are gone forever. Never have I been able to express adequately my deep regret at their passing. For years now I have held on to an ideal, namely that some benefactor of humanity would issue, at appropriate intervals, reprints of the works of the Old Masters of air-war fiction, men like Fred Painton, whose sudden death in action robbed the world of a once-great writer, Art Burks, whose stuff ranked with the best of the pre-war years, and George Bruce, of whose unique talent I can say little that has not already been said by admirers of the Bruce literary progeny, except to remark, in words of faint praise indeed, that his best work stood head and shoulders above the crowd, bar none. You will say that this is sloppy sentiment. Well, if this be sentiment, make the most of it! It's just my way of saying that there will probably never be a period in air-war fiction like those ten or twelve years before the war.

By the way, old boy, whither are you bound? A vast percentage of the guys who were raised on these mags are no more, and dost thou think the public clamors for your particular brand of blood-and-thunder now? Another thing, an author (?) writes an opus, and by the time his epic reaches the stands, it's probably all out of date. What with the present unstable state of technological advancement, especially in aviation, the current mags will have to undergo a radical change-over, unless of course, they're still going to run stories of the recent conflict. If you're writing about a certain set period in past history, all well and good, but if you're thinking of reconverting to peaceful aviation literature, you're going to have to get some writers who know their way around, Ginsy, and who can keep up with the latest trends. To use a crude illustration, it would look queer to run a story in a mag in which a guy wins the 1910 Gordon-Bennet race with a Deperdussin monoplane, while in the meantime, successful experiments are being carried out with jet and rocket propulsion. Comprenez-vous, mon cher ami? I don't want to make this too difficult.

I couldn't let you go, Ginsy, without at least one appeal for some WWI tales. I'm not asking for anything spectacular, but I an unconquerable yen to see some of exquisite, almost photographically accurate scenes of WWI air combat by Blakeslee. And how about resurrecting the Assemblit?

Au 'voir until the next patrol,  
 Henry Baratt

## The Hot Air Club

Gentlemen:

Your February issue of "Dare-Devil Aces" has a few errors which I would like to call to your attention.

First I would like to say that I feel qualified to criticize your magazine because I just completed my first 3-year hitch in the Air Forces and a good part of the time was spent in the South-West Pacific as an aerial gunner.

When did the Air Force start making commissioned officers out of their gunners? A navigator or bombardier may be a gunner but I know of very few who received their commissions to fly primarily as gunners. In the story "Decoy Maneuver" 2nd Lt. Pearson was given the role of just plain top-turret gunner. Quite an error, don't you think?

In your story "Wings of the Lost" it would have been much simpler to drop the bombs through the doors of the plane. I have seen it done many times successfully. Just how does the pilot of a B-17 release the bombs one at a time? He has a salvo bar and can release all of them at once but not a few or singly. I don't think bombing can be done at the altitude shown in the drawing. The bombs wouldn't arm themselves and if they did they would blow the plane dropping them to hell.

Few pilots with a brain in their head would order their crew to bail out in shark-infested waters of the South Pacific. Did you ever see what happens when the life rafts are released in flight. Usually the ropes don't break and if they do you lose the tail of your ship. If you don't believe me just try it. I thought the doors on a B-17 opened outward. In your story they slid open.

If life rafts were thrown over at the same time the men went out they would land so far apart that it would take three days to swim to them. If you think I'm nuts just try it. I'll give odds.

In closing, gentlemen, I must confess that you have a good magazine and I enjoy reading it, but I do wish you would have someone that knows read the stories before they are published.

Respectfully,  
S/Sgt. Arthur R. Reid, Jr.

Dear Ginsy:

Hello from across the border, for we do get copies of DDA up this way. Think they must smuggle them in for our paper salvage drives.

Really enjoyed, "In Hell for Breakfast" but why drag in stories like "Last Flight?" Those krauts aren't made that way.

Only one more little thing we found fault with, Nosedive, and that is we still have a few good pilots in the R.C.A.F. after you take all the American heroes out, so how about giving them a little credit, for after all, Canada was the training ground for the Allies and from the vast portals of our training schools passed through boys of practically every nation of the world. So how about a little boost in the DDA.

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**Dare-Devil Aces**

So in ending, Ginsy keep the DDA's a-flying and if our budget allows it we'll keep on buying a copy.

Your northern Kiwi,  
G. Matheel,

Ginsboig:  
Having run out of dough I take pen in hand to send you my sincerest gripings.

For one thing, in the Feb. '46 issue, in the story about "Pappy" Boyington, the Corsair was dubbed the F 4 F-1, which is precisely the designation afforded the famous Grumman Wildcat series. The Corsair, I think you will find, is called the F 4 U, not F 4 F.

Now for the other. Your forgotten aces club seems to have left out a notable ace of WW I, Macrate Mackingham. His one claim to title and fame is the battle in which he, single-handed and in an unarmed misplaced Jenny, downed the whole German von Bare-tail Circus by merely tearing up a copy of your column, dear Ginsy, and tossing it to the winds, whereupon the entire squadron landed to file a complaint about the illegal use of poison gas in aerial warfare. (The Mercedes engines in the flying circus' Fokkers were frozen tight.)

Till we meet again,  
Yours,  
Jimmie Black  
P.S. The below address is for the buck you will [not—N.G.] send me. Thanks.  
J. B.  
110 S. Fulton Street,  
Mobile, Ala.

Dear Ginsburg:  
Hotcha. It sure good to see you back on the stands. Are "Fighting Aces," "Battle Birds," "G-8 and his Battle Aces" going to appear too? Orlando Rigoni's "Three Steps to Hell" was swell, and so was Dave Goodie's "The Las Dogfight." Let's have more World War I stories.

Ahhh, that Frederick Blakeslee, he is my ideal. His cover on your February issue with those Hellcats was a beaut. As you see I dabble in art myself. Please may ask you a favor? Instead of a buck, how about a Blakeslee original? There's a spot on my wall that just waiting for one. (Especially one with the Sopwith Dolphin and Fokker D-7).

Yours till Louie the Lush hurts a flea.  
Charlie Roehm,  
1138 Pine St.,  
So. Pasadena, Calif.

Dear Noseburg:  
Here I am again after a slight recuperation of a year. When I last read your magazine I knew then and there I had to put distance, considerable distance between us, but fast. Now I came back, and lo and behold! There staring me in the face was Dare-Devil Aces, so I finally admitted what has to be, has to be, and I bought it.

There is a great improvement in the mag, or rag. Of course I turned immediately to

## The Hot Air Club

Hot Air Club and since when have you been dishing out dough for being insulted? Are you desperate or is it an income tax deduction you're after. Here at dear old Keesler Field, we haven't much morale and what little we do have is broken down when at the turn of the month, there at the PX, we see it staring us in the face. To anyone who buys it there is a tendency to extra K.P. or a G.I. bath, but still I read. How about a small pocket size edition? It seems every time we settle down for some reading an inspection is pulled and it is very hard to hide that bulky object, particularly the odor. Oh well, I guess I'll quit my beefing for now, and say "Keep up the good work." It must surely be work, on the mag, or rag.

Sincerely,  
A. 76 Lone  
Ye Olde Nutmeg State



By David Cooke

You twits have been asking for this:

The work of the little liaison planes was so important, and they were in such demand over the actual battle lines, that the Army even converted several LST's into aircraft carriers for these machines. They have the wood flight deck in an elevated position, similar to that on the old *Langley*, but it is only 70 yards long and 12 feet wide, with a white guide line down the middle of the strip. Because of the short length of this flight deck, the pilots give their planes power with wheels tightly braked and tail held high. And when full power is reached, the brakes are released and the plane speeds down the narrow deck for the takeoff. Under normal operating conditions, and with a slight headwind, it is possible to take-off in about 500 feet.

Most liaison pilots were proud of the fact that they flew the only planes constantly over the battle fronts without protective armament of any sort. Instead of being defenseless, however, they insisted that they had the largest guns in the world for protection. For in case of attack by ground batteries, they could radio back and have the entire area plastered with devastating fire. Because of this, they were rarely fired upon from the

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**Dare-Devil Aces**

ground, since gun flashes would have exposed the enemy's position and left him open to artillery fire.

But though they did have proxy armament for use against ground concentrations, the liaison planes had but little defense against air attack. Despite reports to the contrary, they are vulnerable to fighter attack when over open country, and many were shot down. When the country was hilly, however, they were often able to maneuver close to the ground and evade thrusts by faster enemy fighters. But even this was sometimes precarious, for on more than one occasion, while ducking into valleys to evade enemy aircraft, they were fired down upon by troops along the sides of the passes!

The no-armament rule is not a concrete one, though, for several "Grasshoppers" were fitted with armament much heavier than anything any of our standard fighters carried even as late as the early summer of 1944. With typical G.I. ingenuity, ground crews attached up to six rocket tubes to some of the Cubs, and these planes were thus able to partake in offensive action themselves without leaving everything to the artillery positions in the rear. The liaison planes were able to mount rockets whereas it would have been difficult to fit them with machine guns, because for one reason the rockets have no recoil and therefore no extra stresses were set up on the light framework of the planes.

Of all the various war work undertaken by the liaison planes, probably the most daring and spectacular was the aerial evacuation of wounded in Burma. The little planes were fitted to carry one litter or a litter and a sitter patient, and some of the things their non-commissioned pilots did with them were incredible. In several instances they found it necessary to evacuate casualties from one end of a flying field while the Japs held the other end, actually flying over the heads of the enemy to escape. When a pilot would take-off he was often instructed: "Don't turn left; turn right, because the Japs are at the left."

The noncoms in Burma were individualists in the most rugged sense of the word. Where most commissioned pilots were accustomed to living in barracks far behind the actual battle lines and having many civilian comforts, in Burma the "flying sergeants" lived in the jungle, slept in the jungle, fed themselves, cut their own hair, and found their own food. Many of them became ill, but they carried on with an esprit de corps that could not have been exceeded.

In one case, forty wounded men lay in a jungle clearing surrounded on three sides by Japs. Soon the tiny planes came hopping over the treetops. They turned and glided swiftly into the clearing, two at a time. Under fire, each loaded a stretcher case and two wounded men who could walk, and in a few minutes took off again for their base. They continued coming in until they had evacuated every one of the forty from under the Japs' noses—and not a single plane was lost!



## The Hot Air Club

These war operations of light planes made for improvements in design and flying characteristics which probably would have been a very long time coming under normal peacetime flying, and these improvements are expected to drastically change the light plane flying picture within the next few years. The manufacturers have now developed designs that are next to foolproof in all respects. They are capable of taking off with virtually no human assistance, will not stall or spin no matter how much the operator tries to bring them into these positions, and will land with hands and feet completely off the controls!

Most aviation experts are unanimous in the belief that within a very short time America will be a nation on wings, with hundreds of thousands of light planes being flown by personal pilots. And that boom will be a relatively safe one primarily because of the lessons learned with the little "Grasshoppers" which served so valiantly as eyes for the Artillery.

### WANTED URGENTLY

Addresses of the following characters: Charlie Piedra, SM 1/c, Hubert F. Smales and Pvt. Dodds. We owe Charlie Piedra five bucks in War Stamps for his prize-winning contribution to our January Column, while Smales and Dodds cash in for a buck apiece. Better send that mail in fast, chums, because you know how money burns a hole in old Ginsy's pocket!

And that's about all even a Ginsburg can stand. The gas bag is leaking badly, the hour grows apace, and even Uncle Nosey must tire of it all sometime.

Watch for us in the next issue—if we still have the job!

Devotedly,  
Nosedive.

## Now for EVERY WORK SHOP! NEW Invention

# Electroplates by BRUSH

Easy to Plate CHROMIUM  
GOLD, SILVER, NICKEL, COPPER

... For Pleasure and Profit!

If you have a workshop—at home or in business—you need this new Warner Electroplater. At the stroke of an electrified brush, you can electroplate models and projects—you can replat worn articles, faucets, tools, fixtures, silverware, etc. with a durable, sparkling coat of metal... Gold, Silver, Chromium, Nickel, Copper or Cadmium. Method is easy, simple, quick. Everything furnished—equipment complete, ready for use. By doing a bit of work for others, your machine can pay for itself within a week. So make your shop complete by getting a Warner Electroplater right away. Send today for FREE SAMPLE and illustrated literature. ACT AT ONCE! Mail Coupon. WARNER ELECTRIC CO., DEPT. H-2, 663 N. Wells St., Chicago 10, Illinois

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Gentlemen: Send Free Sample and Details to:

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# Now She Shops "Cash and Carry"

Without Painful Backache

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

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

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

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

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

As New As Atomic Energy!

# The "Years Ahead" **MIRACLE LIGHTER**

Flame-in-a-Flash

## IMPERIAL LITEMASTER

**\$3.50**  
POST PAID

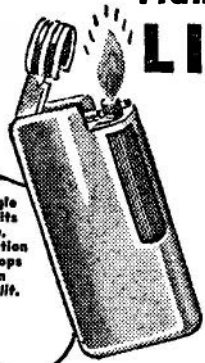
**Read This Absolute Three-Way GUARANTEE**

**ONE**—if after you receive your Litemaster you don't think it's the greatest lighter ever made at the price you may return it in 5 days for a complete refund.  
**TWO**—If your Litemaster fails to perform perfectly any time within 90 days we will replace it for you absolutely free.  
**THREE**—We'll keep your Litemaster in perfect working order forever for only 35c to cover all postage and handling costs.

**One Flick Does The Trick**



One single spin of its smooth, trigger-action barrel pops it open already lit.



**It's New! It's Different! It's Perfect!**  
 No two ways about it! Litemaster's amazing single action pops it open already lit! No more smudged, bruised fingers from spinning friction wheels to maybe get a light. Flame-in-a-flash Litemaster has all the features of expensive lighters plus. Its just-right size fits your hand as comfortably as a fine watch; has fuel capacity for "A Thousand and One Lights" per filling; its new spun-glass wick provides a life time of service without change. No other lighter at any price can match Litemaster at its low price. Thousands who have suffered bruised fingers and flustered tempers trying to coax a light out of outdated lighters will welcome Litemaster's sure-fire, simplified guaranteed superiority.

**WE CHALLENGE COMPARISON WITH LIGHTERS SELLING FOR \$10 OR MORE**

COMPARE it for sure-fire simplified action — for instant flame — for longer lasting performance.

COMPARE it for beauty of design— for streamlined perfection of size and shape and weight.

COMPARE it with the best you can find at any price— give it any test . . . anytime, anywhere.

**MAIL THIS COUPON FOR LITEMASTER**

IMPERIAL INDUSTRIES—Dept. LM116  
 618 South Dearborn St., Chicago 5, Ill.  
 Please rush my Litemaster with Lifetime Spun Glass Wick and three extra flints. If not delighted I may return in 5 days for refund.

**CHECK ONE**  
 I am enclosing \$3.50. Send my Litemaster POSTPAID  
 Send my Litemaster C.O.D. I will pay postman \$3.50 plus postage

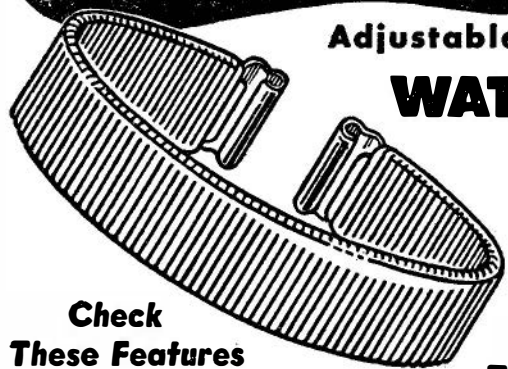
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Please Print Clearly  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

*"It's The Best Band in The Land"*

The New and Better **BANDMASTER**

Adjustable, Expansion Stainless Steel

**WATCH BAND \$2** TAX FREE POST PAID



**Check These Features**

- ★ Guaranteed Stainless Steel
- ★ Will not Tarnish or Rust
- ★ Super-Flexible — Adjustable
- ★ Fits Any Watch — Any Wrist

**Bandmaster Makes Any Watch Look Good . . . and Good Watches Look Better!**

Yes, Bandmaster, at its truly low affordable price is the expensive looking, expensive performing, *tarnish-proof* watch band the world has been waiting for! So flexible, so lightweight, so everlastingly smart! End bothersome buckle-fussing with shabby, quick-aging leather bands. Order your easy-on, easy-off Bandmaster today.

**GENERAL SALES SUPPLY—Dept. B50**  
 608 So. Dearborn St.—Chicago 5, Ill.

Please rush Bandmaster Expansion Watch Bands checked off below. If not delighted I may return within 5 days for refund.

**CHECK ONE**  
 Stainless Steel . . .  1 for \$2  2 for \$3.50  3 for \$5  
 Gold Plated . . .  1 for \$3  2 for \$5.50  3 for \$8

I am enclosing \$\_\_\_\_\_ payment in full  
 Ship C.O.D. I will pay postman \$\_\_\_\_\_ plus postage

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Please Print Clearly  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

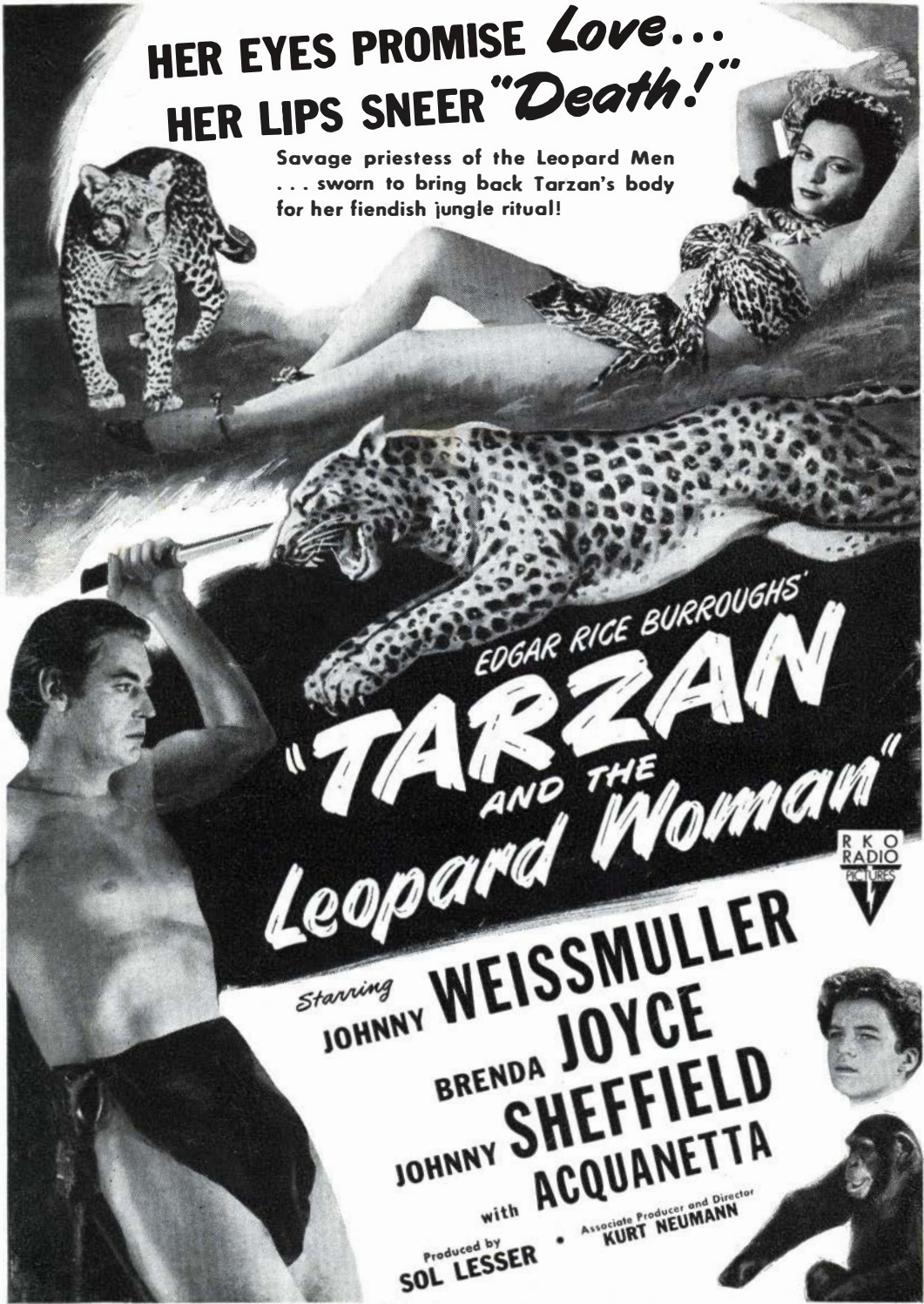
**RUSH COUPON**

**De Luxe 18-Kt. Gold Plated BANDMASTER WATCH BAND**

WITH STAINLESS STEEL BACK, WARRANTED TARNISH-PROOF **\$3** POST PAID TAX FREE

**HER EYES PROMISE Love...  
HER LIPS SNEER "Death!"**

Savage priestess of the Leopard Men  
... sworn to bring back Tarzan's body  
for her fiendish jungle ritual!



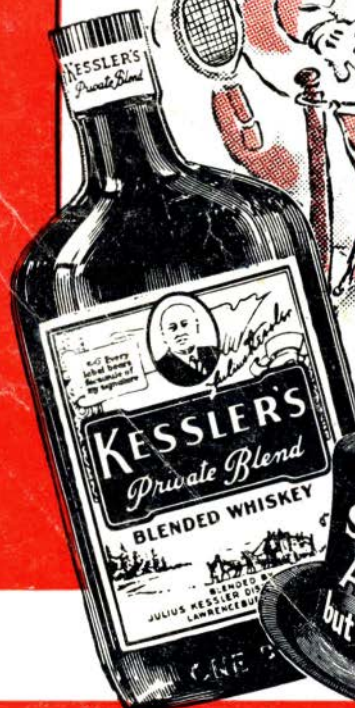
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS'  
**"TARZAN  
AND THE  
Leopard Woman"**

*Starring*  
**JOHNNY WEISSMULLER  
BRENDA JOYCE  
JOHNNY SHEFFIELD  
ACQUANETTA**

Produced by **SOL LESSER** • Associate Producer and Director  
**KURT NEUMANN**

Original Story and Screen Play by CARROLL YOUNG—Based Upon the Characters Created by EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

**"It nets you more pleasure!"—says HI to HATT**



**SMOOTH  
AS SILK  
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